The Wolf of Farore

by Wayward_Chronicler

Summary

War has come to The Kingdom of Hyrule. The people cry for a savior as monsters and spirits stalk the once green fields of the provinces. Famine grips the populace as The Gerudo Tribes and their blin allies strike along the borders. Hope for peace begins to drown in the blood spilled in No Man’s Land.

But Hyrule doesn’t need another hero.
It needs a professional.
"Evil is evil. Lesser, greater, middling... makes no difference. The degree is arbitrary. The definitions blurred. If I'm to choose between one evil and another, I’d rather not choose at all."

-Geralt of Rivia, The Witcher

It was dusk and the fires had already been burned to embers. Epona was grazing on some nearby grasses as he sat under the tree. The simple white tabard of an army trainee draped over chainmail was stained with mud, grass and a little bit of his own blood. He looked at the crystal charm in his hand, watching it carefully and thinking on the events of the day. He knew he couldn’t keep it. He knew he’d have to throw it away since his fears had been proven well-founded. Link bowed his head a little and clenched the sphere bearing the mark of Farore upon it and closed his eyes…

“You know what will happen if you do this,” she’d said. “If you’re wrong. They’ll hunt you down and hang you. Traitors and deserters hang. That’s the law.”

“But I can’t do nothing,” he’d answered. “According to my sources, they’re going to deliberately attack a caravan of wounded refugees and noncombatants.”

“Gerudo refugees, who were spies and assassins they’d say.”
“But we know clearly not all of them are that. We’ve both seen it.” He lowered his head. “I’m supposed to carry The Hero’s Spirit. They call us Chosen. And I was supposedly chosen by Farore herself. But when I start looking, I start seeing the very atrocities I’m supposed to be protecting people against being committed BY the ones I’m working for.” He looked her in the eye. “What kind of hero lets people suffer? What kind of hero doesn’t at least offer a hand in mercy against their enemy before going into battle?” She didn’t get a chance to speak. “What kind of hero am I if I allow acts like this to be carried out?” His eyes narrowed and he gritted his teeth. “I can’t keep doing this. We were supposed to prevent things like this war. And if it was unavoidable to end it swiftly and without excessive bloodshed. Without the madness we’re seeing. Without…” He sighed and reached up to pinch the bridge of his nose. In his other hands was the green crystal charm. She held it with him, a faint violet glow emanating from her palm over it.

“My sister still thinks we might be able to stop it before the winter.” She looked away from him and shook her head. “I don’t know how she’s able to stay so optimistic. Even when I showed her the records from The Inquisition, she was confident we could still change things if we just stuck together.”

“We can still make this right.” Link looked down to the charm in his hand. He placed his free hand over hers then. “Help me. Help me keep Hyrule from making a terrible mistake.”

There was a long silence between them. She looked down for a moment then back at him. “Then go out the back. I’ll make a small distraction. Just go quickly.” She took a deep breath. “If it works, I’ll meet you at the border…”

“Thank you.”

“Go. Go quickly. Before I change my mind about this.”

…It hadn’t been a flawless escape. He’d hurt a couple guards and when faced with over a dozen of them he surrendered. If not for a stroke of luck the following morning, he’d have still been in that dungeon cell. Of course it had all been too late. He glanced to the valley, having gotten there about two hours ago. All he had now were his thoughts and looking at the charm he’d been so proud of earning so many years ago. He heard something and glanced up. There were soldiers coming his way from the South. There were two warhorses with them, a pair of knights mounted on them. The knights dismounted. One approached, pulling the visor of his helm up.

“Link,” he said. “Chosen Champion of The Crown. On orders of the power you serve, you are hereby ordered to relinquish all weapons and symbols of office and surrender.”

“On what charge?” he asked. Immediately, he began to watch them and formulate a plan for escape.

“Desertion of your post.”

“I’m a Chosen. I go where I’m needed.” His blue eyes glanced around again quickly. The guards carried truncheons in addition to their short swords. They were in mail and wore the white and blue tabards of The Kingdom. The knights were in mail with steel cuirasses over their chests and spaulders on their shoulders. They must’ve heard he was near. The puzzle was coming together, as was a way out. “I help the people of Hyrule. Not just The Royal Family.”

“You are needed by the princess’ side!” the other knight shouted.
“No I’m not. She’s safe.” His hand went to his side slowly, casually almost. There was a single smoke bomb in the pouch on his belt, a knife hidden in his right bracer and the recruit’s sword on his back. He couldn’t go for his shield that rested by the tree. “And there are subjects who need me in No Man’s Land.” Link looked the lead knight in the eye. “Turn around. Let me go. If you’re asked, say you couldn’t find me. I’d assume there’s a Chosen with you or at least a Tower Mage so you could find me.”

“If you don’t come with us, we’ll string you up right here!”

“Sir, is that wise?” one of the soldiers asked.

“Chosen are men!” the knight shouted. “Strong fighters, but just men. There are more than enough of us if he tries anything. Besides! He’s a deserter! Deserters hang. That’s the law!”

“Last chance,” Link said. His hand slipped into the pouch and his fingers slipped around the glass orb. He felt his heart picking up speed in his chest. “Walk away. Let me do what I was trained for.”

“He’s not gonna listen,” the other knight said. “String him up!”

The first soldier approached, pulling a rope from their back. The other two moved around his sides. One reached for him and Link pushed them away. The second pulled their truncheon from their belt and took a swing. With preternatural speed, Link moved out of the way of the swing. He caught their arm and hooked one of their legs with his foot. Using their momentum, he sent them into the other soldier. They landed hard on their back with a groan, while the one he’d collided with flipped over and landed face first in the embers of the dying fire. They screamed and stumbled away into the dirt.

The third, who had a rope, dropped it, pulled his sword and charged. Link threw the smoke bomb into him. It shattered against the mail and they stumbled as white smoke filled the air. As they came out of the cloud, he caught their arm with the sword and disarmed them, shoving them headfirst into the tree. The two knights had charged the second they saw the smoke bomb go off, just as he’d hoped. Their longswords were drawn, as opposed to taking the shields from their mounts. Focusing on what he’d been trained, there was a burst of green wind from his feet and for a second, he seemingly blinked out of existence. When his feet landed on the ground again, he was hidden in the smoke.

The knights glanced around. “Where’d he go?” one of them said.

“Help him back up!”

He took the chance and grabbed the arm of one of the knights, pulling them into the smoke. The sword still in his hand, he slammed the pommel of it into their faceplate. Blood spurted from the wound and the knight screamed. The other knight turned around as the smoke had begun to clear. He swung for the hylian. Link blocked the strike with his sword, beating as he parried. Using the moment of shock, he kicked their unarmored knee. They fell forward. As they got up, Link grabbed the club of one of the soldiers and swung it upward into their face. Link dropped the sword in the dirt, seeing one of the soldiers get to their feet and fleeing.

The first knight he’d taken down struggled to their hands and knees. Blood was dripping out the slits of their facemask. “Wh-what in Demise’s name are you? You’ll hang for this, traitor!”

He pushed them back into the ground with his foot. They were too tired to resist. “Maybe,” he said.
“But when you see her. And I know you will, tell her this. I am doing exactly what her family trained me to do.” He picked up the charm and his shield, slipping the latter on his back. None of the soldiers still there were in any condition to fight. Link whistled for Epona. The mare trotted over as he wrapped the thread of his charm around the wrists of the knight. The symbol of his office was placed in the knight’s palms. Once done, he quickly mounted.

There was no turning back now for him. They’d come looking for him. It was only a question of time, he thought, before they started to actively hunt him. Even though he hadn’t killed anyone, he’d still wounded several of The Kingdom’s soldiers by now. With no choices left, he at least took solace in the fact that for all the ideals and heroic traits they’d instilled in him had worked all too well. He would fight for people who needed him, regardless of what tribe they belonged to. He spurred his mare onward and in the twilight rode across the war-torn fields of No Man’s Land.

Chapter End Notes

So, here it is. The main event the other series lead up to! No, you don't have to have read the other to understand what's going on. Partly due to the fact the other one was written frantically over the course of five months to have something to lead up to this and try and introduce some of who will be the main cast.

I don't know if I'll have notes every chapter or not, but given this is the first one, felt that it was appropriate. Gonna TRY for a weekly update on these, but things will happen I'm sure and there'll be schedule slips.

Devnotes:
-Going along this same line of thought of the quote, I’m aiming for essentially Hyrule through the eyes of a Witcher’s Medallion. There is no true good. There is no true evil. There is only choice and consequence.
-When I started this project back in July of last year, it only had a few elements of the Witcher series. But the influence became so great it fit better as an AU and fusion.
-Link’s a lot smarter than people give him credit for I think. After all, he solves all those puzzles in the games and quickly finds ways to exploit an enemy’s weakness. I’d expect he’s even sharper than that sword on his back.
-Do not know if this'll remain a single piece or if I'll break it up into arcs as a series like the other one. Time will tell.

That's all for now. Keep being awesome people!
Among The Refugees

Days had passed since the incident in No Man’s Land. He rode slowly up the mountain trail, watching for the rocks to fall from above. The narrow passes along the Death Mountain Range made it ideal for an ambush. The evening skies were clear and he hadn’t seen any signs of life yet. Link was sure too that Hyrule wouldn’t send anyone up the mountain into the refugee camp organized by the gorons and one of the jarls of Holodrum. Any sort of action could aggravate the volatile and tribal clans in the north and then they’d enter the war. The other option was that they’d close their borders and keep people trying to leave. But that was why he was here. He had forsaken his role in the hopes that he could do more good and hopefully bring the conflict to an end. As he made a turn, he saw smoke rising far down the path. Something was clearly wrong. He gently nudged Epona with his heels and the mare picked up speed.

About half an hour later, he came to the goron village. It sat on the mountain’s northern face and was comprised of a trio of large stone domes with circular windows in them. The mountainside would lead into a massive cave while if he kept going up, he’d reach the volcanic crater. He’d been here once before as a child with others from The Tower of Hera and saw little had changed in the interim. Among the domes though were numerous tents and carts. Black smoke was billowing from several of the tents as a couple gorons with the refugees worked to put the fires out. For a moment, he thought that the Kingdom or the Tribes had attacked. Neither would make sense though. Such an action so close to the border would have grabbed the jarls into the fighting and to his knowledge, neither side wanted anyone else entering the war. He immediately began to scan the village for clues as to what had happened.

“You there!” a guard shouted. Link turned and saw a goron, wearing armor plating over their chest and a metal helmet. He did not look pleased at the new arrival, if how his stony fingers gripped his hammer was any indication. “You a deserter?”

The words cut a little, but he was right. He was still dressed in his mail and bloodstained tabard identifying him as a recruit. He’d been in such a hurry to get out of Hyrule that he’d not even had a chance to remove it. “Yeah,” he said. “I am… What happened here?” Link dismounted Epona, taking the reins in his hand.

“We don’t know yet. No attackers though. Just one minute it’s quiet and then there was fire.”

He nodded and began to look around. Both sides of the war had pyromancy at their disposal and he scanned the area. There were great black scorches on the domes and along the ground. It looked like a clear path as well, suggesting it had been directed in a straight line. “What about the survivors?”

“Who are you to ask?”

“Someone who wants to help.” He turned around to the goron. “People came here to get away from the war. If The Kingdom or The Tribes are behind it, we need to find out.”

“So you’re just doing this out of the goodness of your heart.” The guard whistled. A couple others approached then. “Do you really think we’re that naïve? Get Big Brother. Detain him!”

It took a great deal of control to not follow his trained instincts. He took a deep breath and just raised his hands up and away from his body. It would be clear he would not be going for the sword.
on his back or the hand crossbow on his belt. “Had spies come through haven’t you?” He felt one of the goron guards remove his sword and the crossbow before tying his hands together with a rope. They hadn’t found the knife he’d hidden in his bracer. If he had to he could still get out. A knife wouldn’t do anything against a goron’s hide though.

“You might know all about that then, hylian.” The guard finished the ropes and they took him into one of the blackened domes. As they walked past though, Link noticed a couple long indentations in one of the domes. He felt a chill down his spine as he realized what the most likely culprit for scorching the refugees was.

He was shoved to the stone floor of a small room in one of the domed structures. Torches were lit and there were a couple other people around. A great goron was standing in front of him, wearing similar armor to the guards, but it looked far grander. There were metal bands around his wrists and ankles, while the hammer he had resting in front of him looked like it weighed as much as Epona, while bearing the marks of his tribe.

Link recognized them immediately from when he was first brought here so many years ago. His beard and eyes hadn’t changed a bit. He’d actually been the one who had held one of the trials for them. Back before tensions between Hyrule and the goron tribes on the mountain had reached a breaking point. “Darunia?” He was kicked in his back and went into the floor.

“Speak when spoken to spy,” one of the guards said.

“That is enough,” the big boss of the gorons said as Link forced himself into a sitting position. He tilted his head and looked closer at the hylian. “Out of all the champions The Kingdom would produce I cannot believe you would be a deserter.”

“Things change,” Link said. “A lot has changed.”

“It most certainly has! The king making demands to give them our support and access to our mines? Envoys from Ganondorf and The Gerudo Tribes offering rewards with one hand and threats in the other for helping them? And hundreds of others passing through to try and escape into Holodrum.” He growled a little and hefted his hammer over his shoulder. “And, if the gossip stones are right, there is whispering that The Hero of Hyrule has abandoned The Crown and The Kingdom to its fate, well what sort of picture does that paint for people trying to stay out of the war?”

“I’m not here as your enemy.” He looked up. “You’re right by Kakariko. I’m sure you’ve probably by now even seen some posters showing up asking for anyone to try to capture me. I’m trying to stop this war.”

“Stop it how though?” The room grew quiet. “To get us to join with your king? We were allies just a few years ago, yes. But times change. And you should know full well. I know you were standing at Zelda’s side for some of those meetings. You watched as our alliance crumbled because King Daphnes refused to help The Tribes.”

Link nodded. “You would have welcomed them. Just as The Kingdom under Gustaf had welcomed your people centuries ago. And that’s why I need you to believe me, Darunia.” He looked up at the goron. “This started with a couple border skirmishes and now it’s become a bloodbath in a year.”
The stony features softened. The scowl was replaced with a frown. He closed his eyes and bowed his head. “I’m sorry, Link. I cannot unless you prove you are not a spy.”

That was what he needed. “I’ll find out what attacked you and make sure it doesn’t come back.”

Darunia scratched his chin. “And if it’s your kinsmen? The Army of Hyrule? Would you be willing to face them and even possibly kill them?”

He looked the goron boss in the eyes and remembered what had taken place. He’d already been deemed a traitor and he was sure the wounded knights and soldiers had long since reported the events in No Man’s Land to someone within The Sheikah. “I’m ready for that possibility...”

He began to laugh after a moment of silence, watching the young hylian. The goron grinned at him. “Kids these days. Wanting to see the best in everything but missing the important parts of what’s going on around them...” He put his hammer down and said something to one of the other guards in the gravely growling language of his tribe. They beat their chest and left the room. The others as well began to disperse, leaving Link and Darunia alone. “You are at least welcome to stay a night, but I cannot take chances for the people under my care. Your movements are probably being watched. Even if you ditched your charm. Now, why don’t you free yourself with that knife you have hidden somewhere?”

“You knew,” he said. No sense hiding it now. Link worked his hands carefully and had soon the small knife freed. He began to cut the ropes.

“You did it when you were here with the other potentials years ago. And why else would you let us take your other weapons so easily?”

“Was it that obvious?”

“I knew your mentor, Alfonzo. And he believed firmly in if you were entering a situation that left you weaponless and bound to have a way out.” He put the hammer against the wall. “He also said that if you were captured and to be hanged to ask for water.”

“Because anything can happen while they go to get it. Yeah...”

“What does he think of what you’ve done here?”

Link’s face changed, though he didn’t realize it until he saw Darunia’s reaction. He bowed his head. “He is dead.” The ropes fell from his wrists and he slipped the knife back into its hiding place.

“Do you know how?”

“My regiment was assigned the Castor Wilds. Only one clear way through the swamps and the blins came that way. Most of them were boars wearing armor over the heads so they could smash through the barricades.” He took a deep breath, remembering the closest thing he had to a father. “On the third charge, he was gored. I killed the rider and their mount but he was killed when the creature’s tusk went through him.” He looked back at the goron.

“He deserved a better end.” His tone was low as he frowned. “We know that is war though. Rarely will a death be a fair one.”

“We drove them off, but lost several more in the attack. I got recalled then and was at the palace
for about a week…”

The guard returned, bringing with them a tray that had roasted boar and some pieces of flatbread. There were also several stones on it. They set it down on a nearby table and looked to Darunia once more. The boss offered Link a giant hand and pulled him to his feet. “So. Has one of The Crown’s Chosen Heroes truly abandoned them?” Darunia asked.

Link nodded. “A week ago there was a battle in South Lanayru. Where the Zora River meets the pass to the desert. Just south of the Seer Valley.” There had been a time when the smell of the cooked meat would’ve made him vomit. He’d been conditioned though to accept it and merely felt himself stiffen slightly as the smell mixed with recent memories of the war and what had happened just outside. “From all my sources, it said that there was a group of refugees that were trying for the river. If they could get there, they could follow it to the ocean and get to Windfall. And I was too late.” Link looked at the tray with the food for a moment and then back to the goron. “Women, children, other noncombatants. Just left in the valley to rot.”

“Any survivors?”

He shook his head. “There were still fires from the pyromancers burning when I got there.”

Darunia let out a rumbling sigh. His features appeared saddened at the news. “What have you become, brother Daphnes? What would Gustaf and Robin say about this war?” He walked to the tray and the table. Darunia turned on his heel and pointed a finger at Link. “If you’d told me this a couple years ago, I’d have you stripped naked and thrown into the crater. The King was my sworn brother.” The finger dropped as he turned his head from the hylian. “But recently… A rito courier passed through. He said people are disappearing in some of the towns. Ones who speak out against the war are taken. Some are pressed into the army while others just disappear. Armies sweep through Hyrule’s once golden fields and blacken them with blood and fire… “

Link just nodded as he sat down at the table. “And now there’s other things out there too. I’ve seen new kinds of monsters popping up because of the war. Lots of necrophages in the south following the battles. Plenty of poes too around trees and more stalkin than I’ve ever seen before.”

“War really going that badly?”

He nodded. “They call it No Man’s Land for a reason. What happened up here though? I’d almost expect some blin raiders having managed to get up the passes or using kargaroks as mounts to fly up here, but doesn’t make sense they’d attack a refugee settlement. Not to mention one so close to Kakariko and the Sheikah.”

“It wasn’t them. It was the dragon.”

He knew it. He’d known it when he’d seen the damaged dome. “Great…” He shook his head. “For once I was hoping I just didn’t see the tracks of a dodongo king…”

“Something has made The Eldin Dragon attack us,” Darunia said. “We’ve seen it active recently, but it was always further north, closer to the border. A couple days ago it came into the camp and damaged the archive dome. We scared it off with the drums and a shot from the cannons, but it came back a few hours ago and started torching the tents. Destroyed two of the cannons before we were able to drive it off.”

Link nodded slowly. “What do you know about the dragon?”
“Not much. Usually it’s content to just remain in the crater and anyone going wandering around up there is not likely to come back. We’d rarely see it even when we had people up there. You’re better off asking Gorko.” Darunia picked up one of the stones from the tray and taking a large bite out of it. Dust and grit landed in his beard as he chewed. “Are you seriously volunteering to get to the bottom of this?”

“Yes.” He took a deep breath. “Zelda. She said I was chosen to be a hero. And… And what kind of hero am I if I let people just trying to escape the war suffer?”

“But you might’ve been the cause of some of their suffering.” He took another bite out of the stone in his hand. “What if they don’t want your help?”

“Then…” He thought back to his teachings. As much as he wanted to help people, he knew what he would have to do. “Then that is their choice. The Goddesses granted us that. And I have to respect their choices.”

“Interesting. And if they refuse help but clearly need it? Such as if they are dying?”

That made him pause for a moment as he cut some of the boar’s meat off for his plate. “Why all the questions? Yours was the Trial of Power, not Wisdom.”

“To properly use power, you need wisdom.” He grinned a little as he chuckled. “You know the stories of The Hero and the risks of having only one piece of the Triforce after all.” He grew more serious then. “You’re walking a very dangerous path now if you really have turned your back on her. And The Kingdom. And you’re going to come into things that all your training never prepared you for.” Darunia finished the stone in his hand. “Given you’re here though and asking why shows you’re starting to do think less like a soldier who’s just following orders. Now, answer the question please.”

“I…” He stopped for a minute. There had to be a reason he’d asked it. Link couldn’t think of an instance where someone who was in such dire straits would be refusing help. Maybe it was a trick question. Maybe it was to gauge his reaction. But the more he thought about it, he couldn’t figure why someone would unless they were a threat to others. Or maybe some people just didn’t want to be saved. He couldn’t possibly reason why though. He couldn’t imagine himself like that either. The only reason he’d been able to do some of the things he had was because he’d been willing to ask for help when he knew he was in over his head. “I’d at least offer… But I don’t know. I would want to but would it be the right thing to do?”

The goron smiled again. “That is a question you should always ask when you get involved in events. Try to get a better understanding of the situation before you act. Alfonzo always said you reacted more than acted during your training. And I remember seeing you nearly break both your legs during that trial they brought you and the other potentials for.”

Link tried to ignore the remark, but his sheepish expression gave him away. “And what is right to one might be wrong to another.” He nodded. “I’ve seen plenty of that already.” Link looked up at the goron again though. “Do you want my help?”

“And what are we going to give you in return?”

“I will need supplies. Things to help me keep going.”

“Just forever on the run?” He looked Link in the eye. “Tell me you had a plan at least. That you didn’t go off half-cocked.”
“I do.”

“Well?”

“First. I stop the bleeding. I make sure the people who need me get help. The refugees. The towns left to fend for themselves. The people I should’ve been helping all this time instead of being a bloody puppet. I make sure foreign powers don’t interfere in such a way that could destroy Hyrule. Then… Then I do what I was trained for.”


“I’d prefer it not come to that but…” He picked some of the meat up with a fork. “If I have to. Besides, you have nothing to lose here. I neutralize the dragon or I die trying. Problem solved either way.”

It was quiet for over a minute. Link began to eat the meal before him as Darunia appeared deep in thought. The goron grabbed another of the stones from the tray. “Your heart’s in the right place kid, but you really need to have a better plan if that’s what you want to do. I accept your offer,” he said. “When you’re finished eating, go to the archives. Tell Gorko I’m assigning him to aid you in this hunt. I’ll get you some armor so you don’t roast when you enter the crater. It will also offer some additional protection against any fire it spits at you.”

“Thank you.”

“Hope you pull this off, kid. That dragon could destroy the entire village. If you do kill it, be sure to bring back its head.”

The goron archives were in the dome that had been damaged from the outside. At least on the inside the damage looked superficial. Countless books and papers were on the floor. A couple refugees and a goron guard worked to help pick up the mess. One of them picked up a lantern off the floor and put it on a nearby table. Shelves lined the two floors of the room, but few seemed to still have their books within them. In the center of the room, a goron stood. He had a short tuft of hair on his head and bushy brows. White tribal markings of his people covered his belly and arms. He had a hand on his head and back to Link as the hylian entered.

“All of my research, months of travelling,” he muttered. “And into this mess!”

“Are you Gorko?” Link asked.

The goron turned around, lowering his hand from his head. “I am. Sorry about the mess. We’ve had a recent incident that has thrown my research into chaos.”

“I know. Darunia asked me to handle the dragon and for you to help me.”

His eyes went wide. Link had never seen the whites of a goron’s eyes, but could’ve sworn he just had. “What?! Has Big Brother finally lost it? You’d need an army!”
“I said I would.”

He groaned and gritted his teeth. Link could see a large gap between his two front teeth as he did. “You know you’re not the first uh…”

“Link.”

“Link. You’re not the first to try to get to the dragon’s lair! It’s been here longer than my tribe has been. And it will probably still be there long after we’re gone. There’s even a couple relics near it that suggest it’s positively ancient.”

“How so?” He folded his arms as the goron waddled to a nearby table. There was a leather bag on it and other tools. He’d seen some of them before as he knew an archeologist and scholar back in Castle Town. Judging by a couple of the prints though it looked like his friend and the goron shared a similar interest in the ancient Sky Tribes.

“From what I’ve found, there was a race of people, or possibly even human ancestors who lived in the skies above! They had birds they’d ride that were even bigger than the kargaroks that smaller blins use for mounts. And they revered a single goddess, as opposed to the three that are commonly accepted.” He grinned as he showed Link a map of the surrounding province. “See each of those marked? Those are statues. Statues that appear to have once served a purpose…”

He knew if he didn’t speak up he’d keep going. “So what does this have to do with the dragon?”

“While it was out one time, me and my assistant Golo went in. And we found another statue like the ones marked on that map. But it wasn’t worn or weathered. It was in perfect condition. We didn’t dare move it though. The dragon would’ve noticed if we’d taken it. Given how old the statues are though, they’d have to have been around before then. Or have taken it in around that time. Of course, there could be another possible reason for it. But we wouldn’t know unless we were in its lair, the upper parts of the old Temple of Din.”

“I’ve been in the new one, what was the old one like?”

“I haven’t been.” Gorko looked back at the table of his notes while a refugee human placed a book on top of some of them. “I only have some of the old records. And some of them state that there had been at one time not one, but two dragons. One that was a storyteller. The other a warlord. Now, the storyteller left long ago. He went south in search of new stories. And that might be why there are some dragons in the South Seas like Valoo. The warlord remained though. But never took any serious interest in any human conflicts. The gorons came in and though the dragon was sometimes spotted, it never seemed to have any interest in us.”

“And how long has it been staying out of fights?”

“I don’t know. It’s been a while since anyone went into the caves it calls home. Want to say it was three years ago someone last actually deliberately went for it.” He looked carefully then at Link’s expression. “You’re serious though about going after it… Fascinating…”

“I could use a guide. And someone who might be able to translate anything we find in there.”

“You’re not going to slay it like so many former knights?”

“Not if I can help it.” He put the map he’d been given back on the table. “Something has gotten it upset. Maybe it was provoked deliberately. Maybe it’s another dragon. And dragons are intelligent, right?”
He nodded. “Yes. Very. Some are even capable of shifter magic.”

“Maybe we can reason with it.”

“And if we can’t?”

Link thought for a minute as he stared at the old map. “Well… Darunia said that if I had to kill it to bring back its head. Which is why I need to know about its patterns and behaviors. I need to know how to track it and get into its head. If it’s been here as long as you’ve said, there are probably more records we can look at as a starting point.”

He nodded. Gorko pointed a finger at him as he did. “You’d be right.” He looked back at his desk and began to stack some of the books on the sky beings to clear space. “I can get them gathered. Will take a bit though…”

“That’s fine. I’m going to take a look outside and see if there’s something we missed in the attack. Then I’ll come help you research.”

“Alright.” Gorko grinned a little. “Maybe we’ll find out if the storyteller and warlord knew one another.” He called to some of the other gorons and refugees helping pick up. “Change of plans! We’re looking for anything on the Eldin Dragon! Specifically the so-called warlord in the old stories!” He reached up and rubbed his forehead, running his fingers back onto his scalp. “Really wish Golo was here to help…”
Putting a Puzzle Together

The sun was starting to peek over the horizon when he walked out again. There was still the scent of scorched earth in the air even though the fires had been put out. Link watched as the dead were counted. The gorons started taking the dead bodies and carefully pile them on an unlit pyre. He looked to see some of the refugees standing near them. Some helped, others wept. Many were human, while a few were hylian or even gerudo. Link merely closed his eyes and bowed his head. These were the people who needed him.

Link walked to where Epona had been hitched. “Time to get to work,” he said to the mare. He dug through the saddle bags for a moment before pulling a bottle of milk and another with a label that read ‘lupine sense’. He uncorked the second bottle and drank it. The liquid felt like ice as it went down his throat in spite of being kept in the warm saddle bag. He coughed and clenched his eyes shut as it took effect. A moment later he opened his eyes and saw the world with greater clarity. The smell of the dead grew potent in his nostrils, almost to the point he felt vomit rising in his throat. The wind clearly whistled in his ears and hushed conversations among the refugees became clear if he focused on them.

Link looked among the refugees again. He could see spirits standing among them; with the ones they’d loved in life or had found camaraderie with. Other spirits wandered the camp as well though. It was these he looked to. They wandered the camp, going through the motions of the events before the attack. Others shook and rocked in place but each was an echo of a life now gone. He’d done this before though, and needed to first find the scent of the attacker. He inhaled deeply as his sharpened senses worked to determine which one belonged to the attacker. It took a little effort, but he managed to climb onto the archive dome and inspect the claw marks, where its scent was strongest. Though it had gone to the skies, it was enough that if he used the rest of the lupine sense elixir in the caves, he’d recognize and be able to follow it if they needed to.

As he climbed down, he’d noticed, a couple refugees and the same guard who had brought him to see Darunia were now watching. They muttered about his strange behavior, but seemingly ignored him as he walked past. He’d heard these before though when he investigated. Alfonzo had always said to treat the investigations like the puzzles in the temple trials for potentials. Once he’d climbed down, he went to one of the ruined tents. The few belongings within it were scorched black. He picked up a canvas doll that had somehow survived the inferno and inspected it for a moment before gently putting it aside.

“What are you doing?” a small voice asked.

He looked up from his kneeling position and over his shoulder. A young boy stood there in ripped clothes. His dark hair was matted and long, falling over his eyes while his hands were burned and bandaged. The boy was around the same age he and Aryll had been found by the Chosen of The Crown in Aboda more than twenty years ago now. “Putting a puzzle together,” Link said.

His large eyes watched the hylian’s digging with intense interest. “You’re trying to put the tent back together?”

“No. I’m trying to figure out why the dragon attacked.” He picked up a blackened book. With his sharpened senses from the potion, he looked it over, but found nothing of use. There were no weapons, no armors, nothing to suggest the refugee had lost everything or never had them to begin with. Curiously though, he found some jewelry and gold. It was damaged horribly, but together enough that it was recognizable.
“But it’s a dragon…”

“And?” He looked back over his shoulder again.

“And it’s… It’s a dragon. Dragons are monsters that hoard treasures. Different kinds of treasures. They’re not dumb animals.”

Link nodded a little hearing the explanation. It was true. “Understand your enemy and you will increase your chances of victory.” He thought back on some of his past work, before the war. A small smile appeared on his face for a moment. “You may find that your enemy is just someone trying to help their friends like you are. And if you can reason with them, you may make a new friend.” He looked back at the ruined tent at the jewels. They didn’t appear to be incredibly valuable, but they had been left. He went to check another scorched tent and dug through the ash.

“So you want to be its friend?”

“Better than making an enemy.” Link picked up another ruined box. He pried it open with his knife, finding a few gemstones within and a charm similar to the one he’d tied around the knight’s wrists. Placing his index and middle finger on it, he sent a faint pulse of magic into it, but nothing happened. He breathed a sigh of relief. It was just a poor copy. “It depends on how things go.” He stood up after putting the box back down and thought on his knowledge of some dragons in the past. Clearly this one did not value material wealth. He stood up again and resumed inspecting the site before looking at the child. “Were your parents in the attack?”

He shook his head. “Me and my sister. We came here with Joli. Do you know Joli?”

Though he wasn’t aware of it, his eyes widened and watered slightly. “I don’t.” He briefly glanced up from them to see the spirits pass through some of the others there. The funeral pyre began to burn as a goron spoke the rites to grant the dead peace.

“He’s funny. Always looking for shiny things. Ran into a grotto looking for treasure! He ran out when there were keese in it.”

That sounded like someone else he knew. When he looked up though, thanks to the potion, he saw a pale green, partially transparent man standing next to him. They’d been burned horribly and very little was able to help Link identify them. He did not let on to the child he could see their guardian next to them. “I know a man like that,” he said. “He helped me when I was in the South Seas.”

“You’ve been all the way to the sea?!” The child’s eyes were wide in surprise.

Link nodded.

“What’s it like?!”

“Well, it’s a number of islands, with the big ones being Windfall, Dragon Roost and Mercay. You know about rito?”

The child nodded eagerly, grinning.

“There’s a tribe from Dragon Roost. And they know just by listening to the winds if something is wrong with them. There are pirates. And zora. But not like the ones you’d see along the rivers. They’d have trouble if they came up the rivers into Hyrule.”

“Why?”
“They’re used to the warmer salt water. And the cooler freshwater in the rivers is difficult for them to adapt to. They can but it’s not comfortable for them.”

He took another couple minutes to answer the questions the child asked. He did not share his deeds though. Taking a moment to amuse them he felt would help them both. They were only one of many that had lost their families in the war and he felt some camaraderie to them. Even if it was only because him and his sister Aryll were orphans of another bloody war a little more than twenty years ago. He finished looking around and took a long drink from the bottle of milk. The spirits started to fade from his sight. The stench of death was dulled as well as his hearing back to more human levels. It would still be another hour before his senses were truly normal again, but he knew the enhanced senses could be problematic. The hearing in particular he’d found was the worst part.

He walked back to Epona and stowed the bottles. “So,” he said to her. “We have a dragon. One that does not hoard valuables or jewels that has stayed out of human conflicts for as long as anyone can remember.”

The horse flicked an ear and blinked at him as he reached up to give her snout a stroke. “Gorko mentioned knights going after it though,” he continued. “Maybe there’s some records of the more recent attempts.” He went back into the archive dome then.

It looked cleaner than the first time he’d entered, but there was still plenty of cleaning to be done. A couple refugees were shelving the books now while Gorko had a huge stack of them on two desks. He sat at one and flipped through it slowly, taking down notes in another book. He looked up as he saw Link approached. “Anything new outside?”

“A few things,” Link said. “This one doesn’t appear to have any desire to hoard treasures.”

“Sometimes dragons are pretty territorial. Maybe it’s upset about the refugees. But if that was the case, it’d have attacked when they started to appear. As it stands, it’s been over a year since refugees started to flow from Hyrule proper through the mountain range.”

Link found a chair and pulled it over. He winced a little from the shrill scraping it made on the stone. His hearing was still enhanced. “You mentioned knights had come along to try and deal with it earlier.”

“I did. From all over too.” Gorko stood up from his chair and pulled a book out from the pile. “Anyone carrying enough weapons and armor that comes through we need to keep an eye on. Anyone with an entourage as well. Big Brother doesn’t like strangers to go around so heavily armed unless they have a good reason. Doubly so with so many refugees now. Wouldn’t be surprised if he starts getting some help from the jarls in Holodrum to help keep the peace.”

“Things really that bad?”

“Getting there. We had a couple fights the guards had to break up earlier. I thank Din every day we don’t have a riot. Most people just want to get out of the country before The Tribes reach North Lanayru.”

“Long as the Hyrulean Army holds the Castor Wilds, that won’t happen.” Link opened the book
and started to flip through it. “Wait, I recognize some of these names. Katir from Labrynna, The Calatian Bear… These are some pretty big names.”

“Anyone with a red ‘x’ by their name went off after it and never came back.”

He glanced back down. That was all he needed to do. “That’s a lot of names…”

“Exactly.” He coughed a little and went back to his notes. “The ones who don’t either weren’t hunting the dragon or were able to be talked out of it.”

“Hmm…” He kept going through the names. The number of willing knights and adventurers trickled to an end around the time the war started. He did stop though at a couple names, recognizing them as Chosen who had gone missing decades ago. “Find anything else out about the dragon?”

“I might have actually.” He grabbed another book and flipped through his notes. Gorko slid it over to Link. The hylian read quietly some of the scribbles. “So, The Warlord of Eldin was said to have traveled the world, seeking the strongest warriors and at one time lead an army of lizardmen and a few humans who he felt were worthy. Though his army was victorious many times and he personally led them, he felt empty and disgusted. Disgusted because humans are so petty and maybe a bit of hate in that he had never once met an opponent he could consider worth his time. So he retreated into the mountain. Our records however suggest that the dragon doesn’t even consider people worth his time anymore. So anyone who challenges him actually faces his appointed knight.”

“So he’s been at this for… Years.”

“Centuries, actually. That was just the most recent set of records we could find.” He motioned at the one Link held as he spoke.

“So, we try challenging him and make him keep his word. Provided we can’t talk it out of it in the first place. We do it somewhere we have an advantage. Does it have wings?”

Gorko nodded.

He began to formulate more of his plan. There was little heroic about what he was going to do, but he wasn’t going to risk the lives of the surviving refugees. He would need the obsidian shard bolts from his bag to shred the creature’s wings and the small bombs to help crack its hide. He’d first bring it to the ground. Then he’d finish it off. He also needed a backup plan though in case it was clear there was no way he could bring it down. He wasn’t going to let it hurt anyone else. “Could we lure it into the old Temple of Din and then collapse it?”

“Doesn’t that defeat the purpose of challenging it to a fight?”

“Do you really want to take a chance?”

Gorko was quiet for a moment. “We can do that. A couple powder kegs in the main chamber on the supports will bring it down entirely. And I think Din would forgive you for it if it meant saving lives.”

“Sounds like we have a plan then.” He stood up. “I’ll go prepare.”
It was noon by the time they reached the cave him and Gorko would enter. It was far up the pass and from where he stood, he could see Eldin Province as well as the majority of neighboring Lanayru. He could even make out Castle Town at the heart of The Kingdom and the smoke rising out of No Man’s Land. Link was digging through Epona’s saddle bags as he waited. He’d traded the recruit’s uniform and tabard for the armor that Darunia had offered him. It was a deep red tunic with a plate piece over his torso and heavy greaves over his legs. His left arm was encased in similar plate to protect his sword arm. The gauntlets were woven fibers and scales made from skinned dodongos. His arming sword and shield were on his back. He pulled out a quiver of special bolts for his crossbow and loaded one. They were enchanted to explode into tiny obsidian daggers moments after having been launched. In the pouches on his belt were six small bombs and the rest of the lupine sense potion along with a bottle of milk and a little blue vial to mend his wounds. He hoped that he wouldn’t need it because he was sure any loud enough echoing in the caves would hurt his ears had he consumed the potion. He gave the mare a gentle rub on her neck before hearing the others.

Gorko walked up the pass with a pair of particularly bulky gorons. Each one was carrying a massive keg of explosive powder on each shoulder. Gorko was telling them about the importance of making sure things from the old temple had been recorded before they destroyed it, but they didn’t seem to pay any attention to him. In silence the two with the kegs kept going up the path while Gorko stopped next to Epona and looked to the entrance as well. The archeologist wore a scale armor vest on and gauntlets similar to Link’s. The biggest difference though was Gorko’s gauntlets had heavy plates above the knuckles. Even though gorons were hearty beings, Link knew full well the stories of how some would be eaten whole by dragons.

“My brothers will set up the explosives in the temple,” Gorko said. “Then they will head back down.”

“Sounds good.” He pulled the helmet of the armor on then and looked to the cave. “You ready?”

“I am.”

Link took a deep breath and lit his lantern with a flick of his fingers. After he’d hooked it to his belt, he started inside with Gorko next to him.

The cave began to grow hotter as they headed deeper. Not long after entering, they came across an old camp. They found scorched skeletons of men in armor and mail. There were four horse skeletons as well. Link cringed a little seeing how they’d thought it was a good idea to bring their mounts so far into the cave. The bodies looked like they had been left where they fell and the weapons were of no importance. Looking around, there were a few different caverns they could go.

“Map?” Link asked.

Gorko pulled one out of his bag and started looking it over. “This map might not be right,” he said. “Volcanic activity could’ve sealed off some of the paths or just rock slides. The dragon might’ve even changed things around to keep people guessing.” He looked down then. “But the tracks in here are well-preserved.”

Link knelt down and looked at them carefully. There were dozens of them and it was impossible to completely tell what was what, but they all were heading into another cavern. The bulk of them though started to head towards the crater. He got up a moment later. “We’ll try this way,” he said.
“If we have to, I have the potion.”

They started down the tunnel then that lead towards the crater. It began to grow hotter until they came to a great cavern. Rotten wood platforms were affixed to the top level and they could look all the way down to the bottom. There were old statues it looked like carved into the walls and faded cave paintings of gorons. Gorko immediately started looking them over. He pulled a notebook from his bag and wrote furiously while Link slowly walked further down. It was clear it had once been a goron village or fort, but was long abandoned. He stopped though as he saw footprints. They were narrow and clearly not the prints of a knight or someone in armor. He reached up to his neck, but stopped. He no longer had his charm to check for any sort of magic trace. Following them though, he saw they were very fresh and they lead into a tunnel at the bottom.

When they reached the bottom, Link saw a great archway that lead further back. It was a throne room, but if that had been its original purpose, Link didn’t know. Bolted to the walls were scorched skeletons, still wearing the armor they’d worn in life. Their weapons and belongings as well were laid at their feet. Link recognized the heraldry on some of the shields as well.

A figure sat at the other end of it in a chair carved into a long pillar. There was a small area behind the throne as well with a number of round holes cut out of the rock to make windows. The red glow from the crater filled the chamber. The figure was a man and wore red plate armor. In one hand was a long spear with a pair of small prongs behind the weapon’s head. Its base had a small spike on it. Their helmet appeared like the head of a dragon and had a long red tail out the back. They looked up slowly as Link entered.

“Another…” the figure said. “Why have you come?”

“I am looking for the dragon,” Link said. “The one they call The Warlord of Eldin. You are his appointed knight, are you not?”

“Volga,” he growled. “Another looking for glory. How typical… Not waiting for the rest of the army I see. Just leave my master be. He has no interest in your wars.”

“I am not here to fight. I am here to ask them if they know anything about the refugees who were attacked.”

The figure on the throne stood up. The spear twirled in their hand in a circle. “You dare insult my master? Saying that he attacked worthless animals?” He laughed. “They are cowards. Not worth killing. And you! I will kill you where you stand for your insults!” They lunged off the throne, grabbing a spear next to them.
Link pulled the shield off his back and swung it into position. He thrust his arm forward as the spear neared and they clattered with a flash of sparks. Using the momentary stun, he pulled the sword out and moved; ready for what he was sure would be coming next. “If he didn’t attack them, then-“ He wasn’t given a chance to finish his thought as his opponent swept his weapon around.

“I don’t think he’s going to listen to you, Link!” Gorko shouted.

Link took a deep breath and focused. He watched Volga move slowly and with careful, calculated actions. He lunged then. Link sidestepped quickly and with his blade beat the spear down. With an opening, he lunged for a stab, but pulled back when the spear came back up to avoid being hit.

Link backed away as the man lunged once more for him. He got just out of reach. The hylian spun his blade once in his hand and kept circling, looking for an opening. His attacker swept his spear around in another arc, going high. This time though, Link rolled forward, under the swing, and lunged. The blade punctured the armor in their chest. Volga was knocked back from the blow, but Link didn’t see any blood. He hopped back to put some distance between them again. The dragon’s servant lunged, both hands thrusting the spear forward.

This time Link wasn’t quick enough with his shield and the spear grazed his arm. He winced, but the armor had taken the brunt of the strike. There was going to be a bruise at the very least. The next swing though cut through his leg and he could feel blood. It was not a bad wound, but he saw a way to use it to his advantage against his opponent. He feigned a cry of pain and dropped to one knee.

“Another pathetic kill,” Volga spat. He aimed his spear for Link’s throat. “No wonder he hates your kind.”

Link took a deep breath and focused. He’d only get one shot at this and could hear Alfonzo from beyond the grave chastising his recklessness. Magic crackled in his muscles. As the spear approached, the world slowed. He kicked off with his leg as a pulse of green magic flashed around him. It was only for an instant, but it was all the time he needed to roll out of the way. With the magic still working, he had managed in a streak of green light, to get behind them mid-roll. Using the momentum and last surge of the magic, he kicked off the ground, slicing his blade into Volga’s back.

The knight stumbled but recovered quickly, spinning the spear low in hopes of tripping Link. The hylian hopped over it and whipped his wrist forward, sword’s blade moving down to slice their skull down the middle. Volga jumped back and avoided the strike before charging with a roar. He moved far faster than Link thought he would with all the armor and was knocked on his back. He swung down. Link rolled as steel pierced the stone floor and jumped to his feet. Fire and magic flashed from the impact and he felt the heat of it, even with the goron armor. The knight raised his spear and lunged again. Link jumped back. There was a moment of calm in the fight, both of them beginning to circle once more and look for openings. Both combatants watched the other carefully, watching for the quick kill.

“You are not like those knights who came before, he said. “You fight like a hexer!”

“Just a problem solver,” Link said. “And I did not come here seeking a fight. Just answers.” He had
to keep talking now. Distract them and maybe manage to end this before either of them was killed.

“Your master, or one like him, attacked the goron village recently. A lot of people died. People who were not warriors, but victims seeking to escape the war in the south. I never accused him of it when I entered and I know he has no interest in human conflicts.” Link slowly lowered his blade, but kept his shield raised. “So if it wasn’t him, then who could it have been?”

The knight growled. “Don’t make me laugh. You seriously believe those people down there are victims?”

“They are.” He watched them still, keeping his guard up. “And I think you know it. Your master doesn’t care about human wars, but is fine fighting us. Looking for an honorable opponent worth his time. He doesn’t hoard treasure like other drakes.” He pointed to the walls with the bodies on them quickly. “He hoards trophies. And none of those were worth claiming as trophies because they didn’t seek the challenge.”

“They! They are!” Volga dropped his spear then and put his hands to his head. He began to mumble. A growl escaped his throat then. Link saw a glow of fire in his eyes vanish for a long moment. They had turned black where there had once been a pale blue glow. “NO!” He lunged for Link then, their left arm outstretched and began to break out of the armor. It twisted as it turned into a scaled claw. His eyes glowed and Link saw a furnace of heat in Volga’s open mouth. The Chosen-turned-hexer jumped back in time for a spout of flame to erupt from them. The knight continued to change, his armor breaking into pieces and flashing away in fire as it struck the floor. He roared as their helm became his head and body shifted violently. Volga let out an inhuman roar and vanished in a cone of flames. A great pair of dark wings though spread out of it and there was no sign of the knight.

In his place was a massive four-legged dragon. The long plume of hair that had been his helmet burst into flames. His tail whipped back and forth and clearly was blocking Link’s escape path. He growled and snapped his jaws at Link and advanced. Link backed towards the throne, slipping his shield on his back and pulled the crossbow from his hip. The dragon lunged for him then far faster than such a massive creature should’ve been capable of Link thought.

Link was knocked back behind the throne. His helmet flew off and clattered away. He let out a groan and forced himself to his feet, but saw that the goddesses had smiled upon him. He could see the crater through the windows. Link sheathed his sword and as the dragon closed in, climbed out one of them.

The edge of the wall was slick, but Link was able to slide down to a small ledge below as the dragon burst through above. He could see below into the lake of lava that was the Death Mountain Crater. A single large island sat in the center of it with what looked like a magnetic stone bridge across to the old Temple of Din. He started along the ledge as he saw the dragon circling above.

“Link! Your left! There’s a way down!” Gorko shouted from above.

He turned and saw the ledge could lead to a larger set of them he could hop down on. As he did, he felt the stone begin to give way and leaped to the next ledge. This one had bridges that lead right to the old Temple of Din. The dragon plowed through it, sending shards of rock flying. Link felt his
armor rattle from some of the rocks and found himself on his back as the dragon rose higher. He began to cough from the ash and heat in the air. The dragon turned around though and was diving for him. Link pulled the small crossbow from his belt and aimed. His finger squeezed the trigger.

The weapon let out a snap and the bolt flew. A moment after it had been loosed, the head exploded in a small flash and shards of obsidian flew onward. Link quickly loaded another bolt as he got to his feet. The shards struck the dragon’s wing, but didn’t appear to do anything. The talons of Volga’s rear feet dug into the stone island as he spread his wings. Link fired again, aiming for the same wing. This time the obsidian ripped through the creature’s leather wing. It let out a roar of pain and struggled to get airborne again. Link didn’t take another chance and fired a third bolt. There was another flash as the bolt’s obsidian head exploded into tiny scything shards. When Volga spread his wings again, the right one was in tatters. There were some holes in it big enough that Link could jump through them. Volga swept his fore claws out as a long stream of flame erupted from his mouth.

Link’s back was to the lava. He had no option but to pull his shield and hunker behind it. His fingers flickered in a sign and a glowing blue ball of light appeared in his palm. It flashed and he found himself encased in a semi-transparent blue diamond. There was a gentle hum of magic that became a shriek as the fire crashed against it. He noticed cracks appearing in it in moments before the flames subsided. Looking over his shield after a moment he saw the dragon coming for him. Link pulled one of the bombs from a pouch and discarded his glowing shield. Even though the spell had protected admirably, it would shatter with another hit and he’d be knocked in. As the dragon got closer it opened its mouth and began to inhale. Link could see the air around its fangs beginning to spark. He threw the grenade then and it flew into the creature’s gaping gullet. It began to choke on the small bomb and there was a muffled explosion. The scales around the creature’s neck shattered from the internal impact and it collapsed.

The beast wheezed and struggled for air. Link could see in it eyes surprise but also a strange relief. He approached it, pulling his blade from his back. The dragon made no movements or actions against him until he got closer. The eyes turned black and carried no reflection and thrashed violently at him. Its ruined wing flailed and the dragon swung his claws. Link slid under one of them and stabbed his blade through the damaged scales on its neck. Boiling hot blood drained from the wound and the creature’s struggling slowed. Link planted his boot next to the wound and pulled the blade out. Volga’s head collapsed into the ash and dirt. He still struggled, but ceased entirely as Link climbed on the back of his neck and drove his sword through a shattered piece of scale. The blade severed Volga’s spine and the struggle ceased instantaneously.

The so-called Warlord of Eldin would never see another battle.

Once he’d climbed off, Link collapsed back, leaning against the dead dragon’s neck, catching his breath.

“You killed it,” Gorko gasped. “You actually killed it.”

Link glanced up from where lay. He coughed as he searched his pouches. The blue vial was soon in his hand. Link pulled the stopper out with his teeth and drank its contents in moments. His insides burned as the potion worked, forcing his body to mend itself. He buckled over a little as he did, clutching his stomach.

“So he was a shapeshifter too.” The goron knelt next to Link then. “Little ironic then. He disliked humans so much, yet his guise was one of them.”
Link’s breathing was labored, but steady. The pain of the potion’s medicine was dulled a little now as the worst of it was past. “Something was wrong, Gorko.”

“What do you mean?”

“I never… Never accused him of the attack. He assumed it. And when I started talking again. Well, you saw.” He looked at the goron with a grimace.

“I did. He seemed almost confused about what was going on. And then he just lost it.”

“And look at its eyes.” He let out a cry of pain as he felt a wound in his side from a strike righted itself. “There’s a magic at work here. Not a natural one. Not-not completely consumed by magic but being manipulated mentally by it.” Thanks to his time as a Chosen of The Crown though, he already had an inkling of what kind of magic could do this. It would have to be a mystery to solve later though. Link got to his feet and pulled a knife from his belt. He twirled it once in his hand and drove it into the back of the corpse’s head.

“We need to tell Big Brother,” Gorko said.

The head of the dragon was hooked to Epona’s side as Link rode back into the goron village. There were no flies buzzing around it though as Link removed it from his mare’s side and presented it to Darunia. The surviving refugees were silent in shock as they saw the creature that had attacked them before dawn was dead.

The big boss of the gorons picked up the head by one of its horns and looked to Gorko. “This will make quite a tale,” he said. “The dragon of Eldin Caves slain by a deserter.”

“There’s more,” Link said, climbing off Epona carefully. He let out a little groan as he landed from his still healing wounds. “I believe it was forced to attack.”

“Forced?”

“What we saw lines up with it,” Gorko said. “He didn’t listen to reason and when he started to, it left him. And the eyes. They’re still so black that there’s no reflection. It sounded like he was convinced too that the camp of refugees were his enemies. From our records, he should have had no interest in this place at all.”

Darunia nodded silently and looked back at Link then. “What could’ve caused this? A blin shaman?”

“Blins don’t have spellwork that could warp the mind of a dragon.”

Link nodded in agreement. “To do something like that you need a great deal of preparation,” he said. “And to know your target to put a curse like that on something that strong-willed. Or worse.”

Gorko looked at Link in silence for a moment. Again the hylian thought he’d seen the whites of their eyes. “You’re no ordinary deserter, are you?”

He just shrugged. Darunia knew, but Link was hoping that he could keep whatever was left of his attempt at a low profile in the village. “Just trying to help people.”
“So someone deliberately made this thing come after us…” Darunia said. “Why though? And who?”

“I don’t know. Both sides in this war though would have their reasons,” Link said, lying that he already had an idea who might be capable of such an act. “I would like to know too though.” He glanced back at the refugees. “But I cannot stay.”

“At least stay until you’re a little more healed!” Gorko said. “That thing nearly killed you!”

“He is right,” Darunia said. “Korgrith said there’s a few soldiers from Kakariko coming up the path with the refugees.” He looked Link right in the eyes and placed his hands on the hylian’s shoulders. “You stay here you could risk everyone.”

“I know…” Link replied sadly. “I’ll take some supplies. Then head back down the narrower passes. Crown won’t risk people using those.”

“Keep the armor. That can be some of your payment.”

“Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, four chapters in and a lot more to go!

Just some quick devnotes:

-When started the series, I was planning on it being a collection of one-offs where Link and a companion would essentially run through a dungeon together. Or solve some other small mystery. Similar to the short story collections of The Witcher. As the chapters came together though, the war narrative came to be used to tie them all together.

-Decision to have the warlord actually be Volga didn't come until late but felt that including the character would be a good way to kick off the series as well as help set up a greater mystery. And inverts the sacrificial lion trope.

Coming next week! The Hylian Hexer heads for greener scenery in the south.

Thanks for reading. And keep being awesome people.
The Ride to Ordon

It was called No Man’s Land for good reason. What had once been vibrant fields of green and plains of farmlands were now wasted. Roads were abandoned for fear of highwaymen and blin war parties. Small settlements were reclaimed by nature. The people of them had fled to whatever protection Hyrule’s armies could provide. Link could always tell when he’d come to a sight of battle, even if the dead had been collected. It was the poes that haunted the locations and the small legions of stalkin that harvested whatever bones and weapons had been left behind. The poes were particularly common around the trees that held hanged men. Both sides often would do it to deserters and traitors and the dead would become the phantoms.

At a signpost on the third day of his riding south from Death Mountain, he saw a caravan that was down the road. The few guards with it were engaged with a large pack of bokoblins. They were easily identified by the large ears and shrieks as they swung their clubs. It looked like they were struggling against them.

“We need to help them, c’mon girl!” he said to Epona. The mare seemed to not need any additional encouragement and broke into a gallop. He pulled his sword from his back and readied it for a swing. Within moments, he swept the blade forward and cleanly sliced the head of one of the bokoblins off. It collapsed into a heap while another was trampled under Epona’s hooves. The remaining pack retreated with shrieks. The caravan guards looked to the hylian on the horse, weapons still raised.

“Don’t want any trouble, mister,” one of them said. “But you try it you’ll pay.”

Link sheathed his blade then and looked to them. In the covered wagon, among the several clay jars bearing the mark of Lon Lon Ranch and a crate was a young woman who appeared around his age. There was a fair bit of fright in her green eyes, but a little relief that the fighting was over. “Everyone okay?”

There was a tense moment as the men started to realize that they wouldn’t have a fight on their hands. They lowered their weapons slowly. “Yeah we’re. We’re okay.” One of them looked back at the cart. “The cart’s broke though and our horse ran off when the fighting started.”

“Where were you headed?”

“Ordon Village.”

He’d heard it before. Refugees were slipping out that way as well to the coast. Given he was on his own now, maybe he could get a message to Medli from a courier in the secluded village and start to connect with the other allies he’d made before the war. He was going to need to meet with each of them and determine which ones he’d be able to trust. Link dismounted then. The caravan guards moved back into a more defensive position. “I’m heading that way as well. We can use my horse once we repair the cart.”

“What’s the catch?” the young woman in the cart called out.

“You have to take me with you.”

The guards spoke amongst themselves while one of them watched him closely. It was clear they were wary and he heard more than one mention that he may have stolen the goron armor he was
wearing. He waited until the oldest of them approached. They pulled the rust-colored helmet off
their head, revealing a middle-aged man with weathered features. Link recognized the style of
dress from the region they were headed and he had a sword on his back. “What’s your name, son?”

“Link.”

He offered a hand. “I’m Rusl. Thank you for the help.”

He took it and shook. “Glad everyone is okay.”

The older man nodded. “Me too.”

“Dangerous to be traveling along these roads nowadays. Where were you coming from?”

“Lon Lon Ranch. We were in need of some supplies. And had a couple people who wanted to get
home before the raiders started showing up again.” The conversation paused as they heard one of
the guards swearing. A couple other people emerged from the cart then. One was a girl while the
other was a young boy. The oldest of the group said something he didn’t catch and they looked
back at her as Rusl continued. “Just a quick trip to see Talon and get a few things turned into a bit
of a surprise when the blins showed up.”

“Must’ve been desperate to get those supplies.”

He looked grimly at Link. “Indeed. And I fear things will get far worse before they get better. And
I have a feeling Lon Lon Ranch will soon have to openly support The Kingdom in spite of its
history.”

“There!” one of the guards shouted. “The wheel’s replaced. Get the horse hitched up and let’s get
out of here!”

Link took Epona forward and in a minute she was hooked to the cart. It was slower going, but he
felt a little more comfortable that he was traveling with other people. They still were clearly unsure
about him though with how the guards kept watching him, even Rusl, who appeared to be the one
in charge. They’d watch his steps as he held Epona’s bridle and refused to make eye contact. One
of the children approached him, only to be carefully pulled back by one of the guards. About an
hour later though, one of the guards did approach along with Rusl.

“Where are you from?” the guard asked.

Link looked at them. This one didn’t seem to spook like the others and tried to keep staring. He
looked right back. “Originally?”

“Yeah.”

“Outset.” The response had come quick. It wasn’t a lie, but he wasn’t sure how the conversation
was going to go. His training was starting to come into play. To treat it more like an interrogation
given their suspicions of him.

“Pretty far inland for an islander.” They broke eye contact with him then.

Link did not. He watched their movements stiffen and after a few paces, they’d put a few feet
between them so they were still next to him, but had more distance between them. “Do a lot of
traveling.”

“Has the war reached the islands?” Rusl asked.
Link glanced at them. The older man didn’t carry himself like the other guards. “I haven’t been there since I was a child. Don’t have a reason to go back anyways. Besides, I came from the mountains.”

“That explains the armor,” the guard said. “Must’ve cost a king’s ransom.”

“It was payment for a favor.”

“Must’ve been a very big favor.”

“It was.” He looked at his mare for a moment and gave her a gentle pat as they kept walking.

Hours later, the sun began to go down and they stopped in a hollow by a stream for the night. They’d lit a fire and caught some local game for dinner. Link was sitting by the stream with one of the fishing poles the group had, watching the bobber and waiting for something to take a bite. His ears picked up someone approached behind him.

“Can I help you?” he asked, not turning from the stream.

“Perhaps,” Rusl said. The older man sat down next to Link then. “You were with The Hyrulean Army.”

Link didn’t even look at him. “What gave me away?”

“I served seven years before I left to be with my family. You carry yourself like one of the knights. How you swung your blade from your horse earlier looked very much like a method the light cavalry uses.”

There was a moment of quiet and then Link looked at him. “I’d prefer you keep that to yourself.”

“I won’t tell anyone. I am curious though for news from the front. I still had friends among the ranks and we haven’t heard much so far in the country. We’re still feeling it though with raiders getting past the front lines.”

“I haven’t either. What I have though…” Link saw the bobber duck under the water and pulled the fishing rod back. There was nothing on the hook though the bait was gone. “It’s not good. It’s a grind, especially in the south. The army holds the main passes along the Seer Valley, but blin war parties still slip through. In the north, it’s a blood bath. The main Tribes are forcing through the swamps, where their lighter armor is able to maneuver better against the heavier footmen of The Kingdom. Casualties are mounting on both sides.”

“Oh…” He let out a sigh. “So exactly the same as I heard earlier. And almost six months ago.”

“Yeah.” Link put the fishing rod aside. “Neither side can keep this going from what I’ve seen. Unless one side finds some advantage, it’s going to turn into a stalemate that’ll leave both of them in tatters. So much so Labrynna or Calatia might seek to expand their borders and invade.”

Rusl nodded. “This whole war is starting to feel more like some great storm and the only thing we can do is hope we weather it.” He let out a sigh and fell silent for a minute, watching as the sun
started to sink in the west. “Tell me. Do you ever feel a strange sadness when dusk falls? They say-”

Link’s ears perked up and as the old soldier spoke, he did as well. “It’s the only time when our world intersects with theirs.”

“You know the stories.”

He’d walked that shadowy world only a year before the war. Its princess even called him a trusted friend. The thought of her snarking in his ear made him smile a little; sure she’d be doing so again soon. “Quite well.”

“ Heard many of them myself while on the long marches. Stories of heroes worked well for morale.”

Link’s curiosity got the better of him then. He glanced at Rusl again. “Hear any new ones before you left?”

He shook his head. “Rumor has it a new Hero had appeared chosen by Farore though. That he was among the ranks but fear of spies meant his identity remained a secret. That the only soul who knows in all of Hyrule is Princess Zelda.”

There was a hint of truth to what he’d just said. The Chosen had been said to carry The Hero’s Spirit in them after all. However, it made him wonder who they’d named. He wondered if he’d have to face this other named-hero eventually, or even if he’d have to stand with his blade crossed with the princess’ rapier one day. Link shook his head. “There’s probably others. But morale is an important part for any army and the stories of The Chosen are important.” He looked to Rusl then. “I’ve never been to Ordon before. What’s it like?”

“Farmlands and forest. We’re near Faron and the Lost Woods. The foothills are good for the goats. And we’ve managed to avoid the war due to the valley. We’ll be there tomorrow. Close enough too to the border with Labrynna that sometimes we get some good trade from them. At least before the war started.”

“You wouldn’t happen to have any work I could do when we arrive? Wallet’s getting kind of light.”

“You’d have to check with the mayor. I’ll introduce you.”

“Thank you.” He baited his hook again with a worm and tossed it back into the stream. “I’m going to assume as well the guards will be taking shifts and not let me assist?”

“That would be right.” Rusl stood up. “I hope you don’t take it personally.”

“I don’t.”

It was around noon when Epona pulled the cart across a long bridge that separated Faron Province from Ordon. The guards seemed relieved as they arrived in the farmlands down the path. Link saw
several people working the fields in simple outfits. A little further to the southwest, he saw the foothills and some simple structures along it. The cart continued to the heart of a small village that it seemed like the war had completely forgotten about it.

“Hey! Hey! Rusl’s back!” a villager shouted.

At the cry, several others came running. Link was glad to be ignored in favor for the friends and family who had returned. He unhooked Epona from the cart, but his ears perked up when he heard one of the children mention his name.

“Who?” a parent asked.

“The man who let us use his horse,” Rusl said. “Come over here and meet everyone, Link.”

He approached the group and got a better look at the children. Their parents were holding onto them tightly. The look on their faces told him they had not seen someone so well-armed and if they had it had been a very long time.

“Why does he have pointy ears?” one of the children asked.

“He’s hylian,” the girl that had been in the cart said. “Like Malon from the ranch or some of the people who were heading up the mountain.” She smiled at him.

He returned her friendliness with a smile of his own. “I’m glad everyone’s okay,” he said, “but it’s been a very long trip. I’m sure you all want to rest. And I was told to speak to the mayor about work.”

“I’ll take you.”

“Ilia,” one of the guards said. He grabbed her wrist. “He’s dangerous. I don’t think-”

She pulled her arm away fast, breaking his grip. “We’re safe now!” she said. “If he had wanted to slit all our throats he’d have done it while we were sleeping!” The bewildered guard looked back at Link then.

“I’ll take you both,” Rusl said, diffusing the situation. “I need to speak with him anyways about the disappearances.”

“Disappearances?” Link asked.

“You’re better off asking the mayor. Come.”

Mayor Bo was a large balding man with two white tufts of a mustache on his upper lip and had his arms folded as Rusl recounted the tale of how they’d encountered the hylian swordsman. His daughter was in the kitchen of the house already working to prepare a stew for them. It had sounded like most of the trip had been uneventful until the bokoblins that had scared the horse off while they were repairing the wheel.

He nodded as the tale came to an end. “I see too that you know Darunia very well,” Bo said to
Link. “He wouldn’t give one of their armors to just anyone.”

“Like I said on the road,” Link answered. “Payment for a favor. Which is why I’m here actually.”

“You want payment for helping bring my daughter and the supplies from Lon Lon Ranch?” He nodded. “I could arrange it. We don’t have much but…”

“Keep it.”

That made Bo’s brows rise. “Really? You actually wanted to help us out of the kindness of your heart? Such nobility is rare these days.”

“I’m looking for work. And Rusl mentioned disappearances,” He looked at the guard who had been the friendliest of the group. “Maybe I can help there and we can draw up a contract.”

Bo looked at Rusl. The two men spoke in hushed voices as they turned their backs to him. He picked up some of it though. There was concern that whatever was going on would start growing bolder. He also thought he heard a horse had been lost. As they talked quietly, Ilia emerged from the kitchen with a tray. There were four bowls of pumpkin stew on it. She put them on the table before taking a seat herself.

“Does a Dragon Roost courier come through here?” he asked her.

“Twice a month,” she said with a smile.

“Good.”

“Need a pen and paper?”

He returned her smile with a simple one of his own. “It’d be appreciated.”

She turned away then and headed out of the dining room. Link looked back to the meal before him and started to eat. It had been a long time since he had a truly homemade meal like this, let alone one that was so fresh. The mayor of the village turned and sat down then. His chair creaked under his weight while Rusl sat in one next to him.

“Suppose there’s no harm in telling you,” Bo said. “Since about six months ago, every now and then a trapper would go missing. Now, working in the woods is usually dangerous, and they know to stay away from some of the more… Enchanted areas. And if any monsters came out of it, the militia could handle them. That changed a few weeks ago though. One of the guards was killed by the bridge.”

“What kind of wounds?” Link asked.

“It was a blade,” Rusl said. “Didn’t do much to his head, but was stabbed through the stomach twice. He also had defensive wounds on his hands. When I tracked the prints and blood trail, it led deep into the Faron Woods.”

Link took a quick sip of his stew before thinking on his next question. “No one went into the woods?”

“Not since Rusl left with the caravan for trade with Lon Lon Ranch,” Bo said. “We did send some of our trappers in to see if they could find anything, but only one came back. He was wounded.”

“Telo is lucky to be alive,” Rusl said. “He’ll never walk again though.”
“What happened?” Link asked.

“It was as if his legs had rotted away, but his top half was left intact. The necrosis was spreading and both of his legs had to be amputated.”

“With that, I’ve told the village that the Faron Woods are off limits until we can figure out more about what’s been happening.”

“I see,” the hylian said. Link heard footsteps and glanced over his shoulder. Ilia had returned with a couple pieces of paper and a pen with its ink well. “You haven’t hired anyone else to try and find out what’s been going on either then?”

“No.”

“You’re talking about the missing trappers?” Ilia said. “Fado said they were still looking for Rolok.”

“Another?” Bo let out a groan. “Damn… We’ll have no trappers if this keeps up…”

“All the more reason to let me investigate,” Link said. “I’m not part of the village. Longer I stay, more of a drain on resources I’ll be. I’ve picked up a good number of skills over my travels and can put them to use.”

“Such as?” Rusl asked.

“Tracking. Hunting and trapping. Combat in swordplay and-”

“So were the other trackers we sent into the woods,” Bo said.

“They thought they were tracking an animal. We know for a fact though that they used blades. They’re not animals. And they likely have some powerful magic user with them if the survivor’s legs were that badly damaged.”

“Father, this is starting to sound like it is very targeted…” Ilia said. “It could be the wild men. Or the-”

A look from both Bo and Rusl quickly silenced her. Link could see though there was as much fear in their eyes as annoyance for her bringing up whatever it had been. After a second though, the portly mayor nodded. “Could be,” Bo said. He took a spoonful of the stew and swallowed.

Rusl was looking at him in such a way Link wondered if he had given too much away. The hylian kept his face straight and watching the others. “Six hundred. I find what happened to the trappers and keep it from happening again.”

“Six hundred?!”

“Don’t work for free. I travel, so I need to be able to purchase supplies to keep Epona in good shape. Weapon and armor maintenance, some lodgings, tolls along the road. Medicine too is especially expensive.”

“Four hundred,” Rusl said.

“Five-fifty.”
“Five hundred?”

Link nodded. “Five hundred is good.” He stood up and offered a hand to the mayor. After a moment, Bo took it with his right hand and clasped Link’s arm with the left. He let go when Bo allowed him to. “I will make my preparations then and leave for the Faron Woods in a couple hours. I also need to write a letter for the rito couriers.” He looked to Ilia. “Could you pack me some stew for the road?”

She nodded with a smile.
He regretted not asking for the recipe as he stepped out onto the porch of the house. Given the number of ingredients he’d need though he was thankful for at least two large bottles filled with it. He glanced down at the letter to Medli in his hand and walked down to the sundry to send it. Epona was still standing at the hitching post by the shop and drinking from the trough. Link put the letter in the mailbox and unhooked her. He opened one of the saddle bags then to put the bottles of stew away and check some of his other supplies. A pale blue glow burst out of the bag. Link jumped back, the surprise making him release his knife from its hiding place. It rose up, small sparks trailing behind it. With the long four wings and tiny humanoid figure obscured by the glow, there was no question what it was.

The fairy bobbed a little in the air before fluttering towards him. “Phew!” she said, shaking around briefly. “Free at last! Thanks mister!”

“What were you doing in my bag?” he asked. He’d learned in his travels the fair folk of the forests could be both invaluable partners as well as irredeemable troublemakers. He hoped it was the former, but his gut was sure she was the latter.

“I was waiting for you and fell in! A kid tried to steal your potions! Especially the venomblood one! That thing is really dangerous too! What could you possibly need to turn your own blood into boiling acid for anyways?”

“Redeads, dark keese, like-likes, dead hands… Anything that likes taking a bite out of me and isn’t natural.” Link slipped the knife back into its hiding place. “Why were you waiting for me?”

“I… Kinda was spying on you. I heard you talking to the mayor and villagers about disappearances before you went inside. You don’t feel normal either. Like you’re one of the monsters in the woods.”

He ignored the latter remark and kept focused on the fairy. “And why?”

“I need to help my friends! They’re in the woods and there’s a lot of monsters! They’re coming from this old manor. You’re trying to find what happened to the trappers, right? Well, a lot of the monsters around there are wearing things from the village!”

That would make things very easy, but Link couldn’t help but wonder if The Goddesses were playing some sort of joke on him. It couldn’t be this easy. And the fact that a fairy was telling him this made him distrustful. For all he knew they were involved in it. It wasn’t called The Lost Woods for nothing though. Many people had entered it and never walked out.

“Please, I need your help. And you need someone who knows the way through the Lost Woods. Or else you’ll end up like the others. They turned into stalfos.”

“That’s an old wives tale. You need a good deal of spellwork to reanimate a body like that compared to the stalkin in No Man’s Land. Or something big enough to bind it all to act like a keystone in an arch.”

“Things have changed. The forest used-to be safe, but then things started coming from that manor.”

He folded his arms. “When’d it start?”

“About six months ago. There were people moving into the manor. Thought they were just people
trying to escape from the war, so we let them stay. But then things started to get strange around it. And then. There were stalfos. Everywhere in it! And more things started to appear in the woods. And it’s spreading! The plants are changing too!”

Even though he wasn’t sure about it, what she was telling was lining up. But the word of undead spreading like this was not good for anyone. It meant someone was deliberately doing this. He let out a sign. “Alright. But any tricks I’m putting you in a bottle.”

“Oh! Thank you!” She hopped off the saddle and bobbed up and down excitedly. “When you cross the bridge, I’ll show you too something I hid! It’ll be helpful though. It’ll keep you from changing into a stalfos.”

Link mounted Epona then and directed her off. “Is it really that bad?”

“I guided the only surviving trapper out of there before it was too late. It is that bad! There’s this purple fog in most of it which’ll start to change you if you’re not protected. Or one of the fair folk.”

“Great,” he groaned.

“What?”

“I should’ve charged them for hazard pay.”

“I thought you wanted to help them!” The fairy buzzed in front of him.

“I do, but I also need to eat and keep my equipment in good shape. How many people can I help if I can’t take care of myself?”

“Yeah. Yeah, that’s a good reason.” She fluttered next to him then. “Oh! Where are my manners?” I’m Navi. And I’m really happy you’re going to help us.”

He saw her offer a tiny hand. As Epona walked towards the bridge, he offered her a finger. She took it with both of her hands and shook. “Link.”

For a second, Link thought he saw the fairy glow brighter and float a little higher. “Good to meet you!” She soon rested on his shoulder. Another minute or two later they’d crossed the bridge and she fluttered a short ways from him to a set of rocks. “Over here! Be careful though, there’s a deku baba.”

He winced a little at the mention of the carnivorous plant and could swear he’d felt this oldest scars on his stomach and arms burn. Link climbed off Epona and pulled his sword from his back. As he neared, the plant sprouted and snarled. Its tongue lolled out of its mouth and it snapped a couple times before Link beat its head with the flat edge of his blade. It recoiled from the blow and he slashed, cutting the head from the vine. Before it’d hit the ground though, he slashed again, bisecting the jaws in half.

“Run into these things before I take it,” Navi said. “Yeah, that fog is making some of them even bigger.”

He looked at the fairy as she floated above the killed baba. There was no amusement on his face.

“Oh. Really don’t like these things do you?”
“With very good reason.” He kicked the severed jaw away. “So what’s this thing?”

Navi drifted over to a stone next to the plant and for a moment she vanished. When she emerged again, she was carrying a glowing green sphere. “Take it! This thing is really heavy for someone of my size!”

He reached for it and in an instant; the armor he was wearing was gone. He looked at Navi and saw she was carrying a red ball of light now and had dropped several feet in the air. Looking himself over he saw he was now in a deep green tunic. He had chainmail on under it and his left shoulder had a heavy dark piece over it and some of his collar. There was another piece like it as well that was on his upper left arm that bore the mark of Farore; just like what was on one of the pearls he’d helped recover from the South Seas before the war. Over the tunic he had a hardened leather vest colored olive drab. The strap for his scabbard had two knives in small sheaths on it. He was in leather boots with metal over the shins as well. His left forearm had a tough leather guard over it as well while his right didn’t. Somehow as well, he’d gained a green floppy hat.

“Can you please take this too?” Navi was barely a foot off the ground now as she held the red light. Link reached for it and watched the color fade. It was a small red gemstone now that bore a goron mark on it. It felt heavier than it looked, but fit perfectly in one of the pouches of his belt. “I enchanted it so you could carry it in a pouch and have it weigh less. All you have to do now to put it on is touch it for a moment. Did it to the zora scale you have in the bags too. You don’t look like you’re from Labrynna though, where’d you get sea-zora scale armor?”

“That’s awfully convenient.” He finished looking himself over, finding as well on his right there was also now a pair of knives in sheaths on his belt. “So this will protect me from the fog?”

“Well! It was worn by an old hero. Will protect you from the fog and poisons while you’re wearing it. And it was also blessed by an oracle of Farore, so it’ll even heal some minor wounds.”

He immediately saw potential for how it could be used. Even if he didn’t actually get all five hundred of what he’d offered, if he got to keep the armor he was now wearing it’d be worth it. Link couldn’t help but wonder though if this armor had actually once belonged to a previous member of his order due to how the old charm he’d once had bore the Goddess of Courage’s mark. “What about Epona?”

“I don’t have anything that will protect her. It’s safer if she stays.”

Link looked to his mare as he walked back to her. He turned her around on the bridge. “You’re a very smart girl,” he said. “But I don’t want something to happen to you.”

The mare snorted and watched him with her large dark eyes.

He smiled a little at her and gave her snout a couple strokes before taking the saddle bags with some of his more dangerous supplies off. He wrote a quick note to have her be watched until he returned and stuffed it into the saddle so it was clearly seen. He coaxed her across the bridge and she got the message. With her gone, he set one of the bags on the stone and dug through it. He grabbed the last of the lupine sense potion, a bottle of milk and a couple others including a red vial and the venomblood Navi had been shocked to find in the bag earlier. Not sure what exactly he’d find in the temple, he packed three grenades and pulled a small quiver of silver bolts for his crossbow. He also packed a fire striker and a couple bandages. Once done, he hid the bag in a tree. “Alright,” he said. “Let’s get going.”

“Can I ask you a question?” The fairy fluttered along next to him as he started into the woods.
“What?”

“Are you a hexer?”

He raised an eyebrow and stopped for a moment. “The hexers are gone,” he lied. “Wiped out during The Inquisition. They’re just myths now.”

“I know that. But you feel like one.”

“Mmm?” He raised an eyebrow.

“I was around then. And before. Not many things like hexers. They can sense that they’re not normal. Why else would you also have something like venomblood. I noticed the cat in Sera’s Sundries too. He didn’t like you at all. And cats can sense things like the mutagens used to make hexers. How they don’t feel ‘right’ in the order of the world. Because they weren’t created by Farore to uphold Nayru’s laws. They were created by men.”

“You know an awful lot about hexers, Navi.” Link shook his head and kept walking.

She quickly followed as the sunlight above them started to vanish from the thick trees. “Well, like I said. I’ve been around a very long time! Long enough to know too that even if you’re really not a hexer, you could use some extra medicines just in case.”

He stopped and turned on his heel to look at her. The little fairy fluttered about eye level with him. “Where?”

“Hard to miss. Keep following the trail. Most of it’s been covered in the fog, but I know the way so just follow me. It’s built above on a pair of trees. Looks like a little house with cucco legs actually!” She flew a little closer. “So, do you need any?”

The house would not have been difficult to find if it had not been for the violet fog that obscured the paths in the forest. Navi though clearly knew the way and guided him carefully.

“So, how long has this stuff been around?” he asked.

“Longer than anyone wants,” Navi replied. “The village is overrun by monsters too! The kokiri there? Almost everyone is stuck inside!”

“So they can’t stand the fog either?”

“They can, but it’s the monsters! There’s stalfos and redeads and other dead things around too!”

“Necrophages.”

“Not really actually. They’re like what a necromancer would raise. Not like ghouls or other things that’re prowling around in No Man’s Land.”

Link stopped for a moment when the fairy fluttered over another patch of the fog. It was getting thicker and was almost to his waist now. His legs felt like they were trying to fall asleep, but a couple steps after it started, the strange feeling went away. As long as he kept moving, it didn’t cause a problem. Another couple minutes though and they entered a bit of a drop in the trail, the
mist rising to his chest and the sensation washing over his arms then before he spotted the house.

It was like the fairy had described it. A pair of long and gnarled trunks grew up and together, looking like a pair of chicken legs. In the middle of the twisted trees was a large house, above the ground and with all the windows closed up. The front door was at the end of an old ladder leading to a small porch with flower boxes lining it. Link started up the ladder then. Navi fluttered near the door as he got there and knocked. He waited for a response when he heard voices inside. He heard a muffled shout as well of a response and footsteps then. The door swung open and a young woman stood there. She wore a simple dark robe that went to her ankles and had bobbed hair.

“Uh, hi,” Link said. “You open?”

“…Gran?!” the girl shouted back. “We’ve got a visitor!”

“Are they green?”

“Are you actually taking that old fortune teller seriously?!”

“I came from Ordon,” Link said. “I need potions and he said you’d have them?”

She looked back into the house for a moment. “So, you’re actually here to shop?”

“Yeah?”

“First customer we’ve had in weeks since this fog started. C’mon in.”

The door closed behind him, the fairy following him slipping in just before it latched shut. Link watched the girl walk into the back of the small hallway. To his right was a pair of brooms and numerous fetishes and chimes. There were a couple old relics as well and a strange stuffed creature mounted on the wall that Link had never seen before. His nostrils were filled with a chalky smell coming from the back that was poorly masked by spices. A fireplace had pots and pans in it with an orange glow and Link could smell something that made his mouth water.

“Sorry ‘bout the mess,” she said. “We haven’t been able to get out of here since the fog started.”

“You can’t use your brooms to fly out of here?” Navi asked.

“Huh?” She looked at the fairy. “Oh, we can but know how dangerous it is to go flyin’ around on a broom when you’re not the size of a rupee? We gotta go fast too to stay airborne! One mistake and we’d crash into one of the trees!”

“Ouch,” Link winced.

“If the fog wasn’t all over the forest floor we’d be able to get to one of the clearings and get over the canopy.” She had her back to Link as she stirred the pot on the fire. “Everyone back in Ordon okay?”

“So far.”

“But if we don’t stop the fog coming from the old manor, it’ll reach the village and everyone there’ll die,” Navi added. “So we need your help.”
“Are they green, Irene?” an elderly woman cried from the back of the house.

“Yes, they’re wearing green, gran!” She sighed and stood back up from the fireplace. “Sorry, she’s getting a little stir-crazy.”

“Take care of green! It’ll prevent disaster!”

“What’s your name?” Link asked.

“Me?” she asked, looking slightly offended. “No one in Ordon mentioned me?”

“No?”

“Oh! Well! I’m Irene. Best witch in Faron Province!” She beamed and planted her hands on her hips.

“In training!” shouted her grandmother from the back.

“Well, yes, but still! Soon as I master potions I will be!”

“I do need some potions,” Link said. “What’ve you got?”

“C’mon back. We don’t have much because we haven’t had a chance to get supplies with the fog but we do have some that have kept. Got the regular healing elixirs.”

“I’ll take a couple of those, but I’m looking for a few other things more… Specialized.”

“Such as?” She folded her arms then, adjusting her weight so she stood at a slight angle.

“Lupine sense, Din’s Fury, Farore’s Kiss, a venomblood, Nayru’s Tears, a Kaepora’s Vigil, two Thunderbirds…”

“Whoawhoawhoawhoa… Slow down. You know how dangerous some of those are? Even in homeopathic doses?”

“Yeah?”

The witch sighed and nodded a little. “Okay. Just makin’ sure you know what you’re getting into with these things.” She flicked a wrist and a small handheld chalkboard flew off the mantle into her hand. Irene took a piece of chalk from the bag on her hip then. “So, you said Lupine Sense, Din’s Fury, Farore’s Kiss, Nayru’s Tears, Venomblood, Kaepora’s Vigil, Thunderbird, and a couple of menders. Anythin’ else?”

“I think that’ll do it.” He pulled his wallet and dug into it. He spotted a single silver rupee among a mess of green and blue.

“That’ll be…” She scribbled on the chalkboard and muttered. “That’s gonna be two thousand rupees.”

Link let out a strange word that caused Navi to gasp and Irene to cock her head. It sounded like gibberish, but to the right polite ears it would have probably garnered the same shocked reaction from Navi. No longer working as a Chosen Champion of The Crown had its clear disadvantages. “Lemme count,” he said. “I might have to change my order depending on what I can afford.

“Take! Care! Of! Green! Irene!” the grandmother shouted from the back. “Give him the potions!”
“What?” She turned on her heel. “Gran, we could use that money for the supplies for our shop! And maybe even pay our way to Labrynna to see Great Aunt Syrup and Maple if those blin and gerudo raiders start getting into Ordon! It’s two-thousand rupees!” As she spoke, the floorboards creaked. An old woman in a matching robe came out. Her thinning white hair was mostly hidden by a crooked pointed hat. In her left hand was a long gnarled staff that was dripping wet below her wrist and steamed.

“And he will help everyone here avoid disaster! DISASTER!” She waved her arms as she spoke. The elderly woman smiled at Link. “Isn’t that right, dearie? You’re here to deal with the fog? And the monsters in the fog?”

“Mayor Bo hired me to track down their missing trappers,” he said, shifting his weight a little. “Sounds like this fog and the undead are at the root of it all, so that’s where I’m heading.”

She clicked her tongue and pointed a finger as gnarled as the staff at her granddaughter. “Give him the jabbernut extract one too.”

“But gran,” Irene began.

“Do as I say! Even if we had the money from him, there’d be no way we could make it to the border with this fog around! And Bo’s people are good people. We can’t let them suffer if the fog reaches their little valley!” She looked back to Link then. “Your arrival is no coincidence! The fortune teller in the forest is always right! You’re like The Hero who once walked these forests. Why, you even have a fairy companion!”

Link held his tongue on how he wasn’t sure what to believe in those regards, but instead bowed his head. “Thank you,” he said. “The help is greatly appreciated. I’m going to the manor where it sounds like there’s all this trouble.”

“Old Roam’s Manor?” Irene asked. “Well, when I flew over it a few months ago, I saw some tents set up. When I went back again, I got a few fireballs thrown at me. But haven’t been back because of the fog.” She handed him a couple vials of red potion then. Link took them with a bow of his head in thanks.

“Pyromancers, great.” He stuffed the potions into the pouches on his belt. “Last thing we need is a stalkin shaman in the middle of that mess or a shadow hag. Least there doesn’t sound like there’s any ghouls and rotfiends.”

“You’re going to need some cursed oils then. It’ll be…” A glare from her grandmother quickly shut her up. “On the house with everything else.”

“Let me pay for at least some of it, please.” He pulled out the only silver rupee of his. “Your generosity and assistance is… It’s incredibly appreciated. Especially recently.”

“Please don’t let us down then.” Irene took the silver rupee and looked it over for a second before it vanished into her bag. She handed him the last of the elixirs. “Gran might believe in blind faith, but I really wanna make sure this all works. You get rid of that fog and the monsters in the manor you can come by anytime and we’ll give you a discount even.”

“I won’t. Thank you.”

The door creaked shut behind him and Link started for the ladder. He heard the beating of Navi’s wings behind him. “Uh…” she began.
“What?” he asked, stopping at the ladder.

“Where’d you learn that word? That was something interlopers would shout to curse and insult their enemies.” She fluttered close to him. He could see the glowing female figure in the ball of light as she pointed a finger at him. “No one’s uttered a word like that in the forests in at least three hundred years.”

He got on the ladder and started to climb down. “From a princess. And let’s just leave it at that.”

“But! Where would a princess even pick up such foul language?!”

“You’d be surprised.” He slid down it and back into the fog.
It was another couple hours before Link reached the manor, at the heart of the fog. Even though it was not as high as it was in some places, it was to his knees and so thick he couldn’t see at all where he was putting his feet. He was sure that if he wasn’t careful he’d walk right into a deku baba. Wherever he turned, death was everywhere it seemed. What had once been vibrant green trees were now black and their leaves were changing even though the autumn was months away. Navi glowed brightly ahead of him a few feet. For the most part, they didn’t find any signs of life. There was only the sound of wind and the trees rustling. He hadn’t seen any signs of anything living for a long time until they came to a rusted metal fence. Vines had overgrown most of it, but they were starting to wither from the fog’s magic. Link stopped when he saw the crest on the gate. He reached up and brushed some of the vines away, revealing the Royal Family crest upon it. He pushed it open and they started up a hill. They heard a snapping among the fog and Link quickly drew his sword and shield.

“Can you see anything?” he asked the fairy floating nearby.

“Uuh, the fog’s a little nasty, but I’m seeing a few baba serpents. Still rooted. And stay to your right. There’s two really big deku babas over there. Long as we stay far enough away they won’t notice.”

He moved to the right a few more paces before he felt a little more comfortable. He had no desire to encounter a killer plant that could probably swallow him whole. The smaller ones were enough of a nightmare in his mind as it was. It was only a short ways further to the top of the hill and again he stopped.

He saw a pair of emaciated figures in wooden masks by the open doors to what was likely once a wealthy duke’s manor. The stone walls had vines digging into them. Whoever once owned this place had a strong connection with the royal family as well if the crest on the gate was any indication. The majority of the building looked intact at least, in spite of some of the overgrowth. Link glanced around for another way in, but couldn’t find one. With a sigh he reached into one of his belt pouches and felt around. After a minute, he pulled one of his potions out from a pouch.

“Wait,” Navi said. “Wait is that the?!”

He wasn’t listening to her as he pulled the stopper out with his teeth, spat it into the fog, and drank the venomblood. It felt fine at first, before there was an intense heat in his throat. Link dropped the vial and heard the fairy gasp in shock as his veins blackened for a moment. He clenched his eyes shut. The vial shattered on the flagstones obscured by the fog and he coughed. A few flecks of blood left his mouth. A moment later they heard a sizzling beneath the fog. It was painful, but the protection it’d offer was worth it. After he’d caught his breath and felt his heart stop pounding, he started for the creatures, moving in the side. He was now out of the sight of one of the undead creatures and in a swift two slashes sent it back to death’s domain. The other turned slowly towards him and let out a shriek. His ears rang as he was held in place by its dark magic. He was able to move though before it could get close enough to bite him. Link slashed low, causing it to collapse to its knees. Before it could struggle to stand, he stabbed it in the back of the neck. It let out a long moan as it lay still.
“Well, least they’re out of the way now,” Navi said.

Link glanced at her. “Really hope we’re not gonna run into more of those things.” He pushed the door open and glanced inside. He slipped his shield on his back once more so he had a hand free. It was dark. Navi’s light helped show the weathered stone walls and crumbling pillars. They started down the hall’s dark carpet neared the heart of the mansion. A few moments passed when he heard the sound of steel crashing and a voice shouting. His pace quickened and he shouldered the door open. In the great hall, he saw a trio of stalfos. Their bones were not completely human as two of them had skulls of ordon goats. He pulled a bomb but didn’t use it when he saw what they surrounded.

A girl stood with a short sword in one hand and a wooden shield in the other. A blue fairy floated above her, shouting in a panic. The stalfos slashed their swords and she rolled between the legs of one of them to stab it from behind. It collapsed into a heap of bones with an inhuman shriek.

“Saria! To your right!” the fairy shouted.

The girl looked over for a split second before the second stalfos came at her. Link slipped his shield from his back and jumped down the stairs. With a cry, he brought his blade down on top of the third skeleton. It crumpled under the blow and fell into a pile. The last one hissed and rushed for him. It raised its shield and started to circle him. Link followed its movements. There was a flash of light and a snap. Link covered his eyes with his shield for a moment in time to see the girl jump on the back of the stalfos and stab at it with a cry of rage. It collapsed from her attack. He dropped his shield and grabbed a grenade.

“Get back!” he said. He lit the grenade’s fuse and threw it into the two heaps of bones. The girl obeyed, rushing past him. There was an explosion and the bones were shattered into dust. When they turned the other was reassembling itself. Bone after bone locked back into place as the dark energies rebuilt it. Its neck snapped slightly as the goat’s skull it used for a head reattached. Before it could react much more, Link slammed his shield into it repeatedly. The stalfos stumbled with each strike until it was against a wall. He slammed the shield again, shattering its ribcage. Another strike broke the spine, making the stalfos fall forward. It crawled with its arms briefly before Link forced his boot through the skull. Its movement ceased.

“You have definitely done this before, haven’t you?” Navi said.

“Navi?” the girl asked. “Who is the hylian?”

She fluttered over to her. “He was hired by the village! He’s going to help fix the problems! His name is Link! And he’s a soldier! Well, former soldier I’d guess.”

He got a better look at her now. She looked around the same age he’d undergone The Change, but her eyes looked so much older than his. Her hair was short and green and wore a tunic that matched. She also wore a simple leather vest and leggings as armor. Her sword’s scabbard was on her back and a bag on her hip. A slingshot was stuffed in her belt and a pair of bags were next to it. The small wooden shield was held over her defensively bearing a red mark of one of the tribes of the forest. “What is a kokiri doing here?” he asked.

“You… You know about us?” the girl’s fairy asked.

He nodded. “Not a lot though.”
Saria’s fairy fluttered behind her then. Navi still floated between them. “Not many beyond the forest know about us,” she said. “We like it that way. The dangers are many. And the war beyond our borders is making things worse.”

“Like this happening.”

“Yes. Some great evil has come to this place and now threatens the entire forest. When it was clear that even our father was threatened, I volunteered to seek out the threat and deal with it.” She looked at the shattered stalfos remains then for a moment. “But I fear it is beyond us.” She sheathed her small sword and slipped the shield on her back. “The only reason this evil is contained here though is because of our father. The forest is home to life. This is death. “

“A struggle,” Link said. “One that is being lost if the fog is spreading.”

“You understand.” She reached up with a hand. “I’m Saria. My companion is Proxi.”

He took it gently and shook. “Link.”

“We need to hurry. My friends are in danger the longer the fog spreads.”

“So is the village.” He picked his shield up again. “Find anything when you came?”

“We,” the fairy behind her said, slowly peering out of it. “We did find a lot in the office. Lots of papers and it looked like someone had been trying to organize things.

“No one living, Proxi?” Navi asked.

“Nope. Not a single living soul since we left the Kokiri Village.”

“Alright,” Link said. “One of the witches said that they were attacked by a pyromancer around here too. So maybe we’ll find some sort of troop roster or something up there.”

He pushed the door open slowly to the office. He looked inside, seeing the windows were shattered and dried blood on the floor. The shelves were ruined and there were papers everywhere. There was also a lantern on the table and a large stamp Link instantly recognized. He walked in and picked it up. Saria was right behind him followed by the fairies. The only evidence of the hour was the orange glow that managed to pierce the canopy around them.

“It’s the seal of The Kingdom,” she said. “Was probably left when this place was abandoned to be reclaimed.”

“It’s been used recently.” He handed it to her. “There’s still some wax still in it.” Link picked up some of the papers to inspect. Some bore the very seal Saria was holding now. He read carefully but quickly, recognizing the coding method used. Maybe it had been a field hospital as he kept seeing mentions of wounded in them. Keeping it so far from the front lines didn’t make sense though.

“What does it say?” a voice on his shoulder asked. Link looked to see Navi sitting there. Her wings fluttered lightly. Proxi kept hovering, but could still see it from her position.

“It’s encoded,” he said. “Give me a minute.” It began to make sense as he recalled his training. The
ciphers hadn’t been changed since his departure yet it looked like so it took a minute, but he was able to get the rough outline from them. “It looks like this was supposed to be a field hospital for the front lines for the higher-ranking officers. Far enough from the front that they aren’t in danger, but close enough they can get back quickly.”

“Can you translate it?” Proxi asked.

“I’d need time to break the cipher properly. But that’s what a glance at this is telling me.”

“I haven’t found anything suggesting it a hospital,” Saria answered. She picked up more of the notes and put them on the table with the seal. “There are apothecary tools, but no beds for the sick.”

“What else?” He started skimming some of the other notes.

“The entire north wing is sealed off. Bookshelves, armor racks, a couple beds even.”

“That doesn’t sound good!” Navi said. “Like they were trying to keep something out!”

“Or in,” Link said. He looked out the windows then on the courtyard, seeing the long strange white stalks sticking out of the ground. He noticed the northern wing of the manor, some of the fog flowing out of the shattered windows and holes in the walls. That had to be where it was coming from, but the question was why it was happening to begin with. He looked over the notes then, catching mention of the shadow folk in The Kingdom. “Did you see any strange symbols around?”

“Some of the crates in the west wing didn’t bear the crest,” Proxi chimed. "They had an animal’s face on it. One had an eye on it though. And was completely nailed shut.”

He looked up the moment she mentioned it. “Just the one? Was there a tear from the eye?”

“A crying eye symbol?” Navi asked. “You mean like the Sheikah?”

“You know what it means?” Saria asked.

“The Sheikah are the shadow folk. They are guards of the Royal Family. But they’re not like the ones the world sees. They are in the dark corners typically. Watching, waiting. Seeking out threats.”

“They’re also assassins and spies,” Link added. “How do you know of them?”

“Lot of traveling a few centuries ago. It was during The Inquisition I think you guys call it.” She fluttered over him. Link thought it was small wonder now that she knew about hexers. “Where was the crate you found?”

“With the apothecary tools. Eastern wing,” Saria said.

“Show me,” Link said.

The eastern wing of the building was in far better shape than the rest of the ruined manor. Link could see cots laid out in one of the side rooms and a weapon rack. Not a single blade or spear was left on it. They finally entered the room Saria had mentioned. Keese above scattered at the sound
of the door falling off its hinges when Link pushed it open. It had once been a stable, but stalls for
the horses had been dismantled. Tables with numerous tools were set in one corner. Each one had a
specific purpose for alchemy or magic. There was nothing Link saw to suggest it was for medicine.
Near the gate were the crates Saria had mentioned. He recognized the symbols on most of them as
having come from one of the ranches. There was one bolted together with a mark burned into the
wood. Inspecting it, Link saw the Sheikah symbol.

“That’s it,” Saria said. “I couldn’t get it open. My sword’s blade was too thick to get it in to pry it
open.”

Link looked around for a minute before pulling one of the knives from his scabbard’s front. He
slipped it in one corner and carefully started to pry open one corner. “Try now.” He moved to the
next corner and started again. Saria pulled the short sword from her back and wedged it in. Using
all her weight, she hopped up and pushed down. The lid began to rise. After a second attempt at
prying, the lid creaked off and Link tore it the rest of the way. It clattered on the floor as he looked
inside. The kokiri girl stood on her toes and peered into the box.

She gasped and backed away. “That’s the fog!”

Link reached in and pulled out a large glass jug. It was heavy and had thick walls, but there was no
mistaking what was inside it. The lid was also made of glass and had a set of seals within to make
it completely airtight. Link carefully set it back inside the box after he took a good look. The
picture was becoming clearer.

“Wait, the notes, the tools,” Proxi reasoned. “They must’ve been making this stuff here!”

“Some weapon for the war?”

“I hope not,” Link said. He knew that the war had made many things change but he hoped that one
of those hadn’t driven the people of his country to develop something so monstrous. He looked
back in the box again, finding a book. When he pulled it out, he saw the Sheikah symbol on it.
Inside were numerous notes. Like the letters though, it was encoded, but not with a cipher he
recognized. “Navi, can you understand some of this?”

The fairy flew over and hovered over his shoulder. She muttered quietly for a minute. “I haven’t
seen this kind of text in centuries,” she said. “If we had time and the forest records, I could figure
out everything though.”

“We don’t though,” Saria said. “The fog keeps spreading. But it looks like this is where it was
made. And with no one else alive, it means something or someone is still making it.”

“Could all be on its own by now,” Link said. “Would explain as well why it’s spreading.” He
pocketed the book, counting that it wasn’t in the hands of The Kingdom or The Tribes as a win.
“Maybe that’s why they sealed off the northern wing.”

“That’d make sense,” Proxi said. “They sealed it off to try and contain it then.”

Link nodded.

“Only way in is across the courtyard,” Saria noted. “All other ways are sealed up.” She took a deep
breath and then pulled the wooden shield from her back. “We need to stop it, whatever it is. My
father is dying because he is trying to keep it contained in the forest.”

“We will.” Link walked to the door of the stable that had been turned into a laboratory and pushed
it open. The courtyard was expansive with the strange white stalks becoming far clearer. They were
long fleshy arms.

Chapter End Notes

Seven chapters up, lots more to go. Least most of it is written!

Not much to say here apart from a huge thanks to readers ArcticLios and WrenCat13 for their recent bookmarks!

Onto the Devnotes:
-I did want to include the sages from OoT in some way shape or form. For Saria, I reasoned that she might've really done a good job of handling herself in the Forest Temple in OoT in general. Actually we can prolly reason all the sages in OoT handle themselves pretty well. Shame we don't actually see them in action. Would've made for an interesting dynamic, but there's lots of reasons why we prolly didn't see it. Most obvious being that of the tech limitations of the time.
-Originally, Saria's fairy didn't speak at all in an earlier draft. Felt though that given how talkative Navi is though that the fairy companions might be pretty chatty to their charges. And in a situation like this, it might be very useful to help them get through it. The choice to make it Proxi though, came on a whim after also realizing that I had plans for Tatl and Tael further down the road. Even if it is going to be a while before we see the two trickster fairies from Majora's Mask.

I also have a tumblr you can find here. It is mostly just reblogs of things I find amusing, but I do post chapters there as well and will probably have some sketches and other little things that might not show up here. I'm toying with an idea that will show up next month sometime in connection with this project as a kind of 'tumblr exclusive' using the ask system. Feel free to drop by.

I think that'll do it for now. Thanks for reading and keep being awesome people!
“Wait,” Saria said. She pulled a deku nut from her belt and threw it towards one of the stalks. It flashed with a snap. The hand darted underground.

“It’s a dead hand!” Navi cried. “The hands will try and grab prey to hold it in place while the main entity emerges from the ground. If you take out enough of the hands, it’ll emerge too.”

“Then how do we take it out?”

“When it’s above ground, go for the head. The rest of its body will just absorb blows. Doesn’t like staying above ground though. You could use your deku nuts or explosives to force it from the ground if you know where it’s hiding.”

Link pulled the lupine sense potion from one of his pouches and uncorked it. He drank it, feeling the elixir once more chill his throat. With a cough and a moment, it took effect. The stench of death filled his nostrils and he could hear the ever so slight creaking of the bones in the stalks. Much to his shock though, there was not a single spirit around. With so much death, there should have been. He watched the ground then carefully. There had to be evidence of where the main entity was. Some change in the dirt that gave it away. After a moment, he pointed it out. “Six arms out.” He pulled another grenade and lit it. “Cover your ears.” He tossed the grenade underhanded out into the field of stalks. It rolled as the fuse burned quick.

Saria ducked behind her shield as the grenade burst into fire and smoke. The hands caught in the blast retreated underground and the monstrosity emerged. Link pulled his blade from his back and waited as the earth burst forth. A snarling mass of flesh appeared. Its arms were long with scythe-like claws. Its massive head was on a thin neck and jaws opened wide enough to swallow a skull whole. It stood there a moment, empty eyes watching.

“Just let it get close,” Navi said. “It’ll waddle on over here and then you can both hit it at once. Shouldn’t be able to retreat between the two of you.”

The monster did not waddle. It reached its scythe-like arms forward and crawled with alarming speed towards them. It let out a shriek and leapt from the earth. The other stalks were pulled down as it sped along the ground. The bottom of it appeared to be comprised of dozens of long tendrils that withered and wiggled. Each one had a hand on the end of them.

“RUN!” Proxi shouted. It leapt for the kokiri, jaws wide before crashing into the steel shield of the hylian hexer. He moved in nearly an instant to put himself between them. The mosnter fell back and whirled on the ground, but righted itself in a heartbeat with bones snapping back into place.

Link’s sword swung around, but the creature moved faster, ducking and diving back underground. No hands emerged this time though. The field appeared clear, but both knew it was somewhere. Link scanned the ground, his enhanced vision watching for subtle movements. Something grabbed his foot. He looked down and stabbed a hand. Two more rose from the dirt and grabbed his leg. A few more emerged from behind and pulled him down. He struggled to turn, seeing the kokiri girl circling with the monstrosity. It swiped at her with a claw; she rolled out of the way. The two fairies buzzed around its head, forcing it down. Saria swung the short sword with a cry downward into its head. The blade connected several times, but it lunged, its jaws wide. Only the sparks of
magic and light from the fairies made it pull back as Saria fell on her backside as she tried to jump away.

With the main body distracted, Link made a sign with his fingers. The flow of magic pulsed in his palm and he slammed it into the ground. A flash of fire erupted into a dome around him and the hands burned into ash. The dead hand itself shrieked as vanished underground in an explosion of dirt. For a moment it was calm. Link looked around carefully, trying to spot where it had gone. “Do you see it?” he asked.

“No,” Saria responded. Link got to his feet in time to feel dirt strike his back and the beast’s claws dig into his sides. If not for the mail and tough leather, he’d have two holes in him. His collar was another matter as its wide jaws clamped down. Blood spurted from the bite as Link let a scream force its way through clenched teeth. He felt it soaking his tunic and the teeth digging deep. He kicked against its body before there was a snap and a flash. He fell forward again, but saw Saria a few feet away with a slingshot in hand. She’d loaded a deku nut into the sling rather than a seed and was aiming for the monster.

It snarled angrily and moved to grab him again, but stopped. Link watched it on his knees as he grabbed his sword off the ground. The dead hand twitched, its diseased flesh turning paler. Two of its teeth fell from its mouth as it realized its mistake. Its body began to shrivel against the bones inside it. The long stalks that held its many grotesque hands withered. Another tooth fell from its mouth as it roared in pain and buckled inward, as if it had been struck in the gut. Link was on his feet then. His sword was in his hand. With a shout, he stabbed it through the mouth, blade shooting out the back of its neck as the crossguard reached its jaws and the melting, rotted flesh. He put his foot on the dead hand’s shoulder and pulled the blade out. The creature collapsed and twitched, the transmuted blood from its would-be victim, bubbling inside.

Link fell to his knee then, using his sword to keep from completely collapsing. He was sure that was going to be a very nasty set of scars for his collection. Every time another drop fell from the wound, the ground sizzled.

“You! What were you thinking?!” Navi shouted in his ear. He winced. “You could’ve been killed by that thing! When you drank that potion, was it your plan to get bitten by something like that!”

“That was no ordinary dead hand,” Link said with a wince. “And I had to be prepared for that possibility-”

“That’s not the point! You turned your blood into acid before we even set foot in here! It could’ve killed you just by drinking it! The tunic can heal you a little, but not a wound like that! It’s magic, but it’s not that powerful. And even if you have the mutations like a hexer does-”

“Navi?”

“Yes?”

Link looked right at the fairy with clenched teeth. A guilt-trip on how he’d hurt himself was the last thing he needed at the moment. “Shut-up.” He forced himself to his feet.

“Venomblood.” Saria said. She slowly approached him. “She’s right though. The potency of the one you drank to do that would’ve killed someone. That makes you a hexer.”

“Just part of the job.” He pulled the red vial he’d packed and drank it. The potion burned his throat
and he felt it go to work, mending the more serious of his wounds. It wouldn’t work as fast as the blue one, but it would at least prepare him for whatever was in the north wing. “How do you know of it?”

“It’s made from some of the more dangerous mushrooms in the forest.”

“I know.” He took a deep breath. “Clever with the deku nut to make it let me go.”

“A seed wouldn’t have stunned it and I’ve done it before. Though, not in such a life or death situation recently.” She was next to him now, inspecting the wound. The bleeding had stopped and he got to his feet. He felt though if he got back to Ordon Village, he’d be spending at least a hundred of his payment on things to cleanse the toxins out of his bloodstream. He didn’t want to waste the Nayru’s Tears potion he’d gotten from the witches unless it was an emergency.

“Ready?” he asked.

She nodded. “I do not know what we’ll find, but we have to stop it.”

“Heh. Well that’s typical.” He took a deep breath and walked to the doors.

The old wooden door creaked as he pushed it slowly. Link had his shield on his back and the crossbow aimed inside. The moonlight peered into the room from the open ceiling of the room. It looked as if it had been a great dining hall once. The purple fog billowed around them as they entered. The scent was stronger than outside and it looked far denser. Saria was slightly in front of him, her slingshot aimed inside as well. She let out a gasp. “What is that?”

In the center of the room was what looked like a massive beetle. There were two long claws in its front, crossed and four long armored legs behind it. The fog flowed from under its carapace as its wings beat occasionally and softly. Link was nearly blinded though when its carapace opened a little. Through his enhanced vision, he saw dozens of souls, trapped there. That was why he hadn’t see any of the others around. This monstrosity was using them. The claws lurched, revealing a single massive yellow eye. It blinked and rolled its eye upward. The pupil vanished at the top of its lid and reappeared at the bottom. The wings fluttered and it rose up. The fog billowed from its sides, revealing its underside was comprised of dozens of tangled skeletal remains.

“Whatever it is, it’s the source of the fog!” Navi shouted. “The leg joints look weakest though!”

Link fired the crossbow. The silver bolt missed though and he loaded another. The beast rose higher in the air before landing with a crash. The gust of wind and fog knocked them both back into the courtyard. Link kicked his legs up and got to his feet. Another bolt left the crossbow. This time it hit the eye, but the force and sharpness made it sail cleanly through. The creature didn’t seem to have been harmed at all by it. Instead, it crashed through the wall and into the courtyard.

Saria ran as it swung one of its claws into the dirt. It raised it again and she turned to sling a nut into its eye. The flash caused a squeal to erupt from it as it collapsed.

Link took the opportunity he saw and began to hack at joint of one of its massive foreclaws. He held his blade with both hands and swung hard as he could. Bile gushed from the wound until with one more swing; the blade went through and found the dirt. The claw collapsed. The cursed gohma let out a squeal as its wings beat. He coughed violently in the fog, watching the kokiri cover her
face with her shield. It was in the air again, buzzing above. Its skeletal underside began to twist and bones fell out of it. As they landed, they reformed into stalkin. The kokiri threw a nut out which stunned them. Seeing them briefly disoriented, Link threw one of his grenades, lighting it with a flash of magic.

The explosion shattered the stalkin, never to rise again. “Can you bring it down?” Link shouted.

The girl nodded and loaded her slingshot again. Link fired another bolt at it, just looking to get its attention. It worked far better than he’d have hoped as it dove for him. Its remaining foreclaw slammed into the dirt, just missing his leg. The force of the impact knocked him on his back once more. As the claw rose to strike, there was a flash. Saria had hit it again in the eye and the beast toppled. The foreclaw landed next to Link. He began to hack into its joint like he had the first. The kokiri girl was stabbing its eye repeatedly with her short sword, hoping to keep it down as he kept swinging. Dark gore spurted as Link’s sword cut through the leg joint completely. It began to struggle more as they continued their assault. In under a minute, he’d hacked off another of its legs. It began to curl up on its side, fog billowing fiercer now. Link shielded his eyes as he saw the spirits of the dead once more. They appeared in agony, bound to the creature. The bones on its underside began to twist once more.

“Saria! Back up!”

She gave the eye one last stab and retreated. Link made a sign with his free hand. A flame flashed in his palm and he slammed it into the bones. His veins burned with the energies as he sent a stream of flames into its underside. The creature burned with it. He saw the spirits being released in a wave of unnatural green light. The gohma twitched and beat its wings furiously. More of the fog was released, but the purple in it began to grow lighter and more like white smoke. As the last spirit was freed, the creature stopped moving. Its juices bubbled and steamed within. Though used to the smells of death and decay Link gagged from the stench, but managed to not throw up.

He was exhausted, but it was done. The hylian backed away and sat down. The fog around the manor had already started to clear. He glanced and saw Saria approach him. “We did it!” she said, smiling. “The fog is fading!”

“There’s a lot of it though,” Proxi said. “And those bottles still.”

She looked to her fairy companion. “It’s okay. There is a lot of fog still, but it will disperse in time. It is no longer being made and we can take care of the ones still in those bottles”

“That’s the important thing,” Link said. He looked back to the burning corpse. The smoke rose into the moonlight. His enhanced hearing heard every crack and pop as it was destroyed. “We should burn the notes we found in the office too. There’s no telling if whatever was done to make that thing is in there.”

“What about the book?”

He thought on it. On one hand, it likely held the secrets to the fog as well. The Sheikah had clearly wanted it for something, but on the other if he could learn the cipher they used he would have something that the Gerudo Tribes had been attempting to break since the war started. And with them, he might have an even better chance at ending the conflict. “I know someone who might be able to break the cipher. Maybe give me a better chance at ending this war.”

“That’s a really big goal,” Navi said. “You can’t do it alone.”
“I know.” He put it back. “I’m not alone though. I just need to know who I can trust.”

There was a shocked cry and gasp from the villagers when the charred remains of the gohma’s head and claws were dropped in the center of the village by the hylian. They gaped in shock at it. Link was silent as he watched them. Mayor Bo looked at it with wide eyes.

“What is this thing?” he asked.

“That,” Link said with a deep breath. “That is what has been after your trappers.” He couldn’t tell them the truth. He couldn’t look them in the eye and tell them there had been some experiment carried out there. Not without knowing more and he was not willing to risk their lives.

Rusl was the first of the villagers brave enough to approach it. He knelt down and inspected it with a knife. “This looks like a gohma…” he said. “But I’ve never seen one this big.”

“Yeah. The forest is not safe yet though. This creature was creating a deep purple fog. It is what was responsible for taking your trapper’s legs.” He looked at the mayor. “It’ll fade in time. Until then, just watch for it.”

“Good,” Bo said. “Then we are safe.”

“I need my payment now, please.” He held his hand out. A bag of rupees landed in it from the mayor. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome to stay if you want,” Rusl said, standing from the head. “We could use a hand with a couple other small things. And we can pay you a little.”

He thought on it for a moment. A little extra money would be useful. On the other hand, he was sure that someone would come looking soon enough. “I can stay a day. But I need to move on soon.”

“If you go to the northern stream in the woods, you’ll find a witch,” Bo said. “She might have what you’re looking for.”

“Grandmother and her granddaughter?”

“Irene and her grandmother?” Ilia asked. “Are they okay?”

Link smiled a little. “They actually helped me.”

Chapter End Notes

Little shorter chapter this week, but that wraps up his trip to the old manor in the woods.

Devnotes:
-I really wanted to include a dead hand somewhere in the story because they're so
freaking freaky, but if you stop to think about it, it's really not that threatening. It moves so slow that if you can get out of its grip it can't really do anything. If you could get the door open and all, you could escape it. Would pose very little threat to someone like a witcher. Answer? Make it even more monstorus and faster!

That's about it. Next week, well, you can prolly guess who's showing up from the cast. Thanks for reading and keep being awesome people!
He was lost. There was no question. He was confident though if he kept following the stream it’d lead out of the Faron Woods. At least it was cool and he’d left the village a day before a patrol from The Kingdom came through. It was too close for his comfort. He’d have to be more careful from now on. If he was caught, he was sure he’d be attacked on the spot. He’d defend himself and people would die. He knew this and they knew this. In spite of all his training and enhancement from the mages in the Tower of Hera, he knew full well he could be taken down as well. The pain in his collar from his most recent scars reminded him he was not invincible. Link pulled a bottle of goat’s milk from one of Epona’s saddle bags as the mare sauntered along the stream’s edge. He drank it all in a single go before dropping it back in the bag. The bite from the dead hand still ached.

Another hour and the sun started to set. He’d stop in a little bit when he was sure he could find a defendable position in the event the patrol came this way. The path he’d taken was not one of the more common ones and when the opportunity had presented itself, he had crossed the stream a couple times to try and ensure tracking would be more difficult. He stopped Epona for a moment and pulled a map out to see if he could find his bearings.

“Maybe we should’ve just ridden hard along the road we came in on, huh?” he asked.

The horse turned her head slightly and her left ear flicked.

“Well, a little longer it looks like and we’ll be back in No Man’s Land.” He rolled the map up and put it back in one of the saddle bags. He gently nudged Epona in the sides with his heels but the mare did not move. Instead, she cried and bucked. Link only got a brief view of black and red before he was thrown off. He was flipped in a somersault and landed on his stomach with a groan.

There was a familiar, feminine laugh then.

“Well, least we’re not meeting in a dungeon cell!” someone said. “…Again.”

He knew that voice well. When he looked up, he saw a pale blue hand being offered. Link shook his head once and took it. They helped him to his feet. The first thing he noticed was her hair. It was the same shade of orange that glowed in the sky at this hour. It was back in a high ponytail.

“Why can’t you just say hello like a normal person, Midna?”

“Do I look normal to you?” There was a teasing tone in her voice as she planted her hands on her hips. Her eyes were a deep red and wore a black top that looked like it was just the sleeves and a vest to cover her chest. Her skirt was to her ankles and bore white circles that looked like inverted gears while the mantle she wore had its hood back and was a shade of turquoise underneath the blackness.

To anyone else, they’d have seen something not quite human. All Link saw was someone he knew he could trust. He let out a chuckle. “Least to me.” He smiled. “It’s nice to see a friendly face. Even if you gave Epona a minor heart attack.”

“Hey, she scared me.” She waved a hand at the horse. “I’m just looking for you, find the hour is
right and hop between worlds.”

“Why were you looking for me?” He had a strange feeling about this. Whenever Midna showed up unexpected, it usually meant some form of trouble.

“Straight to business then? No small talk?”

“Not when the last thing you said to me was ‘here’s a recruit’s uniform and helmet. Try not to get caught. I’ll see you later!’.”

She looked a little sheepish at the remark for an instant. If he hadn’t known her so well, he’d not have caught it. It was but a moment though. Her confidence returned and a self-assured smirk was on her lips. “Well, you made it. And if I hadn’t left then anyways, I’d be stuck here at least until dawn. And…” She stopped, cocked her head and stared. “Are you wearing a sock on your head?”

“It’s a hat.”

“It looks ridiculous.”

“It’s kind of grown on me. And can make a good pillow.” He walked back to Epona and gave the mare a pat. “So, why are you here exactly? Did we not seal a couple portals right or did someone find another of those twilight mirrors?” Link turned then to face her, folding his arms. “Or is this because you’re bored again?”

“No. But if who I’m after has his way, you won’t need magic to walk between worlds.” There was no more humor on her face. She looked far more alien in his eyes at that moment than ever before. It frightened him a little actually.

“What’s going on?”

“We should probably find a place for you to stop for the night. It’ll take a while to explain.”

They didn’t go much further, finding a place under a tree. Link heated some of the stew he’d gotten from Ordon over it as he went through the potions he had. Midna sat across from him, arms wrapped around her legs, the slits of her skirt revealing her boots. She pulled her hood up as the wind began to bite.

“So,” she said. “What’ve you been up to since I let you out of that cell? Clearly you’re not on some special assignment for your pink princess if what you said when I found you was any indication. If anything, they’re trying to hunt you down now I’d guess.”

Link put down one of the potions he’d picked up from Irene and her grandmother. He’d made another stop before leaving the forest around Ordon. His eyes glanced up at her. “Long story. But the short one is, surviving,” he answered. “You want any of the stew?”

“Sure. And what about the longer version?”

“I just left Ordon. There was this twisted gohma and a dead hand taking trappers.” He picked up another potion. This one was a thick cream white one with a label that read Nayru’s Tears. Link made a face at it before stuffing it in his leather wrap with a couple others. “The Kingdom was
doing something there with it.” He put the next potion down and dug through one of the saddle bags he’d removed. “I found this book too.” He handed it over to her. “Can’t make heads or tails of the cipher but just having it out of their hands I think is a victory.”

She flipped it open and skimmed a few pages. “Hmm.”

“What?”

“Well, this looks a little familiar.” She had stopped on a page with some diagrams.

Link moved so he was next to her and could see what she was reading. Though some of his training was able to decipher the alchemical work involved, it was not his area. “It does?”

“Yes.” Midna closed it. “It looks like it’s an old twili dialect. Or similar enough given our heritage.”

“Can you translate it for me?”

“You help me with my problem I’ll do a lot more than that for you.”

He nodded. “What’s wrong?”

“You know how The Twilight Realm sits between a lot of other realms?” He nodded. “And how sometimes people banish things to the space between dimensions?” She saw him nod again. “Well, sometimes they throw things into our realm not knowing that there’s people living there thinking it’s their dumping grounds and throw things there that are incredibly dangerous. So we get to keep an eye on them.”

Link looked at her then carefully. “I really hope that you’re not about to say someone got thrown in there like during The Inquisition.”

“No, thank the Twin Sols, no.” She shook her head, though her eyes narrowed and he could clearly see the thought made her mad. “One of these artifacts we had vaulted has gone missing. And I tracked it to your world.”

He didn’t need any more details. Link looked her right in the eyes. “What do we need to do?”

“Well, tracked the sorcerer to this world.” Midna snapped her fingers. A dark teal crystal appeared out of tiny black squares and floated above her index finger. “And though I was sure I could take him alone, thought that having someone who could be another target would be useful.”

“So that’s the only reason you tracked me down?” he asked in mock offense. “So that I can wave my arms around like Ravio did with the griffin while you do the hard work?”

She laughed a little, grinning at him. “When you put it that way it sounds terrible.” The smile faded though as she took a deep breath. “But, this relic is incredibly dangerous. And given the fact Hyrule is at war right now, anything that happens like this could drag The Twilight into it. I don’t want that. My father doesn’t want that. My cadre doesn’t want that. We’re having enough trouble in the council right now with some voices wanting an invasion even though it’s not feasible now that we’ve closed every solid bridge between worlds. Only time we can even cross is two hours each day when the worlds are in alignment.” She flicked the crystal on her finger and it spun, floating higher for a moment. “To say nothing of the fact that there’s just no good reason at all to open all those old wounds again. Especially after The Conjunction. Was all a long time ago and we should just move on now.”
Seeing the crystal, he immediately pulled the map from his belt and unrolled it. “Something else I’ve been worried about actually.”

“What?”

“Foreign powers entering the war. Right now it’s just Hyrule and The Tribes. Imagine what would happen if Labrynna got involved.”

“It’d become an even bigger mess.” Midna looked over the map and flicked the crystal once more. It began to spin and floated down over the map. “I don’t know a lot about light world politics, but I know that if you have more powers entering a war that’s not trying to make the sides negotiate, it’ll get a lot worse before it gets better.”

“Empress Ambi tried to prevent a conflict actually.” He got to his knees and crawled to the fire to stir the pot with the stew in it.

“She did?”

“Before The Conjunction. She was in contact with Zelda and the prince. And after some convincing, managed to get Ganondorf and a couple jarls from Holodrom to come down too.” He chuckled bitterly then, recalling the evening. At least he hadn’t needed to wear that ridiculous ruff Zelda’s chamberlain had tried to get him to wear.

“Obviously it didn’t work.”

Link nodded and pulled the spoon out of the stew for a quick taste to test the warmth. “Mmm…” The spoon dropped back in the pot. “Some of her own people tried to kill her because they haven’t gotten over the war between Hyrule and Labrynna.” He got a pair of bowls for them then and started to divide the stew up between them.

“What?!” The crystal suddenly dropped onto the map. She glanced at it for a moment then back at Link. “That seems like the stupidest of conspiracies. And a lot are pretty stupid to begin with.”

“You’re telling me. The idea was to make it look like the Chosen or Sheikah were behind it. All because a lot of nobles are still mad over how the war twenty years ago ended.” He moved back to sitting next to her. “So, we need to find this sorcerer and get him back to The Twilight before he does any damage.” Link handed her the bowl he’d prepared for her then.

“And the relic he took too is capable of a lot of that.” She inhaled sharply then. “That smells really good. What’s in it?”

“Pumpkin, goat cheese, some chicken.” He pulled a little bottle from one of the saddlebags. “And some spices from the Windfall Islands if you want them.” It twitched in his fingers for a moment and then flew from his hand. It floated above her open palm then. “That’s all I have. That stuff’s expensive with the war.”

“I won’t use much.” She let the bottle fall to her hand and her fingers wrapped around it.

“Promise.”

“Make sure you do.” He sat down and offered her a bowl of the steaming stew. “So. You have a lead on this sorcerer? Or this going to be a witch hunt?”

“I have a rough lead. The relic he took. I can track it with the proper techniques.” She sprinkled a couple pinches of the spices into the stew and stirred it around. “He’s not powerful enough on his own to hop around so easily like me. But I was hoping to get some local resources as well.”
“Which is another reason you came looking for me.”

“Yep. “ She took a bite of the stew.

“What can you tell me about this relic he took?”

She swallowed and looked back to him. Her hood fell back and she pulled it up again. “I believe you’d call it Majora’s Mask.”

He felt a chill go down his spine. They’d only had stories of such a cursed item. “It exists?” Link ran a hand over his face. “Stories say it was used in old hexing rituals. But the tribe that made it was so terrified of its power they sealed it in shadow to ensure it was never misused.” He looked to her. “Meaning it probably ended up in twilit hands.”

“Exactly. It even scared us. That should tell you how dangerous this thing is.” She took another bite of the stew. “You looked at it and you could see something just looking back. It’d make your hairs stand up on end! But worse, you could just feel that this wasn’t like some sealed ghost. There’s intelligence in its eyes. And it’s…”

“Dangerous.” He began to eat his meal.

“Chaotic is more like it. Like it knew what it was going to do but not until the moment it was going to, if that makes sense. But we couldn’t just throw it into another world. And if we tried to dispose of it, we didn’t know what would happen. If it’d release some monster or demon or nothing. All that energy and chaos has to go somewhere. So we sealed it in a vault with other dangerous things people threw into our home.”

“Until the sorcerer got into it.”

“Yep.” She took another bite of her stew. “And I know for a fact he was one of the people who wanted an invasion.”

“Hence your remark earlier about not needing magic to walk between worlds.”

“Yep.”

Link nodded a little. “So, know where this guy is?” He drank the broth of the stew out of his bowl and set it down.

“Why I started dowsing. I got one of his gloves before I left. So just have to finish.” She looked back to the map and picked the crystal up again. Once more it began to spin and float over the map.

“How close to where he actually is this gonna get us?”

“Mmm… General area?” She took another bite of stew. “And I’ll have to do it again tomorrow to see if he’s moved. If he’s smart he’ll keep moving. Which will be bad for us.” Midna glanced at the crystal as it started to hover closer to Kakariko and Death Mountain on the map. “Looks like it’s nearly done.”

“Where we looking at?” He was on his knees and watched the crystal stop spinning and lowering over the mountain. “You’re kidding.”

“What?”
“I was just there. Most of the refugees are flooding out of there so I went to help them best I could.” He watched the crystal suddenly shoot up in the air before falling into his partner’s palm.

“So, what’s it like there right now?”

“Trouble. Lots of people trying to get into Holodrum. Managed to help the gorons though.”

“The big stone guys, right?”

He nodded. “Yep. That’s them.” Link reached up and ran his hand through his hair before yawning. “If he’s among the refugees, this is going to get messy fast. Unless we get really lucky.”

“And when was the last time we ended up getting really lucky working together, huh?” She slurped the last of her stew out of the bowl.

“Uh, remember the ‘ferocious wild grain-stealing beast’ contract from Termina?”

“Other than that.” She shook her head and stifled some laughter.

It was another few days of hard riding, but they reached the mountains. When they’d rejoined the main path to the Goron Village, Link had allowed some of the refugees to use Epona to help carry their belongings. Midna remained in his shadow. As he pulled the last bag off Epona and handed it to the refugees he looked around. There were a lot more tents and people around than last time. Some were fortunate enough to have carts and mules, but many did not. To his surprise as well though, there were men in armor. Soldiers in heavy furs and mail. There were also individuals who wore long robes and were shorter than most of the humans. Their faces were concealed by cloths and their hands were bandaged completely. The only feature that was truly noticeable about them had to be the large white eyes that peered out from under the hoods.

“Link!” he heard a goron shout.

He glanced over and spotted Gorko coming out of the archive dome. “Darunia available?”

“Should be soon.” He glanced at the other refugees that had arrived with Link. “Surprised to see you back here.”

“Well, looking for something. Might need your archives again” he said. “When did the subrosians come?”

“With one of the jarls from Holodrum. Brant of the Natzu Clan.” The goron reached up and scratched the tuft of hair on his head. “With so many refugees coming into their lands, the clans were getting worried. I believe they’re trying to work out an agreement for asylum.” He glanced back over his shoulder. “Think it might have to do with the soldiers that came lookin’ for you too. Could’ve rubbed someone the wrong way on the border.”

“The other clans agree with it?”

“I wouldn’t know.” He waved a hand. “C’mon. Sure Big Brother will want to know why you’re back so soon.”
“Friend of yours?” Midna said in his ear. “Keep forgetting how big these guys are.”

“You should see one in a fight,” Link said in a whisper.

“Have you?”

“Not recently but, it’s not something you forget.” He pulled his hat off as he entered the same dome he’d been dragged into on his first visit. Inside were refugees huddling around and talking, while at the entrance to Darunia’s chambers stood two more of the armored men. Glancing up as the guard walked further back; he saw the creature’s head. It still had the scales and flesh upon it, though the eyes had been scooped out, and was hanging over the entrance to Darunia’s chambers.

“Hey, Link?”

“What?” He glanced over his shoulder for a moment.

“Something’s off about that head.”

“Well, last I was here; it was still attached to the dragon?”

He heard a stifled laugh in his ear. “Link, I’m serious. I’m sensing some sort of energy up there. And it’s not natural for this world.”

“Presence?”

“Hey! Are you coming?” Gorko called from the doorway.

“You’re gonna have to introduce yourself here sooner or later,” he said to his shadow as he started walking.

“In private,” she replied. “Don’t want to cause any more of a panic than that sorcerer probably already has.

Link glanced away from over his shoulder at one of the jarl guards at the door. He got a weird look from the man as he followed Gorko in. Darunia stood near the center of the room speaking with a bearded man in a dark red surcoat and scale armor over it. Under his arm was a helmet with antlers upon it, clearly for ceremonial use. Two of his guards stood next to him while Gorko went to stand next to the goron boss.

“So what are we going to do then?” the jarl asked. “If it wasn’t the sheikah out of Kakariko, then who was it?”

“The dragon was once said to have had an army at its disposal,” Darunia said. He glanced up for a moment to notice Link had entered, but his eyes focused back to the jarl from Holodrum. “But it’s been so long since those stories were true, I doubt that was a remnant of their forces. The only other possibility is it was the refugees, but from what you described...” He shook his head.

“We do have those caves cleared out,” Gorko said. “With the dragon dead, it looks like there was once another tribe of gorons living up there. We just need to finish clearing out the caves and we can use them to help house some of the refugee population. Would help keep an eye on them if there was something going on and keep them safe from any blin raiders that have gotten behind the Hyrulean lines.”

“So there should be a reduction in the people coming into our lands as well then,” the jarl said. “The other clans will be pleased to hear this. We do not have any reason to become involved in the
war. But if forced, we will.”

“After all that’s happened, we’re just trying to help those who need it,” Darunia said. “I share your fears though, Brother. A day may come soon where we must choose to look after our own and let the others go. We just do not have the resources to support so many. But you have lands that need working. And many have lost everything in the south.”

“We do. And I will take your proposal to the others. We will return once we have reached a decision.”

Darunia smiled a little. “Thank you.”

“Of course, Brother.” The goron and the human clasped their hands and the jarl turned to leave. He glanced Link’s way as he exited the room. His two guards went with him. Once gone, the goron turned to him.

“Surprised to see you so soon, Link,” Darunia said. “And with new armor it looks like. What can I do for you?”

“Can we close the door?” he asked. “This is something I’d really like to remain between just us.”

Darunia gave a nod. Gorko started for the door as the last guard stepped out.

“Actually, he should stay too.” He pointed at the archeologist.

Gorko stopped then. “I should?” he asked.

“Like I said outside.” Link nodded as he heard the heavy stone door close. He glanced over his shoulder and saw the guard had stepped out and closed the door behind him. After a moment of silence, the hylian spoke. “You both might want to sit down. We need the archives.” He glanced at his shadow once they had. The two gorons looked puzzled at him. “Do I have your word none of what I’m about to share leaves this room?”

They spoke quietly for a moment. Their voices were hushed.

“…You killed that dragon?” he heard asked in his ear.

He looked at his shadow on the wall. “You can hear ‘em?” he asked quietly.

“You’ve been way busier than you’ve said!”

“I’ll give you details later.” He saw the gorons turn around again. Darunia folded his arms while Gorko sat at the small table.

“We swear,” Darunia said. “By the golden goddesses we swear not to reveal what you are about to share.” He folded his arms. “Now, what’s going on?”

There was a moment as Link looked at his shadow again. “You can come out now.” They watched as Link’s shadow moved on its own along the wall. An arm emerged out of it followed by a leg and the rest of the sorceress. Midna pulled her hood back, but did not appear as if she was of the twili. Instead, she appeared as if she was of gerudo descent, with her orange hair pulled back in the same ponytail from the previous nights. Her outfit was changed though to a black tunic and bodice. Her cloak had a wolf broach. Darunia’s brows rose as he watched. Link saw his hand slipping to the massive hammer on the wall slowly. Gorko jumped from his seat. “Darunia, Gorko. This is Midna.”
“A witch?” Gorko asked. “A gerudo shadow witch?!”

“Sorceress,” Midna corrected, pointing a finger at him.

“She’s not with the tribes,” Link said quickly.

“The outfit and broach look like a school from Yoll Province,” Darunia said. “Meaning you’re from Labrynna. I heard Empress Ambi was trying to ensure that it didn’t reach her borders in spite of a lot of her people wanting to enter it. And you must be a very powerful one to be hiding in his shadow all that time,” Darunia said. He looked to Link. “I’m surprised she hasn’t drawn more attention. And not a single guard saw her among the refugees.”

“Exactly,” Midna said. “Would like to see a witch pull that off.” She gave the gorons a smirk that made Link smile a little at how familiar it was. “And, I like keeping a low profile.” She looked at him then. “Sometimes hard though when you’re traveling with a wanted man. But I’m just that sneaky.”

“We’re looking for information on an old magic relic that a rogue mage has stolen from an archeological site. One we’ve tracked to the Death Mountain Range,” Link said. “Can’t go to the Royal Library. And don’t want this thing falling into the hands of The Kingdom or The Tribes.” He stopped to look his partner in the eye. “Or The Empire.” She nodded to confirm. “Just need to see if there’s something you have in there that can tell us what we might be getting into.”

“And how bad would it be if one of the sides in the war got it?” Darunia asked.

“Y’remember The Conjunction?” Midna asked. “Weird creatures falling out of the sky? Strange walls that would turn people who passed through them into spirits and back to normal when the wall went away?”

“I remember.”

“Yeah, now make it a thousand times worse. Like re-arranging the world’s entire geography and climates in addition to all that. Unless we find this thing.”

“That’s a lot of damage,” Gorko gasped.

“I won’t bore you with all the details, but we find this thing, we won’t have that problem.” She folded her arms and leaned against the wall. “There is some very dangerous magic at work here and the only reason we’re okay right now is because neither side knows it exists. I’m sure both Crown and Tribe sorcerers are going to notice it soon and then we’re all in trouble. And I don’t want The Empire getting it either. That’s how dangerous this thing is.” There was a lull in the conversation as the information sank in.

Darunia stroked his chin. There was a rumble of thunder outside. He looked at Link, eyes inspecting. “Do you trust this woman, Link?” he asked.

Before Midna could register an objection, the hylian spoke up. “With my life,” he said. “We met during The Conjunction. She helped me undo some of the damage from it.”

“That was you?” Gorko asked. “All I’d heard was one of the Chosen had been sent to sort it out.” He shook his head in shock. “No wonder you were able to slay the dragon.”

“Not to interrupt current events,” Midna said, “but time’s a factor here. Can we get to work? Also, I want to take a look at that dragon head.”
“Why?”

“Something’s off about it.”

Chapter End Notes

Not much to say this time. Just a thank you to Dragon123454321 for the recent bookmark and again to everyone who has given kudos to the story!

As always, thanks for reading and keep being awesome folks!
Since his last visit, the archive dome had been picked up some, but there was still plenty to be put away. It was late though and only Link, Midna and Gorko were within it. The dragon’s head was dropped on one of the tables after a couple thick cloths had been placed to help limit the mess.

“Well, probably good we’re doing this sooner rather than later,” Gorko said.

“Why’d you guys not even skin it before hanging it up?” Midna asked.

“Tradition!” He grinned a little. “Give everyone a chance to see what the monster looked like. Though originally we’d planned to use the embalming and preservation to have it be a trophy. But it looks like it’s already falling apart. Had to remove the eyes actually.”

“They did it with that archgriffin we got out by Lake Hylia,” Link said. “Before The Conjunction I was along the range and got a King Dodongo that was causing problems. Its head got preserved and it’s hanging in one of the halls at the palace.”

“I heard about that. Said they saw a Chosen limping away with his back bloodied.”

Link winced a little at the goron’s words. “Y-yeah. I got really lucky when it tried to pin me.” He pulled his knife from his belt and flipped it expertly in his hand.

Midna snapped her fingers and one of the shadowy crystals appeared floating over her index finger. “Alright,” she said. “Let’s get to work on this thing.” She flicked her finger and the crystal floated away and hovered over the dragon’s head. Link carefully started looking it over, finding the damage where he’d removed it from the rest of the body as a good place to start with his knife. “You guys wouldn’t happen to have the rest of the body?”

“It’s still in the crater,” Gorko said. “But it’s decaying far faster than we’d expected it would. And it’s not the heat and the environment there. The crater is active and all, but it’s got splotches of black parts that turn to ash.”

“Magic. It’s got a lot of magic in it’s body. “Y’know how some magic entities when the energies are broken they just poof into nothing?”

“No?”

“Sometimes cursed beings do the same thing,” Link added. “Some of the nastier redeads and stalkin will literally turn into ash and smoke. All that magic altering them.”

“Yep. And you can apply the same thing to the living by altering them with magic. The Interlopers did that long time ago. But the more magic you put into something, the less sane it becomes. Until it’s more or less just a mindless drone.”

“He was definitely starting to lose it,” Gorko said. “And his eyes turned black. Like, completely black! You could see yourself in them! That’s actually why we had to remove them. They started to smoke and when we managed to remove them, they just turned to ash.”

Link looked up at Midna, noticing the crystal drop slightly. They exchanged a glance and serious
expressions. “Gorko, right?” Midna started. “Can you get us some tea and maybe something to eat quick?”

“Oh, whatever’s good and still warm. Can’t be too picky out here. Especially with everything else going on.”

“Alright.”

The goron walked out of the dome then. Soon as the door had closed, Link sighed. “Y’know you could’ve been a little more patient with him,” he said, prying the skin off the skull under the mane.

“And we are in serious trouble if that sorcerer tried to twist a dragon like what happened to Yeta.” She had a finger pointed right at him. “That was just energy from The Twilight gradually altering her. Not someone deliberately trying to control her.”

“How could you tell?” The meat and muscle squelched as Link kept working to remove the flesh from the head. He was making progress, even if the dried blood was starting to flake and make a mess.

“The eyes. Yeta’s turned red. Your dragon here didn’t.” She pointed at her own eyes for a moment. “Why most twili have red eyes because of that exposure and just generations of it coupled with our common ancestry with the sheikah people. Enough general exposure will do it. But with the only way between our worlds now being dawn and dusk and with a whole pile of twilit magic, something like that isn’t gonna happen naturally in the Light World. Gorko also said they turned black. Were they something else before?”

“Yeah.”

She swore in twilise and shook her head as her hands were planted on her hips.

“What?”

“I need a local map.”

“So he’s here?”

“Probably. Or at least somewhere along the range. And because you didn’t have your charm I bet you didn’t notice anything off about this dragon too.” Another shadowy crystal formed in her right hand as she let go of her hip. Teal bands of light crackled from her fingertips and started to cut into it.

“He was a shapeshifter. First ran into him as a human knight. Think they have the spear he used around here still.” He looked up from his work. “And what was I supposed to do? Let The Tower watch my every move through it?” Link stopped for a second, pulling the knife out. “Though, they probably are still looking for me and trying to track me from there anyways. And Cia’s very good at tracking me ever since The Conjunction.”

“Well, let’s see her track you with this then.” The magic flickered off the crystal but it no longer appeared as the other one. Instead it looked like the head of one of her wolves with emeralds for its eyes. With a flick of her fingers, a silver chain formed and it flew from her palm.
With barely noticing it’s path, Link raised his right hand and caught it. He heard his friend laugh.

“Good to see that your reflexes weren’t in that thing.”

“Heh.” He inspected it carefully then. The eyes of the wolf seemingly glowed strongly and the chain rattled as it shook due to the magic in the air. “So, what do I owe you for this?”

“Getting that mask back,” she said with a smirk. “With your mutations you should be fine from any exposure that comes from it. It’s so little anyways it’s probably equal to whatever is able to slip through when our worlds are in alignment.”

“Does it work like my old one?” Link pulled his hat off and stuffed it in his belt before slipping the chain and the wolf charm around his neck.

“Pretty much. Only you can’t use it to talk to people unless you’re the one who initiates it. Or someone else has a piece of the same crystal it was cut from.”

“Meaning…” He chuckled a little and looked at the other crystal that was still floating over the dragon’s head. “Meaning I can bother you whenever I want then.”

“Not quite. But if we’re in the same world yeah.” The door opened to the dome again and the two looked to see the goron archeologist had returned carrying a large tray with a pair of plates on it and a teapot with steam flowing out of the spout. “So, why’d you run off all of a sudden then rather than investigate why the dragon was acting weird?”

“Kakariko.” He picked the knife up again and carefully started to pull more of the mane and skin back. “Sheikah village after all and loyal to The Crown. They came to investigate what was going on. Couldn’t stick around or I’d put all the other refugees in danger.”

“Have you found anything yet?” Gorko asked as he put the tray down.

“Still getting the mane away but should get a better look soon here.” A second after he’d spoke, the crystal above it darted to the back of the dragon’s skull and began to spin. He looked up at Midna.

“Found something that’s not supposed to be there,” she said. “Get digging.”

“Heh.” He pulled the mane away and started carefully removing the rest of the scales and skin. “Y’know, you should be back here or use your magic to just finish stripping the flesh off the bones.”

A look of mock shock came across her face. “And ruin my nice gloves?!?” she cried. Her lips curled into a smirk. “You’re already back there working on it anyways.”

“Yeah, yeah. We both know you could do it without even touching the thing though.”

“Would make it go a lot quicker though,” Gorko said. “You really don’t want to ruin your gloves?”

She turned slightly to face him. “It would be faster, but we’re also trying to find specifically what sort of weird magic is going on here. I use mine on it to remove all the skin and matter from it and the sample becomes contaminated with my own energies. We could still pick it out, but would take days rather than minutes.”

There was a squish as his thumb slipped and punctured the flesh. A foul stench came out of it, causing Midna to cough and Link to wince. He expected his thumb to have pressed into the dead dragon’s brain, but instead it just fell into a gap. Thankful for his gloves, he probed further with his
thumb for a moment before removing it. With both hands he picked the head up and pushed the
mane out of the way of the hole again.

“Ugh, that is ripe.”

“Windows already open,” Gorko said.

“Get me a light,” Link said. He heard the snap of the sorceress’ fingers and a small glowing white
sphere floated next to the back of the dragon’s head. A brief glance at it reminded him instantly of
the sols that dotted The Twilight. Carefully he took it and lowered it to inspect the wound further.
“Something got in the back of his skull.” He rooted around a little more with his finger before
pulling it back and shining the light inside. “Oh…”

“What?”

“Midna, you remember that archgriffin?”

She cringed. “Oh, gods. Don’t tell me.”

“Twilit bloat,” he said. “Burrowed right into the back of his head.” Link moved his finger a little
then, finding the creature’s legs hooked into the gray matter. “Doesn’t feel like a very big one.
Smaller than the one we saw with the griffin.” He pulled his finger out, grateful for the gloves and
worked the knife into the opening to remove the dead parasite.

“So gross,” Midna said with a groan.

“Can smaller ones do what the bigger ones can?”

“Yeah. Yeah they can. And are pretty reactive to the appropriate magic too.”

“You two aren’t going to have an appetite after this I’m betting,” Gorko said.

“I’ll be fine,” Link said. “I’ve long gotten used to the smell of rot and burning bodies.” He caught
what he was saying as he pulled the parasite out and dropped it on the blanket. Its hooked feet still
had pieces of the dragon’s brains attached to it, but it was clearly dead. “That’s probably-“

“…Probably a bad sign,” Midna replied, saying the exact same thing he had. The exchange made
Gorko chuckle a little and shake his head. The crystal lowered and floated over the twilit bloat’s
corpse before falling. “Well, this is proof enough for me that the artifact is to blame.”

“It is?”

“The magic is familiar. Let’s just leave it at that.” Link glanced at her when she said it. He pieced
it together as well. The twilit bloat was just the strings that had bound Volga to a puppet master.
“I’m gonna need a map of the mountain range now.”

“I’ll get that,” Gorko said. “Link, can you take care of the dragon’s head?”

“Yeah,” he said, starting to wrap up the head and the dead bloat in the cloths they’d laid down.

“And when you’re done with that, go take a bath in the hot springs I heard one of the refugees
mention,” Midna added.

“Wasn’t that much of a mess, was it?” He finished wrapping the head and tied the cloth together to
He had to admit, after a long soak in the hot springs, a shave and grooming, he did feel a lot better. Even the bite from the dead hand didn’t ache as much after the heat and steam. It also felt good to not be wearing armor for once. As he walked back to the archive dome he realized he hadn’t been out of a form of armor since he had been thrown in the castle dungeon. He couldn’t help but wonder if Midna had been watching him though. How else would she have been able to find him so quickly and had the recruit’s uniform? He’d not thought about it much as he was eager to just get out of there. When he pushed the door to the archives open and reached the table though, it would have to wait. The twili had fallen asleep with her face on the map. The dark crystal she’d been using for dowsing spun over a single location on the map of the Death Mountain range; Old Kakariko on the Northern Face of the peak.

He pulled Midna’s mantle off the back of a chair and put it over her. The feeling made her stir and glance up. “You looked tired,” he said.

“That tea put me to sleep,” she said. Link stifled a chuckle as he recognized the look in her eyes. “Looks like the dowsing finished. You know this place?”

“Was an old sheikah village,” he said. “Got abandoned in some war long ago with Holodrum. Wouldn’t be surprised if some refugees set up there now.”

Again, she swore in twilise. “I think we know why the jarl’s people got attacked then.” Midna pulled at her cloak and mantle until it was in place again.

“You got a plan for when we run into this guy?”

“Mmm… Ask him nicely to hand over the mask so I can take it back home and him probably in chains for breaking some of our highest laws?”

“Oh, well I’m sure he will since it’s the princess asking him to do so as opposed to a hexer from Hyrule.”

She laughed a little. “Seriously though, I’m expecting he isn’t going to give it up without a fight.”

“So, I’m guessing I play the distraction while you hit him until he’s unable to fight anymore.”

“Actually I was going to have my wolves play that role primarily. He’ll probably be focused on me because he knows what I’m capable of. You’re the wild card though. Given you’re not a mage, he won’t think of you as a big threat. Until you get right up to him and smack some sense into him. And if he’s wearing the mask, rip it off.”

“And if I can’t?”

Midna let out a sigh. “As much as I’d like him to stand trial for stealing one of the most dangerous
relics ever thrown into the shadows, a more permanent solution might be safer. If you can’t get it off him, take his head off. This plan too allows us some improvisation if we need it.”

“I can do that.” He glanced about. “Where’s Gorko?”

“He went to bed an hour ago. Did a little digging too into some of the books he’d pulled out for me while you were washing up.” She leaned against the back of the chair and crossed her legs. “Every tale has a grain of truth in it. But without something like the Royal Archives, we’re gambling here that we’ve found the right one. My magic, your blade and a couple old stories about nightmares.”

“We’ll need a contingency plan then.”

“You leave that to me.”

“Midna…”

“No, I know what I’m doing.” She folded her arms then with a sigh. “We’ll time our attack around dawn or dusk. If it looks like we can’t stop him, I’ll pull us both back into the Twilight Realm, and I’ll keep him there until the time passes.”

Link’s eyes went a little wide as he looked up at her again. “He could still kill you on the other side.”

“I know.” She looked back at him. “But I cannot let him possibly undo all the damage we spent nearly a year fixing because of The Conjunction.” Midna bowed her head then, looking at the table and the map. “Besides. He came from my clan. He’s my responsibility. Shouldn’t-”

“Then warp me in too. You’ll stand a better chance with me there.”

Her eyes moved to focus on him, barely turning her head as she did. “And then you’ll be trapped there with me.”

“Only until the next cycle. So about twelve hours.” Link rolled his head on his shoulders a couple times to stretch his neck. “I’d not be happy about leaving Epona alone for so long, but if it means we prevent a disaster like that, I could stand it.”

He could see the gears turning. She was seeing how to modify the plan. Or even possibly make it so he’d be left behind when she did it. He recognized how her brow creased and she gritted her teeth while looking away from him. Her painted lips fell into a frown with a sigh and she looked back at him. “You’ll be okay in the wilds of the realm until then? Because I can’t warp us close to the towns or palace. They see you, they’ll want to literally rip you apart probably. And I know you’ve faced groups of magi before, but nothing like a twilit sorcerer cadre.”

“Yeah. I’ve seen you at work. I’m imagining a dozen casters with your skill.”

She laughed. “I’m flattered, Link.” He knew from the grin on her face she was not going to let him forget it. “Alright. Together then.” She got up and adjusted the cloak a little more before pulling the hood back up. “Doesn’t look far. Should be able to get there before dawn.”

“Great. I’ll grab my stuff and let Darunia know we’re on our way out.”

“Good.” When he turned back she was gone. He heard her voice though, right in his ear softly. “Let’s get going then.”
With a nod, he turned and headed out of the archive dome. At the hour, the refugee camp was mostly quiet. There were a few fires still burning but it was clear many had long fallen asleep. He spotted the subrosians still awake and talking with one of the gorons as they looked over one of their finely crafted swords. Once he entered the main dome, he found most of the refugees fast asleep inside and a dying fire glowing in Darunia’s chambers. Link nodded to the lone guard as he passed. The goron boss hadn’t fallen asleep yet it looked like and was pacing. Darunia looked up as he heard Link enter.

“Need something?” he asked.

“We found it,” Link said. “Old Kakariko. We’re heading out now.”

Darunia shook his head as he went to the table. “Right near the border. That’s a refugee camp too.”

The thought of the refugees there and what could have been going on with a rogue twili sorcerer in their numbers was more than enough reason to get a move on for Link. “All the more reason we need to get going. Someone finds that relic and it’ll cause trouble.”

“Try not to cause a panic? I’d rather not risk something with the jarls. Especially with recent news.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s talk of the zoras near the Snowpeak Range joining Hyrule’s war effort.” He sat down finally and rested his head against his hand. The table creaked under the weight of his elbow. “You know what that means.”

“Labrynna.” Link took a deep breath and rubbed his eye. “Can’t risk a foreign power entering the war. They do ally with The Kingdom and we can expect the sea zora won’t like it at all. If I recall right too, Ambi doesn’t have enough political sway to keep both her people and King Phoceni out of it.”

“And if they don’t like it, we could be looking at an invasion. Hyrule cannot fight a war on two fronts. And neither can the gerudo.”

“So I need to keep them out.”

Darunia nodded slowly. “People are starting to ask questions about you, Link. Some of our traders down in Kakariko found a couple wanted posters with your face on them. A lot of refugees pass through there up the mountain.”

“Have they said what I was to them?”

He shook his head. “Not yet. But you do something big enough…” Darunia pointed a finger at him. “You are playing an incredibly dangerous game. Shekiah are going to start looking for you. And I’m not talking regular agents of The Crown. I’m talking inquisitors. Or outright assassins.”

“I know. One thing at a time though. No one can have this artifact.”

“What’re you going to do with it when you have it?”

“Midna will seal it in shadow. Just like the old stories said it was. No one will get it.” He looked over his shoulder, thinking he heard something outside in the main room. “I know you can’t spare troops, but I thought I’d tell you we were off. And thank you for letting us use the archives.”
“I swore to Jarl Brant that I’d help how I could with this situation. You will not be going alone.”

“You’re coming?”

The goron nodded, giving Link a massive grin as he grabbed his hammer. “I’ll get a few of our finest, including two who know their way around a cobble crusher, just in case. We’ll find out what’s happened at the camp.”

Link smiled a little. He was sure his shadow was as well. “Not expecting the help, but, thank you.”

“Well, if this thing’s as dangerous as it sounds like then you’ll need it. And need to investigate what’s happened.”

Chapter End Notes

Holy cow. Ten chapters posted so far. And still more to come!

Some Devnotes:
-When I started the project, I did think about possibly having it be where all the companions were people he’d meet along the course of the story, but decided against it. The idea was that essentially Link had gone through some adventures that were like the ones we see in the games before the events of the story.
- I love doing a lot of the dialogue in these pieces. You can learn a lot about someone just by how they talk or hold themselves around people.

A huge thank you to my good friend MittensMcEdgelord for doing an awesome piece of fan art for the story! They're a wonderful friend as well as a talented writer and artist, so go give them some love too. Especially if you like the recent Prey game.

There is also a special announcement on my tumblr in regards to this massive undertaking for anyone interested.

That's all for now, so I'll see everyone next week. Thanks for reading and keep being awesome people!
Old Kakariko

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was treacherous going at night, especially when the rain started. The old Kakariko Village was on the northern face of the mountain’s rocky face and nestled among the rocks and through a long tunnel. Darunia was at the front with his hammer and a massive tower shield on his left arm. Over his bulk was a plate chestplate and thick metal bands around his legs. Behind him were two more soldiers. Each carried a massive shaped piece of metal in a crude cobble crusher sword. It had no edge, but was so heavy that only a goron could truly use it with any finesse. Of course, Link had only seen one or two gorons he’d actually describe as having any sort of finesse. He watched one of the ones with the sword stop as Darunia held up his shield arm. Link pulled gently on Epona’s reins as the group came to a halt. Glancing over his shoulder he saw Midna. She was looking back as well at the last four of the gorons who had come with them. They muttered quietly in their gravely language as one of the soldiers up front turned from his boss and started back.

“What’s going on?” Midna asked.

“Don’t know,” Link answered as the goron boss turned around.

“Everyone on alert,” Darunia said. “We should’ve run into one of the jarl’s men by now.”

Carefully, Link directed Epona to the side as two of the other gorons moved past to join Darunia and the others. He pulled his sword from his back and heard a snapping crackle of magic from Midna’s fingers. “Sense anything?” he asked.

“Someone has definitely been using twilit magic here,” she said in a near whisper. “If he’s not here, he hasn’t been gone long. And the map suggested that there was only one way in and out of the village.”

“So we may have him cornered.”

She gave him a nod as the group walked through the tunnel and into the ruins. It wasn’t long before they reached the opening. What greeted them was the abandoned village. It looked like it once had been a refugee camp recently, but now there were empty tents and no sign of bodies apart from the smears of blood and bones on the ground or walls of dilapidated wooden buildings. A single old well sat in the middle of it all among tattered tents and fading fires.

“Oh gods,” one of the gorons said. “What happened here?”

The wolf around Link’s neck began to rattle on its chain. Epona tapped her feet a little and snorted at the strange calmness around them. The sorceress slipped off of the mare’s back, her boots landing in the fresh mud with a squish. He landed right after her as one of the gorons came to take the mare to the back of the formation. The group started into the heart of the camp then slowly. The hylian hexer’s eyes scanned the ground and listened for anything around them. It was clear though a fight had recently taken place. Again, he felt the new charm shaking and looked at Midna.

“Defensive positions!” she nearly shouted. “If you see the sorcerer, leave him to us!”

“Y’see something?” Darunia asked. The gorons readied their weapons as they moved.

“No, but I sense it.” She looked to their right and into some of the ruined wooden buildings. A loud
Link felt his bones shaking from the magic its shriek rattled the group with. There was the sound of more feet slapping in the mud and grime. More of the shadow beasts emerged, some literally melting out of the shade of the ruins.

“Think we know exactly what happened to the refugees now,” Link muttered. He glanced at Midna as orange and teal bands of energy began to dance around her fingers.

“Looks like they were all killed,” Darunia replied, spinning the massive hammer in his hand as he dropped the shield into the dirt defensively.

“Oh, no,” Midna sighed. “Much, much worse.” Her eyes watched around them. They still had the way out they could fall back if they had to. She counted silently, nine of the beasts. Then eight. A ninth appeared climbing out of the well. “I can’t bind so many effectively, Link.”

The pack of beasts charged then. One of the gorons with a cobble crusher swept his hunk of metal upward, clobbering it under the mask. He let the weapon drop from above then into its body. Another jumped him before he could lift his weapon again though. It clawed at him, scraping their thick hide. Two more jumped one of the other of the group. Link flicked his fingers and a blue light formed behind his shield before the magic barrier formed around him. It solidified and shrieked as the hand of one of the beasts made contact. He lunged and drove the sword through its stomach. The attack did little, causing Link to curse about not having a proper sword for handling the creatures. He kicked it back and quickly dug into his belt pouch and grabbed one of the oils he’d purchased from the witches back in Faron. He had it in his hand when the creature came at him and crashed against the transparent blue diamond around him. He stabbed again and again before sidestepping an attack from it to sweep his sword down and into the back of its neck. It didn’t sever the creature’s head, but was enough to put it on the ground.

Another shadow beast came at him again, but was swatted away by Darunia’s shield. As it fell on the ground, the goron boss swung his hammer face first into its body with a splattering crunch. Black blood spurted out of the creature along with ash and smoke, but it did not vanish. The other gorons were fighting back still, easily beating the creatures and inflicting wounds that would have left ordinary mortals as red paste and ground bone in the muck.

A lash of teal light whipped out of Midna’s right hand and wrapped around one of the monsters. A flick of her wrist and snap of her fingers though made the light constrict and in a heartbeat, the creature’s arms and legs were sliced cleanly from its body. It looked like the fight was going their way.

When the seventh of the creatures fell though, one of the surviving ones that had stayed away from the melee shrieked. It was louder than before and Link could see the twilit energies snapping around its mask. He tore the cork of the oil out of the vial with his teeth and poured it onto the steel blade. He knew it wouldn’t be as good as his old white sword, but at least it would help give him an edge. Soon as the beast had finished screaming, the others began to get back up. Bones snapped back into place and bent bodies righted themselves. Even the one that Midna had dismembered had its limbs pulled back into place by an invisible force and got back up. As the first one that had been slain got back to its feet the same goron swung his weapon into it, clobbering them into the wood.
Link raised his shield as another of the shadow beasts angrily swept its hands into the magic barrier. A second strike and the barrier shattered. His shield rattled with their hands before he slashed low and behind its leg. As it buckled and howled from the pain of the oil burning in its wound Link brought the blade down on the back of its neck. He heard a goron shouting as two more of the monsters jumped on top of him. Another grabbed one of the shadow beasts off his comrade to pummel with his hammer into paste.

“Leave a few!” Midna shouted. “If one’s still standing they’ll just revive the others!” Teal bolts shot from her fingers in a flurry, punching holes through one of the nearest monsters.

“Then how are-“ Darunia shouted as he beat his shield into two of the reborn beasts.

“Leave three standing,” Link said. “We’ll handle them!”

After a moment of hesitation and wiping some gore from his face, Darunia nodded and growled out the order in his native tongue. Two more shadow beasts fell, but at the cost of one of the gorons. Link saw one of the cobble crushers get grabbed from behind as the monster’s tendrils wrapped around it tightly and bore into his hide before another goron pulled the monster off. He jumped back as another swept a hand at him and retaliated by slamming the edge of his shield into the creature’s faceplate. The wolf around his neck began to shake once more as he saw darkness engulfing his feet with occasional flashes of orange bands. Suddenly the monster was ensnared. He heard another pair of snaps and saw two more also held. A glance at the sorceress saw her hands raised and dark squares of twilit energy rising around her. Within moments, only the three bound beasts were still standing.

He twirled his blade once in his left hand and focused. Green light flickered from his fingers and up his arm until he took a single step. The nearest beast took a swing at him, but hit nothing but air and a trail of green light. The hexer was behind them now and stabbed through the back of their neck, severing the spine. The trail of energy streaked across the black field and when Link reappeared, he swung upward, taking the monster’s arm off. Just as the third began to scream though, it was silenced as he skidded through the dirt and opened its belly with his sword. Magic crackling around his body still, Link finished the job and swung his blade down with both hands, chopping its head off.

The bodies began to turn black and burst into smoke and tiny black squares. Moments after, they dissolved entirely, leaving nothing but ash and gore where they had once lay. Link inspected his sword for a moment before wiping the blood form it and slipping it back in the scabbard on his back. “Anyone hurt?!“ he shouted.

“Ignien is bleeding!” one of the gorons replied. “How the hell were they able to claw through our hides?”

“Magic,” Midna answered dryly. “Shadow beasts are cursed creatures. Like any kind of stalkin and some wolfos.”

“What I wouldn’t give for my white sword right now,” Link muttered.

“You didn’t have your silver bolts?”

He looked up and then looked at his partner. She began to laugh as the gorons began to look around the ruined camp.
“Don’t tell me you forgot them. Like how you had to put the oil on in the middle of the fight.”

Link just groaned and shook his head. “They’re still in Epona’s bags.”

“Well, go get them then. We’re probably going to need them.” She snapped her fingers and the dark crystal appeared over the tip of her index finger. “I’ll see if the sorcerer is here.”

“So, what exactly were those things?” Darunia asked, approaching Midna.

“Your refugees. Or at least some of them.”

The goron glared at her. “You mean we just killed a number of-“

“This isn’t just some polymorphic curse. It warps the mind and the body.” Her eyes locked with his and she remained watching the large goron. “Imagine a fragment of yourself getting locked in your mind and then watching as your body does things that you would never do if you were in control of it. Imagine watching as your own form is warped and twisted into something you cannot see as anything other than a beast. This is magic similar to what creates a redead or a stalfos. Understand? This is what that artifact is capable of.”

He growled a little. Link glanced over as he pulled a quiver of silver bolts out of Epona’s bags and fixed it to his belt. “But curses can be broken.”

“Yes, I know it and you know it and even the idiot former Chosen over there knows it.” She jerked her head in the hexer’s direction. “But this is not some simple curse. Breaking a curse that is this twisted and powerful means that the individual will likely not survive changing back. And if it is and they survive it, it means they may very well not even be in control of themselves anymore. Meaning you’d also need luck.”

“So if we were to go about breaking a curse like this,” Link asked, returning. “What would we need?”

“Something close to the power of the artifact we’re after. Knowledge of how the curse works. And, preferably, a counter-curse tailored to the curse in question or one similar enough that it can be used. Transferring the curse as well is useful, but some counter-curses will solidify the curse into a physical form. Where we get some cursed relics from The Inquisition centuries ago. Either the curse forms a physical object due to the relic’s power in breaking it with the counter-curse, or the curse is transferred into an object like a ring or a sword. Some ancient relics and spirits can have it done to them too.”

“So,” Darunia figured, “something like the Goddess Harp in possession of The Royal Family.”

“Like I said though,” Midna continued. “We’d also need some luck probably.” The goron let out another groan and shook his head at her. “Look, I don’t like it either. These people did nothing wrong and were just trying to survive. It’s more merciful to kill them than let them live on turned into monsters.”

“Boss!” a goron shouted. “We found some people! Survivors!”

Darunia’s head snapped around when he heard and he quickly turned that way. Once he was gone, Link looked at his partner.

“Would one of your little sols actually break this curse?” he asked quietly.
She shook her head. “We’d need one of the pure ones,” she said in a hushed tone. “Preferably the Twin Sols themselves. Could do it with the Fused Shadows, but then we run into if the person will survive the counter-curse. All depends on the amount of magic in them. Takes more to twist the mind than the body. If they were still clearly themselves, the chances of them surviving are a lot higher. But as shadow beasts…” Midna bowed her head slightly and shook it, closing her eyes.

“Okay, good to know.” He turned then to go check on the survivors as well.

“Link.”

Link turned on his heel to look back. He slipped slightly in the mud and black blood, but kept standing.

“If they were twili, they would probably survive. We-they were changed once before after all.”

Two gorons made short work of lifting the massive overturned cart that blocked the entrance to one of the ruined house’s basements. A torch was shined into the dark while a stench filled the opening. Link heard startled cries and saw five people; two boys, a girl, a hylian man and a rito woman. The man held a pitchfork and was aiming it up the stairs.

“Everyone okay down there?!” Darunia shouted.

One of the children yelped and began to cry at his loud and rough voice. The rito shielded them with her feathery arm while the man slowly lowered the pitchfork. “Are they gone?!“ he called back.

“Yeah, they’re gone. You can come out now.” He moved aside and within moments the five had left the basement. Link could still see the terror in their eyes as the children stuck close to the rito. None of them were in good shape, but there didn’t appear to be any injuries among them.

“You, you’re the goron boss from the camp on the other face,” the rito said. “Is everyone alright there?”

“For the moment.” He lifted his hammer over his shoulder. “Wasn’t expecting to find anyone alive around here.”

“We got lucky when Ateren went mad,” the man said. “When he started turning people into those… Those things.”

Link immediately turned to face him. “How long ago was this?”

“A day or two after we heard a dragon attacked the other camp. He just. He started muttering things. Refused to help pack things for those who were moving on. And his eyes got really big then. Turned yellow! His skin turned blue!”

“Stay on topic,” Darunia said. “What else happened?”

“He started screaming about things,” the rito woman said. “About how… How this world deserved to burn. That it should be bathed in shadow and ash. I don’t know which he wanted more. Just went mad. Nari tried to comfort him but when she touched him, he grabbed her and she was turned into
one of those things! Then it all happened. The shouting, the fighting. People being turned into
monsters by him”

“We need to find him before he does it again,” Link said. “Do you know where he went?”

She shook her head. “We grabbed a few of the children who hadn’t been changed and ran. We tried
to get out the main way, but were blocked by the monsters. So we hid. In the fighting a cart got
knocked over the door. Just then stayed quiet. Even after the fighting stopped, we could hear them
out there. Had barely anything in there to eat or drink but we knew if we got the cart moving at all,
the monsters would investigate.” One of the children began to cry again. She knelt down on her
knees to comfort them.

“So no sighting of him then,” Darunia said, waving a hand to one of the gorons nearby. “Hope
your friend can track him then.” He lifted his hammer over his shoulder as one of the gorons with a
cobble crusher approached. “Daruk! Take them back to the village. Make sure they have food and
water. Take Ignien with you and have Gor Liggs tend to him.”

“Sir!” the goron said, beating his chest armor with his right hand.

“Link, with me.” He motioned and started walking away. Link followed. “I’m going to send a
couple others to notify Jarl Brant of what’s going on. Are you and the sorceress going to be okay
here on your own?”

He nodded simply. “It might actually be in your benefit,” Link said. The goron boss raised an
eyebrow. Link could see he wasn’t happy with the answer. “If something goes wrong with the
spellwork to seal the relic away or some other problem occurs, we want to make sure there’s no
one around.”

“What kind of other problems?”

“Well, we could turn the entire ruined village into a crater,” Midna said. The goron spun on his
heel in the direction of her voice and sudden appearance. He looked down at Link then.

“…Yeah, she does that. But she’s also right.”

“Yep. One thing goes wrong with this and we could be looking at an even bigger mess. The artifact
gets damaged while using energy could explode. Could suck things into it and between realities by
ruining the spellwork. Lots of things could go wrong. So leave it to us experts.”

“If this sorcerer survives whatever you’re doing, I want him brought to me. We’ll hold him and
then deal with him with Jarl Brant.”

“We can do that.”

Link’s eyes darted to his left to her. The way she had her arms folded over her chest and posture
though was familiar to him. He said nothing though, and hoped Darunia wouldn’t be suspicious.
There was a tense moment as it looked like he was going to say something but didn’t. The goron
grunted then.

Her lips curled into a smirk. “Well, provided he lives and comes quietly. Of course.”

“We’ll be back either way,” Link added. “If we not, get as many people you can and find a way to
seal it away.”

“Right. Good luck then.” He turned and shouted in the goron tongue. The others quickly lined up
with the survivors and he began barking orders. Within moments, the group had left. A silence fell over the ruins apart from the wind.

Link looked to Midna then. The illusion of a gerudo woman vanished in flickering black squares. She flashed a smirk at him and pulled her hood up over her head. “Found him while you were busy with those survivors,” she said.

“Where?”

“The well.”

He looked to it with her then. There didn’t seem to be anything out of the ordinary with it. Link approached it, pulling his blade once more. When he peered down it, it was empty and stone, with metal bars on the side that could be used as a ladder. Link looked back at Midna in silence.

“I called a wolf down there while everyone else was busy. There’s a door with a sheikah symbol on it.” Any playfulness was gone from her features. “Inquisitor stronghold.”

“Great. Just what we need.” He sheathed the blade and climbed over the edge. Almost a minute later, his feet landed on the stone base of the well. A pair of boots landed next to him and when he glanced, Midna was right next to him, energies crackling in her hands. Before them was the stone door to the prison. Though it looked sealed, they both saw indentations and marks on it of how it had been forced open. The wolf around Link’s neck began to shake on its chain. “Ready?”

“Yeah.” She snapped her fingers and the same small glowing sphere from their autopsy. Link pushed his hands against the wall and there was a clunk. The stone door with the faded sheikah eye painted upon it lurched upward and rose. He stepped inside, followed by Midna, holding the sphere floating over her palm. A moment after they’d entered, the door lurched shut and the sound of it landing on the stone floor thundered down the hallway.

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks to kamkong for the bookmark and the rec and again to everyone who’s given kudos!

Devnotes:
-Thinking on the goron fighting style we see in Majora's Mask and the weapons they use in Breath of the Wild makes me picture them being very heavy and brutal in their fights. A goron may have finesse, but I doubt we'd see it in a fight. It would be brutal and heavy.
-Adapting the spells from OoT into witcher-like signs was a fun project. Running from the theory the ones we see The Hero of Time uses are the actual spell, a sign version would be far weaker as witches are not dedicated mages.

That's about it for now! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome!
The bottom of the well was not what either of them had expected initially, but it made sense from what Link recalled from old history lessons about The Inquisition. About how some old Sheikah forts and prisons were hidden in plain sight. After a minute of walking, Link and Midna both came to the entrance and both instantly knew it had been a prison. A metal mesh was on the brick wall in front of them. Link scaled it in moments and they saw the main chamber.

The large square room lead off in three directions. One to the west and east and one north. The way west was blocked off by rubble and debris, suggesting it had collapsed some time long ago. The way east was open and a glance down the way revealed numerous cells. Over a dozen broken corpses lay in heaps in some of them with flies buzzing around them. A few even had gaping holes in the back of their heads.

“By the Twin Sols,” Midna said. “So many bodies. And they smell real fresh still.”

“Damnit.”

“All the more reason to find him.” She shook her head. “This doesn’t make any sense though. Seeing this suggests he’s been here longer than he’s had the mask.”

“What could he have possibly been doing to those refugees?” Link asked, entering one of the cells. “This looks like he either was torturing them or performing vivisection.” He squatted down to inspect one of the bodies. The damage to the back of the poor man’s head was just like that of the dragon. Carefully, he saw a dead twilit bloat inside. “Not that that there’s…” He cut himself off as he noticed something. “Wait a second.”

“What?”

“Can you give me a little more light?” As he spoke, the small glowing sol floated over and glowed brighter. It gave him a better look at the barbarism that had been inflicted. Some of the more intact bodies though immediately had Link’s gaze. The muscles were swollen and the bones twisted. He knew magic could do this, but it was clearly not forced by magic. It looked more like as if it had deliberately been grown that way. There was also how the bones looked thicker in some places and thinner in others. This all looked far too familiar from his time as a Chosen Champion of The Crown. “Midna, you said one time there are still hexers in The Twilight. Do they use mutagens for The Change or is it all magic?”

“I don’t know. I could find out though.”

“Good. Because the way some of the damage looks, he may have been messing with mutagens on these people. And they have bloats in their skulls too.”

He heard her sharply inhale. “Gods, that’d mean that…” Midna shook her head. “Only a child before puberty could possibly survive them.”

“Yeah, I’m right here.” He got back up. “Most of the time if an ordinary person takes those mutagens they’ll just die. But if kept alive with magic through The Change and done properly, you’ll get a mindless hulk. Like the dullest of big blins.” He glanced over at the bodies once more. “Well, not quite mindless, but still.”
“Seen this before, huh?”

Link gave her a single nod. “South Seas. One of my first solo assignments.”

“Tell me more when we’re done here.” She held an open palm out and the small sol floated back to hover over her palm. “We gotta find him and get the mask back.”

“Agreed.” He started for the door, but paused, quickly drawing the sword from his back. At seeing that, in Midna’s free hand, orange and teal bands of light began to dance and crackle. A second later though, the magic vanished and Link lowered his sword. What he’d thought were a pair of impish monsters were just grotesque statues standing at the archway back into the main room.

“The statues?” Midna asked. He thought he could hear her smirking.

“Yeah. They looked like foglets in the light and shadow.” He reached back and slipped the sword back in its scabbard. “They’re too thin though. The arms are too long and the legs are too short.”

“Never seen anything like it before. Kinda ghastly to look at them, huh?”

Link nodded before stepping past the statues and back into the main room.

At the end of the hall they came to what looked like had once been a mirror chamber. Numerous torches were set around an altar in the center. In front of a ruined pedestal and stand that had once held a magic mirror was the wall and upon it was a defaced Sheikah Eye with deep gashes sliced into the stone. What caught their attention though was the figure sitting cross-legged in front of the ruined pedestal. They wore dark robes with turquoise accents and a mantle similar to Midna’s. His sleeves were massive and his orange hair was cut short. Link couldn’t see their hands, but he was sure spellwork was already being prepared in them. There was a snap and their head jolted upright. He was wearing the accursed mask and watched them through its warped eyes. He cocked his head to the left, with another snap, and then to the right. The mask’s eyes moved independently, following the hylian and twili in the room.

“Do you know who we are?” Midna asked.

“You…” they said, but the voice didn’t sound right to Link’s ears. It was an even and calm male’s voice. But it was too evenly paced; too rehearsed to be truly natural. “You are a traitor... You are both traitors. You turn against your own. But do you... Do you see yourself as a traitor?” His head jerked around to face Midna. He said something that Link recognized as Twilise, but other than that had no idea what he said.

She replied in the same language. Link picked up some pieces of it, but could guess she was asking him to remove the mask.

“Chaos has two faces, Princess,” he said, the unnatural voice returning. Link stayed quiet, watching it. He glanced once at Midna to see her standing casually, but he’d caught a brief moment of surprise. Ateren’s head moved and was glaring right at him. He could see magic beginning to crackle along and around the edge of the mask.

“Wait,” Midna said. “Ateren, stop this. You could spark a war doing this!”

“But... But we were made this way. They called us monsters. Demonspawn. You dare suggest that
a war isn’t justified?” He cocked his head back and forth a couple times and exhaled sharply. Ateren’s arms jerked upward. That’s when Link saw it. The mask was fused to his face. “And you seek to appease our jailors and their puppets.” He was standing now, on one leg and watching the twili. His body twitched before he brought their arms inward and then snapped them out again. “You are not worthy of your title. Or your bloodline. A true Monarch of Twilight would…” A crackle of energy began to dance out of the long sleeves. Link could feel the energy in the air. Another glance at his partner and already saw a globe of turquoise magic between her palms. It was just a question now who was going to make the first move. Link slipped his shield on his back as quietly as he could. The two twili mages were watching one another, ignoring him entirely. Link was hoping that’d be the mistake their quarry made.

Link pulled his crossbow from his side. A silver bolt already loaded. He’d have preferred to have the light magic enchanted ones, but they had been taken from him back at the castle. One of the sorcerer’s arms shot towards him, a trio of bolts of magic shooting out of the sleeve. Link fired. The silver bolt shattered against a magic barrier while two of Ateren’s shots hit Link square in the chest. One shot clean through his arm. He already felt himself bleeding, but the magic of his armor mended the minor injuries.

Midna’s arms flew apart and the globe between her hands vanished in a flash. A pair of twilit wolves appeared out of the long shadows cast by the torches and rushed the sorcerer. Out of Ateren’s other sleeve was a lash of red energy. One of the wolves was hit and vanished into darkness as the lash cut deeply into the chamber’s wall. The other moved to be between the sorcerer and Link.

He watched as the two circled, seeing the sorcerer move their arms like Midna had. Within moments there was a flurry of magic flashing between the two of them. He backed away for a moment. There was a lull as Ateren melted into a shadow and emerged a moment later. More black sprites fell from above. Link saw glowing red twilit markings on each. They engulfed the wolf, who began to fight back.

Link pulled his sword from his back. One of the sprites skittered on the floor and leapt for him, tentacles writhing out the back. As it flew in the air, he swung. It was cleaved in two and vanished. Another came for him and another. He quickly counted dozens of them. Another jumped and smashed into his shield. Yet another of the shadow vermin bit his ankle. Seeing he was going to be overwhelmed, he made a sign in his hand and slammed his palm into the ground. A dome of fire erupted around him and incinerated the vermin. He glanced up to see the sorcerer again. A glowing ball of magic was coming right for him. Before it struck though a dark funnel with turquoise around it appeared in front of him and pulled it in.

“Got anything that could help you avoid getting hit?” Midna asked. She was right by his side now. Another lash of magic came from their attacker and forced them to dive apart. “Or taking one?!” She opened the portal again. The spell came out of it, the sorcerer dodged.

“Keep him busy for a second!” Link had one thing in mind. He pulled the Din’s Fury from a pouch and ripped the cork out with his teeth. He downed the potion in a single gulp and dropped the vial.

His heart pounded as he felt the fluid in his throat boil. His muscles tensed as he saw more sprites falling from above. They didn’t seem to be falling as quickly. With a deep breath, he swung his sword in an arc, slicing through more of the falling vermin. A return swing sliced a couple more of the vermin before they touched the ground. As he cut through the last one, he pulled a grenade. He
heard a snap and saw Midna had lit its fuse with her magic, even though she was on the other side of the room. A great turquoise lash of energy was wrapped with the red one from Ateren. Midna let out a cry as she directed her arc right. It threw her attacker into the sheikah eye on the wall. Link tossed the bomb in his hand as they flew. It clattered against the wall and exploded.

There was no sign of a body. They knew he’d vanished into a shadow. Link and Midna stood with their backs to one another, watching the room. He heard her energies crackling in her hands. Another snap and he saw one of her wolves appear. “The mask is part of him,” Link said. “No way we’re getting it off.”

“Plan B then,” she said.

Link glanced down to see a field of shadow forming. “Please tell me that’s you.”

“It is.” He could hear the field expanding. Glancing over his shoulder he saw her holding her hands up. Another magic whip appeared and swung. Link rolled forward, ducking under it. The torches flew through the air. He got up in time to see Midna catch it with her own magic in another challenge. The masked sorcerer floated forward before the field of dark energy Midna had laid down ensnared him. Link saw orange bands around their legs. They lashed out with their other hand and threw another trio of bolts at Midna. She was knocked back and collided with the wall. There was a flash of orange as she hit it.

He pulled his shield from his back and moved to stand between her and the attacker. Ateren had two glowing whips of magic now. The sorcerer jumped upward and spun. Link made another sign with his fingers and ducked. He heard a gentle hum as the blue crystal formed around him. There was a loud shriek with each strike against it. With the fourth, Link saw it shatter. He glanced back to Midna as the sorcerer moved away from them.

“I’m okay!” she said, getting to her feet once more. He saw a faint orange sphere vanish from around her.

“Can you bind him again?”

There was that familiar, cocky grin on her lips. One he had seen many times in the months they’d worked together during The Conjunction. Not another word was needed. Link beat the pommel of his sword against his shield a couple times, grabbing the sorcerer’s attention. The shield suddenly was pelted by red bolts as Link ducked behind it.

Link gritted his teeth as he felt the magic rattle against his shield. The hail stopped for a moment. He glanced over the top to see Ateren throwing another large globe of energy at him. Had he not imbibed the potion, he’d have been hit. Instead, he dropped his shield and grabbed his blade with both hands. In a single swing, steel struck the magic ball and sent it flying back at the caster.

Before Ateren could try and invert the spell back at him, darkness formed under him. Two bands of orange wrapped around his legs and then two more jumped out and grabbed their arms. He let out a scream as the globe came back and struck him square in the chest. Dark red lightning crackled around his body and frayed his robe. Midna pulled her hands down and their opponent was on their knees. Link leapt forward and swung down with a shout. The blade went through back of the sorcerer’s neck and his head rolled off.

They stood for a moment to catch their breath then. Link felt his body shaking; another effect of the Din’s Fury mixing with the adrenaline and how much magic he’d already used. Midna had her
hands on her knees and was catching her breath. She quickly stood back up with magic ready though. When Link looked up, he saw the dead mage’s head floating upward. It turned in the air to look at them. The twili sorcerer’s head fell back to the floor, leaving just the mask floating in the air. Link caught a glimpse of it. Ateren’s eyes were wide and mouth frozen in a scream. Dark holes looked like they had been drilled into his jaws, brow and cheeks.

“Uh, Midna?” Link asked, fingers coiling a little tighter around his sword. The mask remained floating in the air, its eyes fixed on his partner.

“Oh, that’s a surprise,” she said.

“It served its purpose,” a voice said. Like when they’d entered, it was calm, even and direct. “A puppet that can no longer be used is mere garbage.” The mask’s eyes flickered and the yellow whiskers twitched. There was a rattling sound before Midna raised her hands defensively. Magic crackled between her fingers, but it flickered and died in seconds. She was reaching for it, eyes wide. He saw her trying to step back, but slipping on her heels.

Link pulled the crossbow off his hip again and loaded a silver bolt when he saw her starting to struggle to keep from grabbing it.

“Link!” she shouted. “It’s…”

“I see it!” He aimed and fired the crossbow at the back of the mask then.

“What are you—” she began, but the snap of the bowstring cut her off. The mask spun around and the arrow struck a barrier of magic. A second later, orange bands wrapped around it, Midna’s magic freed from whatever had happened. In spite of the magic and her struggling, it drifted towards her, eyes still fixed on Link. “No… No!”

In that instant, Link acted on his instincts. He dropped the crossbow and jumped. There was a flash of green magic wind and he appeared above the cursed mask, blade aimed downward. The second the steel met its face, there was a flash and a screeching that made his ears ring. He could make out Midna screaming as he was thrown into the wall on the other side of the room. The screeching stopped. In a few moments, his ears stopped ringing as well. As his vision returned in the dim chamber, Link could see the mask on the floor, broken in half. His sword had been shattered and there was smoke floating out of the two halves of the mask as it began to turn black. He took one of the blue vials and drank it completely. His wounds weren’t going to seal on their own as long as Din’s Fury was still in his system.

Where was Midna though? He looked to where she’d been held but only saw her ruined mantle and scorched clothes in a pile. After a moment of letting the potion do its work, he forced himself to his feet and limped over. He landed on his knees and looked at the remains for a moment. His eye caught something though sticking out from under the black and turquoise. It was a tiny twitching hand. The mantle fell apart in his hand as he pulled it away. Lying on its side under it was a humanoid creature that was barely up to his knee. It was covered in fur and had dark markings on its chest and left leg. Its red eyes were massive, though barely open. The markings on those arms were familiar. Its orange hair though…

“Midna?”
The eyes moved at his voice. “Is it…?” Her voice was far higher than it normally was. She was struggling for air.

“It’s done.” He looked at the shattered mask. “I don’t know if we’re safe from it in the future, but yes.” Before he could find a way to tell her what had happened, she spoke up.

“Good… We’re safe.” She tried to sit herself up, a shocked gasp coming from her mouth. He noticed a long fang in her mouth now when she did. Her eyes were wide as she looked at one of her hands. “That…” She touched her face and looked ready to cry. Or let out a litany of cursing. Link couldn’t tell.

She almost looked like one of the strange statues they’d seen earlier. Softer in shape and not quite as monstrous, though still enough to be called hideous. “I know a curse when I see one, Midna. We need to get you out of here.”

“I…” She tried to stand, but couldn’t. She could barely move her arms. Before she could do anything else though, Link had taken his hat off and slipped her feet first into it. “No… What…”

“It’s probably still raining.” He pulled it up on her before wrapping the rest around her small frame. “And you don’t look good.”

“Damnit, I’m the princess of the most powerful sorcerer clan in the entire Twilight Realm. I will not be swaddled like an infant…” She scowled at him, fang sticking out.

In spite of the situation, Link couldn’t help smirking a little as he got back to his feet. The imp was cradled in his arms. “Well excuse me, princess, but you can’t even stand.” Link held her against his chest as he got his lantern out and lit it on one of the few remaining torches. He hooked it to his belt and carried her out of the dried well. As he carefully climbed out, he felt tiny hands holding tightly to his scabbard’s strap. They walked through the ruined refugee camp and carefully Link climbed on Epona. He turned her reins and with a gentle nudge in her sides, they started back up the mountain pass.

She was silent for the ride back to the goron village. The rain continued, but at least did not appear to get any worse. He could see torches lit and the people moving about in the camp outside the domes as it came into view. He finally couldn’t take it. He looked down at the bundle he held to try to keep dry. “How’re you doing?”

“I don’t feel good,” she said. “It just. I can barely move. I feel like every ounce of magic has been ripped out of me and then twisted.”

“You’re not going to be stuck like this. Curses can be lifted.”

“I know, but the work involved… That was very strong magic. Stronger than mine even. You have any idea what you might need to break something like that?”

“I can find out.” He looked down at her. “And I know you’re not one to give up either. We’ll get you back home-”

“No!” Even though she was in bad shape, she was loud enough to make Epona start. Link held onto her and the reins to keep from falling off. “I can’t go back! Not like… Like this!” She moved so her head was against his chest.

He could see fear in her eyes. To see them on someone so confident and forward scared him. He
took a deep breath then and instinctively squeezed her a little against him. “Then we’ll find a way to lift it here.”

“You need to get south though. Before the war turns.”

“I know an information broker. I can get what I need from them and maybe a lead on the curse.” The horse took a turn and the village vanished from view as they went around the pass. “We have the archives at the dome as well as a starting point.”

“…And I can dig through them while you’re down there.” She took a deep breath. “Between us we should find a few leads.”

“Exactly.”

Midna let out a weak laugh.

“What?”

“Maybe the hat isn’t so bad…”

Chapter End Notes

Hope everyone is doing well this day! Another edited and ready!

There’ll be something special on my tumblr, baring any incidents or issues, Friday for anyone interested in prompts.

Devnotes:
- In spite of the linearity we see in The Shadow Temple's design from a game perspective, I do feel it does some wonderful environmental storytelling and this extends to the Bottom of The Well. We see what looks like a horrifying dark prison, made even darker by the fact that it is in a sheikah village and essentially watched over by them.
- Had to include Imp!Midna.

That's all for now! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome people!
Link went straight to Darunia once he’d ensured Epona was dry in the nearby cave. He still cradled the imp in his hat while he entered the dome, using his deep green rain cloak to help shield her from the eyes of refugees. He found them in the archive dome with Gorko. They were going over what looked to be a map of the caves. The fire was roaring as well and it was warm and inviting.

“Those kegs are still in the temple,” Darunia said. “We could demolish it.”

“And with so many war orphans coming through it’d only take one to get lost and hurt in there. Especially since I don’t think anyone is going to be using Old Kakariko after what it sounds like happened,” Gorko said. “I’m pretty sure Din would forgive us as well, since we have a newer one finished and are demolishing the old one to ensure no one gets hurt.”

“Tomorrow, take a couple others with you and document everything. Remove any last relics and move them to the new one. Once it’s cleared we’ll detonate the kegs.” He looked up as he heard Link’s boots. “I take it you two succeeded.”

“We did,” Link said. “But, we’re gonna need the archives again. And wouldn’t say no to a doctor.” He was feeling the Din’s Fury wearing off. His legs shook, his reaction time returning to more human levels. Gorko brought him a chair.

“What’ve you got there?” Darunia asked, pointing at the bundle.

He looked down at the imp. She looked up at him, a red eye peeking out from the blanket and her fang sticking out of her lip in a sneer. The gorons gasped though when they saw an arm stick out of the cloak. A moment later, her head emerged, eliciting a gasp from the gorons. “Midna got hit with a curse…”

Gorko watched as she adjusted the cloak and hat bundle to cover herself a little but remained in Link’s arms. “Well, we did know that mask had some incredibly powerful magic in it,” he said.

“You’re tellin’ me,” Midna said. She sighed and pushed some of her hair out of her face for a moment before it moved on its own and tied itself into a simple ponytail. “Polymorphic of some kind I’d assume. Knowing that the mask was behind it too gives us a good starting point.”

“Did we dig out all the books on it last night?” she asked.

“I can go through the basement.” He folded his arms. “I’m more concerned though what people will say if they see you. People do come into the archives to look around.”

“I agree,” Darunia said. “There’s too many people around.”

“Don’t forget I can hide in shadows,” she said, raising a finger. “I might not be at full strength, but I can still do that. I just need a little bit to recover.”

“We need a reason to risk having you around though,” Darunia said, folding his arms. “Things are already tense. And you’re one of Link’s associates. They’re already looking for him. Give us something in return and I’ll allow you to do your research.”
She gave a tired nod. “I can do some translation work. Already did some when it came to those books yesterday. What’s a little more?”

Darunia looked at Gorko, who nodded. “I could always use someone with linguistics skills,” he said. “I have a backlog actually from my travels.”

“Let me take a look, maybe I’ll recognize it.”

“So she can stay?” Link asked.

“She can stay,” Darunia said. “Long as she helps and doesn’t do anything to scare anyone.”

“Good.” He looked a little relieved. “I need to get to Zora’s Domain in the Snowpeak Range now. We can’t risk something that’ll make a foreign power want to enter the war.”

“Agreed. If they weren’t allied with the sea zora, I’d say it wouldn’t matter. But because they are…”

Link got to his feet, still shaking a little. “I’ll depart tomorrow at dawn then by the river.”

“They might recognize Epona,” Midna said, glancing up at him. “I remember the boats that patrol the river goes past a couple forts.”

“I never said I’d be on the boat.” He pulled his hat back on. “I do have the zora scalemail. Won’t be comfortable, but I can dig some hooks into the keel of one going upstream and wait until it reaches the domain. Speaking of which…” Link removed the scabbard for his sword. “Who do I talk to about a new sword?”

It had cost him nearly every rupee, but he had a strong subrosian-crafted steel arming sword now stowed in his scabbard. It lay next to one of Epona’s saddlebags in a small tent, as he prepared for his trip. He’d already put on the armor he’d be wearing to ensure it still fit properly.

It was a deep blue shirt that had long sleeves under a scalemail vest. The armguards and greaves had a set fins on them that folded out, along with small gemstones charged with magic. When activated, he could even walk on the floor of a lake. He’d already used it to walk on the ocean floor on his first major assignment years ago now. The most important part though was the facemask that was around his neck. The cloth was enchanted so that when he pulled it over his face that it’d function like a set of gills. There was also a thick set of goggles that were attached to a long hat, which would cover his face. Not an inch of skin would be exposed while he was wearing it for the simple fact it had been designed with ocean depths in mind. Traversing the rivers of Hyrule would be simple compared to that. He fixed the hat on. It was like the green one, but longer and more reminisce of a zora’s head. He tried pulling the mask down over his face and the cloth around his neck up over his mouth and nose to make sure it was comfortable before pulling both back. It would take a few days, maybe a week to get up Zora’s Domain. He wanted to make sure he didn’t have to constantly readjust it all.

“I thought you said you were leaving in the morning,” Midna said.

He jumped a bit hearing her. Looking around, he couldn’t see her. When he looked to the bag again, he saw her, still an imp, floating over it. She wore the tattered remains of her. “Just making
“Sure everything still fits,” he said. Link pulled the hat off. “Thought you’d be back in the archives at work.”

“Taking a break.” She grinned. “With so many people around, it’s actually kind of easy to move from shadow to shadow. No one’s noticed me yet.”

“That’s good.” He stuffed two vials into one of the pouches on his tunic. “You look better.”

Midna scowled at him. “And what’s that supposed to mean?” He could see her fang sticking out.

“Compared to when I carried you out of the well. You’re up and about. You don’t look as pale or exhausted. I’d guess your magic is back to normal?”

“Not quite…” She drifted down behind the saddlebag. “I can’t do a lot of the tricks I used-to, but I can levitate almost effortlessly now. Casting illusions around myself too is far easier. And…” Her hair moved on its own. Link watched as it seemed to extend and form a great red hand. It twisted on its own and she was able to use it to dig into the saddlebag. She’d soon pulled out the bottle of spices he’d carried with him. The grin on her face seemed incredibly appropriate for her current shape.

“I didn’t know you could do that.” He smiled a little.

“Used to do it all the time actually.” The hand pulled back and within moments it was back to being her hair. “Just not exactly practical to use I’ve found when using spellwork. If I hadn’t made the portals to catch the spells from the sorcerer, I could’ve caught them like that and thrown them back. This way though I’m using it more like a focus for my magic. Which is something I couldn’t do.”

“Impressive.”

“Takes magic to create and hold spells with though. The amount of energy involved isn’t practical for anything but the biggest and nastiest sort of things. The things you don’t want to risk putting through a portal too.” She looked up at him. “Remember the cyclops in Lorule?”

“The hinox?”

“Yeah that thing. When it came charging at me, I could’ve caught it like that. Then thrown it aside. But it was easier to just blink to the left and let it crash into the wall.”

He chuckled. “That would’ve been impressive.”

“I know, but I really didn’t want to waste the magic.” She sighed. “Like this I don’t have a choice.” Midna slowly looked up at him, folding her arms then. “Speaking of magic, what were you thinking?!! Attacking the mask like that?!”

“What?”

“Link, you had no idea what that would’ve done!” She drifted higher then so she was looking down at him. Her head brushed the tent’s ceiling. “Hell, it could’ve brought the entire cave down on top of us from the energy it released! It could have shot eye beams at you and turned you to ash! And because of what happened we don’t know if there’s any unforeseen consequences!”

He let out a sigh and shook his head. “So what? Was I supposed to just let it place itself on your face like it did the mage?”
She merely glared at him for a minute, but looked away with a sigh.

“Well?”

“It was a risk, but I might’ve been able to resist it long enough to get it back to The Twilight.” She looked back at him then. “If you hadn’t have jumped in like that!”

“And leave me behind here in spite of what we agreed upon yesterday.” Link shook his head with a sigh before looking her right in the eye. “Damnit, Mid… I saw you struggling. And if it had gotten on your face, then what? If something happened to you, then we could be looking at The Twilight entering the war. Neither of us want that.”

She spun in the air to look away from him with a scoff. “Something did happen.”

“We can break that curse. Bringing you back from the dead wouldn’t be possible.”

Midna glanced over her shoulder at him. “And if I’m stuck like-“

“You’re not gonna be stuck like this. I promise.”

There was a minute before she sighed and turned back to face him, planting her tiny hands on her hips. She drifted down to eye level a bit more with him. “You are such a noble idiot.”

“Hey, you said the exact same thing to me when I got cursed back during The Conjunction.”

“I know.” She was smirking now. “You made a terrible wolf too.”

“Well, that and you said I wouldn’t be stuck like that.”

She laughed quietly then, but her smile faded. “So, you have an idea where to start looking for information for all this?” she asked.

“Sure do.” Link packed a couple different bolt types for his crossbow and removed the grenades. The water would ruin the powder in them so there was no reason to take them. “I’ll have Telma put the information on my tab.”

“Who?”

“She’s an information broker I know.” He adjusted himself in the tent a little so he was more comfortable and yawned. “You want to know something going on, you can talk to her. Won’t be cheap, but always good information. If she doesn’t have something on Majora’s Mask and curses, she can point me at someone who does.”

“And she’s a zora?”

Link shook his head. “She used to work out of Castle Town before her bar and home was taken from her. So she set up along Lake Hylia; neutral territory. King Zora has them join the war though she might lose it again.”

“She’s gerudo I’m guessing then…”

“Half.” He pulled the hat of his armor off and yawned. “A few others like her lost their businesses. A couple were hanged. She got out before it got that bad though.” Link looked back at the imp. “Sure I can work out something with her. Maybe find a way to ensure she can stay put. I’m gonna
need a good information broker too.”

“Can you trust her?”

Link shook his head. “Not like I can trust you. But I can trust her to do her job. And I’m not going to be giving her things like state secrets.”

“That’s something at least.” Midna hopped up from behind the saddle bag, spinning as she drifted into the air. “Remember too, you can use the wolf charm I made for you like your old one.”

“I know. Though still not sure I like the idea of you spying on me through it.”

She laughed. It was higher than her normal voice. “I’m going to be busy enough translating all these things. Have you seen the basement of the archive dome?”

“I didn’t know there was one.”

“Exactly! If you really need something or are going to be looking over some magic information, let me know. I’ll do what I can from here.”

“Thanks.” Link felt his arms shaking. He grabbed another bottle of milk from the saddlebag.

“You okay?”

He pulled the cork and took a mouthful. “It’s the Din’s Fury. It’s leaving my system still.” He took another drink. “We try not to use ones like that too often.”

“I think I can see why. Like that green one you took when we were stuck in the Skull Woods.”

“The Farore’s Kiss?” He nodded. “I couldn’t see a thing for a day after that.”

She laughed. “Yeah, me and Ravio had to take turns to keep you from walking into trees!”

He laughed a little with her. “Apart from the fact I am pretty sure you both guided me into one or two.”

“What? Me?!” There was a feigned shock on the imp’s face. “I would never do such a thing!”

“Of course you wouldn’t… The Twilight Princess is above such tricks!” The two friends laughed for a moment. “You going to be okay on your own here?”

“I’ll be fine. I might look horrible and my magic isn’t at full strength, but I can still use it to throw someone a hundred feet in the air and hide in shadows. I’ll get a message sent at dusk too. Make sure my cadre knows I’m okay. ‘cause the last thing we need right now is one of my brothers coming looking for me.”

“Agreed.” He corked the now empty bottle. “Given the amount of panic I got over my report mentioning the twili after The Conjunction, I can’t imagine what a couple more might cause.”
Link took the rest of the day recovering and doing a couple small jobs around to help the gorons and refugees. He’d earned some money, but he was sure it wouldn’t be enough to buy the information he needed. After saying his goodbyes, he started down the mountain on foot. The sun was just starting to rise as he walked, running into more refugees heading up. He was making good time, which he felt was important. Sooner he got the information and a way to keep the zoras out of the war the better. As he neared Kakariko from the main path, he went off the trail. Being a Sheikah Village, the last thing he wanted was to walk right into it. He’d slipped around it before. The only difference this time was that he needed the river that ran past its southern edge. It didn’t take long for him to get around the village and soon came to the river. He could see to the west there was a boat coming up the river.

It was a large riverboat with sails on the top of it, but not as big as the galleons that would be seen in the South Seas. It bore the flags of The Kingdom and a crest of a red eagle. He recognized it and immediately pulled the mask over his face. Link had the feeling there was one of his own on that boat and had no desire to encounter them. He took a deep breath and dove into the water. After a moment, he allowed himself to breathe, feeling the strange sensations along the facemask as it filtered the water. At least he thought it wasn’t as weird as the mermaid’s lungs potion. A small sign formed in his fingers and the gemstones activated on his armor. He dropped to the riverbed then and walked along its bottom. A little longer and he’d reached the boat. It had dropped its anchor and Link saw the wooden hull. He pulled a set of four hooks out and kicked off the river floor. He drifted upward and dug a hook into the thick wood. Holding onto it, he got the other in place. A moment later he’d had two more attached and was secured under the boat. A few minutes later he saw the anchor pulled out of the water and he felt the boat lurch. Something was amiss though. The boat suddenly began to glide through the water. He felt it rise as it gained speed. There must have been a wind mage on board as when he entered the water, the wind was blowing to the East, yet they were traveling west and against the current. If they kept the current speed, he might get to Zora’s Domain in a day.

The hours passed. The riverbed changed considerably from when he’d entered it. Link had to hold even tighter onto the hooks to keep from being swept away. Glancing forward, he saw corpses floating. They were hylian and human; gerudo and blin. The water itself was murky as well now because of them all. The boat still cut forward through the water at the high speed it had been moving. He realized scavenging skullfish and drowners would be along soon, if they hadn’t already started to rip the bodies apart. Link thought quickly how he would fight them off if they came after him. He still had his knife in his bracer, but his bigger concern was how they would swarm. Live prey though like himself was a more difficult target and both the cursed skullfish and aquatic necrophages were both known more for being scavengers.

The boat kept going at speed, passing through the majority of the corpses. That’s when he saw it; the massive skeletal fish that was swarmed by smaller ones. He grimaced, seeing he was going to attract the swarm even if he managed to move in some way. Link pulled the knife from its hiding place and prepared for the swarm. Within an instant of drawing it, he was mobbed. Dozens of tiny skullfish started nipping at the scale he wore. They tried to shred the materials. Even though the armor had been designed with sharks in mind, their teeth still managed to cause discomfort. The large one though got a hold of his arm as he skewered a couple of the smaller undead fish. He felt the teeth digging through the fabric and mail. A few air bubbles drifted out of his mask as he let out a cry of pain before Link coughed a little. He was forced to let go from the only hook he still had a grip on. The boat kept moving. His feet twisted and he was released from the second set.
For a minute, he had no idea which way was up or down. He stabbed at the giant skullfish that was latched onto his arm. The others continued to swarm, biting madly. Link made a sign with his fingers and as he drifted past a rock, slammed his palm against it. In a flash, the water around him was boiled. With it, the skullfish were scorched. The large one’s head was all that was left that clung to his arm. He hadn’t managed to right himself though and got a brief glimpse of another rock before everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

Not a whole lot of notes but just a little transition chapter and an apology to anyone who’s been checking the tumblr for what I mentioned last week. Life got in the way and the thing in question has been postponed. Hopefully I can get it on and shared later this week or the next one, but if not it will prolly show up in November or December, around the time the first arc here is finished being posted.

Don't even really have any devnotes this time around.

Okay, maybe one or two devnotes:
- Chapters like this I feel can be wonderful for character development and help sort of keep things at an even level. It can't be nonstop action all the time after all. But it doesn't necessarily mean it can slow the entire story down. Time will tell if I succeeded for this one, but it was fun to just have the characters slow down for a minute, get their bearings and get their plans together.
- We're a little more than halfway through the first arc for posting! Wow! Does time fly or what?

Huge thank you as always to everyone who's read and left kudos, comments and bookmarks! Thanks for reading, keep being awesome and I'll see everyone next week!
When he was fully conscious, he found he was standing stripped to his shorts and bound in manacles in a wet cell. A pair of zora guards wearing scale armor and large, mask-like helmets stood outside it, talking quietly. He still had the wolf around his neck at least. Link glanced about and listened.

“Why would Labrynna send a spy anyways?” one of the guards whispered. It echoed against the stone walls of the dungeon enough that he could hear. Their coral spear clicked against the floor as they moved slightly.

“I don’t know,” the other said. “Maybe they’ve heard the rumors.”

“I hope they’re just that.” They shook their head. “Do you see all those scars?”

“I recognized a couple skullfish bites and he was bleeding when they found him washed up. Recognized a couple more too. Deku babas on the arms and stomach, couple on his chest. And the scratches on the back…”

“Those looked like dodongo claws. And the burns. What was that one on his collar?”

“I don’t know, it still looks recently healed.” They must’ve been referring to the one from the dead hand he reasoned. Link glanced around as carefully as he could without drawing their attention. This was definitely one of their cells. “If he’s not a spy though, he could be one of those berserkers from Holodrum with the sort of equipment he was carrying… Or a monster slayer. Maybe specializing in the preternatural? Why else would he have that strange wolf and the silver crossbow bolts?”

“I don’t think so. He could be an assassin.” Link saw one of them lean in a little more to their companion’s ear. “He had those bottles. And the one the witch called venomblood. Said it was a horrible way to go.” There was a creak of a door opening. The two guards immediately quieted and stood at attention. They spoke quieter than before. He got a glimpse of who they were talking with. The zora was shorter than the other two, and his coloration was different, more a shade of grey than the blues of the guards. He was dressed similarly, but lacked the helmet. Link did spy jewelry around their neck and the two fins that hung to the sides of his face had more as well, including a pair of coral earrings at the end. He had never met them, but knew instantly it was the young prince Ralis for he had seen him once during a visit with Zelda when he served as an agent of The Crown. It had been years ago though by now. If Link had to take a guess, Ralis was now around the same age he had been when he’d earned the blue and white tunic.

The smaller zora pushed the cell door open. The guards entered first and kept their spears trained on Link. He looked the hylian over slowly. Link didn’t react. He watched carefully though, looking for an out in the event he needed one.

“We’ll keep this simple,” Ralis said. “You tell me your name and what you were doing clinging to the bottom of the Prince of Hyrule’s riverboat.”

Was he too late? Had an alliance already been signed? Honesty though he thought in some areas would work better at least. He took a deep breath. “I heard the zoras were going to join the war
against Ganondorf,” he said. “If it was true, it could cause the Storm Sea Zora to get involved as well. That could drag The Empress and Labrynna into the conflict. Did not want to be detected by the Hyrulean forces.”

“Surprisingly well-versed in current events, whatever you are. And you are not a Labrynnan in spite of the armor you wore.” He watched Link closely. “You still didn’t tell me your name.”

“Link.”

“Well, Link. You carry some very interesting equipment as well.”

“Pays to be prepared.”

“And what does a man like you need things like venomblood or skulltula venom for? Or a variety of different bolts for a small crossbow? Or a subrosian-forged arming sword all the way from Holodrum?”

He wasn’t going to tell them what he had once done, but the two guards earlier had given him ideas. “I’m a problem-solver. I solve people’s problems, they pay me.”

“So you’re an assassin.”

“No.”

“You carry plenty of tools to be considered one.”

“I try not to kill people.” He rolled his head a little. “Only monsters. Draconids like dodongos and forktales. Hybrids such as griffins, lynels... As well as the undead and necrophages like drowners and ghouls. That’s what the venomblood is for.” He looked at one of the guards. “You wanted to know the one on my collar? Dead hand. The bites on my right calve? A redead that had been blown in half by a bomb. And you were right. Those three on my back were from a king dodongo.”

Ralís nodded slowly. He looked to one of the guards for a moment and then back to Link. “Perhaps then we can strike a deal. Your life for a demonstration of your skills.”

“Can you remove the manacles then?”

“Not yet.” He raised a hand. “There is a monster at one of our holy sites. And we would like to see it taken care of. Can you kill it?”

He sighed. “I would need information. Reports, scouts, past encounters… Might even need to contact an information broker on what it is. In which case I’d need funding to pay them for their services.”

“I thought you said you went after monsters.”

“I might do that, but I’m not stupid about it. I’m not like a knight going off at a dragon because his lord asks him to. I need to know what I’m going after. Need to know its habits. Its weaknesses, track it…”

“I see.”

“You want it done right, I need information and resources.” He looked them right in the eye. “And my equipment back. All of it.”

There was a pause as the zora noble looked to the guards. “Release him.”
“Your highness, are you sure?” the guard asked.

“I’m sure.” He looked back to Link. “You’ll be unarmed until we leave here though.”

“Understandable,” Link said. He watched as a zora undid the manacles. He rubbed his wrists for a moment once free. The feeling had come back quickly. “Now, what can you tell me about this monster?”

“It’s unlike anything we’re familiar with,” Ralis said. He headed for the cell door. Link followed with the remaining guard behind him. “When we first encountered it, it was like a chu, drifting in the water. But it had something inside it.”

“That’s not uncommon. Chus usually engulf prey. And they can get pretty big.”

“That something though seemed to move and direct the creature,” the guard said. “We chased it into the Lakebed Temple, but lost it in there. Eventually it found us though.”

“How so?”

“There were six of us. We entered one of the larger chambers and it attacked us. It had turned the water in the room into a part of itself. We did manage to wound it. The core, the object inside it bled. But it broke a grate and escaped deeper into the temple.”

Link began to think how it could have done such a thing. “How long between the initial encounter and this attack?”

“ Took us about a day to find it again?”

“And how long has it been since then?”

“A week.”

“So this thing could be even bigger now.” He looked to the guard. “How many survived the attack?”

“ Just me,” he said. He bowed his head a little and then looked at the hylian. “When it was down to three of us, we drew straws. One of us would go back and report what we’d found. I don’t think they’re still alive.”

“If they are, I’ll find them.” They came to a guard’s room then. The other of the two guards had already set out Link’s armor and clothes. They were still a little damp, but not soaked through like when he’d been in the river. He picked it up and started to get it back on. “Can it leave the temple?”

“No,” Ralis said. “It’s trapped there. It’s a concern though that it’ll find a way.”

“Makes things simpler.” He pulled his pants on and then quickly did the boots. “I will need at least four frost bombs. Clockwork timers instead of fuses.”

“Frost bombs? You realize how dangerous those are.”

“Yes I do. I’ve used them before.” Admittedly though, he had never used them on another living being. However, the circumstances dictated he’d have to. He just hoped it wasn’t as terrifying to watch as when he’d watched Lana freeze a pack of drowners and proceed to shatter them into
scything and bloody chunks with a burst of wind magic.

“I’ll have a guard get them to you when you enter the temple. And not a moment before.”

It was a small relief to him he wouldn’t be carrying the devices until he truly needed them. “Fine by me.” He pulled a shirt on and tucked it in before slipping a belt on. “I’d assume then we’re close to Lake Hylia.”

“You are.”

“Good.” He pulled the tunic on then over his head. “I’m going to need to visit the Cardinal Inn before I go to the temple. Maybe a local has seen the creature or heard something you haven’t.”

The last time Link had been to Lake Hylia had been during The Conjunction with Ravio and Midna. During his time there, they’d slain an archgriffin that had been terrorizing the populace and closed the last portal between Hyrule and Lorule. On the outside as he walked through the paths between simple huts, it didn’t look like it had changed at all, apart from the fact the inn they’d stayed at had been burned to the ground. Another one had taken its place not far from its location though. It had a bright red cardinal weathervane on its grass roof. A similar sign hung over the door. It was a recent addition and the paint was still fresh on the walls. Link pulled the facemask up over his face to help conceal his identity as he pushed the door to it open. He could smell something cooking as he entered. The downstairs was fairly empty apart from a couple locals who were congregated around a table. One of them glanced over when they saw the new arrival but they were soon back to their tankard. Link approached the bar. Behind it was a young man cleaning it. He looked barely old enough to have facial hair. There was also a very large fluffy cat lapping up a saucer of cream.

“Do you have any milk?” he asked.

“For thirty.”

Link dug into his wallet while the young man got his drink. He slipped them a purple rupee and took a long drink. “Keep the change.”

He grinned at seeing his payment. “Anything else?”

“I wish to speak with the proprietress as well.” He glanced at the cat then. “I’m sure Louise can vouch for me.”

The cat glanced up when he spoke. Her eyes followed his every move then. The young man quickly rushed into the back of the tavern. Link had caught a look of worry on his face at mentioning the cat. He took a drink of his milk and looked at the cat then. She had started to become alert. He saw her moving and her hair starting to stand on end, making her look even larger than she already was. He watched even as the cat’s pupils dilated and her tail swished.

He looked the cat right in the eyes for a moment, but broke contact and went back to his milk. She followed suit though and returned to lapping at her saucer. Link however, heard footsteps from behind. He slowly moved his hand, ready to pull the hidden knife from his bracer if he had to.

“Can I help you?” he asked.
“Can help the lot of us,” one of the locals said. To his right, Link saw a poster placed on the bar. A quick glance was all he needed to see his face on it and a bounty of a thousand rupees. “Just come quietly.”

Link took another drink and turned to face them. They were dressed simply and it was clear they had no rank. One did hold a club in their hands, but the other two were unarmed. A quick glance was all he needed to determine the way to take them. “You are aware of how devalued the Hyrulean Rupee has become because of the war, yes?”

“That can still feed our families!” the one with the club said. “And no one likes deserters!”

“Do you three really think they’d put out such a high bounty on a single deserter?” a woman said. They looked to their lefts. Link glanced that way as well. Telma stood with her arms folded under her chest. Her dark red hair was back in her usual ponytail and the apron she wore was bloodied. Link also spotted a meat cleaver hanging from the apron. “If you three think going after someone with that sort of price on his head is smart, you’re cut off for today.” She looked at Link then. “I hear you want to speak with me.”

“Somewhere private, please,” Link said. He looked back at the three men. “She’s right though too. The price might be that high because of the danger.” He grabbed his milk and walked over to her. She turned then and they headed into the kitchen. Telma pushed the door open and waited for him to enter. It swung behind them.

“By Din, Link,” she said, giving him the look of a scolding mother. “Are you insane?! There’s posters of you all over from here to the South Seas! And all I’ve been able to get from the usual suspects is that you’re a traitor!”

“Do you believe them?” he asked.

“You’re not working for Zelda anymore, I know that much.” She removed the apron and meat cleaver to hang on the wall. Link spied a slaughtered boar on a table. Two other people were at work preparing it for a meal. “And if that’s the case, I don’t think I can help you. You had the Royal Treasury to draw on.”

“Then why even talk to me if you’re so sure?”

“Call it a professional courtesy, hun.” She folded her arms. “You made sure you paid in full whenever you came by. Never ran up a tab either. And you got a couple of your Chosen buddies to help make sure the rioting didn’t burn down my old bar with me still in it.”

He leaned against the wall then and took another drink of his milk. “Well, for the moment I have access to a royal treasury, just not Hyrule’s. Which is why I’m here. Prince Ralis of the Snowpeak Zoras has contracted me to handle the monster in the Lakebed Temple. Told him I needed a broker to get some extra information.”

“Monster? In the temple?” She narrowed her eyes. “You’d better step into my office then…” Telma turned and Link followed her into a back room. It had the curtains drawn and a simple desk in the middle of the room. She sat down behind it. The cat, Louise, had followed her in and jumped on the table. “We’d heard rumors from some of the zora guards of something in there, but nothing you could call reliable.”

“And why is that?”
“Because none of my agents have gotten down there to get a look at it.” She gave Louise a pat. The fluffy white cat purred.

“As expected…” Link pulled a chair up and sat down. He rested his arms on his legs, leaning in. “Now, I’ve also heard rumor that they might be joining the war. How much of that is true?”

“It’s not a rumor. It’ll be true in a couple weeks I’d expect. Even Zelda herself has been up there talking with the king and queen.” She scratched Louise behind the ear. The cat lay on the desk then, looking quite content. “A lot of the senate up there though have voiced concerns that the king and queen are thinking with their hearts rather than their minds in regards to this.”

“How so?”

“The king’s daughter from his first marriage, Ruto, has gone missing. Hyrule is offering to use their information network and a couple Chosen to find and return her. In exchange, the zoras let them use the large rivers and lakes for their armies. This includes plans for new irrigation to help prepare more food as it’s looking like this war will continue another year.”

“Terrific…” He finished his milk and put the glass on the table. “What about Labrynna?”

“There has been… Vocal protest by the sea zora ambassadors in the court. Conflicts like this have happened in the past and it always ends in tears for both sides. Worrying that this will affect their trade even more than it already has. They’re not having any of it. And… I could have an agent find out what Empress Ambi’s thoughts are on the entire matter. It wouldn’t come cheaply though. And I doubt Ralis would like you spending his money that way.”

She was right about that. Even though the prince was probably only in his teens, the way he’d handled the interrogation was impressive. “Do you know if they tried finding her themselves?”

“I do. But no word on if it was successful.” She removed her hand from Louise, who let out a mew in protest. “I’d expect it failed though. And that there’s more going on than they’ve told you.”

Link thought on what he’d been told. If this was all true, he could be looking at more work to rescue the princess. He’d be willing to do it if it prevented the risk of Labrynna entering the war. “Do you have any leads on where she could be? Just yes or no. Not if you actually know.”

“I can find out.”

“We may have this conversation again then.” He stood up.

“That all you need, hun?”

“For the zoras, yeah. But I do have something that may require me to start a tab… Personal interest.”

Her eyebrows rose. Louise even looked up at him. “Never thought I’d see the day. What kind of personal interest?”

He looked back at her. “I need information on polymorphic curses and Majora’s Mask. Preferably how they’re related and methods of breaking them.”

Telma inspected him carefully then. He was aware of how insane the request sounded. “I’m not sure if you’re serious or you hit your head on something. That’s just an old story.”

“But every story has a grain of truth to it. Even if it’s archeological information, I need it.” He took
a deep breath. “And I have a friend who is afflicted by such a curse. I promised to help. The Mask is the only lead we have.”

She was quiet for a minute, writing down a note on a sheet. “Must be some friend if you’re willing to chase fairy tales.” Telma finished and put her pen down. “Alright. I should have something then soon. I have an agent or two who could get that for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone! Hope you're all well this Wednesday! Here's this week's chapter!

Devnotes:
-The age-up for Ralis I'm not sure worked, but needed it for the plot. Following on the heels of TP, I could see him becoming a shrewd and effective politician to lead his people.
-Given Telma's role in TP, it felt like it'd be a natural extension to have her filling the role of an information broker. Moving her to neutral territory also makes her accessible to Link.
-Cats do not like witchers. Even if they're kind-hearted cat lovers like Link. I'm pretty sure it's the mutations.

Thanks everyone who's read and left kudos and a special thank you to MissLink for the recent bookmark! That'll do it for me tonight. See you guys next week! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome out there!
It was dusk when he walked out on the bridge to the island in the middle of the lake. He’d gotten a message to Ralis and the zoras that he was ready to enter the temple and to have the frost bombs ready for him. The guard he’d spoken with earlier was already waiting for him, holding a small metal box. He opened it when Link arrived. Inside, Link saw deep red cloth with four glass cylinders sitting on top of it. Each one had a glowing blue fluid inside and metal caps on each end. He inspected one of them.

“Know how to uses these?” the guard asked.

“Remove the bottom cap, put it on the top, twist to activate the timer,” Link said, taking each one carefully and slipping it into a pouch on his belt. “When it hits zero, it breaks the vial, exposing it to air. The alchemical reaction takes over and can freeze everything within a fifty foot radius that’s not shielded.” He carefully slipped them into a pouch on his belt. “Guessing the entrance is under the island?”

“I’ll guide you if you need it.” He closed the box and put it down once he’d removed the last of the frost bombs.

“Glad I brought the armor.” He closed the pouch and then checked his bolts. He had silver and steel bolts, both of which would work well. “Anything else you can tell me about the monster?”

“Just hope you take care of it.” The zora walked to the edge of the island. “Prince Ralis also wishes you not to disturb the altars if at all possible.”

“My priority is the monster.” Link looked to the guard once more. “If I find the others, I’ll get them out before.”

“Thank you.”

Link gave them a nod. He looked at the lake and pulled the face mask of his armor up and the plate on the hat down, concealing him entirely. He took a deep breath and took a step off the island. He landed in the water and activated the armor’s enchantment. He began to sink into the lake. Again, it was strange breathing the water, but the armor did its job. His feet hit the bottom after another minute of sinking. The entrance before him was a cave that had been turned into a doorway. White stones were in the wall and a pair of elegant pillars stood next to it. A pair of zora guards floated near the entrance. One lowered their spear to stop him, but the other turned and waved a hand. They raised their spear then and opened the gate to the temple. Link took a few steps before kicking off the lake floor and swimming in.

He swam down, into the earth, beyond the entrance before coming to a wall. Link kicked off the floor and swam up towards the surface. When he broke the water he saw a long path before him leading into a massive hollowed-out cave. He wondered if some of it was actually the island above him. He looked around as he walked. In the hollow was a three-tiered tower with geometric...
carvings along the walls. It was also partially submerged. Looking over the edge, he saw it went to a sandy bottom. There were some creatures moving below, but he couldn’t clearly identify them. Link knelt down though before entering the water and pulled the wolf charm out from his tunic. He gave it a squeeze and channeled a tiny amount of magic into it. A pulse echoed from it, making the still water ripple. In his mind he felt two magic presences. One was deeper in the temple; the other though felt like it was spreading from his left. Link got in the water again and decided to investigate the other source first. It didn’t feel as strong as the other. Perhaps it was the zora guards.

When he landed on the bottom again, he followed the pulse. The creatures turned out to be small balls with dozens of spikes, rolling along the floor towards him. Link pulled his crossbow, aimed and fired. One shot for each was all it took, causing both to burst into violet goop. With the way clear, he advanced along the submerged temple halls. He looked up when he entered the featureless room, noticing light coming from above. He sent a pulse of magic through his armor and drifted towards the surface. It appeared he had entered a room for storage. Again, he pulled the charm out and felt the two presences. He was close. Whatever it was, it was in the next room. He stuffed it back into his tunic and drew his blade. Carefully, Link pushed the door open enough he could peak through. Inside were numerous pots and some unlit torches placed for use. There were even a couple statues he recognized as being a popular depiction of the goddess Nayru. There wasn’t a sign of anything in there and he couldn’t tell if there was another door out. The wolf started to shake under his shirt as he went further in. Link looked carefully around. About a minute after he’d started walking through the storeroom, something flew at his head. With a swing of his blade, the clay pot in the air shattered.

He swung around to have his crossbow aimed in the direction the pot had come from. A shriek grabbed his attention. Before him was a zora woman, holding another pot. She looked shocked, but Link noticed defiance in her eyes. Her lavender dress was ripped and she had a couple cuts and bruises on her body, but nothing appeared life threatening. He noticed as well that the shape of her head was not like the long tail of other zoras as well. “You!” she shouted. “He sent you, didn’t he?! I’m not going to marry that royal bastard! He can go beach himself after what he did!”

“Who?” Link asked. He had not been expecting to find anyone alive in the temple.

“Don’t… Don’t come any closer!” She raised the pot over her head and her fins twitched.

“Who are you talking about?” He tilted his head a little. “Wait, you’re the princess.” Link lowered his crossbow. He regretted it as the next pot flew at him. He dropped his sword and caught the pot. “Hey!” His tone surprised even him. There was silence as he placed the pot on the floor. “I don’t know a lot of what you’re talking about, but I was sent to kill the monster in here. Honestly, wasn’t really expecting to find anyone alive down here.”

“But, you’re wearing Storm Sea-zora armor,” she said. “Labrynnan marines wear it.”

Link pulled the hat off and the mask down around his neck. She gasped. “Do I look like a Labrynnan to you?”

She was quiet. “…So we’re going to join the war then.”

“No. I’m here to try and keep that from happening too. The papers haven’t been signed yet from what I’ve heard.” Link took a deep breath and picked his sword up. He slipped it back into its scabbard. “What’s your name?”
“I… What, what do you care? Are you seriously worried about me?!”

“Because I want to help. And I’m offering you a way out of here which keeps you alive.”

The zora princess lowered her head. He was sure she was thinking about how she’d acted. She rubbed her left arm slowly. With a sigh she looked back up. “I am Ruto, princess of the zoras.”

It was just as Telma had told him. He offered her a small smile. “Link.”

“Where are you from?"

“Outset. Originally.”

“Neutral island.” Her fins twitched again. “Uh… Sorry about throwing the pot at you. Just, there’s all sorts of other things around here. And I saw the armor and-”

Though he’d be lying if he wasn’t upset with her behavior, he couldn’t blame her for being jumpy. “It’s okay.” Link tried to keep his voice level and calm. “How long have you been in here?” He folded his arms.

“I… I don’t know actually.” She put a hand up and rubbed her head. “I came here by a couple people to hide. Said if I didn’t want to marry one of the Labrynnan zora princes that I’d have to stay hidden for a long time. But then… Then the morpha appeared.”

“Morpha?”

“The monster you were sent here to slay I’d assume.” She lowered her hand. “I tried to get past it, but it kept cutting me off. It didn’t want me to leave.”

“So you’ve been here at least a week then.” Link had started to piece together the events of what had happened. There was also the feeling he was being used deliberately once more by royalty. “Do you know anything about the royal guards trying to get in here?”

“I thought the morpha was the reason for it.”

He raised an eyebrow. “What do you mean? What exactly is this thing?”

“First tell me who hired you.” She folded her arms. “I’m not going anywhere with someone until I know that.”

He had to admit, that was smart. “Ralisis.”

“Well, at least glad to know someone was trying to look out for me.” Her arms fell then. “So, Link of Outset. You were sent here to slay the morpha.”

“And look for a couple guards who may have survived. Given how I got this job as well, I assumed he’d be asking me to look for you next.” He looked to the door for a moment, thinking he’d heard something. “You clearly know more about the thing than I do though. What is it exactly?”

“Well, it’s a primal water spirit. Our water witches use smaller ones that are more like chus to help monitor the lake. There’s usually a small stone as a magic anchor. But I’ve never seen one able to convert water to enhance its body. And I definitely have never seen one with an anchor made of flesh.”

Link was sure now he’d been used. Either way, if this kept the zoras out of the war, he was going to do it. He made up his mind though if he ever got pulled into something like this again, he would
call Ralis out on it. “So we have to kill it.”

“Yes. I’ve already tried leaving twice and it’s stopped me both times.” She shook her head and looked to the wall. A moment later she looked back. “If I had my scale, I could at least maybe stun it long enough to escape.”

“Scale?”

“It’s my spell medium. Without it, I can’t even hope to stun it.”

“I have frost bombs.”

Ruto shook her head. “You don’t understand. That and my sapphire are the only things left I have from my mother! I’m not going to leave it! And if it’s as big as I saw it last time, you’re going to need help anyways!”

He wasn’t going to turn away help, but did have concerns. “How long have you been practicing magic?”

“All my life.” She stood with arms folded and legs slightly apart. The look of confidence on her face reminded him of another stubborn princess. “First spell I cast I was eight. I know what I’m doing.”

“Good.”

“Good?”

“Yes.” He looked back to the way out. “We’ll find your scale and then together we’ll take the morpha out. Do you have an idea where it might be?”

She nodded. “I left it in the library. We spent a lot of time there. There’s some traps we put up too just in case.”

“Can you show me the way?”

“Yeah. No problem. Just hope that thing doesn’t come looking for us.” She went to the door and pulled it open.

“The ones you came with. Are they still alive?”

She shook her head. “The morpha killed them. Some of their things are still at the library though. I haven’t been able to get back there though yet.”

“I see.” He walked out with her and pulled the mask back up. Once that was done, he pulled the hat back on and the mask down. Ruto already dropped feet first into the water. After another deep breath, he went right after her.

They moved quietly, with Ruto pointing out the way. They came to overgrown living quarters, covered in algae. They broke the surface of the water after another minute and climbed out. Link pulled the mask off his eyes so he could see a bit better. Ruto had already moved to the door to the next room and picked up a rusted spear hidden by it. She slipped it under the door and moved it to
the left. Once done she pushed the door open. Within were a number of stone shelves and tablets resting on them. Link looked around carefully, spotting a table that had a couple lanterns around it. They approached before Ruto started digging around on the table. He heard her let out a sigh of relief as she pulled a gemstone off it.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“The Zora’s Sapphire,” she said. “One of our most prized treasures.” Ruto grabbed a bag off the chair and dumped the contents onto the table. The item from the bag he grabbed immediately out of the pile was a dusty old clawshot. One would be invaluable and it was clear whoever was here wasn’t about to be using it anytime soon. He dusted it off and tested the mechanisms before attaching it to his belt next to his crossbow. While Ruto was checking a nearby shelf, a couple vials from the bag caught Link’s eye. He grabbed one and inspected it. He recognized it as similar to the ones he’d used. Link grabbed another and inspected it. The deep green in the glass and the mark etched into it was immediately familiar to him. It was a Farore’s Kiss. Another was a lupine sense. There were also a Thunderbird and a Din’s Fury and even one he recognized called Red Ice. There were even a couple elixirs to mend a Chosen’s wounds. He gathered them up though and quickly started looking around the rest of the room for other pieces of evidence.

“Did these people have swords and shields?” he asked.

“They did. One had a sheikah blade I think.”

“Anything else?” He got back to the table and began digging through the papers and other items there.

“What?”

“Did anyone have a polished stone with them?” Before she even was able to pause, he kept talking. “High in magic energy. Probably wrapped in a gold string and worn around the neck?”

Ruto tilted her head. “One did. Why?”

“Where is it?”

“He had it on him when we were attacked.” She pulled the bag on over her shoulder so it rested on the opposite hip. “When I first saw it, I thought he was a Chosen. Or had killed a Chosen and taken his badge of office as a trophy.” The fins on her arms twitched then.

Link debated whether he should not tell her. He was aware of the risk that it could carry. Of course, if he didn’t tell her it could possibly mean they would join Hyrule’s army anyway. Even if they hadn’t kidnapped her though, it was still a dishonest situation and the politics involved could be very bad. “It-”

“What? Is that why you came here then? To find them?”

“No. It’s… Complicated.”

“Try me.” She pulled a chair from the table and sat down.

He relented and pulled a chair out as well. “They may have been agents of Hyrule’s Royal Family. And may have been trying to keep you hidden until the treaty was signed.” Link held up two of the potions that had come from the bag. “I recognize these potions. I’ve used them even.”

Her eyes went wide. She suddenly looked very worried. The wolf around Link’s neck began to
dance a little while he caught a flicker of blue light and energy pulse in her fingers. Seeing her pull her chair back from him confirmed it. “You’re that deserter! The one they’re offering a thousand rupees to be brought in for!”

Link let out a sigh and clenched his teeth. “Yeah.”

“Why would they even want to spend that much to bring in one man unless…” Her eyes drifted to the wolf that was shaking. “You’re a hexer! I thought you were wiped out during The Inquisition! That’s an interloper’s wolf!” He was about to speak when the princess continued. “I-I never could have imagined Hyrule had your kind as agents of the crown!” She shook her head. Ruto looked back up at him. Though there was still fright, there was an understanding in her eyes. Link wasn’t sure though if it was because she realized he actually wasn’t a threat or why the hexers had become so terrifying. “You don’t look as monstrous as the stories say.”

“You should see me after a few of these things.” He held up one of the potions and offered a small smirk. The small pulse of magic flickered stronger in her hand. “Sorry, force of habit. We’re not quite the monsters people make us out to be. We’re just people who are doing jobs. There’s a lot of stories out there from The Inquisition and, well…”

“I’ll take your word for it. But, if you were working for Hyrule before you betrayed them and clearly knew enough to ask those questions, that’d mean you must’ve been one of their Chosen.” She laughed a little then, the sound shaking slightly. “A thousand rupees seems a little low for the price to try and bring in one of The Crown’s champions if even half of those stories are true.”

“Yeah. It’s a long story.”

She took a deep breath. “So are you really trying to keep my people out of the war between The Kingdom and The Tribes?”

“Yeah. Last thing I want is more people getting involved. More people dying and possibly even seeing Hyrule destroyed in a two-front war.”

“So you know about Remor then?”


“Yes…” The magic flickering in her hand vanished. “He’s my fiancé.”

“No wonder you want him to go beach himself.”

“He is such a bastard!” she growled. “My people here are struggling with the war and all He can think about is how it can benefit him!”

“Guessing you don’t have a say in it at all.”

“Not really... We have grown to rely on trade with one another and I can help ensure my people are safe and happy by assisting our longtime allies. The war has forced us to take a neutral stance between Hyrule and The Tribes. And since the summit at Tarrey...” her eyes darted away for a moment. “It's not important.”

“Mmm?” He remembered the chaos of the evening he had been involved in and talking with his fellow Chosen. As he remembered though, he began to smirk. “Oh.”
“What?”

He leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. “The attempt on Empress Ambi? Or that you were the zora Pipit found drunk and swimming naked in the town fountain while singing bawdy tunes with two witches of your entourage late during the evening ball?”

Ruto rolled her eyes with a groan. It made him chuckle a little at recognizing it. “Damnit. Look, I had never tried that stuff before and I paid for it the next morning. How the gorons can even stomach that stuff even with their stone bellies is beyond me. And it was not a fun evening.” Link raised a hand to help muffle his laughter. “Oh shut up. If you had to deal with Ganondorf’s majordomo trying to swim upstream all evening you’d want a few drinks too.”

“Believe me, I had quite a few after stopping the assassins.” He scratched behind his ear for a moment. “And also paid for it the next morning.”

Her jaw fell open and she studied him closer then. “That was you?”

“Yeah?”

“And I thought I had a rough night there.” Ruto relaxed a little in her chair. “Can't possibly imagine what kind of hell you had to deal with foiling that. Bet The Empress was impressed.”

“She was. Said that The Crown was lucky to have me.” He smiled a little bit, remembering the days he served The Crown. It faded as he remembered his companions from The Tower. “But I couldn't have done it alone. I had my partner and my friend help figure it out. Got in a little trouble for it though...”

“How? You saved the life of,” she started, but stopped. “Was it because you saved her?”

“Mmm?”

“Hyrule and Labrynna aren't exactly in the same school of fish. Relations are better than they were but Remor is an example of just how far we have to go still to get over the war from when we were children.”

He shook his head. “I broke protocol. I broke into the quarters she had been given to get the last pieces of evidence. That a couple people in her entourage had planned it.”

“Ah. And that could have been seen as an act against The Empire.”

“That's what Zelda said. That we had to treat this affair carefully because of how many volatile political elements were at play...” A small yawn escaped his lips. “I got sent on an assignment to an archeological dig in the desert as punishment.”

“Well, I could see her wisdom there. Your actions, though insubordinate prevented a war probably as everyone pointed fingers at each other. She'd need to punish you for it, but did it in a way that may protected you from any political blowback?”

“Heh. Actually felt a little less like a punishment and more just a reassignment.” He rolled his head on his neck a little before looking back at her. “I don't like being in the courts and constantly dealing with nobles and politics. I prefer being out there. In the fields and actually seeing and helping the people who need it most.”

“Sound a little like my cousin only not as enthusiastic.”
“Mmm?”

Ruto glanced at him when he questioned her. She was looking far more relaxed now, reclining in the chair with her legs crossed. Her fins no longer twitched as well. “Oh, he always wants to help people. Hard not to smile around him. His optimism is infectious even!”

“Sounds like a good man.”

She smiled then. “He is. Even if sometimes that enthusiasm gets him in a little trouble.” The grin vanished as she recalled the event. “Like one time with this thing! That he said reeked to high heaven. Looked like some mutated ocktorok but didn't have the snout for it. And it had taken up refuge in a cave the town had been dumping their garbage. He and three others killed it after learning it'd started to eat some of the villagers and a courier from Dragon Roost! He got incredibly sick after but kept trying to help the village.”

“A zeugl.”

“A what?” she asked, brows raised.

“What you cousin found. It sounds like a zeugl. They like muck and filth in bogs and swamps naturally, but love sewers. Can grow at an alarming rate too and because of all the waste around them, they're often swimming in disease. To say nothing of its natural venom.”

“You’ve faced one.”

“Yeah. Was barely bigger than my horse. She’s an Eldin Drafter, so not small to begin with, but these things can get very big very fast.” He chuckled a little. “I had help taking it down, but still. Your cousin was very lucky.”

She nodded in agreement. “It gave his poor father quite a scare too.”

“I bet. But the people loved him for it too I'm guessing. Their prince willing to get his hands dirty to help them.”

The smile was back. “They do. He’ll make a good king for his people someday.”

Link nodded a little in agreement, even if he’d have liked to have gotten moving earlier. However, he began to think taking a moment like this was going to work in his favor. “Well,” he started, “as enjoyable as this has been, we're still trapped in a temple. With a primal water spirit out there that is getting bigger.”

“Yeah,” Ruto agreed. “And longer I'm down here-”

“More likely your people join the war and we piss off your fiancé even more. We need some silver.”

“There's a couple silver swords on the shelves over there.” She nudged her head in the direction of the wall. “Ceremonial though. Not very sharp and were never likely intended to be used for fighting.”

He got up to inspect the weapons. It was an odd shape and had a very long handle. The blade itself had a curve to it and a hook-like cut on the end that Link couldn’t help but cringe at. It would be tricky to use, but the material was clearly silver and against the morpha he’d take whatever he
could knowing his steel sword would barely harm the entity. “...it'll have to do.” He took it to the table and dug out a whetstone to sharpen it as best he could.

“Link.” He glanced up as he began to sharpen the weapon. “Why are you telling me all this? We met not fifteen minutes ago.”

He gave her the same smirk he had earlier. “Because in another fifteen we could be dead?” Ruto sighed and shook her head, closing her eyes. “Sorry. Force of habit.” He continued sharpening the blade. “It... it was because you looked scared.”

“What?”

“When you figured out who and what I am. I saw the magic you were preparing. Your eyes and breathing changed.” He looked her right in the eye. “Heck, thanks to my mutations, if I focused I could have probably heard your heart beating faster along with the other reactions. And... And no one's ever looked at me with fear in their eyes before.” She remained silent as he watched her, mouth open slightly and head cocking to the left a little. “Well, at least like this. I've seen men and blins fear me before, but due to the potions and in the heat of battle. Never though like this.”

It was quite for a moment as she studied him. The only sound in the room was him sharpening the blade. “You really mean that.”

“Yeah.” He ran the whetstone along again. “Chosen are meant to stand with The Kingdom right or wrong. If right to be kept right. And if wrong-”

“To be made right. I know the quote.” The smile was back and she leaned forward, resting her elbows on her legs. “I did a little studying at The Royal Archives when I was a teenager.”

“Heh. Well, it's a good quote.”

“It is. But, I think you have the right idea. We need to find my scale and get out of here.”

Chapter End Notes

Whoo. Another chapter. Slightly longer than others, and a lot of talking, but helps set things up.

Devnotes:
-Yeah, gave Ruto a dress for the same basic reason initially I gave Midna in her twili shape boots; do you really wanna be going around a place like No Man's Land stark naked? Or completely barefoot, even if you could casually hitchhike in someone's shadow?
-When designing the look of the Water Temple here, I looked at both OoT and TP's designs and messed with it a bit to kinda create what we see here.
-In a previous version of this chapter, Link actually did not get the silver sword he is going to use in the next chapter, but this was written like last year. And when I saw the 'silver sword' design and read the lore behind it from BotW, I saw an opportunity to incorporate it.
-There was also not the long talk between Link and Ruto here, but felt it was needed to be added in for both worldbuilding and developing the characters. Because one of the ideas behind writing the series was to kind of have Link be an experienced protagonist
for it, there's a lot of adventures he's already been through and likely has some stories behind some of them.

Also holy crap, you guys are awesome! Up to 40 kudos! A huge thank you to everyone and a special thanks to Mattoidneko for the recent bookmark!

That's it for this week! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome people!
Finished working on the sword, Link stowed it as best he could on his back with the straps that held his shield and the scabbard for his steel sword. “So, now we need to find your scale,” he said. “Is it magic in nature? Does it have any magic in it?”

“Yeah?” Ruto answered.

He pulled the wolf charm out. He was going to have to get Midna a couple bottles of those spices now for how nice it had been to have. “Then we can find it with this. It reacts to magic and I can use it to follow a trace.”

“It might not be a strong enough trace for a dowsing normally.” Her eyes lit up and she looked back at the table. “Unless…” Ruto stood up and started looking through the items from the bag. “I’ve used it enough times that my own trace could be on it.”

“Can you do that?”

“Yeah, I can do that!” She looked at the wolf. “I’m not sure I should touch that though. It looks like an Interloper’s Wolf from the history books.” Ruto frowned a little and Link saw her eyes lose some of their brightness from a moment ago. “I feel a strange sadness just looking at it…” She shook her head and looked back at him then. “You can do magic though. Right?”

“Yeah.”

She found a bottle with water in it and dumped most of it out. A moment later, a small flicker of magic was between her fingers. A fluid formed from the blue light and entered the bottle. After a moment she finished and corked it. “Okay. We’ll get back to the main room and then use it on your charm. Put a little bit of magic into it when we get there and it should give us a trace of where it could be. The main chamber is connected to the rest of the temple anyways.”

He pulled the facemask back up. “Well, let’s go then.”

They reached the central room very quickly. Apart from the two spiked creatures Link had encountered upon his arrival and Ruto, he hadn’t seen another living being. He was surprised that they hadn’t even found bodies as he pulled himself out onto the top tier of the tower. Ruto gracefully exited the water in a jump and landed standing on the platform. As soon as she had, they felt the room shake. Link saw the water at the entrance rise out of it. It formed a trio of long tendrils that looked more like gelatin rather than water. Flecks of dirt and pebbles were held suspended in it.

“It knows I’m here,” she said. Ruto looked towards the exit of the temple. “I try for the exit and then it forms those tendrils. And I don’t see its nucleus anywhere.”

“Can it think like that?”
She nodded.

“It just wants to keep you here then…” Link did not voice his thoughts that maybe the morpha had been summoned with the expressed interest of ensuring Ruto remained out of the picture. Of course, given she’d said it was used by zora casters made him think that it was equally valid that the entity had been used to try and break her out, but something had gone wrong, recalling what she’d said about the spirit’s nucleus.

“What are you thinking?”

“Huh?” He glanced back at her.

“You have this weird look on your face and you kinda trailed off there.”

“Just thinking how to handle it.” He did not tell her that he was tempted to give Ralis an earful when he got out of there for not giving him the whole picture. “Has it actually tried to hurt you at all?”

“Only if I get too close to the entrance.” She leaned against the wall of the tower and saw Link pull a potion from one of the pouches on his belt. He uncorked it and drank it down.

Link coughed then, feeling the elixir start to work. His veins felt frozen solid from it as opposed to the heat from the venomblood. He leaned over to catch his breath, hands on his knees. Puffs of cold air left his mouth as he recovered. After it had passed though, he felt far warmer than he had all day.

“What was that one?” Ruto asked.

“Red Ice.” He got up, feeling the wolf beginning to shake on its chain. “You have a spell that can help keep you warm?”

“I have my barriers, yes.”

“Get them up.” He pulled the charm out. It was shaking on its chain. He could see the emeralds begin to glow brighter. “Where’s that bottle?”

“Here.” She handed it to him. He uncorked it.

“Any reason you had to use the water in it?” Link carefully placed the wolf charm in the bottle, keeping hold of it with his chain. It began to glow brightly and the water rippled around them. He was getting a fairly good picture of the entire temple in his head as it worked. There was a faint similar trace in the room near them.

“It’s pure,” she said. “Not tainted by the morpha’s presence. Would give us a better trace.” She looked to the entrance. “As you can see… The more water it’s given, the more it can take control of. Theoretically, give it enough time and it could engulf all of Lake Hylia. But that’d take a very long time. Decades probably.” Another pulse from the charm made the water ripple. This time though the ripples didn’t quickly dissolve away. They slowed down. Ruto let out a gasp. “I don’t think it likes what you’re doing.”

Link removed the charm and handed the bottle back to Ruto. “It’s in a chamber over there,” he said, pointing to the north of the entrance. He drew the silver sword the moment he saw a long tentacle of the manipulated water rise out in front of him at the other end of the platform. “When I entered, I got a strong trace in there.”
“It’s the morpha’s nucleus I’d guess,” she said. “If we can isolate that, we can take it down.”

Magic was already flowing between her fingers. It was glowing blue and behaved more like water as opposed to some of the other spells he’d seen.

He dropped the charm back around his neck and quickly pulled one of the frost bombs out. Link prepared it just as he’d said before coming in and twisted the cap. “Count to… Five.”

“What?” She looked over her shoulder at him. “You were serious when-” She let out a shriek of surprise when he threw it. Link quickly made a sign in his now free hand and the crystal shield formed around him. He saw the vial clatter on the ground by the tendril. There was a gushing and bubbling sound as a wall of water formed in front of him. Through it he saw a bright blue flash and felt a rush of cold air. The wall of water turned to ice and the crystal surrounding him shrieked for a moment from the force against it. Glancing back, he saw Ruto standing with her arms outstretched, thin trails of water hanging in the air. Her eyes were nearly clenched shut and hands glowed. After a moment she let go and the water vanished. The wall she’d put up though remained. She rubbed her arms, feeling the chill. Most of the northern part of the entire room had been frozen. The water was solid ice around them. They heard loud thumps against it from below, the magic water controlled by the monster trying to break free.

Link approached the wall and beat his sword’s pommel against it a couple times. It gave way and shattered. The crystal around him shrieked with the impact of a couple large shards of ice, but it held. The tendril that had emerged was frozen solid. There was another couple bangs against the ice below. It was starting to crack. They broke into a run across the ice to the other room. As they got close, the ice started to give way. More of the cursed water broke through. Another tentacle emerged near the edge where the ice was weaker. It lashed out, but wasn’t quick enough to grab either of them. Another though broke out of the ice and rose quickly. Before either of them had time to act, it swung at Link and constricted around the barrier. It shrieked as the water constricted.

He was about to prepare another sign when the tendril broke in half. The shield around him shattered, but the liquid that had been trying to get around him fell to the floor as well. Link glanced back to see the zora straining.

“That’s it!” Ruto cried. “It has my scale!”

“But how did it-” Link started, but was cut off as a massive tentacle of water burst forth and swung

The great chamber of the temple held a statue of Nayru at the other end. Four great pillars stood in the middle of it with ruined seats on them. There was also a stairway down to a flooded area for the mass. The water in the room began to form tendrils. Floating around in it though was a giant violet glob. It was mostly circular, but pulsed rhythmically. For a moment even, Link thought he saw the glob twist and a massive yellow eye appeared, gazing out at them. Drifting among the gel-like water were a couple corpses that had been ripped apart. Little flesh remained on the bones and most of the clothing they’d been wearing was nothing but shreds. A couple were clearly zoras, while Link’s eyes were drawn to one that was wearing a damaged blue and white tunic. Wrapped around a bone was bracer made of silver scale. A gold chain was attached to it and held a glowing blue object.

“That’s it!” Ruto cried. “It has my scale!”

“But how did it-” Link started, but was cut off as a massive tentacle of water burst forth and swung
at them. The two jumped to opposite sides. They heard the door behind them creak.

“That nucleus escapes we’re in trouble!”

He didn’t need to be told twice as he pulled his second frost bomb out. The entity realized it and sent a pair of tentacles at him. One grabbed him while he dropped the device on the ground. The glass cracked, but did not shatter. It hissed and a white mist started to leak. The tentacle lifted him into the air and constricted. He screamed as he felt it tighten and felt the scale plates of his armor snapping. A pulse of magic struck the tentacle and pulled at it, but the grip was only loosened. He could see Ruto trying to keep it from crushing him. Link squirmed a bit and was soon falling. He caught the ledge of one of the pillars and pulled himself up from it.

Another tendril swung for him, but didn’t connect. A glow of magic was around it. “I can’t keep holding it!” Ruto shouted. He noticed something then; it wasn’t going after her at all.

“Get the bomb! I’ll keep it busy!” he shouted back. Link ran for another pillar, leaping over the gap. The tendrils followed. “Throw it at the door!”

She stopped using her magic and ran for the bomb. It was still leaking and he heard her shriek in surprise at the cold air escaping it. The door was starting to crack and water leaked through. It moved in puddles, starting to form small tentacles of its own. Ruto lobbed the frost bomb then towards the door. A second later, she backed away, hands forming a globe of water between them. She spun it out and formed another wall as the bomb went off.

Link jumped back to the area around the pit. Morpha’s tentacles followed. A couple came from the side and tried to cut him off. He made a sign and waited a second. As the tentacles neared, he slammed his palm into the ground and a dome of fire erupted around him. The flash of fire evaporated the tendrils. He had barely enough time though to throw another crystal up to shield himself from the frost bomb going off. As much of the water in the room retreated from it and splashed against the northern walls, attempting to escape the rush of cold air and magic.

There was a moment when it was still. Link saw the remains of its previous victims on the floor near the statue of Nayru. The bones with Ruto’s scale on it was out of the water. He pulled his new clawshot from his belt and aimed. The water began to retreat back into the center of the chamber, intent on pulling the magic medium back in. He fired. The claws opened and latched around the bone. With the press of a button, it recoiled and pulled the scale and bone away. The tendrils took a swing, but he was quick to slash the silver blade, slicing through the twisted water. It hissed and bubbled against the metal before one globe of water slammed into his chest, knocking him into a corner. When he crashed, the blade shattered against the wall, leaving him only the grip and a broken and unwieldly blade due to the size of the grip. He glanced at it for a moment and then back up. He’d grabbed the bone, but not the scale.

Link quickly got to his feet and aimed again, while pulling the second to last frost bomb. He threw it into the stone, not even bothering to set the timer just as he fired the claw back out. Glass shattered as the device’s prongs gripped the bone. There was a blue and white flash as the air chilled. The clawshot finished its retreat and he ducked in his magic shield as frost and ice formed all around. It shrieked and shattered as frost and ice nearly instantaneously formed.

“Warn me when you’re going to do that again!” Ruto shouted.

Link looked up. She was shivering and had made a small enclosure by accident by throwing up walls of water to protect herself. He quickly ran over, skidding on the newly-formed ice. It began to
crack as he moved across it. Morpha fought it. Right behind him, a tendril erupted out of the ice. “Catch!” he shouted. Link threw the scale and its bracer towards her and quickly turned to keep moving. Two more tentacles of water tore through and flailed madly, working to smash the ice. Link had no options but to keep moving. His steel sword wouldn’t do anything to the cursed water like the silver one had.

The scale landed on the ground at Ruto’s feet. She grabbed it and pulled it over her right hand. With a wave of her hands, the ice shattered around her and the glow from the scale illuminated her corner. With a cry, she enveloped the tentacles with her magic and pulled back. They jerked away and fell back into the center of the room.

Link turned around. It had turned its attention on her now that she had the scale. The tentacles of water formed, rising up and swung at her. But with her medium, she was able to hold them back with far greater ease it looked like. It gave him a chance to look in the water. Among the small pieces of ice floating in it, he saw the nucleus. It was squirming around, moving with incredible speed. He pulled his crossbow and moved his hand, following it. If he’d not already used his Din’s Fury, this would’ve been easy. Instead he had to focus. Link held his breath for a moment and jerked his hand to the left. He fired. The bolt pierced the water and slowed before stopping. The monster realized and a couple more tendrils forced their way out of the ice to swing at Link. He ducked down, sliding along the ice as a tentacle swung down behind him. He pulled the clawshot then, wondering if he could grab it out of the goop. A pulse of water magic forced the tendrils back down.

“Where’s the nucleus?” Ruto said. She backed away from her corner then, magic still flowing in her palms.

“Center!” Link shouted.

She raised her hands and swept them down like an orchestral conductor with a shout. A pulse of energy arced out from her and split the water down the middle. The nucleus bounced in the center as the walls of water started to come back in on it. A globe spun out from a side of it and enveloped it. Link saw it being pulled into the air. The rest of the water beneath it fell back into place. He saw his chance. Link aimed his clawshot and fired as it was held in the air. The three prongs dug into the fleshy object and as it retracted it was pulled towards him. It slipped out of the claw as it got closer. Link aimed with the broken silver sword as it fell towards him. He stabbed forward as the purple fleshball fell. Green gore gushed out of the wound. An unnatural sound rippled from the creature as it writhed, impaled on the blade. It continued to squirm, trying to get back to the water. Link pulled his knife and stabbed deep, near the initial wound. It let out another cry of clear pain. A third though and it ceased moving. He gave it a fourth though in anger, making it split in half. It fell from his sword and landed on the frosted floor. The remains began to blacken and dark smoke started to ebb from it.

“Ow… How do you do this for a living?” Ruto asked. He looked up to see her. She dropped to her knees and then hands, breathing hard.

Link took a deep breath. He sat down slowly. “Been trained since… Since I was six,” he managed. “The water… Will it be okay?” He put a hand to his head and pulled the mask off. It was easier to breathe without the fabric.

“In time.” They were silence for at least a minute as their gasps for air echoed in the room. “Link?”

“Yeah?”
“I… I don’t think I can walk out of here.”

He looked over at her. A piece of him wanted to laugh, wondering if the goddesses were indeed finding ways to amuse themselves with his current choices. “You overexerted your magic, didn’t you?”

“…Uh-huh…”

Link let out a long sigh and shook his head as he pulled a blue potion from one of the pouches on his belt. “Second time this week I’m going to have to carry a princess out of some goddess-forsaken hole in the ground,” he muttered, pulling the cork out.

“Huh?”

“Nothing.” He downed the potion then.

Chapter End Notes

It's that time again! Another chapter this week wrapping up the water temple.

Devnotes:
-I was actually planning this to be one of the first chapters for the project, but as the main plot started to formulate, it got moved to this point.
-Figuring out this fight was a pain actually in how to make it work, but feel it came out well eventually.
-Had to have him snark at the end there. After all, wouldn't you given the circumstances?

I am also debating adding in an extra section to these chapters after a specific character enters the story. It's coming up though and I'd like some thoughts; the idea is essentially like a collection of 'codex entries' at the end of each chapter designed to help flesh out the world. They'd all be written by the character in question, including an intro piece. Now, they won't be big additions to the chapters and some chapters might not even have them. Topics would include monsters, individuals, relics and maybe even some history relating to the AU. It might happen regardless as I know I'm prolly gonna come back to these chapters and do some cleaning up here or there (such as removing typos I missed or rewording things that look and sound awkward) but I'd love to hear some thoughts and any topics so I know what to prioritize if you guys wanna see it.

As always guys, huge thank you for all the kudos, bookmarks, comments and just generally coming by to click on this continuing adventure. Next week, a bit of a surprise... In fairness it's mostly because I wrote out the chapter as revisions came through and even surprised me!

Thanks for reading everyone and keep being awesome! See you guys in seven days!
Link indeed had to carry the exhausted zora princess out of the temple. To his surprise, there were no guards to greet them. He kicked off the lakebed and the armor’s enchantments made him float upward at a steady pace. He broke the surface, happy to be breathing fresh air again. Ruto had her arms around his neck and looked barely awake. It was late at night now, a full moon hanging in the stars above. He heard her let out a sigh as he climbed onto the dirt beach of the small island. She squirmed and moved so she was standing. Her legs gave out though and he was forced to keep her from collapsing entirely.

“Where were the guards?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Link said. He took a deep breath and moved to sit on the side of the island as well. He looked along the long wooden bridges that connected the island to the edge of the lake and the hamlet there. There were torches alight and a boat waiting. In the dim light, he could still make out that it was one of the river patrol boats. “Damnit…” Link got to his feet and pulled the soaked facemask back over his nose and mouth.

“What?”

“That’s a patrol boat. Maybe that’s why there were no guards.” He looked back over his shoulder. “Can you walk?”

“I can barely stand…”

He rubbed an eye and picked her up again. “You’ll want to get that looked at. Make sure you didn’t hurt yourself casting.” He started for the bridge then. “Don’t go using it for a few days too.”

“I know.”

“Good.” He remembered the time the twin sorceresses from the tower had overexerted themselves so badly one time they had bedridden for a week. Magic was just like any other muscle in the body and it needed to be handled properly. Link yawned as they walked.

“We still have a problem though,” Ruto said. “Even if they see me safe, there’s the prince.”

Link was already trying to think of how to handle him. Being used by the royalty was one of the reasons he’d left the service of The Crown. “Ralis?”

“No! Remor!” She winced a little. “He may still want to move some of his people around here. Or use it as a way to spy on my people and the mainland. You remember the war Labrynna and Hyrule fought? A little more than twenty years ago now?”

“I was orphaned during it.”

Ruto immediately quieted and looked away. She was silent for a minute before slowly looking back to him. “Well… His father fought in it. Lost territory as part of the treaty. Him and other Labrynnan nobles I’ve heard are looking for a reason to get payback. Maybe reclaim the honor their families lost.” Her eyes lit up and she smiled then.
“What?”

“You saved me!”

“…Yeah?” He stopped walking.

“I can grant you a boon!”

“Where are you going with this?”

She reached down and dug into the bag she’d taken from the temple. The Zora’s Sapphire was pulled out and she held it up. “And I offer you this.”

“Why?”

“Because I am to give it to the man I am supposed to call my husband.” She looked him right in the eye. “You put yourself at risk. You said you were there to kill the morpha, but you didn’t do just that. You saved me. That makes you infinitely more worthy than the man I have been told to marry.”

He saw exactly what she was doing. “Ruto… I don’t know about this.”

“I’m not sure either. But, this was my mother’s. And my father would not deny her this. Even if she has gone. If I don’t have it, I have found someone better. And you are without question better.”

Link sighed. “You know I’m a wanted man. And when you figured out I was a hexer, you were scared.”

“Not when I tell them I gave it to you for your work. And you can return it when a chance presents itself and I’ve gotten rid of that bastard.” He could see a slight redness in her cheeks. “Besides, aren’t people like you doing things for a payment? It’s only proper that I give you something.”

“You want to put your father and Remor in a deadlock…” He had to smile a little at the cleverness.

“Exactly.” She offered him the stone again. “At least until we can find a more permanent way to keep Labrynna’s people out of our homes.”

He relented. “Until then. Just give me the bag and no one will notice until you have the opportunity.”

When they’d finally reached the lakeside hamlet, she was able to walk on her own, even if leaning on the hylian for help. Link wondered if it was partly an act though as he kept catching her taking glances at him. He stopped for a moment to pull the cap tighter. A pair of soldiers stood nearby. He recognized the chainmail and tabards they wore along with the telltale pikes of Hyrulean spearmen. A pack of villagers were shouting at them to leave. Among them was a zora guard trying to keep the peace.

“The captain says we’ll only be here until our task is done!” one of the spearmen shouted. Link couldn’t pick out the exact words of the villagers, just that they were various insults slung at the soldiers. “We just got here early so we could get to work the moment we got word to!”
“Please, return to your homes!” the zora guard said. “Everything will be okay soon!”

“Load of horseshit!” someone shouted. Others started agreeing.

The two soldiers backed away. Link noticed how their hands had shifted on their spears even in the low light.

“There’s gonna be a riot,” Ruto said. She shook her head and a determined look came across her face. Even though she still used Link’s shoulder to steady herself, she straightened herself. “What is the meaning of this?!” she shouted.

The crowd fell silent and looked to the man in the ocean zora armor and woman holding onto him. The guard nearly dropped his coral spear. The two soldiers quickly turned to face them, but didn’t make any action that could be considered hostile. “Princess!” the guard cried. “You’re safe!”

“Of course I’m safe! No thanks to any of you! My half-brother had to hire a specialist all the way from Outset to get me out of the temple!”

“You were in the temple?”

“Long story.” She let out a sigh and looked at the soldiers. “What are they doing here? Last I heard any chance of an alliance was still in the senate.”

“They said they were here under orders of the Prince of Hyrule. To offer aid once everything was signed. Prince Ralis called us to help deal with the situation here when the villagers started to gather.”

“And where is Ralis?”

“Currently speaking with the Hyrulean captain.”

“Take me there this instant!”

One of the soldiers motioned for them to follow. Link and Ruto did so as the guard and remaining soldier remained to try and calm the peasantry. He was thankful that it wasn’t a long walk and took him right to The Cardinal Inn. The soldier pushed the door open and held it for them. Inside it was well-lit and strangely empty of locals. Link looked quickly around. Another pair of soldiers stood nearby. They had swords and shields, while their captain sat on the bench of a table. He knew they were a captain because of the plate they wore instead of just the chainmail. His helmet sat on the table as well. Across was Ralis and the same two guards who Link had seen when he had been in the cell. Telma was near the stairs, arms folded and watching carefully. Neither of them seemed to know what she’d done back in town and for that Link was grateful. The conversation the captain and the prince were having though silenced when Link and the princess entered.

The hexer froze. He quickly began running through escape routes in his head. He still had the facemask up and his hair was stuffed into the back of the hat he wore, so he wasn’t as recognizable, but he still worried that he’d be made and the soldiers would try something.

“And who is so bold to be allowed in here when I said this would be a private meeting?” the captain asked.

“It would appear that the problem-solver I hired has done more than just killing a monster,” Ralis said.

Link held his tongue. He wanted to give Ralis a piece of his mind for being used, but thought
better of it. He could do so later. Of course, holding onto it as well could prove useful. Either way he didn’t get a chance to speak.

“We did,” Ruto said. “And he’s surprisingly noble… So willing to risk life and limb. He even carried me all the way out of the temple to the hamlet.” They both knew it was a lie, but Link was expecting her to weave enough into the tale to help sell the reveal. “Will you help me take a seat with my brother?”

He just nodded and complied. Once Ruto was on the bench next to her brother, she handed him the bag with a smile. As he did, he felt the crystal in his tunic shaking a little. His cobalt blue eyes glanced up and quickly scanned the room before settling on Ralis and turning to him. “My contract is complete,” he said simply, and speaking low. “Do you require additional services?”

“No,” Ralis said.

“Good. I’m getting a drink then.”

“You can have a drink later,” the captain said. “The bar is closed.”

“He looks like he could use one after slaying a monster,” Telma said. The captain glanced at her for a moment. “You all look like you could use a drink too. Might make your negotiations go a little quicker.”

“Agreed,” Ralis said.

“One round,” the captain said. “Then back to our discussion.”

Link had already started for the bar as they were talking. He had no interest in hearing more of the negotiations that were going on. He was also sure his arrival was as much a surprise to the captain as it was to Ralis and a little bitter over being used. He felt the crystal shaking under his shirt. He reached to pull it out, but stopped when Telma slid him a glass of milk and the sizeable bottle it had come from.

“I can make you a milk liqueur if you’d prefer something with a little more kick to it,” she said.

“This is fine,” Link said. “I don’t have the money to pay for a room and should be off anyways.” He took a long drink from it. As he did, he noted there was an envelope in place of the cloth that usually was placed under the glass.

“You know how dangerous it is to travel at night, and after saving the princess you could stay here no charge.”

“Live by my contracts.” He casually took the envelope then. A small mark on it told him it was the very information he was hoping for. “And money is tight anyways.”

“Things are tough all over, hun.” She turned to the casks behind her and started filling tankards. “Why don’t you come in the back and let the nobles have their privacy?”

“Mmm.” He glanced up for a moment in time to see her wink at him. “Yeah. I think that might be best.” Link grabbed the bottle and his glass before following Telma back through the kitchen. A moment later, they were in her office. Another person was sitting in one of the chairs there, watching Louise on Telma’s desk. The cat was watching whoever it was just as she had Link. For a moment, he wondered if it was a Chosen, but when they peeked around the chair, he could clearly
The man in question was wearing tattered purple clothes, along with a matching coat. Next to his chair was a large pack, bearing a few masks upon it and a bedroll on top of it. He was grinning. Link looked to Telma then before taking another sip of his milk.

“Link,” Telma began, “Mr. Oblicze here has some things you may want to hear. He was a merchant before the war and was passing through.”

“How so?” he asked, looking over.

“I hear you need someone who knows masks,” the strange man said.

He glanced back at Telma for a moment, who gave a nod. “Yeah?”

“Well when Telma told me just what you were looking for it piqued my curiosity!” He stood up and offered a hand. When Link took it, Oblicze grasped it with his other hand and shook vigorously. “I had to meet the man who had seen Majora's Mask and lived to tell the tale! You weren’t alone though it sounds like. That someone else was cursed by the ancient hexing mask?”

“Very perceptive of you.”

He let go of Link’s hand then. “Have to be in my line of work. Has been helpful too... even though I have lost almost everything in the war.” He looked back to his backpack for a moment before slowly looking at Link once more. “I have to ask though. Not many people would go looking for all this information. Why, it seems almost romantic to risk this. What with not only you being the most wanted man in Hyrule but even a group like The Sheikah would know how dangerous such a relic is-”

“If you're implying it's to save a princess like in some old tale, there's more at stake.” Link had to resist rolling his eyes at the remarks. “What do you know about the curses that thing can create?”

“Can't say I blame you being to the point, Link. The hexes the mask was said to be capable of drew upon the grief and suffering of those around them. That it existed to spread chaos in that grief. And a war such as this is fertile ground for chaos and grief.”

“Mmhm.” He took another sip from his glass.

“To soothe such pain though, one needs to calm that suffering.” He waved a hand as he spoke, gazing upward to the ceiling before lowering his head back to look Link in the eye. “As if they are being laid to rest.”

Link felt his knees give slightly and his muscles ache a bit more as Telma went to her desk and carefully picked Louise up. The cat kept her gaze on Oblicze. “Speak plainly,” Link asked; a tired edge in his voice. “I'm soaking wet, sore from fighting a rogue spirit under the lake and carrying the Crown Princess of the zoras about half a mile.”

Oblicze chuckled a little and nodded, clasping his hands together gently. “Fair enough. You need a song.”

“A song?”

“One that can heal and help lay a spirit to rest. Like... Like a dirge.”
Link cocked his head a little. “And what would such a song do?”

“Why, cleanse the cursed individual. If they were a spirit it could lay them to rest! If they lived and breathed though, it should merely remove that pain. And be made anew once more.”

His eyes widened slightly at this information. He glanced at Telma for a moment, who merely nodded to him. “I see. So they would survive it like a counter curse.”

“Correct.”

“You wouldn’t happen to know this song, would you?”

“I used to have books on some of the more obscure masks, but they were burned by the same mob that destroyed my shop in Castle Town! But, the Royal Archives may have such information. It’d be risky to go there for you but, you said yourself. There’s more at stake here.”

Telma had really come through for him. Link let out a sigh of relief. “I see. This is invaluable.” He smiled a little before digging for his wallet. “What do I owe you?”

Oblicze raised a hand when Link pulled out a handful of rupees. “Just a favor,” he said. “I may be in trouble on my travels one day and if our paths should cross, all I ask is you help me as I have helped you.”

“I'm just a hexer. So not sure-”

“Nonsense. You're a hero! Hexers were once praised and sung almost as greatly as The Hero is today!” He picked up his backpack and slipped it onto his shoulders. “They saved people from monsters!”

“Not all monsters are evil beasts born of Demise's curses though.”

He began to walk to the door, still wearing that same grin he had been when Link first saw him. “Just as not all humans are pure-hearted.”

“Yeah.” He stuffed the rupees back in his wallet. “Know all about that. Thank you.”

“It was my pleasure.” Oblicze pulled the door open and bowed his head slightly. “Thank you for your hospitality, Telma. But I must be going. I’ve already been here too long.”

“Take the back way,” she said, scratching Louise behind an ear. “There’s a meeting out front and I doubt anyone would want to see you.”

“Of course.” He looked to Link once more. “Have faith! Believe in your strengths!” With that, he turned and stepped out, closing the door behind him.

Link looked back to Telma then. “He was quite the character,” he said.

“Yes, but he knew a lot about Majora’s Mask,” she said. “Information I was able to back up and is in that envelope I gave you. There’s a little more in there too, but a lot of it Mr. Oblicze has already told you.”

“Good.” He finished his drink. “What do I owe you?”

“More than you have right now, hun. Don’t worry though. I’m not going to call your tab in just
yet.”

“Might be a while before I can scrape together the funds.”

“Then I will be waiting. Just don’t be like Groose and leave it open for a year.”

He chuckled a little. “Yeah.” Link glanced to the door. “Well, I’d better be going.”

“You’re welcome to stay the night. With what I’ve been hearing, you probably have just made sure that Lakeview remains in Zora control. Not sure it’ll last if Ganondorf moves his forces south through the Seer Valley, but for the time…”

“Won’t lie. A warm bed does sound nice rather than hiding out in the barn or out with the poes in No Man’s Land.”

“Then might I recommend the one on the far end upstairs? On the left?”

Chapter End Notes

Another day, another chapter. The creation of this one was a bit of a surprise. As when I started editing and more of the core story came together, I needed the scene we see in it. All shall be clear in time. Though fair warning, it might be a bit. That arc hasn't even been written yet, though it has been outlined. Matter of fact, I'm happy to say that all but the last three arcs are completely outlined now!

Other Devnotes:
-This chapter actually set up a lot and getting it to work down the road gave me many a headache. I hope it entertains when the time comes.
-Wondering if the entire joke of carrying Ruto along wore thin after he made it last chapter.
-Mr. Oblicze… Now who would have such a name…?
-Boon is such a fun word! Why don't people use it more?!

As always guys, many thanks for reading and all the kudos, bookmarks and hits! That'll wrap it up for me this week. See you next Wednesday and keep being awesome!
When he reached the room he saw what Telma had meant. Its windows were wide enough that he could climb out and near another building. He could jump across into it if he had to. It was simple, but also had a desk. A bed stuffed with hay and wool blankets was to his left as he entered. It wasn’t much, but he wouldn’t be staying long anyways. Link pulled the armor off slowly to inspect it after removing the scabbard and shield from his back. The damage would have to be repaired to it and the only forges that would know how were in the South Seas. He pulled the hat off then and ran his fingers through his hair, dropping the hat on the bed. Again, he felt the wolf charm around his neck shaking. He dropped the armor on the bed and grasped it.

“Glad you finally figured that out!” a familiar voice snarked. Link quickly looked around. “Works just like your old charm.”

“Midna?” he asked.

“Yep, I’m here.”

“Your voice sounds clearer than if it was through the old charm.”

“With good reason. Remember who gave it to you!” She laughed a little. “So, I am calling you because I’ve got a couple leads. Nothing too big but, it is a starting point. Apparently, one of your old heroes was involved with something similar. Or it could’ve been Majora’s Mask too. No way to be sure from the two or three stories we’ve dug out though.”

“Oh?” Link kicked the stool from the desk over and sat down. He closed his eyes then. He didn’t have to, but it had been a habit formed when he was once an agent of the Royal Family and communicating with his old charm. What he was not expecting was that when he did he’d see her. She did not appear as the cursed imp she was currently, but her normal self; arms folded, but with her right hand out and a dark teal crystal floating above her index finger. She appeared to be wearing a simple white shirt, a black vest and matching slacks with a leather belt around her waist. She looked up and gave him a smirk. He opened them quickly after and looked around. He was still in the inn room Telma had given him. Link closed his eyes again and found himself face to face with the twili once more. “My old charm never did that…”

“Because they weren’t made like these ones.” She flicked the crystal up a little with her fingers, making it float a little higher for a moment before it landed again. “Well, the story me and Gorko found was an old one about a goron warrior. He was cursed and died filled with regrets. Until someone who matches the description of some of the heroes of your world came along.”

“They say how?” He opened his eyes and dug about the desk for a pen and paper. He found some and quickly started taking down notes.

“Well, we don’t know if it was broken or not is the thing. The records are incomplete. Gorko said a lot of it was oral tradition.”

“So what’s the connection then?”
“Some pieces of it reference an even more dangerous and cursed mask responsible for it. I know it’s not much, but it’s a start. Any luck from Telma?”

“Quite a bit actually. She gave me something down in the bar. I haven’t had a chance to look yet, but I did meet with someone who gave me quite a bit, including that we need a song to break it. Telma said a lot of it was also backed up by what she gave me.” He picked up the envelope and looked it over. It wasn’t sealed so he could look through it. “I’m surprised that she actually got something so quickly.” He started to pull it out, making sure to keep the charm clutched in his hand so he could keep talking. The first page was a simple invoice and letter. Some of it appeared hastily written telling him he would have to be gone in the morning if he didn’t want to be captured as well as a couple details about the patrol boat’s compliment of soldiers. Looking it over, Link realized that they had likely planned a spectacle out of the ‘rescue’ of the princess he’d just saved.

“Well, she’s an information broker you said.”

“Yep. Still.” He shook the paper once and moved his left hand up the side to help flatten a fold so he could read. “How’re you doing up there?”

“Well, I am getting a little sick of hearing Gorko go off on his love of the sky tribes. Sounds like he’d love to get up there. But all he’s got is stories and piles of research. And even though a lot of his theories make sense with the material he’s pointed me at, nothing that can really be concrete. Besides, you’d need a very powerful airship to get up there. And even then, some way to find what’s up there.”

He chuckled as he turned the page over. “Sounds like Shad.”

“The archeologist who gave you and Ravio that map?”

He nodded before realizing that he couldn’t see her with his eyes open through the charm. “That’s him,” he said. “I’m sure he and Gorko would get along well. He’s always had an interest in the sky tribes, but…” Link stopped to check over his notes then and compared them to the information Telma had given him and what Oblicze had told him. “Hang on…”

“What?”

He looked through it again. “How…” He closed his eyes again to face his friend. “Was he carrying any sort of powerful magic artifacts?”

Her eyes went wide. “You’re kidding? You have the medium for the counter-curse?”

“No. But I do have a story. And it fits with both what you said and what the guy Telma got for me said. Got pen and paper handy?”

“Y’know I have a memory like a steel trap.” She repositioned so she was leaning against a wall. That familiar smirk was on her lips. “What’s she say?”

“Story that’s similar to the one you have, but with a zora. He went off to help his lover and got beaten up by pirates along the coast. Was dying in the water until a child came along and got him to shore.” He opened his eyes to look to check the last details again on the note he’d been given. “Couldn’t heal him, but had some method of easing his suffering with a song.”

“Was it the same guy?”
“Uhh…” Link checked the other pages. Most of them appeared to be similar retellings of the same story. “I can’t tell, but there’s mention of an ancient cursed mask in each one. According to Telma’s agent who got this stuff it looks like this was all oral tradition from the water witches of the lake. I have three, four different versions of the story, but they all share the mask and music element. The most well-documented one looks like it’s a tale of The Hero.” He put aside the papers and looked at the last one. “Huh, the last piece she gave me said there’s an ocean zora version even all the way from Termina…” He put the paper down and then closed his eyes. “With what the guy Telma found said about Majora’s Mask existing to spread chaos and grief, I think we’ve found the truth in the stories. If we had the Royal Archives, we could be sure. It’s the single largest collection of information on the entire continent. Things there are ancient. Going all the way back to Gustav uniting the Northern Kingdoms into Hyrule.”

“And going there would be very risky…” She shook her head and looked down. “Even if we got a message to your friend, given you’re a wanted man could make him a target.”

“Well, it’s the only place that might have this stuff.” He rubbed an eye. “Our other option is to go to him in disguise.” He couldn’t help but yawn. “And the longer you stay, the more likely we’re going to cause problems for you back home. How long as well before someone from your cadre comes looking for you? Or your brothers?”

“I know. And I can only send so many letters home before they suspect something as well.” She looked back up at him. “Wait, I have some ideas, but first you need to get back here.”

“What is it?”

“It’d take some prepwork and I’d have to start right now, but I could get you back to Death Mountain by morning.”

He cringed a little. “You’re going to warp me.”

“I know exactly where you are because of the charm. I can pull you through the Twilight Realm and use it like a slingshot to get you here.” She let her arms drop to her sides before she put her hands on her hips. The crystal remained floating where it had been. “They don’t know where you are right now, right?”

He nodded.

“And if you handled things for the zoras, rumors are going to start.”

“I already had three locals think they could hold me until The Crown got someone there to arrest me. A patrol boat is here too. Got really lucky I had the facemask up and hair stuffed in my hat. No one recognized me.”

“So, it’s a miracle that they haven’t picked you out yet. And walking all the way back to Death Mountain is going to take days if not weeks. But if you had Epona, you could quickly get to the castle in a day or two while they’re still searching the southern roads.”

“Why not just warp us both to the castle then?”

“Because someone has to be the anchor for this to work. And I’m the only one who knows the magic to do this here. If we hadn’t sealed everything up during The Conjunction, I could come to you then make us both show up right at the western gate of town.”

“Alright. You warp me back, we prepare and then leave for town?”
“Sounds good. I’ll get things together here. Even make sure Epona’s ready to go. Be ready at
dawn. I can only do this when our worlds intersect. We miss that window; it’ll be another twelve
hours before we can try it again.”

“I’ll be ready. Thanks.”

She smiled at him. “Great!”

“Anything else?”

“Mmm… Wouldn’t mind talking a little more someone who isn’t completely obsessed with
whatever’s in the skies… but preparing the spellwork for this is going to take a bit. So I should get
started. We’ll have plenty of time to catch up on the ride.”

“Okay. I think I’ll try for a little sleep then. Wake me when you’re about ready so I can make
sure I have everything.”

“Of course.” She smiled.

“See you later?”

“See you later!” The crystal floating vanished and his vision was darkened. He let go of the
charm in his hand and looked back to his notes.

Link finished his glass of milk and then poured the rest of the bottle into it. He got up and put the
stool against the door. He put the bottle in such a way that the slightest impact would cause it to
fall and shatter. Once done, he pulled his boots off and prepared for sleep. He pulled the blankets
back and climbed into the bed. Link blew a long exhale through his lips and closed his eyes.

He was awakened by the wolf shaking on his shirt and quickly sat up. Whatever dream he’d been
having had forced him to sit up and have the knife hidden in his bracer pulled out. Looking
around, he found himself alone in the room. The stool and the bottle were still in place. He could
hear the sounds of people outside talking. The wolf charm shook again and he grabbed it.

“Yeah?” he asked, eyes still scanning the room for anything that could’ve changed.

“I’ll be ready soon,” Midna said in his mind. “You up?”

“You woke me, but that’s fine.” Link kicked his feet out from under the blankets and took a deep
breath.

“Well, we only have a small window of time.”

“Give me five minutes to get dressed then.” He slipped the knife back into its hiding place and
grabbed his boots.

“You can have ten. I have some last minute stuff to do for this.”

“Okay.” At that moment the bottle fell and shattered. “…Call you back.” He let go of the charm
and heard voices outside. They were hushed now since they’d heard the shattered bottle, but he recognized the captain’s voice. He grabbed the charm again. “Can we move this along any?”

“What’s going on?”

“I’m pretty sure I’ve been made.” He grabbed the armor and pulled it on over his head before reaching into one of the belt pouches. Squeezing one of the stones in there and with a small pulse of magic, he was soon wearing the green armor, complete with the hat. He let go of the charm and quickly pulled his weapons on. The door shook violently.

“Just break it down!” he heard the captain say.

Link went to the window, peeking out of the curtains. There were four crossbowmen down below, each with their weapons aimed already. He grabbed the papers off the desk as splinters in the wood began to fly. He saw axe heads smashing through the door and heard Telma shouting at the soldiers.

“You’re harboring a wanted enemy of the crown! And it is in my power to do whatever is necessary to defend the realm!”

He gripped the wolf charm for a moment. “Mid?”

“Almost ready,” she said.

“Can you warp a moving target?” He was ready to go out the window when another idea formed. Focusing, he ran for the window. Channeling, he heard the door give way, but was already gone in a gust of green magic and wind. The window shattered as he went through it, shielded by his energies. A second later, he appeared on the roof. It wasn’t too secure though and he fell through. A woman shrieked as he did. Link got to his feet and looked back to see he’d landed in her kitchen. The crossbowmen turned when they heard. He didn’t catch what they’d shouted, but the glass shattered as they let bolts fly. There were too many and he wasn’t going to fight. Link broke into a run and out the door, clutching the wolf around his neck. As he ran, he saw others leaving the boat that was still docked.

“Not really!”

“Great.” He darted towards the main street in the hamlet. Two more soldiers were coming after him now and the crossbowmen were behind him. Looking quickly he took a right and went around to the other side. They were shouting. Glancing around the corner he saw a pack of them approaching.

“Hold your breath…”

Link clenched his eyes shut and let go of the charm, knowing what was coming next. He took a deep breath closed his hands into fists. His hair started to stand on end and in an instant he felt queasy. He felt his feet leave the ground. The temperature of the world around him changed dramatically to mild warmth from the cool air of Lake Hylia at dawn. A moment later he felt a dry heat and his feet on something hard. If he’d had anything to eat he was sure he was going to throw up. His knees buckled a little as the warp came to an end.
“That wasn’t so bad was it?” he heard. Link opened an eye. He was standing in a cavern. When he opened his other eye and looked around, he recognized it as the dragon’s throne room. Around his feet was a circle of twilit markings that glowed turquoise. He looked over and saw Midna, still an imp, floating by the broken wall.

“I always feel like I leave my stomach behind whenever that happens.” He took a couple breaths and started over. “Couldn’t do this back at the village?”

“Gorko wanted to see if they could move the bird statue he found now that you killed the dragon. I managed to talk him into going early.” She drifted over to him. “Once here, was an hour or so of preparing it and checking my dowsing to make sure things were anchored right. Besides, would draw attention anyways with so many refugees around.”

“…Good point.” He looked around the room before starting for the exit. “I thought they were going to be moving the refugees up here. Or some of them at least.”

“Darunia’s afraid that someone’s going to get into the crater.” She drifted beside him for a moment before sitting on his right shoulder. “So they’re going to close it off and have to do that big wall. And sealing the old temple so no one does something stupid.” She yawned then, stretching her arms out. “So, how long you need to prepare?”

“I haven’t even eaten yet, Mid.”

“I thought you said you left your stomach behind.”

“Felt like it.” He smiled a little at her as he started to the stairs in the main chamber. “I was so exhausted after all that swimming I just completely crashed when I finished talking to you.”

“And carrying a princess.”

“…You saw that.”

“I can see what the charm sees, you know how it works.”

“You’re not going to let me forget that are you?”

The grin vanished and she put a finger to her chin. Midna looked up at the ceiling of the stairwell. “Mmmm… As long as you don’t ever mention wrapping me up in that hat and carrying me out of a well.”

“Deal.”

“So, how serious were you about actually going to the castle?”

“Completely.”

“Alright, just making sure. ‘cause I had a couple ideas.” She kicked off his shoulder and floated forward.

“What kind of ideas?”

“Well for one, you look like a wanted criminal.” She held up a hand and a poster formed in it. Link grabbed it the moment it had and looked it over. It was identical to the one he’d seen at the hamlet. “A couple people from Kakariko came through handing these out.”
“I’ve seen these too.” He ripped it up. “Going to start making moving around difficult.”

“Yeah. Unless you could wear someone else’s face.”

He looked her in the eye. The grin had reappeared on her face. “You did say in this shape you were better at casting illusions around yourself.”

“Yep. I’ve even practiced with it since you were away. And I can put it around someone else and remain in their shadow to keep the illusion going! I’ll make you look like a fresh-faced recruit and you won’t even have to put on that trainee’s tunic! Or an old veteran. Or even one of the scouts given the green tunic you’ve got.”

He stopped for a moment. “How’d you find this out?” A realization hit him. “Midna, you didn’t mess with the refugees?”

“Of course not.”

“Good.”

“I played a trick or two on some of the gorons.” Link let out a sigh and shook his head. The imp floated around back and was leaning over his shoulder. “Hey, Darunia got a good laugh out of it when he figured it out! Said it might teach some of the younger guards to be a little more aware of their surroundings!”

“You weren’t seen though, were you?”

“Of course not.”

He stopped to lean against the wall a little with a yawn. “Any way to see through it?”

“Only if you’re a powerful mage.” She pulled herself up so she was resting her elbows now on his shoulder. “We can go tomorrow too if you need a day to recover. If I did that much swimming I’d be exhausted too.”

“We need to press our advantage.” He looked to her. “They think I’m still down there. It’ll take them time to get a message to someone. Even more time to travel. Though… I could use a nap I think after breakfast.”

Chapter End Notes

And another post day has come! Little late on posting it tonight but it's still here!

Devnotes:
-I've had a great deal of fun taking the lore we see in the Zelda games and trying to piece together some sort of unified collection of stories and the like via common themes and then messing with them with how The Witcher deconstructs tales.
-A tricky part with a story like this is so many pieces moving around that the characters might not see. It's caused several headaches, but I'm enjoying all the elements playing with one another.

As always guys, thanks for reading, comments and kudos. Cracked 50 last week and that's a huge milestone and wouldn't be possible without you guys! Special thanks this
week to MittensMcEdgelord, ShutUpImEvil and YellowWomanontheBrink for their bookmarks!

See you guys next week and keep being awesome!
As they arrived back at the goron village, they found it looking even busier than the last time Link had been there. Many of the refugees rushed about, avoiding eye contact or talking with one another. As Link approached the domes though, he saw immediately why they were acting that way. A pair of guards stood near Darunia’s dome, talking with one of the gorons. The blue and white tabards and spears however, gave them away as soldiers for The Kingdom. The goron guard however, sounded particularly angry.

“...that's not good,” he muttered, grabbing a blue scarf from the back of a passing refugee.

“They must be asking questions about you,” his shadow whispered.

He kept walking, quickly while the guards were still occupied with the goron. “Probably. We need to go. Epona where I left her?”

“Yeah.”

They’d reached the other side of the dome, where there were no hyrulean soldiers. Nailed to the wooden door however was a poster with his face on it and a thousand rupee reward for his capture. A moment after his eyes saw the, admittedly very accurate portrait, it dissolved into shadow and flickered into ash. He glanced at his shadow for a moment. “Good. I'll tell Darunia and we'll be off.” He pushed the door open then and worked his way through the numerous refugees still there. To his surprise, a few of them looked badly wounded and had bloodied bandages wrapped around their arms and faces. In the back, the door to Darunia’s room was open and a single guard stood there. He moved in Link’s way as he approached, but when Link pulled the scarf down, he stepped aside and let him enter. As he did, he heard a man’s voice.

“I can take them down, but the cart will be checked,” the other man in the room said. They wore a leather robe with markings along the front and numerous strands on the openings to the large sleeves. His dark hair was in thick dreadlocks and he stood with a girl next to him. Darunia was scratching his chin as the man continued. “They're on full alert ever since the jarl from Holodrum visited you. Heard rumor too that sheikah spies have already been sent into their lands.”

“It’s because of the other camp and that Chosen that passed through,” the goron boss said.

“A Chosen was here?” Link asked, interrupting.

The three others glanced up from the table. “...you're back very soon.”

“I had help.”

Darunia grunted, smirking slightly. “Clearly.”

“And this must be the man that Chosen was looking for if the posters are any indication,” the robed man said.

“Link, this is Renado and his daughter Luda. He's a shaman from Kakariko.”

The man nodded, looking Link over. “Most wanted man in Hyrule,” he said.
“Mmhm.” Link removed the scarf from his neck entirely and put it on the table. “Just wanted to let you know we're leaving so shouldn't cause you anymore problems.”

“No down the narrower passes you're not,” Darunia said.

“What?”

“There was a rockslide last night it seems,” Renado said. “Killed a few people and hurt others who were brave enough to try that one rather than the main road through Kakariko. I'm actually here to take some of the wounded down where we have better treatment options.”

Link sighed and ran a hand up over his forehead and through his hair. He noticed briefly it was getting longer. “...Great.”

Darunia approached him, glancing back at Renado for a moment. “Link,” he said. “A word please.” The goron boss walked past him to a corner of the room. Link followed right behind him.

“Yes?”

“I'm not going to ask how you made it back here so fast,” Darunia started, “but I am going to ask why one of your fellow Chosen was so interested in that well in old Kakariko.”

“That's where the artifact was.”

“Then why is it he has formally requested a half dozen sheikah to be put among the refugees like their agents were spread among suspected interlopers?”

He looked down for a moment, averting Darunia’s gaze, and glanced to his left at the wall. “...I cannot say.”

“This has to do with your partner I'm guessing...”

“Right here, y'know,” Midna replied. Link’s shadow on the wall changed its posture to having its hands planted on its hips and standing at an angle he never would.

Darunia let out a low growl as he reached up to scratch his beard. “Of course you are.” He looked right at the glowing red eyes of the shadow. “What are you exactly?”

“Well, that's a bit rude of you. Why-”

“Mid,” Link interrupted, looking at her.

Darunia shook his head. “Gor Liggs saw you when you headed into the dome before you got cursed. Said it was an illusion you were wearing.”

The shadow sighed, her right hand slipping from her hip. “So much for a low profile,” she muttered. “You know the stories. About how the interlopers were tortured and burned at the stake for their crimes.”

“Midna, is this-” Link started.

His shadow looked right at him, eyes locked with his. For a moment, he thought he actually saw her normal eyes rather than the glow of the magic. “Link, I represent my people. Let me make that choice.” After a brief moment, he merely nodded and the shadow looked back at Darunia. “Not all
of them were killed. Some were taken to places like Midoro Prison or The Arbiter's Grounds. Or even that well we found Ateren in. Tortured for confessions. Chained in dimeritium and their implanted spell mediums torn out of them. And the ones who survived were sealed in shadow and left to die in an alien world.”

“The old conspiracy is true then,” Darunia said. He looked back then at Link for a moment then to the hylian’s shadow. “That would then...” His eyes went wide and he looked Link in the eye, teeth clenched. “You brought an interloper here?!” he rumbled.

“Twili,” Midna corrected, her voice growing sharper. “And we are NOT our ancestors. Just as Link here isn't one of the Chosen of The Inquisition.”

Darunia growled a little, eyes looking to the side for a moment at Renado. The shaman was busy talking with his daughter it appeared and hadn’t been listening in. He looked back then to Link and Midna. “But not everyone may see it that way.”

“Yeah. And you see why we didn't say anything,” Link added.

“When The Conjunction happened a couple years ago, we were divided,” Midna continued. “Many thought it was the light world trying to finish the job. Hell, I thought that too.”

“But the conjunction was a natural event,” Darunia countered. “No one was to blame for it. Gorko even theorized during it that this wasn't the first time it'd happened. Why else would Hyrule have such a diverse population of beings?”

“That's what we learned too,” Link said. “And how much our histories were twisted by people in power.”

His shadow nodded. “And that even three hundred years after, there's still that fear and hate. The Conjunction could've restarted all that. We tried closing every door between worlds we could. Thought we'd succeeded but...”

Darunia nodded. “Clearly not.”

“There is still one way between The Twilight and your world. And if we were to close it, it'd be like plugging up a river. Magic would flood your world and cause an even bigger disaster than The Conjunction.” Link looked at Darunia as Midna’s words sank in. The goron boss scratched his beard for a moment, nodding slightly. “One leader of their people to another, just about everything I have done since meeting this noble idiot of a Chosen Champion has been to try and prevent an extradimensional incident. Including going after one of my own clan who thought your world should burn.”

“And if we don't get out of here and break the curse on her, we could-”

Darunia began to chuckle darkly, head nodding as he did. When he stopped, he looked at both of them with a creased brow and frown. “See why all the deception. Don't like it, but understand it.” His features relaxed slightly. “Neither of you can stay.”

“You're going to help us?” Link asked, hope plain in his voice.

“For a price. You both have risked your lives for people you don't know. For those you represent to try and keep the peace.” He pointed a finger at them then. “But, you also deceived me, even though I understand why. Even if it’s for a good reason.”

“So...” Midna began, “name your price.”
“A favor.” He folded his arms. “One that I will call in one day. I'll remind you of this conversation and tell you what I want done. You do it. The debt is repaid.”

Link moved slightly so he was between his shadow and Darunia. “Give me both then,” he said. “Contacting Midna may be... difficult.”

Darunia shook his head. “No. She’s part of this too.”

He felt something brush his shoulder. “Link, it's fine,” she said. He looked back. She’d left his shadow and floated behind him, her tiny hand on him. “You know I've handled things like this before.” The imp let go of his shoulder and looked right at Darunia then. “Though, he's right. When you're ready for that favor let Link know. He'll pass it along.”

Darunia sighed, shoulders slumping a little and any signs of displeasure leaving him. “Good,” he said. “Now. Let me speak with Renado. I have an idea."

“Mmm?”

“He is here to take some wounded in the rockslide down to treat. To give them proper beds and cleaner medical attention. And a more delicate hand than Halse or Liggs can lend to the task. Link can be disgusted among the wounded while you hide in the shadows. Epona will draw the cart.”

“They might want to check him over.”

“This was sounding familiar to him and some of his training. He gave Darunia a nod and glanced back as Midna melted back into his shadow. “I'll need shoe polish,” he said. “And some rock dust.”

“You'll need a bloodied cloth or two too,” Midna added. “Way to hide your face like that scarf you grabbed.”

“Renado will have those,” Darunia said. “I'll speak with him right now, but both of you get ready.”

He turned and started back to the table.


Link bowed his head and took a deep breath before looking back up at him. “Thank you. Know I've put you in a bind with all this.”

He smirked slightly, a small grin on his face. “We've agreed on terms. And I'm not like an old hexer invoking the Law of Surprise. I'd rather know what I'm getting.” He turned once more to the shaman and they began speaking once again.

Link watched them talk quietly. Renado appeared surprised by something Darunia said, but quickly began nodding and ushering his daughter past the hexer and into the main room of the dome. Link leaned against the wall and folded his arms to watch. “Y'know, hexers back home still use that,” he heard in his ear.

He looked to his shadow on the wall that appeared to be leaning against some invisible counter with its legs crossed at the ankles. “The Law of Surprise?” he asked.
“Yep. So. Let’s get you made up to look like a wounded refugee.”

“Still a question of where you’re going to hide.”

“What? Not your shadow?”

“No. The Sheikah have their lenses of truth and shards of agony. Tools that—”

“I know. We have similar items in The Twilight. And even in this shape they might still be able to detect me. It’s not exactly twilit magic I’m using like this, but it might be enough to make them want to look into it.”

“Yeah. So…”

“Wait… Oh. Oh, no. I think I know exactly where you want me to hide.”

Link had yet to put on his disguise, but had hooked Epona up to the cart. The saddlebags were in the back and a few wounded had already been carefully placed as well, Renado carefully treating them before stepping out as his daughter called for him. The hexer gave Epona’s neck a scratch. “We’ll be out of here before you know it,” he said to her.

“Why do I have to be in Epona’s shadow?” Midna asked. “There's a lot of horses like her around here! I don't need to be in her shadow either to put an illusion around her either!”

“Because they’re checking people going down the pass, not Eldin Drafters,” Link said, glancing over his shoulder at the rest of the camp. The hyrulean soldiers were nowhere to be seen thankfully, but the rest of the refugees seemed incredibly tense. To just about anyone, it would just look like he was talking to the horse hooked up to the cart. “Besides, we can’t risk them detecting you. And if something does go wrong you can release the harness and have her run off.”

“And leave you to get your sorry butt thrown into a cell again? Nuh-uh. Not happening.”

He had to smirk a little at her tone. “I thought you liked coming to save the hero in a dungeon.”

“Wh- what makes you think I’d come get you out again?!” Epona snorted and shook her head then, as if she was reacting to what Midna was saying.

“Precedent.”

“Maybe I’ll just leave you in there this time,” she muttered.

“Don't think you would. You may be many things, but disloyal and untrustworthy aren't them.”

She sighed. “Yeah. Yeah you're right. Still, would prefer yours to the horse.”

“Me too, actually.” He reached up to give Epona’s snout a stroke when he saw the shaman and Darunia coming up from the main gate. “Hey. Renado's coming back. I'll make it up to you when we're in No Man's Land. Should only be a day anyways.”

“I am holding you to that.”
He had to smirk a little at it as he turned to face Renado and Darunia. Both of them didn’t look happy. “We've got a problem,” Darunia grumbled.

“Just one?” he asked.

“Damnit, Link. Be serious about this.”

“I am serious.” He folded his arms and looked the two men in the eyes. “So, let me guess? The Inquisitors are on their way up the mountain?”

“Yes, actually,” Renado said. “My daughter spotted them. And they appear to have a small guardian with them as well as those shards Darunia mentioned.”

“Meaning they would pick you out easy, Link,” Darunia added.

He sighed and glanced at Epona for a moment. Link was sure Renado didn’t know the truth, but it was clear what the goron was implying. “I cannot stay. And if we take the direct path now, they'll know you have been helping me.”

“This is also the only way between Holodrum and Hyrule. Unless you took the long way around and south through Calatia and The Free City.”

“And by that time we may have a bigger problem,” he muttered.

“Mmm?” Renado asked.

“Nothing.”

Darunia scratched at his beard. A rumble escaped his throat for a moment before he began to nod. “Well, there is another option,” he said. “Will be still risky.”

“I'm listening.”

“I've sent Darbus and some of the mine crew down to start clearing the rubble. It'll still take days to clear, but I can send down some ropes and you can climb down to the even narrower path that hasn’t been blocked by rocks. It rejoins the other path you've been using, but it is even narrower.”

“What about Epona?”

“I can take her down still,” Renado said. “She's an Eldin Drafter. There's lots of them in Kakariko. She'll blend in easily.”

He breathed a mental sigh of relief, but fell back on his training to not show it. He didn’t know if something would give him away at all to the shaman. “Alright.”

“I understand your hesitancy Link,” Darunia added. “You're trusting a stranger with the life of your closest companion.”

“Yeah...”

“Renado will ensure she's down safely.”

“Yes,” he said. “I'll bring her to the spring near the outskirts of the town and leave her there for you to retrieve. If you need a place to hide as well, there’s a small cave you can slip into. It leads to
the back of the spring and should give you a good view of the area.”

Link began to nod, seeing it was the only way any of them would get out of it. “Okay. Just don't try to ride her.”

“Oh?”

“She's picky.”

“Ah. Well she’s already hooked up to the cart anyways.”

Darunia cleared his throat. “I'll go get someone to gather the ropes and take you down the pass, Link,” he said. “And it'll give you a minute to say goodbye to your horse.”

“And I must get a couple more supplies for the trip down,” Renado said. “We’ll be leaving very soon though.”

“Thank you,” Link said. “I’ll get her saddlebags out of the back then and find Darunia when I’m ready.”

“Sounds good.” With that, the three of them went their separate ways. Link walked to the back of the cart. About six wounded men and women lay in the back, along with Epona’s saddlebags. As he slung it over his shoulder, he felt the wolf around his neck rattle. He glanced at his shadow for a moment, seeing faint wisps of shadow merge with his own.

“Guess you're not hiding in her shadow anyways, Mid,” he said quietly.

“I heard,” she said in his ear.

“You did?”

“You guys were standing right next to Epona the entire time. Of course I did.”

He nodded a little and walked back to Epona to give her one last look over. “You wouldn't happen to know anything about guardians?”

“Just that they're ancient sheikah tech my people have been trying to replicate with our energies for centuries. If they're anything like our attempts at it, they're notoriously unstable. Hit it with just a little magic and it'll go berserk. Attack everything that isn't a guardian.”

“Great.”

“Yep.”

“Might be good we changed the plan then.”

“Yeah. I'd rather not set one of those things off just because it stood too close to Epona.”

“Even with the curse?” He heard her growling in his ear. Link sighed and glanced down for a second. “Mid...”

“I know. Just don't like being reminded of it... and another thing. Why do you keep calling me that?”
“Calling you what?”

“Mid. You've been doing it ever since I got turned into this... this thing.”

“I have?” He sighed and shook his head. It hadn't been the first time he’d unknowingly given someone a nickname. “Sorry. I didn't even notice.”

“Haven't even noticed? How do you not notice something like that?”

“Just didn't.” He closed his eyes for a moment. “I can stop if you want.”

“...so, not because-”

He saw exactly where she was going with it. “Why would I? You've seemed a little shaken since it happened. You know me. Would I do something like that?”

She sighed. “No. Of course not. You're too kind sometimes for your own good.”

“Exactly.” He smirked a little, an idea entering his head. Maybe it would put her mind at ease. “Besides. If I really wanted to give you an embarrassing nickname don't you think I could come up with something better than ‘Mid’?”

“Like to see you try, wolfboy,” she muttered in his ear.

“That a challenge, stal herder?”

“Maybe it is, hog rider,” she replied, her voice gaining a teasing tone.

He chuckled a little. “Best you can come up with, boot thief?”

“You're not even tryin' are you, yeti lunch?”

“Just getting warned up angry genie.”

“Oh really, bug bait?”

“Yes really, trough-”

“What are you doing?” Darunia’s voice rumbled.

Link fought the urge to jump around and draw his sword at the goron’s sudden appearance. “Wh-what?”

He stood with a long thick rope wrapped around his shoulder and some hooks to be used to help him climb down. In his right hand was also a pair of pick axes to help him get down. Darunia let out a groan and shook his head. “…you're talking to your shadow again, aren't you? She know the new plan?”

“Yeah, I know,” she said loud enough for them both to hear. “And going with Link. Since we can't risk detection.”

“Good. Finish yourgoodbyes and let's get going.”

A moment after Darunia had turned to start for the way out of the camp, he heard Midna in his ear.
“...I win.”

He glanced at his shadow for a second. “You do not. We got interrupted.”

“So? Can you think of another other than trough swimmer?”

He sighed as he started following Darunia. “Was going to be trough bather actually.”

“Hah!”

“Fine, we'll say you won this one, Mid.” He caught himself and glanced at his shadow with his head bowed slightly.

“Eh, you can call me that. Besides, I have plenty of other things I can call you anyways.” There was a quiet few seconds between them then. “Y’know, no one's ever called me that before.”

“What? Mid?”

“Yeah.”

“Little surprised.”

“I've been called Middy once.”

Link had to smirk a little. “I'm betting it was only once.”

He heard her snickering. “Like you're a mind reader.”

Chapter End Notes

And another chapter!

Devnotes:
-I debated back and forth when putting this one together because arguably little happens and it's mostly character dev. But Link is being hunted and many people are after him. They won't be idle and there's no way he'll know what they're planning so he has to adapt to things that happen suddenly.
-When developing the characters, one of the core bits between Link and Midna would be reminding one another of the stupid crap they've done in the past. Each referenced nickname is actually something I pieced together for their backstory. Some will forever remain noodle incidents however.

And that'll do it for the post. As always guys, many thanks for all the reads, kudos, comments and bookmarks. I'll see you all next week! Keep being awesome people!
They reached the point in the path about an hour after leaving the goron village to find the rockslide. One massive goron foreman shouted orders while teams took turns clearing the rubble. Two gorons were coiled up in balls and spinning to grind their way through the rocks while ones above tossed pieces of rock on the top of the pile away. As another few were thrown away, Darunia approached the foreman. Link watched from a distance as the two talked briefly before Darunia returned, holding a hammer in his hand and a large spike. He walked past a couple other miners who were sitting and talking quietly as he passed. Darunia started for the side of the pass.

“Remember how to do this?” Darunia asked as Link caught up. He handed him the simple hammer and spike.

“Just like when I was last here,” Link said. He took the spike and inspected the dirt before pushing it in and hammering it in place.

“You were nine or ten then.”

“Yeah? I had to rappel into a cave during The Conjunction and on the dig I got assigned to before it.” He tested the spike for a moment before hammering it a little more.

“Heh.” Darunia handed him the rope. “Do you need the picks then?”

“Probably not.” He began to tie the rope around the spike. “You sticking around to belay?”

“How long you think it’ll take you to get to the lower path?”

“Uuuh…” Link took a moment to check over the side of the cliff once he’d finished tying the rope off on the spike. It was not the same one he’d gone down during the trials with a clear smoother face. Apart from a few cracks, it looked like he would be going quickly, even if he didn’t want to. There was little he could hold onto. “Shouldn’t take too long. Not a lot of places I can hold apart from the cracks it’s looking like. Provided we don’t find any skulltulas in those cracks should be fine.”

“I can go ahead of you,” he heard Midna say in his ear. “Zap anything in there that might crawl out.”

“Okay.” He glanced back at Darunia and tossed the rope over.

“Just be quick,” he said.

Link grabbed the rope then and looked up at the goron boss. “Really owe you for all this, Darunia.”

“We already agreed on a deal, Link. You both do and when the time comes, I’ll be calling it in.”

“Of course.” Link pulled a couple straps out of Epona’s saddlebag and made an improvised harness quickly out of them to help hold the rope and himself. After testing his weight, he gave Darunia a nod. “See you later, I’m sure.”
Darunia offered a small grin as he grabbed the ropes. “Don’t get killed out there, kid.”

He gave one final nod, before the hylian went over the edge. Quickly he started to glide down, using his hands and feet to control his descent. Moments later, Midna emerged from his shadow and drifted below him. Her hair swished back and forth for an instant before it became a claw and lunged into one of the cracks. Link stopped and saw a flash of teal and red. His ears caught the squeal and crackling of a small skulltulla being crushed and sliced apart by magic. With it clear, he continued down. A few moments later, he heard the sounds again and stopped. This time though, he also heard twilise cursing. When he glanced down, he saw a much larger arachnid be pulled out of the crack and thrown over the edge. The view of the mountains from his current position though made him smile a little. To the south, he could see the outskirts of Kakariko and even the fields. North were more mountains and the border with Holodrum. If he went far enough West, he’d eventually run into Snowpeak and beyond that The Hera Valley, nestled in the mountains.

“You’re clear down here!” he heard Midna shout up at him.

“Thanks,” he answered before continuing his descent, smiling a little at the incredible view.

Another minute or so and Link’s boots landed on the path under a natural overhang. More than a hundred feet up was where he’d started. His stomach rumbled, reminding him of how he hadn’t even had anything to eat. Link gave the rope a couple tugs to signal to Darunia he was down before letting go and starting down the path. He pulled Epona’s saddlebag over so he could dig through it and found some jerky and a couple skewers meat. “You finished the stew I see,” he said before taking a bite of mutton jerky.

“There wasn’t a whole lot left,” Midna answered, floating over to him.

“You use the last of my spices?”

She snapped her fingers and the bottle appeared floating over her index finger. He took it back then and stuffed it into the bag. “So when we get to the castle, how’re we gonna get into the archives?”

“If we’re lucky, we might not have to.” He took another piece of jerky out and offered it to her, but she raised a hand and shook her head. He merely shrugged and took a bite of it before starting down the path. “Shad does have a lot of books in his house and I did learn some stories from him about The Hero. If the similarities are enough, we may have that as a good starting point.”

“And if he doesn’t then sneak into the archives?”

“Yeah.”

“Hoping he does though. All this stuff we’ve found really does sound like it’s one of The Hero’s stories.” He took another bite of his breakfast and started down the path.

“That raises another question actually. What kind of security does The Archives have? They have things like the shards of agony or lenses of truth? Regular warding against magic? Libraries back home because of our arts are some of the most well-guarded and warded buildings we have.”

“Just regular guards from my visits in the past. My charm never reacted to any sort of magic there. Even in the vaults underground.”

“Huh…”
“They could’ve added more though in the weeks I’ve been gone. But it’s not exactly a strategic resource you could say. There’s a couple old treasures of The Royal Family that could be seen as it.” He stopped talking for a moment as he remembered Midna’s position. His trust won out though and he glanced back for a moment. “There’s a vault too like what you got the Fused Shadows out of at The Palace, but most of the relics aren’t kept there.”

“Where the Goddess’ Harp was kept.”

He stopped in his tracks and looked back at her. “How do you know about that?”

“History?” She shrugged a little. “An interloper during The Inquisition tried to assassinate the entire Royal Family, only to be stopped by a Chosen. Story goes he found her playing a harp that they’d been trying to get a hold of for a long time because of the magic in it.”

“Alright, I can understand that…” He started walking again, memories beginning to bubble up from his years as Zelda’s personal knight and the sounds of that harp. Those had been such simpler days before the realities of their positions changed everything. An idea however started to form from it. He reached up to scratch at the scruff starting to grow on his chin. It would be risky, but it could mean preventing The Twilight from entering the war.

He felt the imp leaning over his shoulder then. Her arms were folded and she rested her chin on them. “He was killed by the Chosen if I recall right. I’d assume though the only way in would be with a member of the Royal Family. Especially if that thing is anything like the Fused Shadows.”

“Heh. Yeah.” There was a sound of rocks striking the side of the mountain above them. Link quickly pulled his shield from his back and moved to the side of the path. He felt Midna leave his shoulder and for a second saw his shadow on the wall move on its own and ripple unnaturally and lifted his shield over his head. Rocks clattered against it for a tense couple moments. As the sounds echoed around them, Link slowly lowered the shield and looked back up. “They must not be aware someone’s down here now.”

“Or something went wrong.”

“Mm.” He slid the shield onto his back once more and started down the trail.

Their hike down along the harrowing side of the mountain continued. The paths were so narrow that a goron could not walk it. More than once his feet had slipped slightly and he heard a gasp from his shadow. As the sun moved to the afternoon sky and began its slow sink towards the horizon, the trail rejoined the one he’d taken his earlier trips up. He could see Kakariko off in the distance and the main path up the mountain.

The whistle of an arrow grabbed his attention, the bolt striking into his side. The mail and leather took the strike, leaving him unharmed. Swiftly, the crossbow left his side in the direction it had come, catching a hunched figure knocking another arrow. His finger squeezed the trigger and the figure shrieked. A moment later, orange bands snapped around it and constricted. Its cries fell silent and it collapsed from its perch. Link glanced over his shoulder to see Midna had left his shadow, hair raised in a claw and crackling with energies.

“Was that a bulblin?” she asked.
“Sounded like it,” he replied. Link quickly headed for the body on the trail, loading the crossbow again and slipping it back on his hip. He knelt down and pushed the body over before glancing back at the imp. Their head twisted around in an impossible way while their arm had bone jutting out of the animal hide wrapped around their right forearm. He also saw their chest was crushed. “You really did a number on him.”

“Can’t get my bolts to work right in this shape.”

“Ah.” He immediately pulled the club off their back next to their quiver. The metal cap and spikes on the end of it told him all he needed to. He double-checked, inspecting the blin’s armor. It was not simple thin leathers, but studded and treated. There was an indentation in the collar. “We’re in trouble. He’s a Tribe scout.”

“What?”

“This bublin is a soldier. Look.” He showed her the indentation. It was a Gerudo symbol. “He’s one of Ganondorf’s agents. And I doubt he’s alone.” Link got to his feet then. “How’d they get past the patrols though?”

“They couldn’t have warped. Not with the ways between worlds being closed unless they somehow found how to use the old shrines.”

“Closest shrine is just on the outskirts of Kakariko, but The Sheikah would’ve noticed if they did.” He looked carefully along the path before pulling the lupine sense from a pouch on his belt. He uncorked it and took a drink.

“Always the hero, huh?”

“If they’re this close to the village it means they must have a camp nearby. And a raid on Kakariko could do some serious damage to Hyrule’s information network.”

“And though something like that would help you keep from getting caught by them, you’re going to find that camp anyways and clear it so they don’t threaten the village and the people there.” She drifted to his side, folding her arms under her chest. “But it could also have longer negative effects on the war.”

“Yeah.” He put the bottle to his lips and drank. Within moments the elixir took effect and he coughed once. He inhaled sharply and soon had the scent of the bublin. He could even visualize the path if he wanted to as he pulled his sword from its scabbard and shield from his back. “Can’t be a big camp. They’d have noticed if it was. But bublins are a lot smarter than their cousins.” He started following the scent trail.

She darted back into his shadow. “What’re you thinking?” he heard in his ear.

“Maybe a dozen total. Shock troop squad probably. Ones in the Castor Wilds would try and get behind our lines to raid and sabotage our supply lines back to North Lanayru.” He started up the trail, back towards the mountain. “They probably don’t have any bullbos. These passes are too narrow for them.”

“Would they have a mage with them?”

“They might.” A realization hit him then. “That might be why they’re undetected. And with Cia focused on the front, the regular seers at The Tower wouldn’t notice it.”

“Gossip stones?”
“None along this path. A couple on the main one going up from the gate in Kakariko though.” He stopped as he came to a hole in the mountainside. He’d gone up this trail a few times recently and knew as he saw it. The scent lead into it, while a faint glow of a torch inside it leaked out. “That wasn’t here before.”

“No. No it wasn’t when we came up. And look at the rocks around it. Looks like they tunneled out of it. Or probably blasted it with bombs.”

“Great.” Link took a step into the cave. A few steps in however, he saw that it was a tunnel, leading to a small secluded clearing nestled among cliff faces. Simple wooden palisades had been erected within. There were no banners or anything marking who it belonged to, but atop one of the towers, Link spied a bublin, standing at full alert and watching the entrance.

“Okay, they’ve been busy… And I think I know why no one noticed.”

“Yeah, this place is completely isolated.” He took a deep breath and looked for an opening.

“You’re not seriously thinking of charging in there?”

“No. I’m thinking of a more stealthy approach.”

“Well, this should be good.”

He glanced at his shadow and then back to the camp. “Any suggestions?”

“Well, that guy on the tower will see us soon as we get out of the tunnel.”

“I think I got an idea then.” He stepped back into the shadows of the tunnel and removed the clawshot from his hip. Link checked over the mechanisms carefully and made the claw open. “Can you get up there and knock him out?”

“Getting close will be the issue. But I see a crack in the wall I could get in the shadow there and then sneak up it to take him out.”

“Okay.”

“What about you?”

Link merely held the clawshot up to his shadow on the wall. “Scale the wall and then scale the tower. Simple. Once on the tower we’ll get a better view of things and a better idea for a course of action.”

“Yeah.” He saw his shadow flicker for a moment and dart away. If not for the enhanced senses from the potion, he’d not have seen her shadowy shape swiftly slide across out of the tunnel and along the wall to the palisade. Link stepped forward so he could see out, watching the guard on the tower. The bublin on top of it kept his eyes on the entrance, not noticing the shadowy trail creeping up the ladder. A moment later though, Link saw a flash of red and a claw grab the guard’s head. His enhanced hearing heard a snap of magic and saw the bublin’s body go limp. It was carefully lowered to rest on its back on the tower’s floor. With it clear, he rushed forward to the palisade. The device pulled him off his feet and he used the momentum to leap over into the camp. Not stopping, he aimed as soon as his feet hit the ground for the top support of the tower and fired the clawshot again. It grabbed the support and planted his feet against the other supports once he was off the ground. With his free hand he grabbed the side and pulled himself over, keeping low. The imp floated next to the bublin, her claw of hair latched firmly around his head and energies occasionally snapping quietly.
“Is he dead?”

“Just unconscious,” she said. “Better to leave him alive unless we’re clearing the camp. But I don’t think we are.”

Link looked out then, his jaw falling open. “Sweet Farore…” He ran a hand up through his hair. Over a dozen tents were in place. There were no boars, but he recognized two tents that had violet smoke slipping out from their flaps. In the center of the camp was a circle. It flickered slightly with energies both he and Midna could see. What grabbed his attention though was the fact that there were far more than the at most a dozen bulblins there. A nearby cave had guards at its entrance while several more were at work in a makeshift armory. Two massive boar-like moblins stood by a large tent talking to one another and comparing the trophies around their necks. A third appeared out of the cave, carrying a massive bow and great spears for arrows.

Quietly he started counting. Two guards at the front gate, one on the tower with him, four at the cave entrance, one already dead on the trail, six at the armory; Link soon had spotted at least twenty of them among the camp, not counting the moblins. He suspected more were in some of the tents and they had at least two shamans with them. Carefully he took the clawshot and readied it once more, aiming for the palisade wall. “There’s too many,” he said quietly to Midna. “If I had explosives and you weren’t cursed, maybe we could take them.”

“We can’t just leave a camp like this so close to Kakariko though,” she said.

“I know. But we can get a message to Darunia about it through Renado. The gorons can clear it. Keep The Sheikah out of it so they don’t step up their campaign against The Tribes.”

“And I know exactly why you don’t want them finding out.”

He smiled faintly for a moment. “That obvious?”

“I know you. And you don’t want any more bloodshed than there’s already been.”

“Yeah.” He fired the clawshot as she darted into his shadow and slipped back over the wall. By the time the guard on the tower came to, the two had already fled back through the tunnel as twilight washed over Death Mountain.

Chapter End Notes

So, another Wednesday is upon us and that means another chapter to be posted! Now, there are only five remaining chapters before the first... Eh, let's call it 'season' is completed. I shall be taking a break afterwards for a month, possibly two. But it shall not be spent idle, for the second season is already written and I am working on editing right now. It'll start showing up again December at the earliest, and January at the latest, baring any serious issues.

Devnotes:
-I am aware that I prolly got things wrong with the rappel scene, mostly because of the fact that I’m pretty sure a lot of the more modern equipment we see in climbing is not that old.
-The choice to have him NOT fight the blins at the camp came from the idea of his training to not fight if the odds weren’t in his favor, to say nothing of his infiltration skills being showcased.

As always, many thanks for reading and kudos and bookmarks and comments! That'll do it for this week, I'll see you all next Wednesday! Keep being awesome people!
The moon was already in the sky by the time they reached the bottom of the path and were off the mountain. Not far in front of them were the fires in the refugee camp and smoke coming from houses in Kakariko. Link took a sip from his canteen and glanced at his shadow for a moment.

“How do I look?” he asked.

“Mmm?” he heard Midna say. “Oh, not toxic if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Good.” He took a quick survey of the site down the path. “Don’t want to scare anyone.”

“However, might be a good idea for me to put an illusion up. People might be looking for you down here.”

“Good idea.” He looked back at the camp then. As he did, he saw black squares flicker around him and cover his body. They flipped around, like cards on a table and within moments, he appeared in rags. His blond hair was black and his skin was weathered. He looked at his hands for a moment, not recognizing them.

“Long as I stick to your shadow, you’ll not look like the most wanted man in all of Hyrule.”

“Thanks.” He took another sip from the canteen and started walking.

“Think enough people would be scared if they knew there were blins that close to them.”

“Yeah.” There was some quiet between them as he entered the camp. Dozens of people were scattered about. Link immediately spotted a pair of sheikah guards though near the entrance to the village. They were occupied though and he quickly went past them towards the spring near the gate. Even at this late hour, people were still awake. He stopped at the spring and knelt to refill his canteen.

“So… How’d all this start?” she asked in a near whisper.

“Mmm?” For a second he glanced at his shadow and kept his voice low. He spotted a guard starting for the spring and got to his feet once more. Scanning the area, he spotted a small cave to the right of the spring and headed for it.

“The war. I know things were kinda tense here when we were working during the Conjunction, but a war like this has to have been a long time coming.”

“It kinda was…” He looked back to see the guard kneel down to take a couple drinks himself from the fresh water. Link went deeper into the cave, seeing a way out that would give him a good view of the spring, but let him stay relatively unseen.

Midna’s shadowy impish form emerged from his shadow. After a moment, the blackness solidified and she reformed physically in the world. The illusion around Link was broken in a flicker of magic. “All the more reason to try and keep my people out of it.”

“Yeah.” He offered her the canteen and she took a drink from it. “A few gerudo tribes that identified as part of Ganondorf’s United Tribes continued some of their raids for goods, in spite of
his orders. He came in though on a diplomatic mission due to conditions in the deserts for help. Didn't realize what sort of political development it was. I was thirteen at the time so...”

Midna smirked as she wiped some of the water from her lips. “More interested in other developments?”

“Uh…” He looked to his left and down.

She giggled softly. “Hah! Your ears are turning a little red.” He merely groaned at her response and shook his head. “Sorry. I had to.” She took another sip of the water before handing it back to him. “So. How did that all go?”

“From the records actually, we were getting somewhere at first.” Link took the canteen in his hand and closed it before looking back at her. “But then King Robin died. During the talks. Was sixteen by that time.”

“Guessing then people started pointing fingers at Ganondorf.”

“Yep. Zelda's father, Daphnes, called off the talks.”

Her eyes widened a little in surprise and she drifted over to his side, leaning casually against his shoulder. “Thought he did it?”

Link shook his head. “No, felt with how it was causing problems that it might be good for everyone to cool off for a year or two before going back to the table.”

“Risky, but I can see the wisdom. What happened next?”

He sighed with a little exhaustion as he looked at her as he continued. “When talks resumed, The Tribes had managed to set up something with the zoras of Snowpeak in the way of trade. It didn't sit too well but, the raids had slowed to the point that it was clear the raiders weren't backed by him.”

“And then the conjunction happens I bet.”

Link glanced over his shoulder back at the spring, seeing the guard had left back to his post. “Heh. Actually no. A harsh winter in the desert and rising prices of goods from the zoras bringing trade up river...”

“Aaah... So Ganondorf got desperate.”

He nodded. “If I had to take a guess, yeah. Raiding along the border picked up from the blins. But we'd never seen them so well equipped. Trade disruption got so bad Empress Ambi from Labrynna got involved to try and keep it from going any further.”

“Well, knowing the zoras here are allied with the other zoras in Labrynna, that makes sense. They want to protect their economy.”

“Ambi has always been a peacemaker as well. She was the one who replaced Emperor Tangin, who started the war in the South Seas.” He fell quiet as he remembered his childhood before arriving at The Tower. A sad smile played across his lips. “She didn't want to see another war.”

“Well, she failed,” Midna remarked bluntly.

Link looked back at Midna in the eye. “Because of a few idiots in Labrynna wanting to kill her and
frame Hyrule. Bastards were still bitter about the war in the South Seas because it cost them a lot of power. Me and Lana barely managed to stop the assassination attempt at the summit.”

Midna looked at him with wide eyes. “You know the Labrynna Empress?” she asked, her tone giving away her skepticism.

“Kind of?”

“Damn.” She shook her head as she lowered her head to rest on her arms. “That alone probably put a price on your head when you left your pink princess.”

“Heh. Well, I did get assigned to a dig with my buddy Shad for it.” He yawned then, running a hand up through his hair and pushing his hat off. He pulled it forward and looked it over. “Though that got cut short by The Conjunction... which was when things really turned for the worse. While we were running around The Twilight and Lorule, the raids picked up as more and more monsters showed up all over. A Chosen was killed in one.”

She nodded. “I remember hearing that. We dealt with the twilit griffin while your friend was looking into it.”

“Well, Pipit found our boy's sword among spoils of a recent gerudo raid along with signed orders from Ganondorf himself.”

“And then it started.”

“Yeah. About six months after we destroyed our last mirror and that night in Aboda together...”

She bowed her head a little, shaking it. “Damn...” Midna looked back up at him a moment later. “And that was one of the last peaceful nights you've had in over a year.”

“That was a fun night though.” He looked to her and smiled.

She grinned back, the fang sticking out of her mouth. “It really was. That guy's face got so red!”

“I know, right? Hah. I haven't been kicked out of an arcade since...” The smile faded for a moment as he remembered. “Since I was there with Marin.” He looked down at the long floppy hat in his hand before looking back at her. “Did you have to make the next ball explode like that?”

“I wanted to wipe the smug grin off that guy's face. Besides! You were able to keep the guards from arresting us by waving your charm in their faces.”

“Yes, because I was the 'foreign diplomat's royal escort' in spite of the fact we did zero diplomacy that night.”

“It worked out didn't it?” She grinned, floating a little bit next to him. “And you didn't have to explain to anyone where that diplomat was from.”

“No one batted an eye. Though I can't believe how lucky we got there with no one finding out you were a twili.”

“Well, I had my illusion no one even realized. They just thought I was some eccentric noblewoman from Labrynna.”

“And I was the poor Chosen assigned to her...” He shook his head a little, smiling before a sigh escaped his lips. “I miss those days.”
“Can’t say I blame you. Maybe we’ll get lucky though.”

“Heh.” He yawned then and glanced back to the spring. “Well, looks like we did.”

“What?”

“I see Epona.” He got to his feet. Sure enough, the mare was taking a drink from the water as Renado spoke with a guard. Midna darted back into his shadow and another illusion wrapped itself around him. Link soon exited the cave and approached them. His eyes noted the shard of agony on the guard’s hip next to the traditional sheikah sword.

“I already told you,” Renado said to the guard. “I had to leave my horse at the goron village because he was exhausted from the trip up. I was lucky one of Darunia’s friends had one that was available. Darunia said a courier would take it then south to Ordon along with some letters.”

“And you’re here to return it to them,” the guard replied. “With respect, we have a wanted man we’re looking for who was last seen up on the mountain and he had an Eldin Drafter.”

“How can you be sure it’s the right one though?” Link asked. “Eldin Drafters all look very similar. Ruddy colored with white manes and tails. How’re you sure this is the one you’re looking for?”

The guard turned to face Link, folding his arms. “Better safe than sorry. Not sure exactly who he is but if The Crown is offering a thousand rupees for him, must be someone important enough that we can’t take chances.”

“He might know though he’s being hunted,” Renado countered. “And in which case, the smartest thing to do initially would be to get rid of specific identifying aspects.”

“Yeah, that’s a good point.”

“He probably headed into Holodrum,” Link lied. If not for the seriousness, he was sure his shadow would be snickering. “Go along the pass and then slip across the border.”

“You’re surprisingly sharp, mister,” the guard said.

“Do a lot of traveling. Now, if you don’t’ mind, I have some letters to deliver.”

The guard studied Link for a moment and then looked at Epona. After a moment he nodded slowly. “Might be better to leave at dawn for it.”

“Probably will be, but glad to have a ride. Walking all the way wouldn’t have been fun.”

“Heh. I hear that.” The guard looked back at Renado for a moment. “Sorry for the trouble. Couldn’t take the risks. Impa The Elder has been insistent on increasing our guard recently.”

“I understand,” the shaman said.

“You two have a pleasant evening.” The guard returned to the gate. Once gone, Link looked at Renado.

“Clever disguise you have there,” he said.

“I know quite a few tricks,” Link replied. He approached his mare and attached the saddlebags once more to her. “Hey girl, you miss me?” Link stroked Epona’s neck gently.
“Have to be if you’re a hexer.” That caused the hylian to stop and immediately look at Renado. The shaman held his hands up. “I noticed the elixirs in your bag. Your secret is safe though. I know full well how magic is not inherently good or evil. That it’s all how one uses it.”

Link let his relief show. “Thank you.” He looked back to Epona for a moment then. “Are you heading back up the mountain?”

“Soon.”

“Good. I need you to tell Darunia that I made it down safely. And that he needs to send about a dozen cobble crushers along the narrower pass.”

“Why?”

“There is a blin camp that was set up along it. They tunneled out of a secluded patch of the mountain. How they got there, I have theories, but it needs to be taken care of, and quickly. Before they attack the village.”

Renado nodded. “I can do that.”

“Thank you.”

“Of course. We need to help each other in these trying times.” Renado looked to the camp. “Especially with good becoming blurred.” He turned to Link again. “You don’t strike me as the sort to just abandon people in need.”

“Got that right,” Link heard his shadow mutter.

Link ignored it in favor nodding to Renado. “I like helping people.”

“As do I. I do however think you should stay the night. Epona did take the cart a long ways. She needs her rest.”

“Yeah. She does. We’ll be gone first thing in the morning.”

The sun was starting to set as they neared the northern gates of Hyrule Castle. Surrounding a piece of the walls was an encampment of soldiers loyal to The Crown. Link watched as a group of light cavalry went past them on the road, giving them the right of way. They didn’t seem to even notice or care about him. Soon as they were gone, he glanced briefly at his shadow under his feet. “It’s working it seems,” he whispered.

“You doubted me?” he heard in his ear.

“Just a little nervous. Remembering the last time I was here.” He rode across the bridge and was halted by a pair of guards. Unlike the soldiers, they wore less armor and each carried spears. They also wore more leathers as opposed to mail or plate.

“What is your business in Castle Town?” the guard asked.

“I’m visiting a friend,” Link said. “Should only be here a day.”

The guards talked amongst themselves briefly. He heard mention of a curfew briefly before the one
who had been talking turned back to him. “Charge is fifty rupees for a stable for your horse, but we can waive it for a scout.”

He tried not to look surprised, but took Epona by the bridle and pulled a purple gem from his wallet to hand to the guard. “Thank you,” he said, walking past the guards. “Scout?” he whispered.

“You’re already wearing greens and look kinda like you’ve been in the field a while,” Midna said. “Just a little work to make you look like you’re one of their agents.”

“Clever.”

“Besides, I only need to put the illusion over your head this way. Less strain on keeping the spell working.”

“A regular scout isn’t going to be allowed into the castle.”

“I know. I’ll change it later. You might want to ditch the shoulder though. It is a clear mark and can be easy to identify. Your old chain shoulders and upper arms were less conspicuous because of no markings and common among scouts and light soldiers.”

“Didn’t really get a chance to grab those on my way out.” He took Epona to the stables near the edge of the wall and took care of her before walking into town. Link also took several of the potions out of her saddle bag, including the more dangerous ones before heading towards the keep.

As he did, the buildings started to look nicer. There were fewer people on the streets as well. What had once been busy streets filled with people and stalls of people selling goods were mostly empty. It had become a familiar sight to Link during his time away from the front. People were going about their business quickly as well and avoiding eye contact. This was not how the city should have been.

He looked back over his shoulder as he started into a narrow alleyway. Six guards marched by, spears on their shoulders. Once they’d passed he stepped out and kept going. Eventually he came to a fairly impressive house nestled among similar ones. The windows had drapes drawn and Link saw a pair of soldiers outside it. They appeared to be occupied and talking to one another in the light of the setting sun. Glancing around, he didn’t see anyone else other than the soldiers. The door opened then and another emerged. A captain, if the armor was any indication, but it looked far nicer than the ones he’d seen in the field. They wore a royal purple cloak and their helm was far more ornate as well. He watched them talk to the guards before they and one of the soldiers headed down the street, leaving a single guard standing at the door.

“That can’t be good,” Link heard in his ear.

He let out a sigh. “They’re questioning people,” he said. “Talking to my contacts.”

“So what’re you going to do?”

Link thought for a minute on the situation at hand. He glanced back at his shadow. “We’ve come this far. And the last thing we want is causing an incident that pulls your people into this war.”

“All it’d take is a cadre or two in the right places from what I heard at the camp last night.”

Link looked back to his shadow slowly. “Is it really that bad?”

“Sounding that way.”
He let out a long sigh and looked back to the building the guard stood outside of. Torches were starting to be lit along the roads. He looked up then. Several of the houses had small balconies. “I’ve got it.” He stepped out of the alleyway and went north, away from the guard. They glanced up at him, but then back to the cobblestone streets. Link worked his way around to the other side of the houses. There was a moat there that separated the town from the keep and Royal Palace. After a quick glance around, he climbed in the water and swam for Shad’s house. A minute later, he was in the back of the house. He looked up at the wall, seeing no guards upon it and aimed his clawshot at one of the pillars on the balcony. The device fired suddenly and the claws dug into the armrest. Pushing one of the buttons on the grip, he was reeled up at a rapid rate to here he could climb over it with ease. The doors were unlocked and he pushed one open ever so carefully to avoid making noise.

“Are you absolutely sure?” a woman said. The voice Link recognized instantly. He flattened himself against the wall, hand going for the crossbow on his belt.

“Quite,” a man said. Another voice he recognized. “I have not seen him since he returned from the Castor Wilds with Lana and the wounded. And even then, he was whisked away so quickly by The Sheikah and Royal Guard I didn’t get a chance to even say two words to him. Until I heard the news from Auru about him… Going rogue. Are those guards okay? He doesn’t know the meaning of a fair fight when it’s just his fists. I’ve seen it.”

“No one was killed if that’s what you were asking. And you’re saying he never mentioned any of this to you at all?”

“Not a word.” Link heard his friend sigh. “Who are you going to ask next? The other Chosen? Lana or Cia? Both of them?”

“The investigation is ongoing,” another woman said. It made Link freeze. No wonder there’d been a Royal Guard captain there. “When there is more that we are comfortable sharing, it will be done publically. For the moment, we are trying to keep it quiet and not alert the public to what has happened. We don’t want to cause a panic that a Chosen has possibly defected.”

“I see. Will I still have access to the archives in The Royal Library then? Or is your suspicion given my working history with Link a reason to restrict my research and movements?”

“For the time being, only magi and agents sanctioned by The Crown themselves will be allowed access,” the princess said. “As much as I enjoy our discussions and you have been a valuable friend during these trying times, preparations for the siege take precedence.” Link heard movement downstairs, plate and chainmail clinking against one another.

“So it’s true then. You’ve found where the so-called King of Thieves is hiding.”

“And how did you learn of this?” Impa said.

“Just rumor, general. Many of my alumni are fearful of the events of the war. And I have no problem saying I am as well, especially given the other academics I knew from the desert. People are scared. Fearful that their neighbors may be spies for The Tribes. Especially since there are rumors right now surrounding Link? If one of the Chosen of Farore herself has turned on The Crown and thus The Goddesses… And if they learn they are not mere rumors…”

“Enough,” she said. “That is why we have come. Why we are talking now. To try and figure out what he’s up to so we can prevent him from hurting anyone. Before he kills someone connected
with The Crown.”

“...I see.”

“He must be punished, he has been insubordinate,” Zelda said, Link recognizing the style of speaking she was using. “And he badly hurt the soldiers who went to capture him when he abandoned his charm. But I know he’s trying to do what he thinks is right rather than following what will actually work. Shad. Help me bring him back.”

“I don’t know if I can convince him, your highness. Besides. You’ve known him longer and better than I ever will.”

There was a long pause. Link felt his fingers coiling around the grip of his crossbow. His left hand had gone to the grip of his sword. The second woman spoke up then. “Then we shall take our leave. Thank you for your time. I’m sure we’ll be speaking again soon.”

“As am I.” There was about a minute of movement Link caught downstairs through his ears but he still didn’t let go of his weapons.

“Midna?” he whispered.

“I closed the doors behind us,” she said in his ear. “Don’t sense any spellwork here to detect things. It’s just us and your friend now. We’re safe. I’m gonna let the illusion drop. Save my strength a little in case we need it again.”

“Okay.” Only then did he let go of his blade and crossbow. He pulled his hat off, still soaked from the moat water, and looked for a place to wring it out. Link heard the stairs creak from below. When he looked out the door of the library he stood in, he saw the other hylian. He looked like he had been interrupted while having dinner if the napkin still stuffed in his collar was any indication. His glasses slipped down his nose when he saw Link and his mouth fell open. He was about to speak, but Link quieted him.

“There is still a guard out front,” he said.

“Wh-what are you doing here, old boy?!” Shad said in a hushed voice. “The entire kingdom’s looking for you! And you show up right here as I have a discussion with Zelda and Impa downstairs about what you’re doing?!”

Link raised his hands. “It’s a long story, Shad.”

“What in Demise’s name were you thinking?! Beat over a dozen guards senseless and then steal a horse? And for what?”

“She didn’t say?” Link felt himself tensing up. He wondered if he could trust the scholar now.

“Said it was a matter of national security. That Ganondorf has spies everywhere and that whatever was going on she couldn’t discuss it here.” He reached up to push his glasses back up on the bridge of his nose with an index finger.

“If I tell you, it might make you a target.”

“I’d say I’m already a target just by knowing you along with the fact that I had a number of other contacts from the Zuna Ports before the war started! You always seem to just attract the strangest
curiosities and nonsense! Do you have any idea how much of a headache it causes sometimes?”

“Join the club,” Midna muttered quietly. Not quietly enough though.

The scholar looked around. “…Who said that?”

Link looked at his shadow for a moment. He let out a sigh. “You’d better sit down, Shad,” he said. “This will take a while to explain. And if things weren’t so desperate I wouldn’t be here anyways.” He reached up and scratched a little behind his left ear.

“Only you would be crazy enough to sneak into a house via the moat.” He pulled the napkin out of his collar and walked to one of the chairs in the room before sitting down.

“Front door wasn’t exactly an option.” He folded his arms and leaned against the wall. Once Shad appeared comfortable Link glanced at his shadow again. “You can come out now.”

“Does he really have to see me like this?” Midna asked.

“Would make working together a little easier.” He looked back at Shad for a moment, the look on his friend’s face saying it all. “No one else has to unless you want them to.”

“Fine…” In nearly an instant the imp emerged from his shadow.

Link glanced back in time to see Shad jump out of his seat. His glasses slipped down his nose again as his brows rose in shock. “Wh-what is that?!”

Midna glared at him, baring her teeth.

“Remember The Conjunction?” Link asked. “I mentioned two people to you who had helped me. Ravio and Midna.” He looked to the imp that was floating in front of him. “You met Ravio, briefly. This is Midna.”

The other hylian slowly calmed, his natural curiosity starting to get the better of him rather than the fear of the unknown. He looked her over carefully. “So… So you’re the infamous Midna?”

It was her turn to have a brow raised. She spun in the air to face Link. “Just how much have you told him about me?” Her tiny hands were on her hips.

“That you were a bit of a troublemaker. And a couple of our jobs during the conjunction,” Link said. “Nothing else, I swear.”

“Oh really?” She grinned at him in a way that felt entirely appropriate given her current shape.

Chapter End Notes

And another Wednesday so that means it's another chapter!

Devnotes: Only one this week.
-I thought about numerous ways to get the backstory about the war in but with the focus on Link, it meant that the only way he'd know is from serious history and all. I know it's better to show and not tell, but getting through so much backstory could prolly fill a book itself.
We finally see Zelda! Well, not so much see, but hear. One of the characters I am most worried about for this story.

Only five chapters left before the first arc is completed! Again, want to remind everyone that I'll be taking a month or possibly two hiatus once that is done, but there may still be little pieces of things related to the story here and there showing up on Ao3 and my tumblr.

Special thanks to Untrust_Us for the bookmark last week! And as always, a huge thank you to every reader, comment and for every kudo you guys give. I'll see you all next week. Keep being awesome!
“…And that’s the long and the short of it,” Link said, finishing his tale of escape and desire to find a way to end the war. “I can’t keep working with the army if they are carrying out acts like that massacre. But I can’t support what The Tribes are doing either with escalating retaliation becoming the norm. And I’ll be damned if I’m going to leave my home to this blood bath.”

Shad rubbed his glasses with the napkin as he sat back down. The fireplace burned and lit the room with an orange light. Midna floated with her legs crossed in a sitting position next to Link as he sat opposite of Shad. The scholar nodded a little. “I can perfectly understand those concerns,” he said. “Can you trust Medli though?”

“Just like I trust Midna and Ravio; with my life.” He rolled his shoulders a little and sat forward. His elbows rested on his knees. “She’s one of Valoo’s Handmaidens after all. And the Dragon Roost Tribe are couriers. So she has access to that information network. And not like they’re the ones on the Tabantha Frontier, so less risk of people finding any useful information.”

“I would assume then she told you about the refugees.” Link nodded in response. Shad chuckled a little. “You’re the only Chosen I know of who has such extensive contacts outside of Hyrule.” He looked at Midna for a moment. “And ones from beyond this world.”

“You’ve got a lot too,” Link said. “Surprised that Impa the Elder hasn’t had you dragged off to be questioned about them.”

“Well, I almost was. I think it was Zelda who covered for me, but I’m sure she’s running out of patience for the princess.” He wiped his mouth with the napkin and looked at his now empty plate. He stood up and took it to a tray near the fireplace and left it there before turning to face Link again. “There’s been some difficulties as well recently with her brother and some new advisor. With everything that’s been going on, I haven’t had a chance to talk much with her outside of the business of running a nation.”

“She never mentioned the massacre?” He glanced briefly to Midna, who was floating next to him in a sitting position. She appeared bored, inspecting her nails.

“No, but I’m not privy to military actions. I’m cleared to discuss major events and the like with Chosen or a Tower Mage, but any movements are strictly forbidden.” He folded his arms then. “You know what it was like. Everything compartmentalized. Chosen and Military actions remain mostly with them, diplomacy was its own department and then The Sheikah with their spies and inquisitors.”

“Yeah, we’ve probably not seen everything.” Link agreed. He felt a pang in his chest as he thought back on the choice he’d made weeks ago, wondering if it was still right, but nodded slightly before looking back to Shad. “Zelda’s just trying to do what she can with the information she has and we’re all in the dark a little. And have to make our choices as best we can.”

“Yeah. And even then a lot of people have not been discussing it with me anyways. I think it’s because of my contacts in the desert.” He looked down at his feet for a moment before looking back up at him. “I completely lost contact with all but two or three of them a few weeks before Ganondorf’s forces crossed the Zora River last year. I fear that they were hanged.” He sighed and
shook his head as he went back to his chair. “Academia and rationality is usually one of the first casualties of hysteria.”

“Don’t I know it.”

“Not meanin’ to interrupt this social call, but I do need to get back sooner rather than later or else this war is going to get a whole lot worse when my people come looking for me.” Midna said. “We’re the reason why people are so superstitious of mirrors after all.”

“Right, sorry.” Shad said. “From what you’ve told me and the notes you’ve brought, it looks like this was a piece of a popular old ballad.” He went to one of the shelves and started looking along the book spines. “A tale about the masks we wear to hide our pain. Our failures and fears and overcoming them. A number of different scholars have written works on it actually. One historian from Holodrum actually had…”

“We don’t need all the details,” Link said. “Just what elements of it are true so we can figure out which song will break the curse.”

“That’s what I’m trying to find, old boy.” Shad pulled one of the books from the shelf and started to flip through it. “Most of the time, the truthful elements will be what is common in each story. For instance every Hero was supposedly blessed by Farore herself. Now, we don’t know for sure if she actually did or they earned her blessing through the trials they overcame, but The Hero of Legend is always associated with The Goddess of Courage.”

“We know that though,” Midna said.

“Well, sometimes it’s things that are only in the oldest stories. If you can trace it though, you can reasonably determine what is likely to be true and what is likely embellished or false.” He handed Link the book after he’d opened it to roughly the middle. “This book covers some of those details. Given the popularity of The Hero even, he was worked into this tale. Or maybe it was that way to begin with.” He pulled another book then from the shelf. “Something absolutely fascinating though is the similarities in the three primary stories. One with a deku scrub, the one with the goron that you found in the village on Death Mountain and the one with the zoras Link was able to get. Like they could have been completely independent of one another with a different hero in each one. They could have all been just tied together by another bard who found turning it into an epic connected with Majora’s Mask was something to gain fame with.”

Link looked to the imp. “Can you read any of this?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she said, floating over his shoulder. “This looks like the goron one. And your song is mentioned again.”

“It’s not uncommon of for the old tales to involve music to break curses.” Shad said, looking at the book in his hands. “You can even hear the exact songs used in some in tales.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” Link asked.

“Well, without the proper training or a medium for the magic, it’s just talking,” Midna said. “Like why in some cases saying the magic words to a spell doesn’t actually do anything. Like your signs. You have to will them and focus a little to make them go off. Otherwise whenever you made a gesture you’d be throwing magic everywhere.”

“Good point.” He flipped the page after a moment to look at the next one. “So, we need the song
“Unless one of you has formal singing,” Shad said, pulling down a couple more books. He checked each one before putting them on the table. One he took back to his chair. “The notes have to be right and channeled with magic.”

“Don’t look at me,” Midna said. “I don’t sing. I dance. And because my magic is the way it is in this shape it might not be strong enough to break it if I even could hit the right notes.”

Link let out a sigh and rubbed his eyes. “Okay. And knowing how powerful that mask was…”

“We’d need an equally powerful instrument then.”

Shad dropped one of the books he was holding. It landed on his foot and he let out a soft curse. “You’re not going to do what I think you’re going to do?” he said with a wince. Shad limped slowly back over to his chair, picking up one of the books.

“And what’re we planning?” Midna asked, smirking.

“You’re planning on taking The Goddess Harp. Right out from Zelda’s chambers!”

The imp laughed a little. “You’re already talking to a deserter if the wanted posters are any indication. What was it? A thousand rupees for whoever brought you in alive to be hanged?”

Link looked up at her with annoyance for a moment, catching her grinning. He looked back at Shad then. “Not the harp,” he said. “I don’t know how to play it anyways.”

“Then…” Shad shook his head then and looked down. He looked back up at them a second later, teeth barred and brow lowered. “I have half a mind to go get that guard downstairs right now. The Ocarina of Time?! The mere fact that you are thinking of breaking into the castle to steal one of the most valuable relics in the entire kingdom is… Insane!” He pointed at them both. “There is a reason why such an instrument has been kept within The Royal Family for generations! Just like the harp! To protect that power…”

“That power from those who would cause harm with it,” Midna said with him. “Majora’s Mask was safely locked away in one of our vaults when some idiot stole it out of them. Know all about that whole spiel.” She folded her arms. “And if it weren’t for the politics, I’d have suggested using one of ours. As it is though, me showing up like this could spark them wanting to get involved in the war.”

“That may be, but this is an act that goes way beyond what Link was already doing. We… accept that there are some unsavory actions that we must take given the course of this war. Some of it is not things we are happy with, but we have to make those sacrifices for the greater good. There are still ways we can try and handle this without needing to resort to something like this. It’s why I haven’t left yet. Still hoping that maybe I can convince the nobles to come back to the table.”

“It is,” Link said. “But what choice do we have?” He looked to his companion. “Longer she stays, the riskier it’ll be for everyone. I’ve already worked with the Zoras of Snowpeak’s Domain who want to stay neutral in this. And the gorons of Death Mountain who we’ve had a broken alliance with in the buildup to this war.” Link looked back to Shad. “I’m already wanted for desertion as it is. For doing what I was trained for; to be among those chosen to keep Hyrule right. And if it is wrong to set it right. There are no stories of The Hero walking his path to set The Kingdom right when they have committed crimes. So that’s where I’m standing right now.”
The room was silent for a minute. Link kept his eyes on his friend. It pained him to have put Shad in a position like this. He knew he was thinking of going to get the guard then. Midna drifted down between. “We have another problem though,” she said. “You’ve talked to Zelda and we just showed up here. It was coincidence, but The Sheikah Inquisitors might not see it that way.” Shad’s face lost all color at that. “I’m just saying that’s what might happen given how jumpy everyone is around here. You said it yourself. People are scared of spies and their neighbors. We have to do this. And you’re going to probably be the first person they come asking.”

“I can’t stay then…” Shad said. “Even after everything I’ve tried.” He shook his head slowly. “They’ll come for me.” He looked up at Link, anger in his eyes. His lip curled down in a sneer. “All because you had to…”

“Shad, I’m not going to hang you out to dry,” Link said. “You don’t have to give us the songs or any other information.” He held his hands up. “If you need to get out of here, we’ll get you out. Have a place you can even go and continue your research on the sky tribes.”

The anger left his face, replaced with clear suspicion, but Link recognized the curiosity in his eyes. “You’d do that?”

He nodded. “Your help during my career as a Chosen has been invaluable. As has your friendship. And I’m aware of how bad a place I’ve put a lot of people in. I think about what this has done to Lana and Cia. What’s going through the heads of Master Horwell and Swiftblade. Or my fellow Chosen like Pipit and Groose. For all I know I gave Rauru a stroke when he heard what I’ve done.” Link sighed. “Trust me. I’m aware of this. And I want to try and make sure I put as much of it right as I can.”

“And you can’t go back…” Shad nodded slowly. “You thought a lot about this before deciding.”

“I did. Hardest decision I ever made.” Link stood slowly. “Won’t force you. But if you do want to help us, we’ll make sure you can pursue your passion. Get you out of the castle and make a big enough distraction that they’ll come looking for me rather than you.”

“Right…” He rubbed his eyes, slipping a hand under his glasses. He was quiet for nearly a minute. Midna moved to speak, but Link held up a hand and looked at her. His eyes wider than usual and the long shape of his mouth told her everything, so she stayed quiet. Finally, Shad ran a hand back up through his hair, looking at a leatherbound journal on a table next to his chair. “So, if I were to agree, where would I be going to continue my work? It’s a daft idea to wander Lanayru or Eldin Province without any sort of an escort. Especially the southern reaches of Lanayru. Called No Man’s Land for a reason out there.”

“Death Mountain. An archeologist there by the name of Gorko has been researching the sky tribes for probably as long as you have. He helped Midna get this information.”

Shad’s head snapped to look at Link. “Wait, THE Gorko?!” The scholar seemed completely surprised. “I thought he was still wandering! I’ve read some of his work. My father had a couple of his papers!”

“You know of him?” Midna asked. Link caught the hesitance in her voice.

“He’s one of the leading experts on the sky tribes! I think I have one of his papers around here actually. My personal paper, not just borrowed from The Archives. About The Isle of The Goddess. It was a massive city in the clouds, built by a tribe of ancient hylians known as The
The imp gave Link a look as she planed her hands on her hips. He had to smile a little. It was nice to see Shad excited. “Let’s not get too ahead of ourselves yet,” Link said. “That’s only if you want to help us. After all, leaving Castle Town is going to be difficult.”

“I know. Yes. We must think this through properly,” Shad said. “I do this and I lose my tenure and ability to research at the Royal Library. Leave Zelda to this entire conflict.” He picked up one of the books off the floor. “Or I abandon it and have a chance to learn more and discuss my work, my father’s work, with an expert and maybe publish a paper that becomes world-renowned…” He clenched a fist and bowed his head to rest his chin on it. “And perhaps survive long enough to actually help bring about an end to this dreadful war rather than end up in a cell or hanged…”

“Don’t make this choice lightly,” Midna said.

“I’m not.” Shad handed Link the book then. “We leave tonight. You can get into the castle on your own I’m sure.”

“Are you sure?” Midna asked. “A minute ago you were thinking about going to get the guard.”

“You’re giving me an opportunity. A chance to prove my theories right. To prove my father’s work was not in vain and escape possible problems here until I can find a solution. When he died, his theories were not accepted. But he had enough that it survived. And if Gorko is still working on this, I can bring some of my father’s books. His research. Together we might find something. Something that vindicates all the time and effort he put into this. I can’t do all my work in the library after all. Have to eventually go out and dig in the field. Speak with other scholars.” He started digging through his books. “Maybe that’s one of the solutions to ending the war. No one’s talking anymore. If I can get to my desert contacts maybe we can start that again. Small steps to start to get us back to the table.”

“We leave tonight then,” Link said. “There’s a way we can get into the castle beyond its walls.”

“Let me gather my packs. Would you be so kind to gather the books I will require?”

“Sure.”

“Thank you.” Shad was smiling again. “When we’re beyond the walls, I’ll show you the songs.”

“Okay, so we need a plan now,” Midna said. “How’re we going to get you out of here undetected? I can’t cast an illusion over both of you.”

“I’m open to suggestions,” Shad said. “I can’t swim, and with all the books I have I’d sink like a stone.”

“I can carry the books, don’t worry about that.” She demonstrated, her hair extending and shaping into a hand to pick one of the ones from his chair up. The red hand twisted around and the book broke into tiny black squares that vanished. Midna gave him a grin.

“Fascinating!” He began to pull several more books down to take.

“Hey, don’t go overboard.” She bobbed in the air a little. “You’re gonna be carrying these when you’re out there as we’ve gotta get back in the castle still.”
“We’ll still need a way out,” Link said. “The guard out front is still there and curfew is in effect.”

The scholar nodded a couple times as he pulled another book from his shelf. “Well, you were able to escape with a trainee’s tunic and a helmet,” Shad said. “Do you still have them?”

“They’re back at Death Mountain.”

“But I could get one!” Midna said. “And in this shape too I wouldn’t have to hitch a ride in someone’s shadow like when I had to get Link’s. I can just float up to the top window and get in through there.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, easy. I’ll get you some of those chain shoulders as well like you had when you were wearing blue instead of green.”

“Okay. And when you get back you put the illusion back around Link while I wear the recruit’s armor?” Shad asked.

Link nodded. “I’ll slip out when she returns and act like a guard come to relieve him. Once he’s gone, you’ll come out. They won’t question a guard escorting a trainee.”

“Okay,” Midna said. “Be ready when I get back.” She floated towards the doors to the balcony and opened one. She slipped out and was gone.

The scholar pulled a couple more books, organizing them. “Have you done something like this before?” he asked.

“A couple times. But didn’t have help with illusions. And we had more time to prepare and build a cover in case something did go wrong.” He looked at Shad then. “Which is what we need to do a little work on even if you’re wearing a helmet for most of this…”

“What do you mean?”

“You still have that dark shoe polish?” Link picked up the small shovel for the fireplace and pulled some of the ash and soot out with it. “By the time Midna gets back you won’t even recognize your own face.”

After sneaking out the back once more, Link shook as best he could to get the water off him. Link looked at his shadow. He wrung his hat out in the moat and pulled it back on. He glanced at his shadow for a moment after adjusting the chain spaulders he now wore. It was comforting to have them again on his shoulders and upper arms. “Ready?”

“Ready,” his partner said. He felt a slight tingle of magic and glanced down at his hands. The leather gloves and armor turned to black squares for a moment before they flipped over. He now appeared to be in the chainmail of a soldier. He had the blue and white tabard over his body as well and greaves over his shins.

“Do I have a helmet?” he asked in a whisper.

“Of course!”
“Okay.” He took a deep breath and stepped out of the alleyway, right foot first as if he was marching. He stood with his back straight as he could, eyes glancing about quickly to ensure no one else was around. Six guards walked by with spears shouldered in a straight line. They walked right past him without realizing he was the most wanted man in Hyrule. Link turned a corner and soon came to the front of Shad’s house. The soldier stood there, leaning against the wall and spear tucked in his arm. He rubbed his hands together and pulled his leather gloves back. Link approached them. They instantly stood at attention when they heard him.

“Sir!” he said.

“I’m your relief,” Link said.

“Oh, good… I’m starting to freeze out here.” He pulled his visor up. “Do you know what this guy did to get a visit from General Impa?”

He shook his head. “Not a clue. I think I overheard Princess Zelda say it was a matter of national security though.” Link almost added that they were supposed to keep him there, but he didn’t know the actual orders of the guard. Any little detail he got wrong he knew would get caught. “Go hit the bunks.”

“Gladly. Stay warm.” The guard pushed off the wall and walked away.

“Thanks.” Link remained tense. His hands had been ready to coil into fists and clobber them in the jaw. He’d have gone for a kick to their knee as well while they were focused on his fist. When they turned the corner though and were out of view he let out a sigh of relief. He waited a minute before knocking on the door three times. He heard footsteps inside and the door opened. Link got a look at his handiwork. The scholar was barely recognizable. His hair was darkened and had been messed with to make it look like he had spent the night in a stable. Ash had been peppered on his face and there was a fresh gash still on his chin. He dabbed it with a handkerchief a couple times before adjusting his glasses once more.

“Was it really necessary to cut myself? I look like I tried to take my chin off while shaving,” he said.

“It just has to look like you got in a fight,” Link said. “Slouch a little more and relax your eyes. You’re a recruit who’s had too much to drink at The Plush Unicorn after being given his first post.” He smirked slightly. “Maybe his first visit too.”

“I am slouching and…” It was clear he wasn’t relaxing his eyes. “I say! Why would I even visit…”

“Shhh!” Midna hissed from the shadows. “The next patrol will be through soon!”

“Sorry, this is just a lot.” He took a deep breath and looked at his feet. “I don’t know how you’re able to do this sort of thing for a living, Link.”

“I know,” Link said. He put a hand on Shad’s shoulder. “When in doubt just let me do the talking. I’m your superior here. Tabards say so.” He looked carefully over his friend. “Helmet on. Slouch a little more.”

He obeyed and Link gave a nod. “How do I look?”

“Perfect for this. Let’s go.”
Know this is a bit late, but here it is! It's a little later than I'd have liked to get it posted, but still.

Devnotes:
- Shad's character I was quite confident with putting together, even though his introduction had me a bit worried. From what we see in TP, he's clearly fairly smart, even if it seems like Link does a pile of work in the main game. Wanted to show off some of his knowledge and all here.
- The idea to have them steal the Ocarina of Time kinda was thrown in when I realized I needed something very powerful to break the curse. So why not use what was originally used in the games?
- Getting Shad out of the city used a little bit of research into real-world espionage exfiltrations such as the "Canadian Caper". Admittedly I'm glossing over a huge amount of detail for a great number of reasons, but given Link's gotten people out of nasty situations before. Heck, one of the previous pieces I did leading up to this story was a rescue mission.

Only four more chapters before the first 'season' for lack of a better term is over! Again, I want to thank everyone and just say you guys are awesome. Thank you to everyone who's read, commented, bookmarked and left kudos!

I'll see you all next week! Keep being awesome and thanks for reading as always!
They started walking through the streets. Link had seen Castle Town at night many times before. This was however the first time he’d seen it in detail with the curfew in effect. Only guards walked the streets in pairs, while some soldiers. A couple cafes that would have been open in peaceful times were closed up tight. Torches were lit, but there were no conversations. The midsummer festival that was usually held long into the night was empty in the heart of the town. He watched another patrol of guards march towards the castle as they neared the northern exit. In silence, the two walked past the guards there. Link glanced at one of them for a moment as they stepped onto the bridge and walked into the camp outside the walls. Given the hour they didn’t encounter many other guards or soldiers and by keeping quiet, they slipped through.

There was always the fear though. The fear that one minor mistake would have them get caught. And as they neared the edge of the camp, Link stopped cold as he heard voices from one of the tents.

“Lana will be here tomorrow,” a man said. “She is coming with one of the Chosen.” Link quickly moved to between two dark tents, Shad right behind him. He could see into one nearby. A pair of guards stood outside and light from within let him see a woman. She was dressed in long purple robe with white accents and was leaning over a table. The sleeves seemed particularly large. Her short white hair was bobbed close. For a moment he saw her glance up before going back to the table.

“They don’t trust me to handle something like this, so they call my sister in, typical…” the woman replied. “How many times must I repeat myself then? The information was wrong. We made a mistake. The commander made a mistake. And if we make that move the general is talking about, we’ll be leaving the Southern Pass open. And this time it won’t be a stream of refugees. It’ll be cavalry. Gerudo light cavalry and bulblin war boars to wreak havoc on the farmlands to get a foothold. They do that, they’ll be able to strike along the river. Even this far north. And our wind mage can only do so much.”

“They are only coming to aid in operations like you are. She’s coming to assist in the investigation and provide additional security.”

“One Chosen and a Tower Sorceress aren’t enough?” He saw her shake her head in a way that was all too familiar to him. If not for the circumstances, he’d have smiled a little. She always did that when she was feeling ignored.

“Given the fact that we may very well be able to cut the head off the snake we can’t afford those chances.”

“That may be but…” Link felt the charm around his neck beginning to shake. Shad stopped at the edge of the tent and looked back. He felt his fingers curling, ready to grab the sword off his back.

“If we have to fight our way out, this is going to get bloody fast,” Midna whispered in Link’s ear. The wolf continued to shake. He felt it warming up even against his chest. For a moment, he saw her glance out the doorway. He didn’t know if she spotted him, but was ready to bolt, with his blade drawn if he had to.
“Shad, get ready to run,” he whispered. “Go north past the ruined sanctuary and then follow the road East. There’s a pass before you get to Kakariko. Take it and you’ll make it to the goron village.”

“But…” he began.

“Don’t argue. You’re caught with me they’ll hang you for sure.”

“Lady Cia?” the unseen man in the tent said. “Is something wrong?”

She pushed her hands off the table. “Perhaps… Perhaps I’m a little tired…” she said. Link felt his charm stop shaking and saw her rub her forehead. “I can’t help but feel there’s something we’re missing, but it’s so late we’re not seeing it. Tomorrow we’ll take another look.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.” She stepped out of the tent. “Goodnight, captain.” Once outside she took a right and was no longer in their vision.

“That was close,” Midna said in his ear.

“Too close,” Link said. “Let’s get going before we run into another.” He was sure she’d realized he was there, but was thankful she didn’t reveal his presence. Link quickly headed past the tent with Shad still behind him and as the moonlight was obscured by a cloud, slipped out of the camp.

They walked for another hour before reaching the small sanctuary and graveyard that had been long burned to the ground. As they approached, Link spotted smoke and a couple shapes moving around the ruins. He looked to Shad, who looked ready to collapse from the walking in the chainmail.

“Midna,” Link whispered. “Drop the illusion.”

“Are you sure?” he heard her ask. “I’ll go check what’s ahead in the shadows if I do.”

“I’m sure.”

“You had people there already?” Shad asked.

He shook his head as the illusion around him broke apart. “They’re probably refugees.” Link started for the ruins again. He kept his right hand back, ready to pull his shield. They walked forward.

“Five of them,” Midna said, returning to his shadow. “Two men and a woman. Two children too.”

“Refugees. Any weapons?”

“What?” Shad asked.

Before Midna could respond there was a snap and a whistle. Link quickly pulled his shield from
his back and moved so he was standing in front of Shad. A crossbow bolt shattered against the steel.

“Don’t come any closer!” a voice shouted. “Just turn around!”

“Not here to fight!” Link cried back. “What’s your name?”

“I…”

“What’s your name, stranger?” Link put his shield on his back and raised his hands to show he wasn’t a threat. He glanced back at Shad quickly. “Put your hands up.”

“But he has a crossbow,” Shad whispered.

“It’ll take him a few seconds to reload it. I can get the shield again to block it and if I have to I can close the gap with Farore’s Wind.” Link looked back at the man with the crossbow hiding behind the wall in the ruins. “My name is Link. And I’m trying to help a friend get away from the fighting!”

“You’re not a soldier?” He saw the figure lowering his crossbow. It could mean he was accepting the story, or was readying to reload.

“No. We had to sneak past the camp outside town.”

“Alright…”

“What’s your name?”

“Trevor.”

“Trevor, we don’t want trouble. We’re tired and it’s dangerous to go anywhere alone in No Man’s Land. May we stay with you this night?”

“I…” He looked back for a moment. “Yeah… Yeah you can stay with us for tonight…”

A minute later they were huddled around the fire. A rat was on a spit over the fire while the children slept soundly and bundled in blankets. The ruined sanctuary provided little shelter, but the intact walls at least made it defendable. At the north end of it was the shattered stained glass that had once depicted the creation of the world at the hands of The Golden Goddesses. The woman was huddled close to the children and had a sword in her hands, ready to protect them while the two men were both awake. Link could tell they were all in bad shape. Their simple clothes were stained and tattered. They were likely carrying literally everything they owned on their backs. Their faces were dirty and the men had clearly not had access to any sort of grooming in weeks. Trevor sat down by the fire, keeping his crossbow handy.

“You seem surprisingly well-equipped, Link,” he said. “Sword, shield, a small crossbow… Never seen armor like that before though.”

“Pays to be prepared,” he said. Link looked at Shad. “This is Kelen. He was drafted.”

“Hello,” Shad said, waving a hand.

“Drafted?” the other man said. “Things are getting worse then if they’re taking people not cut out to be fighters.”
“It is,” Link said.

“So why are you two traveling together then?”

“Simple. I was paid to get him out.”

“Ah yes,’ Shad said. “I need to get you that payment… And the books you’re carrying for me.”

Link nodded. “Are you five headed to Holodrum?”

“Aye,” Trevor said. “Anywhere’s better than here. Even if the clans up there are barbaric. At least there you know what you’re getting.”

“It’s a different concept of honor for the clans up there. Battle is a way to serve the Seasonal Spirits. And they don’t have a single throne like Hyrule. It’s a collection of clans and the jarls who lead them.”

“Then how do they maintain order?”

“Council. Each clan has representatives and their jarl leads them. Like the Zora Senate in Snowpeak.”

The group was silent and Link wondered if he should’ve played stupid then. Trevor looked to the woman. “Fiona? That true? You’re from Holodrum.”

“My family was,” she said. “But I was born in Hyrule.”

“You’re not lying by any chance, stranger?” the second man asked.

“I’m not in the habit of lying,” Link said. He could’ve sworn he heard his shadow snickering at the remark. “I do a lot of traveling. Odd jobs for people who need it.” He looked at Shad again. “Such as helping people escape this war.” Link let out a yawn then. “Speaking of which, Kelen, I need my payment.”

“Oh, right,” Shad said. He dug into the pouch on his belt and handed him a piece of paper. Link took it and quickly read it over. It was a pair of songs and his elegant handwriting, telling Link the notes to play and specifics on the two melodies; the Song of Storms and Song of Healing. It also stated that both had been known to remove curses, but he was unsure which would work as such information was sealed away in the Royal Archives. Either way though, he was sure one of them would work.

“A pleasure doing business with you.”

“We could use a sword to help us,” Trevor said. “Would you be willing to help us get to Holodrum?”

For a moment, Link considered the offer. He knew they needed help, but there was more at stake here. He bowed his head. “I would, but I have another contract. I have a noblewoman trying to escape this war and I need to honor it.” Link looked back at the fire and the group around it. “I will give you some advice though to help make your travels safer for no charge. First, avoid the rivers. It’s hard when you get to the pass that takes you to Kakariko or up Death Mountain, but try to use trails and roads that don’t look like they’re as used. Patrol boats are looking for deserters or people who they can press into the war effort. If you find a ruined town or hamlet, check it quick, but don’t waste your time there. Bandits are known to set up ambushes.” He took a deep breath. “Most importantly though, never stop near a tree of hanged men.”
“Why’s that?” Shad asked.

“Deserters and prisoners of war hang. Their last moments are filled with fear and hate. Their souls cannot pass on to The Goddess’ embrace and so they become poes.” At the mention of the wraiths, the entire camp fell silent. “And you cannot kill a specter like that through blade or bow or even magic. You may get lucky and destroy its body, but it will reform when the moon rises again.”

“Then how do you stop them from returning?” the woman asked.

“You must grant the bodies a proper burial. Or burn them on a pyre.”

“And given how we are, I doubt we’d be able to handle them,” Shad said.

They talked a little longer and Link provided them with advice to surviving in the fields. Most of it was aimed at gathering food and fresh water, but also ways to avoid trouble. It wasn’t long though before the woman and Trevor were asleep, leaving Shad, the other refugee and Link the only ones awake. The books Shad had wanted to take with him formed out of Link’s shadow and rested next to him.

“I’ll stay until morning,” Link said quietly. “Then we’re going back.”

“Are you sure about this, Link?” Shad asked. “Going right into the palace?”

“I’m sure.” He yawned himself. “There’s another way in. And it’s why I wanted us to go out this way.”

“There is?”

Link nodded. “In ancient times, an escape tunnel was built that leads through the dungeons.” He looked to the stained glass window. “It’s still intact.”

“And what about getting out?”

“I have a couple ways out. Getting in is the issue. Do this right though and no one will even realize I was there until they notice the ocarina is missing.”

“And if not he can always sneak back out in a trainee’s uniform,” his shadow whispered.

He glanced at his shadow with a slightly annoyed look on his face before looking back at Shad. “I’ll make my way to Death Mountain as soon as I can as well. Make sure you’re settled in and safe. Just in case though, listen to your instincts. If they tell you something is wrong with the group here, go with it. Make it on your own there.”

“Okay.”

Link smiled a little. “Thank you, Shad. I know how tough this is.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone, happy Wednesday! Shorter chapter this week, but last week was a
longer chapter.

Devnotes:
- Was worried about this one, but kinda had no better place to put it as another kinda transition. But hey, gotta show not tell these things and have to show that there's some ordinary people too out there. That it's not just all the heroes and villains.

Another little reminder that we're nearing the end of the first 'season' and that the second one will start in Late December or Early January. **There'll be other things I'll be doing related to it on my Tumblr though.** Including some shorter pieces that may make their way here eventually and possibly some prompts from a list I've thrown together as well as being open for ideas and Q&A. We'll see how it all goes. :)

That'll do it for now. As always huge thank you to every reader, every kudo, every comment and every bookmark! Special thanks this week to Azadrie for their bookmark!

Keep being awesome everyone! See you all next week!
When the dawn came, Link was already awake. He drank some of the last of the stew he’d packed with him from Ordon and stuffed the bottle in a belt pouch. After giving himself a moment to digest, he got up and looked at the refugees. They were still asleep. Even Trevor who had taken the last watch was snoring quietly and against the western stone wall of the ruined sanctuary. Link looked quietly to the stained glass that was shattered and the altar that stood under it. Carefully he went to the right side and began to push. It began to move and after a moment slid freely along the wall. A rotting wooden hatch was there.

“Are you ready?” Link asked in a whisper.

“Born ready,” his shadow responded.

“Good.” He pulled the hatch up and dropped into the hole in the ground. As he pulled the hatch closed over him, he heard a grinding. To his right was a set of old gears which twisted. The altar slid back into place and there was a loud click. Link pulled his lantern from his belt and using his fire striker soon had light. He began walking. The path was narrow but straightforward for a long time until they came to a larger chamber. Water was flowing in it but was no more than ankle deep. Driftwood floated along it as Link walked across to the other side. A couple different passages were there, but Link looked for a mark on the walls that was carved; the symbol of Nayru. Finding it, he headed down that corridor.

“What is it with you and dank dark dungeons?” Midna asked, emerging from his shadow. He didn’t notice she had though. “Seriously, every time we get together we get involved in a place like this.”

“At least this time we didn’t actually start in one,” he said. The shadows of disused torches on the walls grew longer as the light from the lantern on his belt passed them. They came to a corner. Link peered around it. There was nothing ahead. “That reminds me. When I was in that cell… Were you watching me?”

“Not at first.”

“Oh?” He started walking again down the way, spotting another symbol of Nayru carved into the wall.

“I was sightseeing. Using the day to get away from everyone back home. Especially since I just couldn’t stand Zant.” She said the name with disgust. “No one pays too much attention to a shadow here. But then I sensed a very powerful shadow magic being used. I know now it was that girl in purple you saw back in the camp. Anyways, I was curious. And I got even more curious when I saw two royal guards hauling your butt away in chains!”

“So then you found out what was going on.”

“Yep. Then thought I’d get you out. Because I knew you’d want to try and talk your princess out of what was going to happen.”
Link stopped in his tracks and bowed his head. He let out a sigh. “I already tried.” He looked back at her, seeing she was floating over his shoulder. “I got a long speech about how sometimes we have to do very bad things to keep people safe and when I tried to leave I was met with resistance. A couple guards knocked out of commission is one thing but I wasn’t about to take on a dozen of them. So I got hauled off to a cell to cool my heels.” He held up a hand. “I know, sometimes you have to do things you don’t like for the greater good, but every source of mine said this was not some attempt at sneaking troops past the border.” Link looked at his feet and his voice grew quieter. “And when I finally got there I found a massacre. No one was spared. The fires the pyromancers used were still burning on the wagons and bodies.”

“So that’s when you made your choice.”

He nodded. “I wasn’t going to allow myself to be used anymore.” They heard something then. Link’s hand went for the crossbow and aimed it down the hall. He began to advance carefully. To their surprise a humanoid figure kneeling in the water. In the light, it had pale blue skin, but lacked the smoothness or scales of a zora. Instead it was slimy and decaying. It had webbed fingers though and massive eyes, which focused on Link when it realized it was no longer alone. With a snarl, it leapt through the water. Before it could get close though he took careful aim and pulled the trigger of his crossbow. The bolt missed though, whipping over its head as it ran at him on all fours. Before it leapt though, Link saw a flash of teal and orange bands snap around it. The creature shrieked and recoiled, shriveling a little. Glancing back, he saw Midna’s hair-hand shaped in a sign and raised above her head. The fingers moved and there was another snap. Link took the opportunity though and in a single move pulled his sword from his back and beheaded it. He watched it collapse, its black bile flowing out of the killing blow into the water.

“I forgot how horrible those things smelled,” Midna cringed.

“Surprised no one’s come down to clear out the drowners yet,” Link said. “Usually once a month a Chosen is sent down to take care of them.” He put his sword back in its scabbard and reloaded his crossbow. “We’ll probably run into a few others.”

“Great, just what we need.” She stayed floating well above the water. Her magic hand twisted around and fell back, returning to being her ordinary orange hair.

“Thanks for grabbing it.”

“Just put out a little bit of shadow magic to act like a snare. It walked right into it.” She followed him as he started walking again. “I’m surprised you Chosen don’t have a snare sign like that.”

“Wasn’t part of our training. We usually used heavily modified bear traps The Tower mages made if we needed a trap.” An idea struck him. “Though… I could see how useful something like that could be. To instantly throw a trap out with a quick flick of my fingers.”

Midna chuckled a little, floating in front of him and folding her arms. “You want to learn how to pull something like that off.”

He nodded. “I don’t have any of those traps, nor could I get them easily.”

“Well…” He could tell she was thinking on it.

“If it’s one of your tribe’s secrets, I won’t ask for it. I know how important those secrets are.”

“No, not that. It’s one of the first tricks we teach in my cadre. I’m just wondering how your body would react to it.”
He chuckled a little. “My body is able to handle fire, water and wind magic thanks to the enhancements. I think I could handle shadow magic.”

After a minute of silence, Midna nodded. “Alright. Take a deep breath. ‘cause we don’t have time for a proper lesson, this might hurt a bit.”

“What are you going to do?”

“…It might be better if you don’t know.”

“Midna.”

The imp shook her head. “I need to get into your head and put the information there.”

His eyes went wide. “Possession.”

“No, not possession. That’s forbidden by my people’s highest laws.” Her hair twisted around and formed the hand again. “But it will essentially write all that information into your brain and you should then be able to pull it off. You’ll at the very least have a nasty headache after.”

He took a moment to think, but he’d already made up his mind. “Can these traps kill anyone?”

“No, not at the power of one of your signs. If I wasn’t trapped like this I could cut someone into pieces with a spell like that if I wanted to.”

“Do it then.” He looked back at the monster’s body. “We might be able to use it to trap a couple guards if we have to use it to escape. And it’d be good if we both could lay them down.”

“Oh!” The hair-hand rose further. “Take a deep breath then.” He did so and the hand gripped around his head. Link closed his eyes and there was a searing pain within moments. Flashes of images appeared in his head of hands that weren’t his in a dark world. He felt his right arm and hand moving without his desire. The fingers formed a sign repeatedly. After a minute, the images vanished and he struggled to stay standing. “Hey! Easy there!” He saw the imp before him, now using her hair to hold him upright. When he had steadied himself, Link shook his head a couple times.

“That…” He inhaled sharply through his teeth and put his hand to his forehead. “Ow…”

“Are you okay?” The hand removed itself and coiled back behind her head.

“Yeah… You weren’t kidding though.” He rubbed his head a little more and leaned against the wall. “I feel like someone just smacked me in the head with a pommel. And that can crack someone’s skull open if done right.”

“Well, you’re thick-headed so I’m sure you’ll be fine!” She grinned.

Link just gave her an unamused look. Though he did feel the corners of his mouth tugging slightly. “So…” He looked at his hand and slowly made the gesture that would form the sign. He focused as if he was trying to cast one of this other signs. The muscle memory that had been put into his head and hand reacted perfectly once he had and there was a snap. Small orange bands danced in his palm when he twisted his wrist to finish the sign. It burned slightly in the nerves of his hand, but it was done. He tossed it out and saw a small black spot on the wall where the spell had landed with occasional flickers of the orange energies.

“Perfect. Glad that worked!”
“Me too.” He looked back to the corridor. “Well, no time really to rest, but I’m sure this is going to be handy.” Link took another deep breath to try and ignore the headache from what his partner had done. It would pass he was sure. “I wonder if Medli could teach me one of her signs.”

“Probably.”

Before they could say any more to one another, they heard splashing. Link pulled his sword and shield, looking around. Another drowner came crawling quickly through the water. Two more were behind it. “Should’ve brought the venomblood.” The first of the creatures jumped at him. Link stabbed forward, impaling it. It wasn’t a killing blow though and after he’d kicked it off his blade, it jumped for him again.

The snare he’d put on the wall snapped and an orange band jump out. It grabbed the creature’s arm, causing it to shriek, but not be caught. The other two jumped forward then. Link saw his partner throw a snare around one before quickly darting back into the shadows. He raised his shield and lunged forward so the creature crashed jaw-first into the steel. A swing from the left and he beheaded it.

“Another two behind us!” Midna shouted.

Link spun around and threw hand forward. His fingers made the sign and another flicker of orange bands jumped out of it. He didn’t see where it landed though and was tackled from behind. The monster swiped its claws at him as it pushed him into the water. He held his breath and then made a different sign with his hand. A small flicker of red light appeared and when he slammed his palm into the ground a dome of fire erupted around him. The drowners let out a shriek as their bodies were set ablaze and the water hissed as some of it turned to steam. He got to his feet as quick as he could then and watched as one of them charged for him. He raised his shield and beat it back before stabbing it through the chest. He raised his shield and lunged forward so the creature crashed jaw-first into the steel. A swing from the left and he beheaded it.

“I think I missed a lesson or something that…” he started, before a giant red hand smacked him upside the back of the head. “Hey! What was that for?”

“Aim for their feet with that sign!” Midna nearly shouted, floating back in front of him. “You toss them out like that you’re gonna miss all the time or hit someone with them you don’t want to hit!”

“But I saw you do that before.” He rubbed the back of his head. “Throw a hand out and it’s ensnared.”

“That’s because I wasn’t this hideous little imp and actually was focusing it in a different way than a parlor trick like what I just taught you.”

He nodded a little. “Alright. Alright.” Link slipped his sword and shield on his back once more. “So, aim for their feet or where they’re going to be, not their bodies themselves with this one.”

“Exactly.”

“Okay.” He took a couple breaths, feeling his arms burning from the magic. “Sorry if I hit you with one of those.”

“You got pretty close with one of them. And I’d have done more than smack you if you had.”
It made him laugh a little. “I’m sure of it.” Link looked around the mess and got his bearings once more. He lit his lantern again and found another mark of Nayru on the wall. “Let’s get going again.”

“No argument here.

They walked a few more minutes, navigating the tunnels until they came to a set of stairs that lead up. When they reached the end of it, they found a wall. Link didn’t find any marks of Nayru on it but he could hear something from the other side. He put his hands to the wall and tried pushing it forward. It didn’t move. When he tried pushing it to the left or right it also didn’t move. “It’s one way,” he said. “Great…” Link began looking for a way to get a hand hold. Kneeling down, he found a crack at the bottom that he could barely fit his fingers through.

“And if we bomb it, it’ll get someone’s attention.”

“I’m sure of that.” Link looked carefully then at it. “Wait…”

“What?”

“I have an idea…” Link dug through one of his pouches for a moment and found a green vial. He uncorked it and drank the liquid. “Can you slip through the crack when you’re a shadow?”

“In this shape, easily.” She grinned. “It’s how I got through the window.”

“Can you tell me how thick the wall is by going through the crack to the other side?”

“Easily. You want me to slip through and open it from the other side?”

He nodded as he finished the potion. Link gagged a little at the aftertaste, but felt his magic returning from it. “Yep. Real quick and simple.” Midna dropped to the ground and seemingly vanished then. He leaned with his back to the wall and waited before he felt it move. It lurched forward and slipped into the wall to his right. Link turned around, finding her floating there. She was in what was clearly a dungeon cell. It was missing the door to it though.

“Keep quiet. And might wanna wait there a minute.” She floated back to him. “I sensed a strong magic presence down here before I pushed the wall open.”

“What kind of magic?”

“Wind, I think. Really strong too.”

“Could it be a rito?”

“Don’t know.”

The trip through the castle dungeon was easy. Link knew the way and thanks to the illusion over him from the imp in his shadow, there was no way any of the soldiers detected his presence. They merely saw a captain of the guard going about his duties. It was strange to him though. To be walking again in the palace he’d worked before. The vassals and nobles from the primary
provinces were going about their business and talking as if there wasn’t a war going on beyond the walls. Occasionally he’d hear rumor or mention of why the Chosen originally assigned to the castle had vanished. Whatever was going on, it was clear a lot of people were still in the dark about it. Or maybe they were just scared, Link thought. Scared that if they mentioned even a scrap or tiny detail about what had happened they too would be interrogated or have their movements shadowed by the Sheikah. A band even played in the courtyard while a full battalion of soldiers stood for inspection by some of the vassals. He was able to slip past them and into the heart of the palace with no trouble.

The halls were clean and white, decorated with violet cloths bearing gold crests of The Royal Family. Royal Guards were more common as well in the halls. As Link passed them, he had to tell himself to salute them or give them the right of way. His disguise was only that of a regular captain. When he had walked these halls before, it had been the other way. The Chosen were imbued with the will of the Royal Family after all. Their knees only bent to anyone of the royal blood. He remained quiet as well, knowing his way to get to the higher levels. Though he was sure the instruments in question were vaulted near the dungeons as to be kept safe, the keys were kept under careful watch of the family. Another minute and he was near the top levels of the castle, reaching a great hall that lead in four directions. Two would take him to the battlements, while the one before him would take him to the chambers and offices used by the highest ranking officials of The Kingdom. It included rooms that The Chosen would use when staying at the castle and the private rooms of the Royal Family. As he started for them, he felt the charm around his neck begin to shake. Link glanced around quickly, stopping when he saw a figure in the hall to the chambers. He gritted his teeth and a small growl escaped his lips.

“What is it?” he heard whispered in his ear.

Link didn’t respond. Instead he walked through the hall. The charm shook again a little and they heard a man’s voice grumbling. He pulled his crossbow from his belt and checked the bolt. He’d have preferred an inferno bolt, but the standard steel would serve its purpose just fine.

“Link, what is it?”

“I’m wondering if letting that bastard live was a mistake,” he muttered as he came to the door. It was still open a crack and he peered in. The room was draped with cloths and relics. There was even a set of magical tools sitting on a long table and its own fire place. Link spotted the figure that’d just entered the room. He had pulled his long cap off and was using a blanket from the bed to rub his face. Most of his long deep violet robe had gold accents along its edges, apart from a red scarf over his shoulders with the tails hanging down to his feet. Though his back was to Link, he knew exactly who it was and pushed the door open further to step inside. He pushed it closed behind him and it latched.

“I already told you, Cia,” he said. “I’m still working on getting them together so we can carry out the investigation.” He turned around then. If it had been possible, his skin would’ve grown even paler at the hylian standing a quick few strides from him with a crossbow aimed at him. “Farore’s blood, she was right...”
Also, I have put a preview of the next season that will start to be posted this January! It's essentially the first thousand words or so of the next part of the series.

Anyways, devnotes:
- Given the times we've had to sneak into and get out of the castle in previous Zelda games, I'd expect that they might even use the ways in and out as emergency exits or entrances. Someone like Link would know all about them.
- Because I'm limiting Link's arsenal for the story compared to what he usually lugs around in the games, it was important for him to pick up the signs a witcher uses down the road.
- Though Vaati won't appear a lot, he's gonna still be a major influence in the story.

That'll do it for this week! And as always, many thanks to every reader, kudo-giver, bookmarker and commenter out there! You guys rock!

See you all next Wednesday! Keep being awesome people!
He kept his eyes locked with Vaati’s. “Your voice rises any further than that and I will kill you where you stand,” Link said.

“No, no threats, Link!” he shouted. “Though, I must admit it’s fascinating to see you turning away from the light. And whatever source of magic you’ve found to conceal yourself so well.” The mage took a step to the right. The crossbow followed him. “Please put that down… We’re above this after all!” He let out an exhale. “Well, one of us is…”

“Seeing you in a room usually reserved for someone from the Tower of Hera makes me think letting you go was a mistake. Why are you here?”

“Do you really have to ask, Link?” He folded his arms. The wolf around his neck started to shake.

“Given our history, I do.” It took a great deal of remembering his training to keep the anger out of the equation.

“Well… Simple really why I’m here. I’m sure you could figure it out if you put your mind to it. You pieced together my plans quite well in the South Seas.” He seemed to have regained his composure in spite of having Link keep the weapon trained on him. “I didn’t think you’d be so bold though to have shown up here after fleeing. Everyone’s saying you’re mad now. I’m curious though… What was it that drove you to become a traitor?” His tone wasn’t condescending, but genuine curiosity. He’d used the same tone when Link had spared his life several years ago now.

There was only one thing he could say. Even though he loathed the once-minish magician, he had to be honest. “What I was trained for.”

His eyes were wide. “Fascinating… So you don’t see yourself as a traitor at all?”

“Why would I?”

“Because of your betrayal from a cause you have been loyal to for your entire life could be interpreted as evil. The old legends you tell one another too love that dichotomy. Not to mention the fact that Hyrule was on the defense when this war started. The Tribes started it. Ergo, they’d have the sympathies of countries like Labrynna and Calatia.”

“Link, we don’t have time for this,” Midna whispered.

“Who said that?” Vaati started to raise a hand. As he did, Link made the sign of the shadow snare he’d just learned and kept it hidden behind his back. He could feel the bands of magic snapping around his fingers.

There was a groan from the shadows. “I really don’t think either of you should try anything against one another.” Midna appeared, melting out of a nearby wall. “As to why, it’s simple. Enough commotion, someone comes looking. Something tells me too that, whoever you are, you don’t want to cause too many problems either, or end up on a lot of people’s lists for an untimely death.”

“He already is,” Link said.
Vaati looked at the imp with displeasure. “Ah… Link… Fallen so low you’ve got some enchanted talking cat? That must have been how you did it. Cats are always partly between worlds. And you’re wearing something that puts the illusion over you.”

“What did you just call me?” Link had seen the look on Midna’s face before and saw how her hair was starting to coil into a vicious claw, energies crackling between the fingers.

“You’re right, we don’t have time for this,” Link said quickly. The last thing he was wanting was his partner’s anger to get the better of her, even if he did want to find a more long-term solution for Vaati’s involvement. His instincts told him that whatever he was doing, it would not be good for anyone at the castle. It appeared though he was a welcomed guest if the room’s contents were any indication. “Tell you what; I’ll ignore whatever you’re doing here right now if you get me The Ocarina of Time.”

“You’re surprisingly to the point. I don’t recall you being this way.” He shook his head. “I just came from Princess Zelda’s office and I’m not going back in. Not until she’s calmed down over some missing scholar.”

That grabbed his attention. Not only they knew about Shad already, but he was wondering about why one of the most powerful relics in the entire world was not safely stowed in its vault. “Wait, it’s in her office? Why is it there?”

“Why indeed…”

“Don’t get clever,” Midna growled, her hair swishing back and forth behind her and shaped like a claw. “Why the hell would you leave something that powerful just sitting out in the open?”

“That’s actually a mystery…” Vaati lowered his hands to his sides, making it clear he had no intention of any sort of spellwork. “You really shouldn’t leave it in the open, even if it is supposedly the most heavily-protected place in all of Hyrule. And when questioned, well…” He looked down at his soaked hat. There was a moment of silence between them. “Well, if you want it, go get it.”

Link raised an eyebrow. “Just like that?” he asked. “What’s your angle?”

“Simple curiosity. What else would it be?”

He barred his teeth. “Nothing is ever simple with you, Vaati.”

“Well, it looks like you only have a couple options though. You either stay here and continue talking to me to find that she will return to her office and you lose your chance or you go now and get out. You probably already have a plan to get out of here or you wouldn’t have come in the first place. And by the time I get one of the guards, you’ll have already slipped away anyways.” He pulled his hat back on and fixed his scarf.

Link didn’t like it, but he was right. He was sure too this would benefit Vaati somehow, but the risk of not only getting caught but foreign powers entering the war was too great. They would not get another opportunity like this as well and he’d sworn to get Midna back to normal and home again safely. There was not going to be another chance. He lowered the crossbow and glanced at Midna. “C’mon.” He backed out of the room. The wind mage made no movements until Link had reached the door and closed it. His partner had slipped back into his shadow. Link had kept the shadow sign ready though and as a precaution, flicked his hand out. There was a quiet snap and a small
black circle was now in front of the door.

“You really hate that guy,” he heard her whisper. “Don’t you?”

“You have no idea,” he grumbled, remembering the first time he met Vaati.

“Really?”

Link started down the hall. He looked at his hands again to see the illusion was back. “I’ll tell you all about it when you’re back to normal.”

They came to the end of the hall and a pair of great double doors. To his surprise, the two royal guards who usually stood by them were not there. He wasn’t about to waste time and went to try the door. It was locked. She always locked it when she left. Something must have been going on though if the two guards were missing. Link knelt down and pulled one of the knives from his scabbard’s strap. Carefully he worked it in, working it as best he could.

“Hey, do you think that guy is really going to go get a guard?” Midna asked in his ear.

“I wouldn’t be surprised,” Link said. He pushed the knife carefully, trying to get the bolt free. It didn’t seem to want to work. “I put the trap to slow him down, but he’s a wind mage. So he could’ve just gone out the window to find a guard.” There was a jolt of electricity that shot through the knife when it touched the bolt. The knife fell to the floor while Link shook his hand, eyes clenched shut. Midna slipped from his shadow.

“You really think that door wasn’t enchanted with some sort of protective spell?” She had her arms folded and a smug look on her face.

“It’s new…” He picked up the knife and put it back in its sheath. “She used to lock herself out of her own office sometimes.”

The imp landed on her feet then and knelt down. She began to slip her tiny hand under the door but quickly pulled it back. “Ow…”

“Can’t slip through huh?”

She shook her head. “The implanted enchantments and my own magic let me tolerate the natural light in this world, but focused contact still hurts.” She floated up into a sitting position as Link stood as well. “Hmm… There a window in your pink princess’s office?”

“There is…”

“And then I could just unlock it.”

“That’d be perfect.”

Her eyes looked down the hall. “If there’s trouble, let me know with the charm.”

“Right.” He watched her float down the hall. The illusion around him vanished, revealing him in
his green armor and tunic. Link leaned against the wall then and checked one of the straps to the chainmail spaulders he wore. After he was happy they were secure, he stuck his hand in one of the pouches on his belt, finding some of the potions he’d brought. He ran his hand over his head and fingers through his hair. At that moment he realized his hat was missing. He wondered where it had fallen off and prayed that no one realized it was his. His ears heard a click from the door. Link turned and saw it creek open a crack. Quickly he pulled it open and entered.

It was a very large room, with bookcases lining the walls. A central round table had several open ones on it. The curtains were white with gold accents and at one end sat a large wooden desk. It too was cluttered with papers and notes. Link spotted as well a large teapot and cups on a tray at one corner of it. He couldn’t help but smile a little seeing that it had changed so little in the time since he’d left. Always with so much work to be done to help her people or continue her research into the past, Link had always admired her devotion to the seven liberal arts. Most of them though it looked like were military practices and plans. He looked around though for the ocarina he’d come to retrieve. A piece of him was wondering if Vaati had lied to him as he didn’t immediately find it. He began to check the desk, opening the drawers. He found some books and a bowl of candies along with a couple bottles of liquor that hadn’t been there the last time he’d gone digging through her desk, with her permission of course. He turned around to find a couple elegant chairs and a small table by the window. On the table was an inlaid golden harp. The ends of it had what looked like the heads of ancient loftwings. A blue cloth was wrapped around the left side of it, before the strings where she’d rest it against herself while playing. He smiled sadly as the memories started to bubble up in his mind of more peaceful days.

“Over here,” Midna said after a minute of digging through the papers on the table. “This it?” Her hair-hand had picked up a small blue object.

He looked up. “Yeah, that’s it.” Link quickly took it from her and inspected it. His hairs stood up on end as he held it. Even with his minor amount of magic training, he could feel the power within it. He stared at it for a moment, fingers rubbing slightly on it and feeling the hum of its magic. “We can’t take this.”

“I’m inclined to agree…” Midna looked a little worried as she floated next to the table. “This is like me stealing the Fused Shadows out of the vaults back home.”

“You did steal the Fused Shadows out of one of the vaults back home.” He smirked slightly at it. “I know.”

“You also put it back when we were finished.” He wiped the mouthpiece of the ocarina carefully. “We’ll try them here and break the curse, and then we’ll just leave it here.”

“Sounds good.”

“Well… Ready then?” He pulled the paper with the two songs Shad had given him and looked over the melodies. The only one that looked like it would work was the Song of Healing. He put the ocarina to his lips, but pulled it away a moment later. “Wait…”

“What?” she asked, floating in front of him.

He lowered the ocarina slightly. “Do you have something to wear? Because if breaking this is like what happened when you broke the one on me, you're going to need pants.”
She smirked and stifled a laugh. “I have something.”

“Okay, good. Lemme know when I can open my eyes once I’m done and if it worked.”

“Oh come on, Link.” She chuckled a little, folding her arms and shaking her head. “It’s not like we haven’t seen each other naked before.”

He could swear he felt his face turning red as he remembered one time he hadn’t knocked during their time in Termina. Link lowered his head and looked to his left. After a quick breath he slowly looked back. “Y—yeah… Sorry again about that. I should’ve knocked.”

“I was actually thinking of Lakeview. Where you forgot about me falling asleep in your shadow.” Her lips curled even more and her fang stuck out of her mouth. “And then there was the dungeon we formally met in Lorule. Why they—”

“Okay, let’s get this done.” He groaned and closed his eyes as he heard her laughing a little. Link put the instrument to his lips and blew, fingers over the holes. A gentle, yet sad tune came from the ocarina then. As he played, Link could feel the energy building in it. His eyes glanced up at the imp. She had her hands on her face and eyes closed. Link noticed a glow of blue light around her face. A moment later, he saw the glow consume her. Something clattered on the floor then. When he looked he saw what was unmistakably a mask of her impish form. It looked far more monstrous than when it had been on her face, but also colored a little differently. The eyes were mere slits and its mouth was in a wide grin. He moved to get a better look at it but Midna’s voice quickly grabbed his attention, as did her bare feet behind it. He turned away then.

“Gods, that’s rough…” she said with a sigh. He heard her snap her fingers and felt his charm rattle on its chain. When he looked back he saw the last flickers of shadow forming around her arms. She was dressed just as she had been when she’d scared Epona, apart from her cloak. Over her right hand floated the mask.

“How do you feel?” Link asked, putting the ocarina back on the desk.

“Other than sore, much better.” She looked at the mask for a moment. “Feels like all the magic is contained.” A sound outside the room grabbed their attention. She snapped her fingers and the mask vanished into black squares. A step forward and she melted into his shadow.

“Right. Escape first.” He glanced down for a moment to see the illusion form back around him of a Royal Guard. Link stepped out of the room and quietly closed the door. They started for the exit. He passed a pair of guards who rushed for the room, having heard the music. They ignored Link though, just thinking him another guard. Moments later though, he saw her.

Two Royal Guards were standing next to her, one talking about the latest recruits for the army. She was dressed in a light blue dress. Deep gold hair was pulled back and partially placed into a braid, while two long strands were coiled by bands hung to frame her face. She wasn’t wearing the banded crown around her forehead as well at the moment, but there was no mistaking who they were. Link stepped aside and acted as he was a lowly guard captain, but she stopped anyways. He bowed his head and began to pass.

“Wh…” she began, standing there. Link felt the charm around his neck shaking violently. He didn’t stop. He didn’t look back, hoping that he could slip away before she noticed. “You there,” she said. “Stop.”

He did. “Yes?” he asked, keeping his voice low to try and not be recognized.
“Link, you might wanna run,” Midna whispered. “I think you’ve been made.”

“Face me, Captain.”

He did so slowly.

“Link, what the hell are you doing?” he heard through gritted teeth in his ear. For a split second, their eyes met. The two guards with her just looked at him, unaware that he was more than he appeared. It felt like minutes, but it was only seconds. Link opened his mouth to speak. He had no idea what was going to come out, but he was interrupted.

Her eyes had gone wide. “GUARDS!” A flash of light in right hand and her rapier appeared. From her left a flicker of light struck him in the chest. The illusion was dispelled and he could hear Midna swearing in twilise. Sparks of white light clung to his shoulder and arm. He ran then, the two guards rushing after him, gothic halberds lowered.

“That really hurt!” Midna nearly shouted from his shadow. “Why’d you just stand there?! You think she’d listen to why you’d just snuck into her office and almost stole one of the most powerful magic artifacts in the entire Light World?!?”

“I wasn’t thinking she’d do that!” he said back, starting down the stairs. His right hand made the snare sign quickly and he threw it onto the stairs.

“Well what the hell were you thinking she was going to do?!”

“Not that!” He leapt down the last piece of the flight of stairs and rolled. A moment later he heard the telltale snapping of the magic and one of the royal guards scream as he and the one behind him tumbled down the stairs. He turned a corner and charged through the interior hall surrounding the heart of the castle. Link stopped for a moment to try and swat the sparks away. His hand went right through them though. “Can you get an illusion over me again?”

“Not that light magic clinging to you.” She slipped from his shadow, looking a little pale. “Hold still. I can remove them but it’ll take a moment.” Magic jumped between her fingers and she’d soon had a couple small nets of orange bands around the sparks. With a flick of her wrist, the bands snapped away and the sparks turned into black specs that melted into the ambient light. They heard heavy footsteps behind them and the rattling of chainmail and plate.

“We’ll remove the others in a bit. We need to move.”

“Got it.” She swept her right hand out, fingers flicking and snapping with orange and teal light. Three quick bolts of orange jumped from her hand and landed on the floor in the hall behind them. They started running. Link turned the corner and glanced back in time to see the guards get caught along a tripwire of magic. There was a flash of teal and black clouds billowed around them. In the confusion, Midna went back to work, removing the sparks of light magic from her companion.

“That’s a damn clever enchantment she put on you. Wouldn’t be surprised if she’s able to track you through it even!” The last cluster of sparks vanished and the twili melted back into his shadow, catching her breath.

“You okay?”

“Long as you don’t get caught like that again… I’m still feeling the aftereffects of the curse being broken and I’m burning magic fast.”
“I’ll try not to.” He flicked his fingers and threw another snare behind him before heading into the main hall. The illusion formed around him once more. This time he looked like one of the regular soldiers though if the gauntlets he was supposedly wearing were any indication. He looked around quickly and pulled a spear from a suit of plate armor standing in the hall before acting the part. A couple royal guards rushed past him, some still had sparks of dark magic flickering on their armor as they went.

“You there!” one of them shouted as he came to a stop. “Where did that traitor go?”

Link just pointed in the direction the other soldiers had gone.

“Come with us! That dog won’t escape!” He ran past him then.

“Oh, if only they knew…” Link heard from his shadow. He stayed quiet and followed after the man who’d ordered him before slipping off to the courtyard. His plan was simple and he would just have to wait for the next patrol to be sent into the city. Given the hour, he wouldn’t have to wait long. He even saw a couple guards for the city waiting to go. He looked around carefully before slipping in the back of the guards heading off into the city. He spotted the others and soldiers rushing around the battlements above. Among them he spotted Vaati, but he didn’t seem to notice. There was someone Link was watching closely though. They were a familiar blue tunic and armor. Chain spaulders were over his shoulders and he wore light slacks. On his back was a sword and a shield. And around his neck was a green charm. He knew it bore the mark of Farore. They turned on their heel quickly and waved a hand at them.

“Find him already!” the other Chosen shouted. “Try and take him alive, but if you can’t just put that traitor down!”

He didn’t hear much more of the conversation, nor did he care as a guard captain called the patrol up. Link quickly stood at attention with the other four soldiers to go into the city. He just needed to keep up the charade a little longer. Link took a deep breath and started marching in unison with the other guards. They walked onward and under the battlements. The gate was raised in front of them and they walked out into the city. It was different to see the castle town in the daylight, even if it was still early. People were about, but no one met the eyes of the guards. He saw citizens quickly move out of their way and conversations die as they passed.

They walked along the cobblestones and he remained with them for most of the patrol before seeing an opportunity to slip away. He fell out of step and slipped into an alleyway near the stables. He was almost free. He just needed to get Epona out and he could get out through the Eastern gate. Link watched his hands as the gauntlets turned into tiny black squares which flipped over. When they were finished, he was in a captain’s uniform now.

“If you’re gonna be riding a horse, you might as well look the part,” he heard.

“Thanks.”

“Just get outta here quick…” Her voice was strained. He could hardly imagine just how much magic she’d spent keeping him concealed for so long. He knew she was strong, but the time spent with the spellwork had to be taking its toll.

“Do you need something to help?”

“Just go, Link.”
He gave Epona a gentle stroke of her snout. The horse knew who he was and whinnied slightly as he smiled. “Hey girl,” he said to her. “Hope it wasn’t too long a wait.” Link quickly got her saddle and bridles back on and mounted the mare. A gentle nudge was all it took to get Epona to trot out the stable and towards the East gate.

Chapter End Notes

It's Wednesday again. That means another chapter! Winding things down for the end of the season and all too.

I shall also be next week posting a more sporadically-updated companion piece which will be titled The Hera Archives. These'll be short, mostly unconnected stories and background for the AU. We'll see Link going through his training and time as a Chosen, as well as other characters being the stars of the series. It will also be, to a degree, request-based. So if there's an event or character in the series here you've seen and want to hear more about let me know in comments of that series or here. I can't promise it'll get done (or get done soon) but it'll help give some ideas of what people want to see.

Anyways, devnotes!
-Though we won't see him for a while, Vaati is gonna show up again. He was actually foreshadowed all the way back in the Riverbound chapter. There was actually going to be a fight too between them, but Midna brings up that very good point about how it'll get them both in heaps of trouble. Which neither of them want. Vaati because he's barely trusted as it is, and Link because, well, he just broke into The Royal Palace with plans to steal The Ocarina of Time...
-Doing the scene of Zelda's office was meant ot try and get some about the character without actually having the character around. Sometimes you can learn a lot about someone by seeing where they work and live and what is around them. And it can sometimes even work both ways with the characters doing the observations.
-Fun Fact; In an old draft he actually DID steal The Ocarina of Time. However, changed it as given how potent the artifact is and all, that'd be like someone stealing a nuclear bomb. A little blue magical nuclear bomb that can control the flow of time...

So that's it for this week! Next week will be the last chapter until either December 27th or January 3rd! I am taking a hiatus to not only continue writing but also to edit the second season. You can read the first thousand words of it here!

And as always a huge thank you to everyone who has read, left kudos, commented and bookmarked. Speaking of which, special thanks this week to GhostDoingTheMost for their rec bookmark and the kind words! I didn't even know you could put comments in bookmarks until I saw it!

See everyone next week with the season finale and the new series! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome!
Getting out was simpler than he had thought. It was something he wasn’t sure he was happy about, but thankful at least it hadn’t been as chaotic as he had expected it to be. The guards hadn’t heard what had happened and by the time they likely did, he’d already put a great deal of distance between himself and the castle. The illusion Midna had put around him had been released as soon as they were a mile from the castle. They did slow, but didn’t stop until the moon had started to rise and the clouds started to open with rain. Link was thankful his companion hadn’t insisted they stop so they could get her spellwork prepared so she could go home. He was afraid that if they had, it would give their pursuers a chance to catch up.

Their camp was in a dried riverbed with an old stone bridge across it, concealing them from most possible attacks. Epona grazed nearby as Link set a fire. His eyelids were heavy and he kept going through his head the events of the day. It had been long and he knew he’d have to continue on the run again once this was done. A plan had already started to form in his head, but he would need to make sure Epona was safe. He inspected some of the supplies he had along with a couple rabbits he’d caught and skinned that were now over a spit on a fire. He heard a yawn from his shadow then and glanced in its direction. Against the wall under the bridge Midna sat, huddled a bit as a cloak formed around her. She pulled it around herself and rubbed an eye once done.

“Hey.”

“Hey,” she said, sounding exhausted still. “Promise me you’re not gonna need me to do that much magic again anytime soon.”

“Shouldn’t. But we missed our window for you to go home.” He pulled some rations from one of Epona’s saddlebags and walked back to the fire.

“Always the morning. I need to set up my circle to warp me back anyways.” She rolled her head on her shoulders a little before getting to her feet. “What’s for dinner?”

“Rabbits and some apples I found. We have some water too.”

“Well, really know what a girl likes.” She flicked a hand and with a snap of her fingers one of the dark crystals appeared. It floated down into the dirt and began to draw an intricate pattern on the ground. Teal light flickered from it as so.

“Heh.” He glanced over for a minute to watch her work before tending to the rabbits and skewering the apples he’d found on a couple sticks. “How’re you feeling?”

“Exhausted, but glad to be myself again.” While the crystal did its work she reformed the mask they’d gained from the curse. “Glad that song worked. Wonder if it’d break other ones too.”

He nodded a little as he sat and watched the flickering flames. “We got lucky.”

“You’re telling me…” She made the mask turn so she could face it. “Ugh, we should throw this on the fire. The curse is contained in this thing now.”

“So if someone were to put it on again…”
“They’d turn into an imp.” Her eyes sparkled for a moment. Link regretted his question when he caught it. “Although… This did have its uses. And if it’s contained in a mask, it should be safe to use and the wearer would just have to take their face off again to return to normal…”

He sighed as he shook his head and turned back to the fire and the other end of the bridge. “Mid…”

She snapped her fingers and the mask vanished. “I’m not gonna be putting it on any time soon if that’s what you’re worried about.” There was a smirk on her lips. “I spent way too much time stuck like that. I can still sense the magic in there. Dark but contained. I’ll take it back to look at closer with the book you want translated. And if it’s really as dangerous as the magic that made it, I’ll destroy it myself.”

“Okay.” He inspected one of the rabbits and carefully removed it before cutting the meat off it into a small bowl with a fork. He offered it to her then. “So, looking forward to going home?”

She sat down next to him and took the bowl. “Yeah. My own bed. Not having to hear long-winded gorons on sky tribes… But then there’s the politics and some days I feel like I’m just banging my damn head against a wall with some of the nobles and other clans.” Midna shook her head as he offered the ration. She snatched it quickly. “Like this entire mess with Majora’s Mask. We could’ve handled it if we were working together. And I’m already thinking of the aftermath of this.”

“Not going to go over well?”

“Probably not…” She took a bite of her meal. “First it’s going to be who let that bastard get the mask out of there in the first place. Then it’s going to boil into a debate about if we should even be keeping these sort of things or just destroy them. Then there’s going to be talk about if he was right to act against the Light World or we should have intervened anyways to keep him from doing something to give your people a reason to try and attack us…” Midna let out a groan. “And then there’s gonna be talk about why the king’s only daughter hasn’t been married off to some sorcerer prince yet to keep her from doing something ‘dangerous and reckless’ like this all over again…”

Link grabbed a bowl for himself and stripped the meat off the other rabbit into it. “I’m getting a distinct feeling of repeating the aftermath of The Conjunction.” He picked a piece out and slipped it in his mouth.

“At least there it was all just a natural disaster. No one party causing the problems so once all the evidence came to light the finger pointing stopped.” She shook her head. “Not gonna happen this time though.” She took another bite and swallowed quickly. It was quiet for a minute then. The sounds of rain pattering and crackle of firewood the only things they heard. “There’s going to…”

“Mid.”

She looked over as she stopped to finish her meal.

He looked her in the eye, resting his arms on his knees. “Do you really want to spend the next couple hours before we start taking turns on watch talking about politics?”

The twili let out a sigh. “No. Not really…” She looked back to the fire. “I live for my people, you know that. But I’m just so sick of putting up with some of the crap that goes on. And wearing that stupid mask. The whole regal ruler one and… And it makes me want to scream sometimes. You’ve probably seen a lot of that here. When you were working for The Crown anyways.”
He interrupted her. It earned him an annoyed glare, but it vanished when he’d finished talking.
“Then we’re changing topics.” Link moved slightly on the ground to get a little more comfortable.

The wood crackled on the fire. “Got one?”

He nodded. “When you showed me the sign. The snare. I saw others in there. Was that you
learning how to do it?”

“Yeah. It was. You saw exactly what it took me months to learn in a few seconds.” She finished
her dinner then and licked her fingers. “Really glad you picked it up as quick as you did too. Must
be that hylian blood in you. A regular human would have a harder time.”

“Could be the mutations too,” he said while chewing. “I’ve had them since I was ten.”

She looked at him with surprise then. He glanced up to see her mouth open. “Ten years old?”

“Mmhmm.” He swallowed. “You didn’t know?”

“I thought you were a little older at least. Still a child, but…”

He grabbed his canteen from his belt and took the top off. “Nope. They needed it done earlier on.
Before puberty so my body could properly adapt to the potions I use and increase the other physical
aspects.” He began to hear the screams and the feelings of The Change in his muscles and lungs.
There had also been the pain as the tower mages worked their magic to ensure he survived the
process. Link winced a little and looked at the canteen in his hand. He took a swig from it and
offered it to her. “I… I didn’t know you danced.”

Her lips curled into a smirk as she made the canteen float into her right hand. “Yep. Everyone
needs a hobby. My wolves just are something that works with my magic too.” Midna moved to
have her arms around her legs and huddled a little closer to the fire. Dark magic flowed out of her
fingers and in moments one of her wolves appeared. It stalked out of the darkness, illuminated by
the teal markings and glowing eyes. It came over and nudged her with its nose. She began to pet it
as it lay down. “I’ll have them watch as I’m exhausted. Besides, they don’t’ need sleep.”

“Clever.”

“They’ve done it before too.” She took a sip of water from the canteen.

“I know.”

She scratched the twilit wolf behind one of its ears and passed the canteen back to him. “Well, I
didn’t know you had any musical talent.”

“My ocarina got taken when Hilda’s guards locked me and Ravio in the dungeon you found us in.”
He took another drink from his canteen. “One of them dropped it with my other belongings and it
shattered. I’m a bit out of practice with it though.” He began to chuckle.

The wolf looked up at him. One ear lowered itself slightly while the other remained upright. Midna
began to scratch behind its lowered ear and the wolf began to cock its head to that side. “What?”
she asked.

“Vaati.” He laughed a little more. “Vaati is in the room I was in before I got thrown in the cell you
found me in. He probably has the replacement I got when I got my payment for The Conjunction.”
The humor left his face with a groan. “He probably has my sketchbook too…”
“Actually…” She held up her hand. Small black squares formed around it and a worn green leather book. The pages were yellowing and had gotten wet a couple times, but it was otherwise intact. He got up the second he saw it finish forming and took it out of her palm. On the cover of it was a circular design. Twelve runic symbols arranged around it like a clock. Inside the circle was an ornate pattern of three circles, each bearing one of the marks of the Goddess and in their place. At the center was the Triforce. He ran his fingers over it. Once the entire pattern had been inlaid with gold, but that had been several years ago. Only the triangles at the center remained. “He was using it as a coaster.”

“Damn him…” Link sat back down again. He saw the wolf was now resting its head on Midna’s leg, looking far more like a content pet than a fearsome beast of war.

“So, what’s your history with him?”

“Was responsible for a mess in the South Seas. Ended up destroying one of the navy’s freighters with how he had put together some work to direct the winds. I was dispatched to investigate and eventually it lead me to him…” He shook his head.

“And you let him live, clearly…”

“It was complicated.” Link looked into the fire and closed his eyes. “A noble of Hyrule was involved as was a Labrynnan nationalist who was the head of a mercenary company.” He looked back at Midna then. “He gave them things as part of some twisted experiment. It could’ve sparked a war between Hyrule and Labrynna again. Zelda sent me to investigate what had happened to a freighter that had gone missing and was carrying some old relics.”

“Guessing Vaati was responsible.”

“He was the one who set it all in motion. And his magic had blown the freighter off course, right into a pack of gerudo pirates.” He shook his head and watched as the wolf nudged Midna as she stopped petting it. “The relics were actually containers for hexer mutagens when I tracked down the pirates who had sunk the freighter. And the Labrynnan was using them to turn volunteers into… Into these monsters. Me, Medli and Linebeck found dozens of bodies like what we saw in the well.”

“Ugh, great. Now I have that to bring up back home… So, Ateren was making hexers.”

He shook his head. “It looked more like he was trying to create the false darknuts I’d run into during that assignment and from time to time. Big brutes. They aren’t even completely mentally sound either. Just hulking masses of muscle with no reason in their eyes. Tough to face in combat too. But a bit slow. Can break my Nayru’s Love in a couple hits with ease.”

“All the more reason to find a way to end this war then.” She gave him a grin. “Get him out of your room!”

He did have to chuckle a little at that, even if in the back of his mind he wasn’t sure if he’d be allowed back. Link smiled a little and waved a hand at her to give him the canteen back. “Yeah. Any sort of a bed is a luxury for me. While I was on the front. In the Castor Wilds, it was dreadful. We lost a lot of people to disease.” He took a sip from the canteen when she handed it to him. “Some people would sink into the bog while they slept. Always had to find a good rock or something to use because that was on solid enough ground I was lucky if I even got a blanket. Least I had a tent most of the time because I was a Chosen. Pillows were another thing.” He capped the canteen. “Speaking of which, did you happen to see where my hat went?”
“Yes?”

“Did you pick it up?”

Her hand slowed as it stroked the wolf’s head. The giant dark beast had its eyes closed. “…Yes.”

“Can I have it back?”

“You’re not gonna swaddle me in it again are you?”

“I thought we agreed to not bring that up.”

She chuckled a little then. “Well, it should probably get a good cleaning before you use it again though. I’ll get it back to you.”

He smiled a little in return. “Alright.” There was a minute of quiet then as they watched the fires. Midna’s wolf got to his feet and sauntered away, out from under their bridge. Link closed his eyes for a moment, enjoying the sounds of the light rain and crackling fire.

“They still haven’t figured out the ways between worlds aren't completely sealed?” Midna asked. “Have they?”

He shook his head. “Nope,” he replied. “Only ones who'd go looking are The Sheikah and The Tower. Don't know about the former but soon as I got back to the tower from The Conjunction, nearly every day we spent preparing for the war we all hoped wouldn't come.”

“Can only imagine what kind of mess will happen when they realize the doors aren't closed...” She let out a long yawn then and stretched her arms out.

“I did say in my report though that we had closed all the ways we could safely we could find to the best of my knowledge, like we discussed.” Link sighed then as he looked down at his feet. “I hated doing that. Felt like lying though it was wording it in a vague enough way it answered their fears but prevented further questioning...”

“Did they suspect anything?”

“Of course they did.” He looked to her then. She was sitting slightly on her side, using a hand to help keep herself balanced. “No one had encountered an interloper in three hundred years. They ran me through a lot of tests when I got back to the tower. Thought I could've been possessed or you'd have put some spell on me.” As he recalled the testing he chuckled a little at something Lana had said. “Or that I'd brought some twilit disease back with me that could have wiped out all the chickens...”

“Hah!”

“What?”

“My brothers and cadre did kinda the same thing!”

His brows raised. To hear someone in her position was treated as such was a little bit of a surprise to him. “Really?”

“Yep. Imren was really worried that some light world hexer had turned me against my people... That the doors hadn't been closed.”
“That why you started looking? When you got back and found me and Epona on my way back to civilization?”

She nodded. “Yeah. I wanted to get ahead of it. Find out more of the why before someone else did. Sols only know what would’ve happened if someone like Zant found out before the royal family did.”

“You never did give me a straight answer about how you found out.”

There was that familiar smirk on her lips and a mischievous sparkle in her eyes. “It was... deceptively simple actually.”

“Oh?”

“Flow of magic in the world.”

He began to smile, recalling their adventures during that trying time. “Like how you found the portals.”

“Exactly. And also why closing them would be disastrous.”

“So you got really lucky.”

Midna shook her head as she looked back to the fire for a moment. “You have no idea.”

“Mmm?”

“Lady Veran found out about three days after I got back from letting Hilda and Ravio know the ways between worlds weren't quite as closed as we thought.”

“Who?”

“One of the sorceresses who wanted us to pretty much return to the light world and, get exact words if I recall were ‘completely cleanse their filth from our history.’”

He cringed a little hearing it. “...charming.”

“Well, you know, before we met...” She looked away from him, into the dark, Link catching her expression change to a remorseful look. She shook her head a little before slowly looking back to him as she spoke. “I kinda agreed with her. But, getting out there, here,” she continued, a small smile appearing on her lips, “seeing the world every day and how alike we all are? Learning just how covered in blood everyone's hands were during The Inquisition?” She shook her head. “There's no point. All it'd do is continue a cycle of hatred that serves no purpose other than to perpetuate itself.”

“Yeah...” He chuckled a little. “A lot of my beliefs were challenged during that whole thing.”

“Me too. But none more than natural selection!”

Link groaned and shook his head as he looked back at her, fighting a smile. “Oh, bringing up the twilit lynel again, Mid?”

She began counting on her fingers. “And the griffin. And the Ikanans, and the witch who you just had to jump in front of even though I could have just flicked my fingers and had her get hit by that curse!”
"You're missing the basilisk."

Midna shook her head and pointed a finger at him. “That one doesn't count. I had it completely under control before you and Ravio came rushing in. You especially.”

“Heh. Okay. But I had good reason to believe that witch had you. You were on the ground after your barriers collapsed.”

“Just needed her to drop her defenses just for an instant. And I had a shadow I could get to if it failed.’

“Don't recall seeing it. “

“Yes, but by your own admission one time, light worlders don't think about their shadows too often.”

“Yeah. Alright.”

“Heh.” She shook her head and moved a little closer to him. “You gave me a heart attack doing that. Just took the hit and then seeing your body get broken and reshaped.” Midna slowly looked back to the fire then. “Lucky it only reshaped your body and not your mind...”

“Yeah...”

She was smirking again. “And that the counter curse didn't leave you with a tail and wolf ears!”

“Maybe because I was a mutant to begin with?”

“Maybe!”

His eyes went wide a little in mock annoyance. “Maybe?!”

“Curses are funny things. Even after they're broken, there's little pieces of it left. Done right it's not even noticeable. Sometimes it's a tick or a physical change. Or even a mentality.”

“Huh.”

She repositioned a little and looked to him. “What? You didn't know that?”

He nodded. “I did. Uncle Alfonzo told me about how he and Impa had to break the curse on a striga one time and the poor girl after. Or one time Eagus and Swiftblade broke one on a nobleman and the only side effect he got was occasionally forgetting he was corporeal again and walking into walls.”

“Hah!”

“Yeah. I met him once actually. Man was quite the character even before getting cursed apparently.” He glanced back to the fire then for a moment and grabbed one of the roasted apples before offering it to her. She took it and blew on it before taking a small bite. “But I guess I just don't know what part of MY curse stuck with me.”

“Aaah...”

He took a bite of his own apple then, savoring the taste. Epona had moved to the other side of the bridge and settled down, looking ready to sleep. As he took another bite, he felt the wolf charm on its chain rattle slightly and heard the hum of magic. A teal and orange glow floated near his face,
causing him to back away a little. Midna merely moved her hand a little closer. “...hey, what are you doing?”

“Trying something.”

“I get nervous when you start doing magic so close to my head.”

The glow changed to pure teal then. “Relax. Not like this is an offensive spell. This is more like dowsing. Finding the tiny traces of foreign magic in your body...”

“Heh... easy for you to say.” He started to control his breathing, the instincts his mutations had enhanced readying him to strike or flee, even though every other part of him knew she wouldn’t do anything to hurt him intentionally.

“What? Don’t.”

“I trust you Mid. Just get nervous still,” he admitted.

“Heh.” She ran it slowly down to the back of his head and stopped. With a flick of her fingers the magic vanished. “Well... I wonder...”

“Wonder what?” The only response she gave him was an impish grin. “Midna, what are you plot-” he started, but found his eyes close as he felt her fingers rub behind his ear. It was a light touch but enough to provoke a reaction. As she continued a little more, he found his head cocking in that direction, just like the wolf had earlier.

She began to laugh and removed her hand. Her eyes were wide and she was smiling. “Oh gods. Seriously?!”

“...what was...” He righted his head and reached up behind his ear.

“Ehehehehehehe. Are you gonna fail over again if you tilt your head anymore?”

“...probably.”

“Well look on the plus side, wolf boy! Least your leg doesn't twitch when you get scratched!” Any humor vanished from his face, even though he was sure he had a bit of a red hue on his cheeks from the embarrassment. “Aww, don't be like that.”

“Heh.”

“Mmm, probably for the best though that it's just that. I mean, you could've gotten the tail and ears.”

“Yeah, that’d have been hard to explain away when I got back to The Tower.” He stifled a small laugh at the absurdity of the situation and yawned.

He heard a growling as the sun began to peek over the horizon. His eyes slowly opened as he heard it grow a little closer. The sun was pecking through the clouds, creating an orange glow that bathed the fields of Hyrule. He was sure some of it was smoke from the fighting further west. Here though, it didn’t look like there had been much fighting and he hoped it stayed that way.
The growling grew louder and Link looked to his right, seeing Midna’s largest wolf. He was glaring right at him and standing about five feet away. The wolf was almost as big as Epona and had a thick black mane, while he had similar teal markings along his legs and a disc-like object above his eyes and a harness. He remembered seeing how they had gotten the massive scar over their right eye during The Conjunction. There were several more grey hairs too than he’d last seen them. His glowing teal eyes were focused right on him and growled again.

He heard grumbling to his left then in twilise and then realized why the wolf might’ve been upset with him. With her head on his chest was Midna. Her eyes were still closed and she had a hand across him. She began to sit up when he growled again. “Fenris,” she said clearly as she looked at the wolf. The growling stopped in an instant and moved to a sitting position.

“Morning,” he mumbled as she sat up. He felt his arm fall off her side and into the dirt as he realized what must’ve happened.

“Morning to you too,” she yawned. Midna moved to a sitting position next to him.

“Got time for breakfast?”

She glanced over at the circle she’d prepared the previous night. “Probably not... Should get back soon as I can. Or else we risk some people coming looking for me.”

“Mm.” Link began to sit up then as well.

“Besides, I think Fenris didn’t like that I put him on guard duty last night.”

“Heh.” He ran a hand over his face and slowly got to his feet. “You were cold I’m guessing too.”

“Yeah, a little.” She took his hand when he offered it and was pulled to her feet. “So, where are you off to?”

“Lon Lon Ranch. Get Epona boarded and a safe place in case something happens. Then to Dragon Roost. Probably will have to go through Aboda which is gonna be risky but I have no other option. Only place the ferry goes to Windfall and what I can afford.”

“Missing that Royal Treasury, huh?”

He chuckled a little. “Yeah, a little.” Link sighed as he looked at the great twilit wolf. It had moved behind his master and gently pushed his nose against her arm, eyes still focused clearly on him. “I don’t think Fenris liked us huddling for warmth last night.”

“He’s just jealous.” She looked at the wolf with a grin. “Aren’t you?” Midna glanced back at Link for a moment before with a snap of her fingers the massive wolf dissolved into shadows and squares. Each particle of magic flew into her hand and vanished. “Well, know how I hate long goodbyes.”

“All too well.” He smiled a little recalling the very first time they’d went their separate ways. “Hope it’s not gonna be too bad when you get back home.”

“Yeah, well, hope springs eternal...” She sighed and looked to the circle before walking towards it.

“Mid?”

She turned on her heel to look to him. “Yeah?”
He glanced to his left and down for a moment before looking back to her. “Thanks for the help. It was good to work together again.”

“It really was.” She smirked at him. “You need something, you have that charm I gave you now. Dawn or dusk we can talk. Can’t promise I’ll be available all the time but if it’s really pressing I’m sure I could manage.”

“Thanks.”

“Well, time to get going for both of us. Unless you’re gonna get breakfast first.”

“Probably shouldn’t. Put a little more distance between me and any possible pursuers. Just gotta wake Epona up and saddle her.”

“Alright.” Midna opened her palms as she stepped into the center of the circle. Energies began to crackle between her fingers and teal light flickered in her palms. “Don’t get yourself killed out there. Or captured again.”

He had to chuckle a little. “No promises, but I’ll try.”

She laughed. “Well then!”

“Yep.” He took a deep breath that turned into a yawn. “See you later?”

Across her lips was that familiar smirk. The one that gave him such comfort and caused him such worry at the same time during The Conjunction. The lines of the circle began to glow, revealing a angular pattern on the ground. “See you later,” she said.

A moment later, her form turned to shadow and broke into squares. They rose skyward and out from under the bridge. Link stepped out to the side in time to see a portal in the sky, comprised of similar design to the circle she’d been standing. A moment later it vanished and he stood there with Epona under the bridge. He looked to the mare as she grazed at some of the grass near the dried riverbed and then at the saddle and blanket he’d removed the night before. “Just you and me now girl,” he said as he grabbed them and went to attach them. As he slipped it on, he felt the wolf on its chain shake a little. He didn’t need to know what it meant as he finished and mounted Epona, but smiled feeling it.

“C’mon, girl,” he said, gently directing her to the other side of the bridge. “We’ve got a lot still to do.”

Chapter End Notes

And with that, the first season comes to a close. I admit, I was originally planning something a little more action-heavy but given the fact we just got done with a tense escape, a quieter piece of worldbuilding and character-dev I felt would be appropriate. As well as having it work to start setting up a few other threads that’ll be showing up in the coming seasons. Besides, need to wind things down and prepare for what is to come here too! The Second Season needs to be edited and the third needs to be written,
but that's what NaNo is for! In addition to just regular writing...

Devnotes:
-Sweet Merciful Space Mom, I can still hardly believe i gutted and reworked this entire chapter in about a week... Also if someone gets that reference they're gonna get a cookie. Though a potato might be more appropriate...
-In the old version, he had the Ocarina of Time and broke the curse here.
-Given how prominent Midna is among the companions for this incarnation of Link, it felt important to make sure they got some scenes dedicated just to developing their characters and all.
-During the rewrite as well, there was going to be a bit of Link retelling a story. One involving a swordsman, a sorceress... And a unicorn. But that must wait until next season... Alas!
-Fun Fact: This might be the longest posted chapter so far at nearly 5000 words!

I will be having a Q&A on my tumblr here for the next few weeks for the series. In addition I'll be doing a couple requests so if you have something you wanna hear more about or something you wanna see related to the setting, now's your chance!

I have also started posting the series I mentioned last week here. This series will not update like this one though but if you're looking for more while I'm on the hiatus, keep your eyes here. Pieces may show up here and there.

As always, huge thank you to EVERYONE who read, left kudos, comments and bookmarks. This week special thanks goes to the most recent bookmark, RaineTakimura!

However, I also want to thank each and every person who's left kudos and comments over this incredible 25 weeks of posting. It's been almost half a year since I started posting this and I have to admit that I wasn't sure what the reception would be to it. Especially due to the source material, but I am incredibly thankful that in just that time it's been so received. So thank you each and every one of you who has taken the time to read the nearly 90 thousand words of this thing.

Very special thanks goes to MittensMcEdgelord for being my minder and always willing to bounce, LadyKuro for helping keep my sanity with breaks along with other bouncing of ideas, and Kalenmarc for their regular commenting for weeks on end.

Regular chapters shall resume on December 27th or January 3rd! An immense thank you to EVERYONE who's clicked on this and taken the time to read. You guys seriously rock. I'll see you soon enough with more and keep being awesome everyone!
Strange Brews

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His head was throbbing. The sun beat down on him from above. Link let out a groan and forced himself to sit up. Even though his mutations allowed him to drink potions and elixirs that would kill an ordinary human, even this one had knocked him on his backside after drinking it. He couldn’t remember exactly what he had to take it for, but he knew he was missing his hat when he drank it. There was a note stuffed in his belt which he pulled out and began to unfold when he heard a woman’s voice.

“Oh wow,” she said. “These are the best clovers I’ve had in a long time… Just can’t find good ones anymore in No Man’s Land.”

He looked around for who had said it. There wasn’t another soul around it looked like. When he looked over his shoulder, he saw Epona approaching. The mare stopped.

“You’re awake! Good! I was getting a little worried actually.”

That was her voice. His horse was talking to him. Link cocked his head and looked at her.

“You’re surprisingly dim-witted sometimes, you know that?”

“Epona?”

“Oh, figured it out then?” She snorted as Link got to his feet. “Well, seriously. I’m glad you’re okay after that. Especially when Irene said she wasn’t sure what it’d even do to your body when you drank it.”

“I feel like I got hit in the gut with a Horon jarl’s flail…”

“Oh, the big ball and chain?”

“Yes.” He groaned and rubbed his head.

“Well, you still have that contract from Talon. So, ready to get to work?”

“Uhh…” He unfolded the paper and read it quickly. “So… We’re looking for a goat… vampire?”

“That’s what it sounds like. I’ve never heard of something like it before at the ranch. Then again, they brought me to the tower for you guys when I was only a filly. So something could’ve showed up between now and then. Or maybe it’s even some monster brought out by the war.”

She was right. Plenty of undead had shown up with the war and even new kinds of them. They’d even seen a pair of massive poes that when injured by silver would burst into smaller ones.

“Usually undead appear on the field though. So what’s one doing this far from the front?”

“Well, wouldn’t be the first time we’ve run into something unnatural in No Man’s Land. Or even in our entire history.”

“Yeah, I’m remembering that thing that was cloaked in bats.”
“Lucky we had those light bolts too.” She started walking. “Well, let’s get to work then!”

Link walked next to Epona and looked over the contract a little more. Lon Lon Ranch was one of the largest and most reputable ranches in the entire country and the fact that the livestock was being attacked by something could lead to problems. Especially since none of the staff had been able to catch whatever it was in the act. It seemed to have been going after the goats exclusively at least. He assumed the elixir had something to do with why he was having trouble remembering some of the specifics he’d discussed with the ranch’s owner.

“So, this potion. The jabber nut extract one. Lets you talk to animals?”

“That’s what the witches said,” he said. “That’ll probably be our best starting point too.”

“Witnesses, I like it.”

“You want to take the goats or other horses?”

“You’re gonna need me if you wanna talk to the goats, Link. Trust me.”

“Why’s that?”

“This is your first time talking to animals as far as I know. Just trust me.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Okay…” He knew he talked to Epona every now and then, but to hear her talk back to him was something else. “This is still a little weird…”

“It’s weird for me too!” she said. “You know how many times I’ve said something to you and then you just completely ignore what I said? Or I hear you talking and then I respond but you don’t even hear me? Now, usually it’s not a problem. Like when we saw Rusl and company on the road getting attacked. They needed our help. I’m all for helping people who need it. Just like you. But sometimes? You’re not as funny as you think you are.”

“…Ouch.”

“Hey, there’s a reason why they say ‘straight from the horse’s mouth’ Link. You can always trust me to be honest with you. And you can take that from any horse too. We cannot lie.” They soon reached the main gates of the ranch. One of the hands waved at them as they entered.

“You get what you needed?” the ranch hand asked.

“Yeah,” Link said. “Which way to the goats?” Epona walked right past him. He looked at her.

“C’mon, I know where to go,” the mare said.

The ranch hand pointed. “Past the ring for the horses. The new extension. Think Malon’s at work in there already.”

“Oh good,” Link said. He smiled a little.

“C’mon already, Link!” Epona called. “The label said that potion only’s gonna last a day!”
The pens for the goats were corded off from the main pasture for the horses. A couple workers were on their knees milking some of them while a hired guard with a longbow and short sword watched for trouble. He gave Link a strange look when he entered the area, probably because of how heavily-armed he was compared to the guard. It could also have been because Epona had walked there and seemingly waited for Link to enter. The two of them approached a red-haired woman in a simple pink skirt and white top. She was busy milking the goat in front of her. They were not like the ones Link had seen in Ordon, nowhere near as large or having the ring-like horns on their heads.

“Hey, Malon,” he said.

The girl looked over her shoulder. Her lips broke into a smile. “Oh! You’re back!” Her eyes looked him over. “…Where are your Royals?”

She had been the first person to mention he wasn’t wearing the blue tunic of a Chosen. He didn’t know if it was a good or bad thing. He was at least thankful she hadn’t questioned the wolf charm that was now around his neck. “You haven’t seen the posters?”

“Posters?” She looked back at the goat as it bleated. Link heard a long and rambling string of what he assumed was words. Or maybe it was just a garbled groan. “You mean the same ones that Mr. Inigo saw when he was in Castle Town a couple days ago?”

He didn’t want to have this conversation exactly. He knew it would scare her and the last thing he wanted was to scare a friend who had come to the Tower when he was younger with her father to deliver goods. “It’s a bit complicated.”

“Sure it is…” She pulled the bucket out from under the goat and gave it a pat on the back. “What is going on, Link?”

“I…” He glanced down and to his left.

“I’m all for helpin’ you out with this job, buddy,” Epona started, “but you are completely on your own explaining this all to her.” The mare trotted away, heading for one of the other goats. Link watched as she walked away, leaving him to face the frowning Malon.

“So you really have left The Crown,” she began. “Did you think this through at all?”

“It’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever done, Malon,” he said. “There’s been so many times I’ve done things for them that keeps making me feel it isn’t right. I know how the world works, but there was just a line that I felt we crossed way too many times.”

He was expecting her to start to shout at him. She’d done it before when he’d done something extreme and dangerous. Even when they were kids she’d done it. Instead, when he looked back up at her, there was fear on her face. “The war really getting that bad out there?” she asked.

He nodded slowly. “I can’t tell you everything. But yeah. It’s getting even worse.”

“I haven’t heard a whole lot from what’s going on with the front. Whenever soldiers come through, they’re usually very quick. They don’t completely trust us ever since we got those big contracts with Labrynna and Calatia.” She motioned for him to follow as she walked towards another goat. “Then again, I’ve barely been allowed to even go into the field to help wrangle the cattle because of the war. We lost two cows just the last week to stalkin. And Rowhen was nearly killed by a poe.” They came to a goat that was grazing peacefully as she knelt down next to it. Epona was already there and appeared to have finished talking to them. “And whatever’s been attacking the
goats has been at it for almost three months now.”

“That long? Why didn’t anyone try contacting people back in Castle Town? Or even Ordon or Aboda?”

“It’s not safe to travel the roads. We were surprised when a few people showed up from Ordon.”

“Ah.” Link pushed some of his hair back, realizing it was getting long. “Were there any signs of the attacks before those three months?”

“No. Just had to worry about raiders or highwaymen wanting to steal livestock.”

“Ask her if the human attacks stopped when the goats started getting attacked,” Epona said.

Link glanced at his mare for a moment. “What?”

“You heard me.” Epona’s ear flicked and she snorted.

He looked at Malon again as she put her stool down by the goat. “Did the attacks by the raiders stop when the ones on the goats started?”

“I’m pretty sure they did,” she said. “The guards we hired out have been watching the grazing group regularly. You’d probably be better asking them about it, but I do remember hearing that for the past three months they haven’t even seen any humans trying to take livestock. It’s just been animals or the undead.” Malon gave the goat a pat. “Okay, hold still girl. This’ll only be a minute.”

Link looked at the goat as it spoke. In spite of having a potion that specifically allowed him to speak with animals, he hadn’t understood a single word that had come out of their mouth. He looked at Epona after with a confused look on his face.

“Apparently, Malon has very cold hands,” Epona said to him.

“…Ah…” He watched the goat, noticing its discomfort. “So… have any of the goats been killed by this thing?”

“No, actually. Not a one.” She looked over her shoulder at him. “Most of the time the wounded ones have a single nasty bite mark on the back of their necks and are usually bleeding pretty badly, but not one of them has actually been killed.”

“Which one was attacked most recently?” He folded his arms and glanced at Epona as she came closer.

“Sheleen.” She stopped for a moment to point over to one of the other goats. They had a number of bandages around their neck and were stumbling with every step.

“That’s our witness,” Epona said. “I’m gonna go start talking to her.” She started trotting towards the goat.

Link watched for a moment before looking back at Malon. The fact the red mare was speaking and had clearly picked up some of his own tricks when it came to investigating things amused him, but was still strange. “So…”

“Epona seems to be doing well.”
“Huh? Yeah. She is.” He moved so he was at her side rather than behind her. “Does it go after the same goats?”

“Not that I’ve seen. It seems to be giving them enough time to recover once they’ve been fed on.”

“Hmm…” A plan to catch the creature in the act was already forming. “Did anyone actually see this thing?”

“Mr. Ingo saw it. But he’s gone to Kakariko to try and sell some of the cows for slaughter. I know one of the guards too got a shot at it.”

“If you see him tell him I want to talk to him.”

“He’s out in the field today.”

Given the timing of it, he’d not likely have a chance to talk with them he thought. “When does the creature usually come around?”

“After dark. Usually well before dawn. Only a couple of the guards are still awake then on duty.” She finished milking the goat and gave it a pat. “Okay. All done.”

He heard the goat say something and stumble off. “Where are the goats typically at that time?”

“Their pens. By the horse’s stables.” She pointed it out at the southeastern side of the ranch. “And before you ask too, when I heard someone would be by to investigate from my father, I made sure that the entire place was left exactly as it was this morning. No one’s been in there since we got the goats out.”

“Good.”

She picked up the bucket and stool once more and turned around to face him. “You doing alright?”

“What do you mean?”

She started for another goat. “You’re all business for one. And whatever happened to make you leave The Crown I’m guessing is weighing pretty heavily on you.” She dropped her stool next to one of the other goats and sat back down.

“It’s the war,” he said after a moment. “It’s just getting to me.” There was no way he could give her any serious details. Even though Lon Lon Ranch had done a lot for The Crown and The Chosen, they still were not privy to all the secrets and work they were involved in. He knew he said one wrong word to her and the entire ranch could end up being put under investigation. “Got to a point in the fighting that I just couldn’t see that we were worthy of being called heroes anymore I guess. Just trying to make a difference wherever I can now. Was up on Death Mountain and in Ordon recently. Running all over to try and help the refugees.” He looked to Epona again. “You think of anything else that might be important, let me know, okay?”

“Of course.” She smiled. “When you’re done, come inside for dinner tonight. We’ve got a couple suckling pigs.”

“Perfect.” He smiled back a little. “Thanks for the info.”

“Yep!” She picked up the stool having finished with the next goat and turned back to face him. “When you’re all done I’d love to catch up some too.”
“Sure. But can we not talk about the war or anything about my current…”

“Of course. I understand enough that you can’t talk about a lot of this stuff.”

“Yeah. And I don’t want to get you and your family in any trouble. Heck, I’m taking a risk right now helping your dad with all this.”

As Link walked over to Epona, he heard the horse talking. “Yeah, okay, so… It’s a human-sized thing with big wings?”

“Yay as ya az ez eg ings an ors an du uh munjo!”

Link blinked as he stared blankly at the goat. “And I thought Twilise sounded confusing…” He then looked to Epona with folded arms. “Right, so what’d he say?” he asked.

“She said that it is a human-sized creature with big wings and does some sort of mumbo-jumbo to keep the other goats from getting too scared,” Epona said. “Sounds like some sort of magic from the description she gave me.”

“Any discernable features?”

“Ay ose. Eys ot um ead orms.”

“I suppose,” Epona translated. “He’s got red horns.”

Link looked to the goat once more. “So, what’s this magic of his do?”

“Ays eys es eek en anty goats. Ezes em an andy. En ey eets un en enel du munjo dun.”

He looked back at Epona when he couldn’t figure for the life of him what the goat had said other than the word ‘goat’. “She said that it kind of paralyzes them,” Epona said, “like fainting goats, but it doesn’t knock them down. Then the monster feeds on ‘em until the magic runs out.”

“Meaning the only reason this thing hasn’t killed any goats yet could be because the magic used to stun them wears off before it can.” Link looked at the goat again. “Does it affect humans?” he asked.

“Ay anno.”

“I don’t know.” Epona snorted once, lowering her head and shaking it violently. “Ah, damnit… I got a fly in my snout.” She snorted again, shaking her head and bowing it down quickly a second time. Her white mane waved in the wind as she did.

Link nodded. “I got that bit.” He looked back to the goat. “I know this is going to be difficult, but if you have any other details about the attack, we’d like to know.”

“Ey ets e men eets en de den. Ewes et de wendy!”

Epona looked up once more, having gotten the fly out of her nostril. “She said he comes into the pen at night. Just like Malon said. They go out the window too.”
“That’s where we’ll check next then.” Link looked back at the goat. “If you think of something else before dawn, let us know, okay?”

“Ay ose.”

When they had walked out of the gates and started for the goat pen, Link looked at Epona. “Do all goats sound like that?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” she said.

“That really thick and impossible to understand accent?”

“I understood it fine.”

“Well, you were born and had your breaking in here. I’d assume you’d know how to understand the accent.”

“That’s true, but you asked. And no. The Ordon goats sound like you.”

He stopped for a moment and looked at the mare. “Really?”

“Like when you were a kid! Higher voice, incredibly vocal! A couple I talked to while you were killing that undead spider-thing were shouting my name like how you used to call Lana when you were a kid!”

“…You mean…”

“LANAAAAAAAA!” She shook her head wildly, kicking her front legs up slightly, but not far enough to be a complete buck. “And she would always scream back at you in the angriest tone for doing it!” Epona turned her head to look him in the eye. “Admit it; you liked annoying her that way.”

Try as he might, Link couldn’t help but smirk slightly, remembering how many times it had worked and the trouble they’d gotten into. He felt a little misty-eyed as well, recalling the simpler days in spite of the training that lasted days and left him sore and bruised. “…I did.”

The mare simply laughed and Link had to chuckle a little as well. “And before you ask, some horses don’t sound like me either. I know Labrynnan Chargers all sound like ‘proper Labrynnan gentlemen!’ Complete with covering up their cursing with things that sound like they’d come out of Shad’s mouth. And most Gerudo horses sound like they constantly have a sore throat and growling. Must be all the sandstorms.”

“Even the mares?”

She snorted. “Are you kidding?! Especially the mares!”

“So do all Eldin Drafters sound like you?”

“They kind of do.”

“Huh…” He tried to think of other questions along this line that might be answered, if for no other reason it was interesting to talk to her. “What about cuccos? What do they sound like?”

“Always freaking out. I can’t really blame them though. You know how many maniacs like
chasing them with swords or throwing deku nuts at them? Or shooting them with arrows? Or throwing bombs at them? At least until you get a big enough mob of them together. Then they’re fucking terrifying! But you and Lana know all about that!"

Link let out a sigh, recalling the incident that had resulted in summoning gates being locked away, his first kiss and learning what an innuendo was. “We were nine. You’re almost required to do stupid things when you’re that young.”

Chapter End Notes

And so Season Two begins! Updates will be weekly just as before though it might move to Thursdays. We’ll see what happens.

Devnotes:
-From when I started this project I HAD to do something that would see Link talking to Epona, especially after one very specific quest in Blood and Wine. And even worked in foreshadowing to the first part. Legitimately curious though how many people caught it too.
-This was one of the first pieces I wrote for the entire series before it evolved into the long sprawling narrative it is now.
-This was also a chance for something very nice and light and fun to write. Especially some of the jokes and lampshading.

That's about it for this week! As always a huge thank you to all my readers out there. See you next week and keep being awesome!
The goat pen was a simple fenced area with a small pair of weathered barns against the stone wall. At the moment it was empty, the goats in the nearby area to be milked and tended by the farm hands. Link pushed the gate open carefully with Epona right behind him.

“Try not to disturb the scene too much,” she said.

“I know what I’m doing,”

“I do too y’know. Seen you do this enough to know some things we’re looking for too.”

“Alright then.” He looked over his shoulder at her, smirking slightly. “How should we start here?”

“Well, we know the creature consumes blood. It might not be a very clean eater and any blood we find might give us an idea where the goat was standing. And the window might give us a good idea of which way they go when they come in and leave.”

“And?”

“You can use the charm Midna gave you. See if you sense any of the magic the goat was talking about. If it’s been around enough times, there has to be a trace of energy.”

“Which can give us an idea of how to handle it. Smart.” Link was nodding. “I’ve already got an idea too here to catch it in the act.” He walked to the entrance and pulled the gate open. Inside it looked like to have over two dozen goats in the pen would be a bit cramped, but there was enough room for them to move around, especially for livestock. Lending a careful eye to the room, he saw the open window at the top was facing the East.

“Link, over here!” He turned around to see Epona motioning to one of the corners. She was motioning with her head against the wall. “Couple dead birds! Swallows I think. And it smells kind of funny over here too! Not like a dead thing should smell!”

He knelt down and inspected the two dead swallows. They were huddled in a corner together, as if they were trying to hide from something. Link reached for the wolf charm around his neck and clenched it. A small pulse of magic from his fingers and the dirt blew ever so slightly around him.

“Magic,” he said, feeling it. “Plenty powerful too.”

“I’m not seeing any other insects or small animals around this place either. And I think I remember Cia saying once that a powerful enough dark curse would drain the life out of things around the cursed individual.”

“She did say that.” He carefully picked up one of the birds and inspected it. As he did, it turned black and crumbled into ash and smoke in his gloved hand. “Completely consumed by the energies. Any insects or field mice probably burst into smoke when the spell was cast that paralyzed the goats.”

“So, this could be a cursed mage maybe?”

“Likely.” Link got to his feet again, adjusting his scabbard strap slightly. “You’d need a great deal
of magic to curse a mage. Or else he’s worse with magic than I am.” He stroked his chin for a moment and looked to the window again. It looked like it could be knocked closed from the inside and latched.

“You said you had an idea how to catch this thing?”

He nodded. “We borrow a carpenter’s sawhorse from the workshop and cover it with an old goat pelt or two. Make it look like one of the goats that’s sleeping. I’ll hide under it. Move most of the goats in with the horses tonight, but leave a couple in here as bait.”

“I don’t think the goats are going to like that part of it.”

“I wouldn’t either. But we know at least it doesn’t kill them. And if it’s a wild animal, rather than kill, it might try and flee as it has lost an easy meal. Giving me the opportunity to take it down or a way to keep it from getting back in.” He looked to the gate out of the pen. “If it’s dangerous and does get out though I’m going to need you.”

“You can count on me, Link. If it can fly, might I suggest the obsidian bolts?”

“Yeah.” He looked around the pens a little more before starting for the exit.

“Once it’s down though, what’d you do about it?”

“If it’s a mindless beast or some magic entity, kill it. It’s been a threat to the people here. If it’s someone who is cursed though… Maybe we can break it.”

“And what if they’re the only thing that’s been keeping the livestock safe from human criminals?” Epona cocked her head and her left ear flicked a little.

“Mmm?” He stopped to look at the mare.

“We’ve seen people bearing curses before trying to help people and not breaking their curses. Like that priest you and Groose ran into a year back? Gave him some powers at the cost of an incredible pain. Was only that it drove him mad you two had to put him down and thought you were a pair of murderous moblins! And he did a lot of good before that happened.”

“In the end though, he became what he fought so hard to protect the village against. A raging monstrosity driven mad by the hate that caused the curse in the first place.” He looked out on the ranch. Malon was running over, followed by from a distance it looked like a woman with large feathery sleeves. “We’ll have to cross that bridge when we get to it though.”

“Link!” Malon said, catching her breath a little. “There’s a rito here looking for you!”

“I can see that…” As they approached, he instantly recognized the rito woman as a Handmaiden of Valoo. Her arms were folded over her dark grey robe and her wings hung down from her arms like giant sleeves. A red sash over her shoulder held a harp on her back and there was a red and white messenger bag on her hip. Her deep dark auburn hair was back in a long ponytail. She smiled warmly the second she saw Link. “Medli! What’re you doing here?”

“Looking for you!” she said. “I got your letter and with things that have been happening, I knew I needed to find you.”

“You know her?” Malon asked.
“Yeah. She helped me on my first big assignment and some others too!” He smiled a little. “What’s going on, Medli?”

“Uh, can we talk a little more privately?” The rito looked at Malon. “No offense, but it’s a bit of a serious matter. Chief Komali said it’s need-to-know.”

“I can, but I’m in the middle of a contract,” Link said. He looked at Epona for a moment as the horse let out a whinny. “Malon, do you have any goat pelts?”

“We have a couple,” she replied.

“Good. I need them and a sawhorse. We need to make a fake goat I can hide under.”

“I can do that.” She smiled a bit. “Figured things out then?”

“Yeah. We’re going to try and catch it in the act.”

“Just tell me what else needs to be done.”

“Anything that makes it look and smell like a goat. We need to ensure it’s as realistic as possible. Gross as it might be, it’s really important it smells right too.”

“So it doesn’t suspect anything. Could be identifying them by the smell.” Malon was nodding as he spoke. “Okay. I’ll grab a couple hands and we’ll have it ready by sundown.”

“Thanks.” He watched her walk off and then felt Epona nudge him from behind. Link looked back at the mare. “What?”

“You’re gonna have to fill her in,” the mare said.

The rito smiled. “Good to see you too, Epona.” She walked over and petted her.

“Now, here’s someone who knows how to actually say hi! Not just appear out of thin air and magic with a laugh.” She shuddered. “Sometimes I still close my eyes and see my shadow with glowing red eyes!” Epona shuddered and shook her head, pushing her snout into the rito. Medli was more than happy to keep petting her.

“So, what’s going on?” Link asked. “You came yourself meaning it’s really important as opposed to just sending a courier.”

“That’s because someone is targeting our couriers,” Medli said, her voice clearly concerned. “Most of my trip has been on boats. A fishing ship to Windfall then the ferry to Aboda.” She let go of Epona and looked back at him, feathers fluffing up a little as she did. “We have lost seven in the past month. Four the one before. Link, I’m worried this is an attempt to pull us into the war. Or they think we’re feeding information to someone. Things that could change the course of the war.”

“That’s not good.”

She shook her head. “Nope. And you know how tough some of our couriers are.” Medli then stroked Epona’s snout once and turned back to face Link. “I know there’s a lot going on and with what you said in the letter… I can’t imagine how hard it was for you to do that. To just turn away from The Crown.”

“That’s not good.”

She shook her head. “Nope. And you know how tough some of our couriers are.” Medli then stroked Epona’s snout once and turned back to face Link. “I know there’s a lot going on and with what you said in the letter… I can’t imagine how hard it was for you to do that. To just turn away from The Crown.”

“It was.” He looked down at his boots. “I keep telling myself that I’m doing what I was trained for.” Link looked back at her then. “Do you think I’m doing the right thing here? Trying to end this
war by going against The Kingdom and The Tribes?”

“I don’t know, Link. We’ve always tried to stay out of politics like that. All I know is my tribe is in trouble right now. But with what you’ve done, I’m sure you are going to need help. And I can do some of that.”

“Your information network has never let me down. Having that at my disposal would help a lot. Especially for movements.”

“That’s easy for us.”

He looked back up at her. “Let me finish this job first. I’m on a bit of a time limit because I needed a special potion.”

“Hey! Tell her hi!” Epona said. “Like actually I’m talking to you because of it!”

Link stopped to glance at the horse and then back to Medli. “I can understand Epona right now. She wants to say ‘hi’.”

“Oh! Jabber nut extract.”

“You know it?”

She nodded. “Old minish recipe. Nearly impossible to find though. Must have a really good brewer then. Are you okay though? That sort of potion was only used by people who would regularly interact with the minish and their magic. And the last time someone did that was over a thousand years ago. And your body might be reacting to it in ways we don’t even know.”

“Yeah. I’m okay.” He stopped for a moment. “…I don’t look toxic, do I?”

“No. Perfectly normal. If you’re worried though, I can take a blood sample.”

“Might be for the best…” He folded his arms then. “If I have to go up against this creature I’m looking at, I’d prefer not to come back from it looking like a gibdo or using the only Nayru’s Tears I have to purge my system.”

“Yeah, and he spent all his rupees on getting the jabber nut one!” Epona added.

“It was a very specialized potion, Epona. And they didn’t charge me for it. Irene’s grandmother insisted I take it with me along with the others.” When he looked back at Medli, her brows were raised and mouth slightly open in surprise. He could read her face and what she was thinking. “…Yeah, it’s been a weird day so far.”

“So, what exactly are you two doing?” She put a hand on her hip and gripped the red sash across her body.

“Goat-vampire,” Epona said.

“It appears to be some sort of monster feeding off the goats,” Link said.

“That’s what I said.”

He looked over his shoulder. “How about you go talk to the other goats and let them know the plan so they don’t completely freak out while I fill Medli In?”

“Well, that would be a good use of our time… Hey! Could also figure ways we could maybe make
you even sound like a goat! Really fool that monster.”

“And how would we do that?”

“Uh, Link?” Medli asked.

He looked back at her. “Sorry. As I was saying, we’ve got some monster. We’re pretty sure it comes in through the window in the goat pen at night.” Link watched Epona walk past him and head for the goats. “Thinking it might actually be a cursed man too.”

“So if it is, you think you can break it.”

“Hopefully.”

“Well, count me in.” She beamed. “I won’t be much use in a fight as I’m exhausted from flying all day, but I can still do a few things around here. I also have my grappling hook. Can ground it with that.”

“Perfect.”

It was evening. Link looked to see Epona standing in the open stable door for the horses, just waiting for when he’d whistle if the creature they were after would get away. He watched as the fake goat that had been put together by Malon and a couple ranch hands was placed near the window. Medli had perched herself on the roof of the pen and pulled a large cloak over herself to make it look like she was a massive brown owl. In her hands was the grappling hook on a long rope. She watched carefully around with a yawn and looked down to see Link walk into the pen.

Malon was already waiting for him. On her hip was a large quiver and she wore a heavy leather cloak, the hood back at the moment. Only about nine other goats were in the pen and many had looked to have fallen asleep already. “All ready?”

“Just about,” Link said. He pulled a vial from one of the pouches on his belt. It was a bright lime green and the small label wrapped around it named it Kaepora’s Vigil. “Go wait with Epona. Have your bow handy?”

“Just in case… I also have a couple of the guards with me who wanted to help.”

“If it starts to use any magic, get back. Me and Medli know how to handle it. And with the bird I showed you, last thing we need is that energy twisting someone.”

“I know.” Her eyes looked down for a moment. “What about you? Will you be okay if it uses magic?”

“I will. I’ve dealt with actual mages too. I know what to expect.”

“Okay.” Malon took a deep breath. “Be careful then.”

Link gave her a nod and watched her walk out of the pen. Once she was gone, he pulled the cork on the vial and drank the potion. He gagged as he felt flecks of burning pulp cling to his throat, but forced himself to finish it. His eyes dilated beyond the capability of a normal human and he felt his heart beginning to beat far quicker. Things became clearer as he was now able to see far better in
the dark. The bit of exhaustion that he’d experienced earlier that evening had vanished. He shook his head a bit and forced his eyes to go wide. The darkness seemed to fade a little more from his sight even more. Link ran a hand over his face, feeling sweat collecting on his glove. Each bead had a tiny lime green tint to it. Prepared, Link pulled the crossbow from his belt and loaded one of the obsidian shard bolts. Cocking the weapon he then pulled the goat pelt back and hid under the sawhorse. All he needed now was to wait.

The hours passed and a waxing moon hung in the sky. Link watched the goats and stayed as still as he could as he saw, at last, the creature appear. The charm around his neck danced on its chain. He grabbed it to keep it from causing too much noise. Peeking out from the goat pelts, he saw the figure of a man in a tattered robe with bare clawed feet. He had a great pair of yellow bat wings. He looked around carefully and if the feeling from the charm he was clutching was any indication, there was magic already flowing between the man’s hands. The window above closed, making him spin around. Link saw a great pair of horns on their head and the wings spread wider. The goats bleated in a panic, but to Link’s ears it was a jumble of accented ays and ohs. The creature beat its wings and went for the window once more. Link took the opportunity then to push the sawhorse off its base and leapt for them.

The surprise caused the creature to snarl and throw a clawed hand at him. Dark bolts of energy struck Link’s chest, sending him flying through the wall and into the pen. He rolled as best he could and was on his feet among the shattered wooden boards in moments. The creature stepped out, snarling. In the moonlight and thanks to the enhanced vision the elixir gave him, Link was able to clearly see the individual was human, or had been at one time. He pulled the crossbow from his belt and took aim. As he did, Link saw Medli throw her grappling hook from the roof as the creature took to the skies. The hook snagged his right wing. She pulled hard back. In spite of her efforts, the cursed man took to the skies, with the rito holding onto the rope and letting out a long shriek. They both went over the wall.

Link whistled for Epona. The mare bolted from the stables and Link ran to meet her. “That thing is way stronger than it looks!” she said. “C’mon, Link! Hop in the saddle already!”

“Slow down a little!” he said. The mare obeyed, but did not stop. Soon as he was in the saddle, Epona broke into a gallop and leaped the fence after their quarry. The wolf around his neck continued to shake violently from the magic it sensed.

Chapter End Notes

Another day another chapter!

Devnotes:
-Always wanted to include Medli in the series and thought about how she'd develop and grow up as we only see her as a girl in Wind Waker. Figuring out some of her experiences and how she might have developed was a fun little activity.
-I know I have said this multiple times, but I love the rito design in Breath of the Wild. That's the design that's going to be getting used for the fic.
-Doing the investigative chapters are some of the ones I have the most fun with, even if putting them together sometimes causes some headaches. It gives a chance to show off Link's mind at work. I just try to think typically what it would be like as a puzzle in
a game arguably and how he would go about solving it or what information he'd gleam to drive the plot forward.

That's about it for this week! As always, a huge thank you to everyone who has and shall leave kudos, comments and bookmarks! I'll be back next week with more! Thank you for reading and keep being awesome people!!
Gratification

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He could hear Medli shouting and trying to use her tired wings to slow down the cursed man. She was struggling not far ahead of him and Epona. Link took aim with his crossbow, holding onto Epona’s reigns with his free hand. Aiming a little in front of them, he fired. The bolt exploded into tiny shards which flew into them. A couple small holes appeared in man’s right wing. Medli gave her grappling hook a tug and they both heard a snap. The hook was stuck, but the rito’s grip broke on the rope. Medli shrieked in surprise as she tumbled forward, crashing into a rock.

“Medli!” he shouted, pulling Epona’s reigns back. The mare reared, but halted.

The rito stumbled to her feet and fell forward onto the rock, hugging it. Her head rolled on her neck in a clockwise manner. “I’m… I’m fiiiine!” she said, almost singing. “That didn’t really hurt!” She tried to stand, but fell onto her backside. “Just need to figure out how legs work again!” She tried to stand once more, but fell right back down.

Link glanced back over his shoulder to see the ranch had lit up with torches and a couple guards they’d hired were rushing out to investigate. He even spotted Malon on the back of another horse among them. He looked back to see the winged man still trying to gain altitude. Before he could even nudge Epona with his heels, she broke into a gallop across No Man’s Land after them. The rope to Medli’s grappling hook swung behind them and they kept beating their wings. There was a dark glow of energy forming in one of their hands.

“Lookout Link! He’s got some magic!” Epona cried.

“I can see that!” He pulled the reigns to the side and Epona obeyed, dodging the blast of energy. Another pair of smaller bolts arced from their fingers at them. They flew wide though and there was no need to dodge them at all. “If I can get close enough we can grab the hook and pull him down!”

“What the fuck do you think I’m trying to do?!” She panted as Link noticed her begin to pick up speed.

“You don’t have to swear!” He reloaded the crossbow and fired. This time his shot clattered against a dark blue globe of magic surrounding them. The cursed man’s wings beat harder and he kept moving.

“I’m a goddess-damned warhorse who spent her time on the front hanging around foul-mouthed soldiers! Fuck’s just another adjective!” She leapt over an old stone wall. “And with the sheer amount of crazy you run into on a day to day basis it’s the only thing that keeps me sane!”

“Alright, I get it!” He pulled the reigns to the side to avoid another blast of magic. It crashed into the ground and created a crater. The chase continued for another minute before they got close enough for Link to grab the rope. He pulled hard as he could and nudged Epona to go to the right. They heard their quarry roar as he was pulled down. Link pulled his sword from his back then as they circled back around to see the cursed man getting to his feet. He tugged on the grappling hook and it pulled them to the ground again.
“W-wait!” they shouted as Link and Epona grew closer. “What are you?!” Link got a clear look at them now. He had been a hylian at one point if the pointed ears were any indication. His eyes were a glowing yellow and a chain around his neck bore a medallion. Link recognized the crest upon it from his time with The Crown. He had been a noble all the way from Labrynna.

“Explain yourself!” Link said, dismounting. “Why were you attacking the goats?”

“It was necessary!”

“Why?”

“I… Sellsword. I am cursed.”

“Thanks, Captain Obvious,” Epona said.

“Epona,” Link replied, glancing back at her. He looked back at the cursed man. “Maybe you should start at the beginning.” He held his sword up, defensively. “Do not move though.”

“Alright. Alright…” He held his hands up. “Whoever you are, you are more tenacious and prepared than the guards they hired.”

“Why attack the goats?”

“It was necessary, I said… The pain of the magic in me. It hurts, but the warmth of the living eases it. I could not bring myself to drink from another human though. So… So I went after animals.”

“So goats…”

“Not at first.” He moved slightly into a sitting position. “The goats are recent.”

“So you worked your way up.” Link lowered his sword, but did not put it back in its scabbard. “How long have you been like this?”

“A year, maybe two?”

“And how did you become cursed?”

“A witch in my homeland. Said I needed to learn gratitude. Only then would she lift the curse.” He closed his eyes and looked at the ground before opening them again. “She was burned at the stake. So I am now lost to this curse.”

“You never killed any of the goats.”

“How could I? The ranch would be ruined if word got out their animals were dying within its walls! And they’d already lost so many to the brigands wandering the fields…” He looked back at Link. “Back home, I owned a ranch.” He held up the chain around his neck. “Some of the finest horses in all Labrynna.” The chain clinked as he let go. “But this war has destroyed so much of Hyrule. I saw the ranch in its current state and couldn’t let them suffer any more than they already had.”

Link nodded slowly. He was indeed a cursed man, but he could see why he had done everything. The reasons were clear and the events fit with what he knew. He looked at Epona. The mare shook her head and bowed it. Her dark eyes looked up again. “Could you try with a spell with an ocarina? Like you and Midna did?” she asked.

“I didn’t bring it with me,” Link replied, shaking his head. “If I had taken The Ocarnia, The
Inquisitors would’ve been right after us. I’m sure of it.”

“Try what?” the man asked.

Link slowly looked back to the cursed man. “What’s your name?”

“Habsburg… Largo Habsburg.”

“Largo, my name is Link. And I am willing to try something to break your curse.” He put the sword back in its scabbard.

“But if you do that, the ranch will be near defenseless! Let me continue my work here.”

“You keep going like this, you’ll destroy yourself though. And possibly the ranch too. You said yourself even that the goats were recent. I’d assume then you started with smaller creatures. Like rats. Eventually you’ll have to feed on humans. What would happen if you accidentally did kill one of the goats? Or had to move on to other creatures? Or a human? And I’d really prefer not to come back and have to kill you because the curse had consumed your mind.”

“Then return when the war ends, please.”

“You’re going to keep feeding on the goats though! And it might move to the horses!” Epona said. “I can understand what you’re trying to do here too, but it’s going to draw more attention too… Maybe there’s a way…” She stopped and whinnied. Epona patted her front hooves on the ground repeatedly. “Link! I have an idea!”

He looked over his shoulder at Epona. “What?”

“How much money does he have?”

“What?”

“If he owns a ranch back in Labrynna, that means he’s a noble. Anyone in Labrynna who owns enough land is a noble. Meaning he has a great deal of funds…”

“…And The Queen gives him a stipend for public works projects in their lands, which have likely built up considerably over the past years…”

“My lands are currently safely in my brother’s hands,” Largo said. “But I don’t see what you’re getting at…”

Link looked back. “Even with the curse broken, you can help them,” he said. “Hire an additional mercenary company to help patrol and keep the ranch safe from the undead and raiders.”

“It might be difficult but…” His eyes widened. “But I could do it. I used to supply one of the companies out of Yoll Province. I could get my brother to work a contract for them to come here. The diplomatic situation between Labrynna and Hyrule is still bitter from the war over twenty years ago, but mercenaries follow the money, not causes or nobles. And we could word it in such a way that we’d even have Ambi’s blessing!”

Link was nodding, recalling again his time with The Crown and the attempt on The Empress’ life. “It could work. Might be dangerous for her, but like you said. Mercenaries follow the money.”

Largo nodded then. “I can do that. I swear it.”

“Okay.” Link took a deep breath and sheathed the sword. “You keep them safe and you’ll have my
thanks.” The charm around his neck began to shake.

Largo began to cough, hands and knees in the dirt. His wings beat a bit as he choked violently. Link’s hand instinctively went to the sword on his back, but he did not draw it as he saw the man vomit. In the filth that dripped out of his jaws was a faint orange glow. In spite of his exhaustion, he looked far healthier than he had and had more color in his skin. The claws he had seemed to recede slightly and he appeared more human. Link had never seen something like it before and slowly knelt down to pick one of the crystals out. His charm shook on its chain gently as he inspected it.

“It’s magic,” he said. “It’s…” He furrowed his brow as Epona pranced a bit excitedly.

“It’s the curse!” she cried. “He just said that he needed to learn gratitude from the old witch! And he’s starting to!”

“Meaning he needs to do things that people will be thankful for.” His stomach didn’t churn at the smell, for he had smelled far worse on the front. “How’re you feeling?”

“I… Better, actually,” Largo admitted. He slowly got to his feet. “I don’t feel the hunger like I once did. It’s still there but… weaker.” His eyes no longer seemed monstrous, but rather big and brown and filled with worry.

“It’s not broken, but we have time now to find the proper way to break it since the one who initially cast it is dead. Now though, we need to let the ranch know what’s going on. That help will be coming. Perhaps you can even stay there rather than No Man’s Land now.”

“Will they understand though? I meant no harm. But…”

“I know. The curse.” He picked up the grappling hook as Largo removed it from his wing. Link began to coil the rope. “I can make them understand it. And if there are signs of it returning, they can contact me specifically. Someone else may not be as merciful, or think the best solution is to take you to the slaughter house to remove your head.”

“Okay. Are you sure though?”

“Yes.”

After talking over a couple more details and Largo’s letter to his brother, Link climbed back into Epona’s saddle and began riding back to the ranch. The moon was far along in the sky and would be setting soon. If not for the Kaepora’s Vigil running through his veins, he’d have been asleep in the saddle. He took a deep breath and pulled a canteen of water from one of Epona’s saddle bags.

“Well, that went better than expected!” Epona said.

“Yeah,” Link said. “Still kinda surprised we stumbled into a solution but I’m not gonna look a gift horse in the mouth.”

Epona groaned. “You did that on purpose.”
He was quiet for a moment as the mare stopped trotting for a second. He smirked a little. “Yeah. Couldn’t resist.” He rubbed his eyes. He was just hoping to get back to the ranch and maybe pass out in the hay of the barn when the elixirs wore off. Link leaned forward and stroked the mare’s neck. “Really glad too you’re okay. Some of the magic he was throwing got me. You never seem to take a scratch though.”

“Yeah… About that.”

“What?” He leaned back in the saddle a little to stretch and rolled his head on his neck.

“I got nothing actually. You’d think with what we do on a regular basis though I’d be as scarred up as you! Or worse. Like the fight in the Wilds. Arrow coming right for me! And then it somehow wound up in your arm!”

“Yeah, I know.”

There was a silence between them as they turned down the road and started up the hill to the ranch’s front gate. “You did really well.”

“Thanks. We made a damn good team there.” She snorted a little. “Though… I wanna talk to you about something and I don’t think we’ll get another opportunity soon…”

“What is it?”

“We have got to talk about the people you end up meeting. Especially the girls.”

“What?” he responded flatly. Link could hardly believe what had just come out of Epona’s mouth.

“You heard me.” She glanced over back at him before looking back to the way before them. They could make out the walls of the ranch then. “So… How many girls you hit it off with have red hair?”

“Epona, what are you getting at?”

“I’m saying I’ve seen you with enough of them that you seem to get on very well with them. Always smiling and friendly…” Her voice was clearly teasing, but he was tired and not sure if he wanted to put up with it. “There’s Malon of course. She’s always beaming whenever she sees you. And you guys usually chat quite a bit. Come to think of it, was kinda odd how you didn’t but with everything goin’ on I can’t really blame you.”

He was thankful the mare didn’t mention Marin. Even though it had been years now, just thinking of her caused a pain in his chest. He forced the thoughts of the songstress from his mind. “I don’t know.”

“Oh! Or Medli. She’s always smiling. She even was smiling when she went into the rock earlier. And that’s a talent given she’s got a beak. Like how her eyes kinda move and the corners of her mouth perk up!”

“She’s a Handmaiden of Valoo though.”

“So? What? Are they not allowed to…”

“Epona!”
“What? It’s a valid question! At least for this conversation.” She snorted. “Hell, I didn’t even bring up a possible romantic entanglement and that’s where your mind went! I wasn’t even going to ask about that!”

He groaned, running a hand up through his hair. “I meant being friendly and diplomatic is part of her training! There’s a reason why the dragon’s handmaidens are beloved bards in the South Seas.” He looked at the horizon a little and directed Epona to go down the road that would take them to the main entrance of the ranch. “Besides, her hair is more of a dark brown…”

“No it’s not. It’s a dark red. And that’s beside the point, Link. And if it’s not a redhead it’s a woman who can make your brains dribble out of your ears by snapping her fingers!”

“…I can’t believe I’m hearing this…”

“What?”

“My horse is trying to play matchmaker for me.”

“Oh, don’t tempt me. I’m just telling you what I’ve seen! And on that note too, you cannot tell me you haven’t noticed the ways Lana and Cia both looked at you. And still did before… Well…”

He was not going to put up with this anymore. At least with the twins he had a reason. “And you know how jealous they get of one another. Hell, you probably even saw it when…” Link kept his mouth shut, knowing the last thing he needed was to give anything away that could give his mare more fodder.

“My point is they were both sorceresses you got on incredibly well with. And you were trying to sneak kisses from them when you were a teenager! And now you have to at least take a glance at any magic woman that walks by!”

“Epona…”

She snorted. “Why can’t you just find a normal girl? Why does it have to be someone with a bit of fire in her or someone who could turn you into a rabbit?”

Link let out a sigh as they neared the front gate. He dismounted and opened it. He took Epona by the bridle then and guided her through. “Do I look normal to you?”

Epona was silent for a minute as he closed the gate behind her. “Actually, now that you mention it…”

“Oh, sweet Farore no…” He put his hands over his eyes with a long sigh.

“…Someone just recently asked you the same question that matches both your types! Right after she gave me a heart attack!” Epona walked up next to him then. “Not to mention how you two were huddled up under that bridge just a few days ago.”

Link pulled his hands over his face slowly. The sweat and dirt collected on his glove, still holding the same lime green tint ever since he’d consumed the potion that was forcing him to stay awake. “Why did I know the second you mentioned her you were going to say something about that? She was shaking. What was I supposed to do, let her freeze?”

“Ah, but she could’ve just slipped into your shadow and been absolutely fine. I mean, she was barely wearing anything so of course she’d be cold…”
“She had her wolves and set them to guard though. So we had to.”

“Geez, you are thick when it comes to women sometimes!” Epona snorted. “You’ve got them throwing themselves at you! And I don’t think you’ve even really noticed but you should! You had a princess using you as a pillow to keep warm when better sources of heat were available and you didn’t even seem to think about it?”

There was a reason. One that made him hold his tongue though. “Epona…”

“What?”

“Why all this interest in my personal life?”

“Well…” Epona started. “You’re my human. And we horses are loyal to our humans. And we’ve been through more than most. We’ve relayed messages from forts along the border to Castle Town. Went along the coast tracking down a rogue witch. Heck, we’ve even walked The Twilight Realm and Lorule. How many horses can say they’ve been to other worlds?” She lowered her head enough that she could look Link right in the eyes. “And… I’m worried about you.”

“Why?”

“Most of the jobs we’ve been on for The Crown. You’ve been alone. It’s just you and me. You got lucky with the first big one in the islands. I didn’t hear any serious details, but I’ve heard enough when you, Medli and Linebeck were hanging around Aboda that one time that it sounded like you actually liked working with everyone. And then there was Midna and Ravio during The Conjunction…” She chuckled a little. “As much as you guys kinda grudgingly accepted needing each other at first by the end of it you guys were… You were closer than you were with The Twins or Pipit and Groose.” She paused for a moment. “But most of the time it’s just us. You could talk with the people back at The Tower when you had your old charm, but not the same as having someone by your side. It’s dangerous to go alone after all. The past few weeks. Working with other people. I’ve noticed you seem happier. You work harder for the people with you.” She sighed a little. “My point is… Don’t go alone here, Link. I don’t care if it’s someone you have romantic feelings for or some mercenary out of Holodrum looking for money and glory, but please. Don’t keep going alone into the war. I’m afraid that you aren’t going to even recognize yourself by the end of it."

“I’m not alone, Epona,” he said, sun peeking over the horizon. “I have you. And we’ve made a heck of a team all these years…”

She didn’t say anything. Her ear flicked and she stared at him.

“What?” Link took a step forward towards her. “Epona?”

The mare whinnied once and nudged him gently with her snout. He realized it then. Link felt his heart sink as he reached around her and gently stroked her neck with one hand and her snout with another. A cucco crowed and a new day began.

Chapter End Notes
And so, I hope you enjoyed this little bit of levity as things are taking a turn here.

Devnotes:
-One reason this is a bit late in posting rather than earlier is because of the last scene. I rewrote a bit of it here and there to flesh it out more.
-Largo was, obviously, based on Batreaux. Knowing how he desired to become human, I tried to take the basic concepts there and twist it around a bit like we see in the short story A Grain of Truth from the first short story Witcher book. Changing it around though to incorporate a unique way to breaking the curse that fit with the darker nature of the other work. The idea of him spitting out and thus rejecting the cursed magic felt like it'd come out of that world.
-Given how Link seemingly always attracts SOME kind of attention, I had to have Epona call reference to it. Admittedly I didn't realize when writing it that it'd go this way with what Epona said at the end, but it felt appropriate given she is kinda a constant companion of his throughout the games. And arguably the only companion who has appeared in more than one game. Before Ocarina of Time, we see Link actually facing the world alone. In most of the more recent ones, the companions are there and interact to a degree. Even if they're not directly with him like The King of Red Lions or Ravio. The companions are there, but he's still alone. And though there is some appeal I think to it being Link against the world, that sort of effect could really do something to someone.

Anyways, that's it for this week! Next week, we're going out to sea! As always, thanks to everyone for reading and keep being awesome people!
It was a rare luxury that he was intent on indulging in as long as he possibly could. He was sure that it’d soon be replaced by the elements once more and the harshness of the winds of the seas, but Link was going to enjoy having a roof over his head, a roaring fire to keep him warm and a soft dry bed until the morning came and they left the coastal village of Aboda for Windfall. He sat by the fireplace in the nice inn with his sketchbook out and a pencil in his hand. It was also very nice to for once be out of the armor and not carrying the sword and shield on his back. He kept the bracers and the hidden knife though, and the wolf charm around his neck. Otherwise, he didn’t look out of the ordinary in a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows and a tanned pair of pants. The posters had yet to reach the port city, so he was safe there for the time being as well.

Around at the late hour were a few patrons talking and drinking. Two of them were speaking with Medli as she took payment and letters for the courier service the Dragon Roost rito were renowned for. He looked back at the page, having a rough sketch of the cursed man he’d helped a few days ago at the ranch. Link rubbed his thumb against the edge to smear the graphite to shade it a little. As he finished, he saw an older woman come by with a tray of steak skewered on thin knives and a couple baked apples. She placed it on a small table next to his chair.

“Will there be anything else?” she asked.

“No thank you,” Link said. He pulled a pair of violet rupees from his wallet and handed them to her. She stuffed them in a bag on her hip and went back to work. Medli started walking over having finished her own business and pulled another chair over. He looked up as he closed his sketchbook and slipped the pencil in the spine. “Thanks for covering the rooms.” Link pulled the table between them.

“Of course,” she said with a smile. “And this looks delicious. It’s so hard to get fresh apples out in the islands ever since the war started.”

“I’ve seen the price of the spices I like from the islands too go over two hundred a bottle.” He picked up one of the knives and a fork, pulling the first piece of meat off.

“Three hundred now.”

“Nayru wept, you’re kidding.”

She shook her head. “And only going to go higher.”

“Great…” He took a bite of the meat as Medli pulled a map from the bag on her hip.

“Maybe Linebeck could get you some cheap.” She bent the map a little back to make sure they had the coastal section. “He’s been doing a lot of smuggling ever since the war started. Often goods. And though he’d never admit it, I know he’s helped some people escape to Labrynna.”

“And how much is he charging them?”

“I don’t know that.” She picked up one of the apples. “Though, rumor has it that he took two
families of hylians and gerudo all the way around to the far Western ports in the Termina Great Bay and didn’t charge them.”

Link nearly choked on the piece of steak he was chewing hearing that. “Linebeck? Really? He would never admit that if it was true…” He took another piece of meat and ate. “He’s too prideful of his whole ‘man of the sea’ persona.”

“I remember how much we had to bribe him when we needed his boat… Would never have run headfirst into Vaati’s lair either when we first met him but he’s a bit of a soft-hearted devil now.” She bit into the apple and made a muffled squeal of delight. “We need to get a couple of these for the trip.”

Link chuckled a little. “We should.” He watched as Medli pulled the map over a little and showed him it. “So… Windfall then Dragon Roost?”

“That’s what the plan is.” She swallowed what she was chewing. “Before I came to Hyrule to find you, I did talk to Linebeck a little.”

“And?”

“Well, he’d be more than willing to provide you transport again. On the condition it doesn’t lead us into another mad and possibly lovestruck wind mage. He’s docked in Windfall right now, taking on supplies.”

“His words?”

“His exact words.” She took another bite of the apple with a grin on her face. “He just wants whatever salvage rights we can give him. I told him it might be a bit tough though as you’re not with The Crown anymore though.”

“And they weren’t exactly pleased I gave him those when we first worked together.” He leaned back in his chair for a moment, enjoying the softness of it. “The result was exactly what The Crown wanted though.”

“They just didn’t like how you went about it, I know. I run into that most of the time when I’m asked to mediate disputes. It doesn’t even have to be something big. It can be two tribesmen arguing over who gets to put their fishing skiff where at the island docks. And they always feel like compromise makes them look weak. When in reality, it’s just a chance to show your compassion and empathy. And great rulers have those.”

“I’m understanding that, I’m just wondering where they are these days.”

“Well, you have to look at it from both sides. And with the way the war is going, Ganondorf and King Daphnes are both too prideful of their people to admit they’ve made mistakes.” Medli took another bite of her apple. After swallowing she picked the map up. “That’s why I’m more than willing to help you. You’ve always done right by Valoo’s servants. In our entire history, only one other Chosen was ever someone we’d have been willing to do what we’re doing now.”

“Oh?” He took the final piece of steak from the knife and ate it.

“He was the one who saved Valoo from a monster, centuries ago.” Medli picked up her knife and fork then and pulled the three pieces of steak off it. “You must’ve heard that one back at The Tower.”

“I remember some of it… It’s been years since I heard it though.” He picked up his apple then and
took a bite.

“You mentioned others in your letter. What about them? Midna and Ravio and Shad?” She smiled a bit as she skewered some of her meat with her fork. “How is Shad actually? I haven’t seen him in months. Was that information on the Oocca I sent useful?”

“I helped him escape the castle. We didn’t get much chance to catch up. And it’s a bit of a long story.”

“I bet. I’ve heard there are guards everywhere and there’s a curfew.”

He nodded. “People are afraid of their own neighbors up there. I’m expecting a witch hunt to start any day. I might’ve gotten him out just in time too since Zelda and General Impa were already asking him about me. If there were any signs of my… Leave of absence.” He took another bite of his apple and swallowed after a moment. “Anyways, are there specific areas your people are disappearing from?”

“The red marks on the map are last known locations and their routes.”

He took it from her and put his apple down to look it over. He recognized the islands and inspected the marks carefully. Not far to the south of Windfall was Dragon Roost Island; home of the rito. A bit further southwest was the island he’d been born on and another two smaller islands that wouldn’t show up on major maps before it went out further to sea. The marks did not appear to have any rhyme or reason to them. Each one was dated though and there was a big circle in the middle of the chart with a question mark in it. The islands of the Southern Seas lined the circle almost perfectly. “The dates on the marks…”

“Last time anyone saw them. Komali is putting our people on it as well to try and investigate the paths they took. The winds are normal though. We can rule out someone using such elaborate magic to manipulate them.”

“Any word from the Labrynannan Zoras?”

“Ambassador Tolec and his guard arrived at Dragon Roost as I left for Hyrule. I’m sure they’re talking about it right now.”

Link focused on the map, and the large circle in the center of it with the question mark. “What’s here?”

“It’s where all the routes mostly converge.”

“I figured that…” He glanced up to see a slightly annoyed look on Medli’s face at his sarcasm. “Are there islands around there? Or is it all just open water?”

“There are some platforms, but it’s mostly just open water. A few small islands here and there too. I’ve never been down there.”

“Hmm… And the pirates usually don’t go out this way. No trade routes really go through it. At least ones that would be profitable for them.”

“Not a one recently. Sailors are talking of some storms in the area.” She began to eat. “We’ll know a bit more about the situation under the seas when we get to Dragon Roost probably. We’re all thinking it might be some gyorg leviathan or gigantic octo that’s doing it, but it’s too targeted. Only our couriers are missing.”
“And the zoras?”

“We’ll find out soon.”

Link finished his apple then and folded the map back up. He looked at the fire again, watching the flames crackle against the logs.

They left early, catching the first ferry that would take them to Windfall. Due to the surprisingly calm winds that day though, the sun was setting when it docked. The island had a number of elegant buildings clustered around the main docks. The usually open western field was covered in tents and small campfires. The war had not reached the islands, but the people leaving it had. A couple smaller buildings were near the western coastline, along with a lighthouse. The island was a lot larger than it initially looked. The most distinct feature of the town on the coast was the enormous windmill in the center of town. In the setting sun, it cast a long shadow over the docks.

Link stepped off the ferry and moved out of the way as a pair of gorons lugged barrels of supplies from the ship. Unlike the ones on Death Mountain, they bore blue tattoos on their bodies. He looked to Medli as they waited until they could get out of the way.

“Good to be back here,” she said as they walked along the pier. “And good to see there’s still a fair bit of trade going on.”

“Agreed,” Link said. “Then again, I’m seeing a lot of the Royal Seal of Labrynna on these goods.”

“Since trade with Hyrule has been nearly cut off because of the war, the islands need some of their supplies from another source. It’s expensive, but there have been some edicts from Queen Ambi to put it to good use.” She stopped for a moment and looked to the other ships docked. “I’m going to find the harbormaster and get us where Linebeck is docked.”

“That is unless he’s at the tavern.” He shifted the scabbard’s strap around his shoulder a little.

“Should we split up?”

“Yeah. I’ll check the tavern then. I need to see Doc Bandam about a couple of my potions.”

“Meet you at his place then?”

“Yeah.”

“See you there then!” She waved to him as she went along the docks, soon flagging down a worker with a smile.

Link turned and started into the town. It hadn’t changed much since he’d been there years ago as part of his first major assignment when working for The Crown, and it was a little comforting to see that it didn’t look like the war on the mainland had reached it. Apart from the massive refugee camp that was in the open field at the moment, Windfall had always been more of a hub for the islands in the South Seas. One thing that did bother him though was seeing signs in some of the shops along the cobblestone road up to the tavern. Many were refusing to serve those from the mainland who were escaping the war. One or two though didn’t have them, including Bandam’s Brewery.
He was at the top of the hill and by the tavern when someone shouted at him. “You!” they called. “The hylian in green! Turn around!”

Link’s mind quickly started to think what was to happen. He turned slowly, looking over his shoulder as he did. There were five zoras in scale armor. One of them had a long dark blue cloak over his shoulders. On his shoulder was a mark identifying him as a noble from Labrynna. There was a sneer on his face as well and Link could’ve sworn he saw the whites of their eyes as well. Among them was a gerudo in leathers and a dark red cloak. She had a pair of scimitars on her back and a quiver on her hip and was watching closely. She did not have the stature of some of the gerudo he’d met or fought, suggesting she wasn’t from the Northwestern tribes. Maybe she was from the Phantom Wastes or Mudora Badlands he reasoned. The noble approached Link quickly. “So you’re the bastard who stole my bride!” he said.

“What?” Link asked.

“You know exactly what you did! She gave you something! Something she had promised to me!”

It took a moment, but he recalled the events at Lake Hylia. This was Prince Remor. This was the man Ruto had said could go beach himself. He held up his hands. “Did you listen to her?”

“Of course I did! And she named a hylian matching your description as the man! You have insulted me and my family by doing this! And you’ve insulted her by running off!”

“He is a wanted man,” the gerudo said, her arms folded. “Perhaps she’s testing you by doing this. Wants to see how you handle it. After all, if there’s enough doubt from your actions in the eyes of the family, it might get called off.”

“She merely offered me payment for services rendered,” Link said. “It would’ve been insulting not to accept what she offered.”

“Ah, a special problem-solver then.” Her gold eyes sparkled for a moment. Link looked at her, noticing around her neck hung a chain. Upon it was the head of a viper, its mouth open and fangs barred. The eyes were rubies. It instantly reminded him a little of the wolf that hung around his neck.

“Well, I am here to reclaim her heirloom!” The noble’s hand went for the long spiked iron club at his side. “I, Prince Remor of the Caretor Depths, challenge you for her hand!”

Link clenched his fists, remembering his history. He looked at the zora. “…Really?” Link asked. He let out a sigh. “Look, she had whatever reasons she had for it.” He turned around. Two of Remor’s entourage moved to block him. A small crowd had gathered to see what was going on. Link spied even a pair of island guards watching the commotion. One of the noble’s guards spoke with them, probably bribing them not to intervene. The ones in front of him though, held their coral spears ready. Link was out of options. He could try and face all of them, but he was not sure about the gerudo with them, not to mention with so many other people around who could become casualties or a problem, he didn’t want to risk it turning into a riot.

There was however also the fact that if a noble was killed or badly wounded by a Chosen, even a rogue one such as him, it could force Labrynna to send a response. He let out a sigh. Even if he agreed to the duel, he knew if he didn’t pull his punches, he could be looking at the exact same situation for Hyrule he’d been trying to avoid. “I hate politics…” he muttered. Link pulled his sword from his back then. He put it in his right hand and then turned, blade raised upward and the
hilt in front of his face. “If you insist, I accept. Until one of us cannot stand.”

“Fool…” He pulled the club from his belt and raised it with a grin.

Link swung his blade downward in a salute for a duel. The other guards and the gerudo backed away to give them space. The zora noble held the club firmly at the grip and took a step forward. Link moved to his left. Suddenly Remor swung towards his right. Link parried swiftly, but the weight of the club knocked his blade away. He kept his grip though and backed away. Not waiting for another chance, the noble swung again. This time, Link rolled to the side, under the arc, quickly getting back to his feet before. He heard some of the spectators cheer a little.

Prince Remor stepped back, keeping his club raised. Link took a second to look them over. Their stance was that of a duelist. He was expecting Link to fight like one it appeared. At The Tower, they’d been trained how to duel, but most of their training was about survival. If it had been in the field or he wasn’t concerned about wounding them, he’d have his shield on his arm and used that to beat the blows and throw him off balance. Once done, he’d have swung around and brought the blade through the back of their neck. Or he could have slashed low when they charged, slicing into their ankle. As they’d have fallen, he could have sidestepped and then stabbed through their back. None of this was going to happen though as long as he kept his mind focused on just outlasting them.

Link saw how he kept his weight balanced, the movements. The club was heavy and swinging it took a great deal of energy. Link saw an opportunity, lowering his blade. “Conceding already?” he said.

“I’m still standing,” Link said. “And it is until one of us cannot stand… Haven’t even hit me yet.”

Remor took another swing, lunging forward. It was over his head. Link rolled right this time as the club clattered on the cobblestones. He swung it from the ground up in an arc, but missed as Link got out of the way. Link feinted with his blade forward, putting Remor briefly on the defensive. It was only an instant though as he swung again. With each one, he saw how his opponent was letting the weight of the weapon control most of his swing. Link flicked his wrist, the flat side of the blade out in case he ended up hitting them it wouldn’t do as much damage as it might have it made contact. His goal though was to force them to parry, which the prince did like an expert. Also as expected, they brought the club down again, trying to hit him. Link jumped back out of range.

“Link! What are you doing?!” he heard Medli shout. He glanced over to see the rito. It was a mistake on his part as the club was thrust right into his gut and sent him stumbling back. He recovered though before there was another strike and rolled.

“I’ll explain later!” The noble took another swing, this one in an arc. Link jumped back once more, swinging his blade around to beat it further along. It threw Remor off balance slightly, but he saw them recover. If not for the fact he had a lot of people watching him and he didn’t want to draw any more attention than he likely already was, he’d have used the barrier and shadow snares to trip him up. He would’ve loved to have switch hands and pull the crossbow at his hip to put a steel bolt through their knee. But he knew it would worsen things. He was merely trying to wound the noble’s pride enough to force a retreat. Link moved back for a moment and then lunged forward with his sword; another feint. Remor quickly responded to it.

“You haven’t landed a blow still,” he said to Link.

The hylian stayed quiet, watching. Once more, he tried for a feint and again they went to block it.
He cut a circle in the air with the point of his blade, going around the club as it tried to block the strike and beat it to the side. There was an opportunity. Had it been any other situation, Link would’ve lunged right for the heart and ended the fight in an instant with such a wide opening. Instead, he backed away and continued to watch the noble’s moves. Already he could see his opponent growing tired from the swings. Link’s enhancements were keeping him going. As they took another swing, Link allowed it to land. It sent him into the dirt and made the zora laugh.

Link watched him turn his back to him. The crowd gasped a little as he stood back up. He rolled his head a little on his shoulders and twirled the sword in his hand. It was a little clumsy with his right, but he still managed it. When the noble turned, he saw the hylian standing ready again, blade raised. He smirked slightly, knowing all he had to do was just provoke him a little more. Link spat into the street. “I can do this all day…” he said. “Can you?”

Remor noble raised his club once more and charged. Link ducked under the swing and beat the club as it passed with his blade. It knocked him just enough balance enough that they stumbled forward and into the crowd. Some of the onlookers shrieked in surprise. One of the noble’s guards stepped forward to help him up.

“If he can’t stand on his own, this is over,” Link said. He watched the zora try and use his club for balance. As he’d thought, he’d expended all his energy with the wide swings and his temper had gotten the better of him.

“You bastard!” he gasped. “You cheated!”

“And how did I cheat?” Link asked.

“He’s right,” the gerudo woman said. “He didn’t. Neither of you did, but he played the duel differently than you did.”

Remor gridded his teeth. “He’s still a criminal… Meaning I’m well within my rights. Guards! Take him into custody!”

Link saw the zoras surround him, spears lowered. The crowd dispersed in a bit of a shocked panic. He heard a sword being pulled from its scabbard. Glancing to his right, he saw the gerudo pulling her scimitars out. “I don’t think you’ll be doing that,” she said.

“What?” Link asked in surprise. He saw Medli talking to the Windfall guards, trying to convince them to intervene.

“Aveil, you’re still under contract,” Remor said.

“A contract you just broke,” she said. “This was not my fight. You challenged him to it and it was settled between you two. You lost. You didn’t honor your word to the duel, so there is no reason to believe you will honor the contract. Besides, against two of us all of you would die even faster if it was just against him.”

“And why would that be?”

“For one, you’ve seen me in a fight. You know how vipers like me stalk the worms of the desert. You specifically hired me because I killed three lanmolas just a season before the war and the contacts I have in Kara-Kara. If that weren’t enough, there’s the hylian here. He’s not right-handed because of how he wears his sword on his back. Every feint as well he never capitalized on, but you took the bait with each one. And there were a couple instances where he could’ve put you on the ground in such a way you wouldn’t even be able to use that club as a cane! He could’ve
avoided those hits too with how he was moving earlier. He held back while you didn’t. Imagine what he’d do if he wasn’t.”

“You’re very observant,” Link said to her. He moved the sword to his dominant hand then and expertly spun it once in his wrist while pulling the shield off his back. If ever there was a time for intimidation, he felt it was now.

“Part of the job, hylian. And judging as well by what I heard from Prince Remor here and seeing you in action, would it be safe to assume you are no ordinary sellsword? Just as I am no ordinary sellsword either.”

He was shocked, but didn’t show it. Given her words he reasoned that she might be what many at the Tower of Hera had long thought impossible; a gerudo with the training and talents of a Chosen. Given she was sticking her neck out for him like this, Link decided to at least reward her risk of sharing that information. “That would be correct.”

She looked to the prince then. “So, you may all throw your lives away, or accept this defeat and take it as a lesson to not underestimate your opponent. It may cost you more than you realize.”

There was a tense moment as the zoras kept their spears aimed for Link and now the gerudo woman named Aveil. Between the two of them if someone tried anything he was sure it’d quickly turn into a blood bath. Remor made a motion with his hand and turned from them. The spears were raised back to the sky and the noble’s retinue stepped back. Link would’ve breathed a sigh of relief if he wasn’t sure it’d have ruined his work to intimidate the others. A moment later, they had left. Link then let out a long exhale and sheathed the blade and put his shield on his back once more.

“What was that all about?!” Medli asked, approaching.

“A matter of honor,” the gerudo said, sheathing her blades. “Or at least what some believe it is…” She looked back at Link. “So the rumors are true then… A Chosen of The Crown has defected…”

“You’re surprisingly well-informed,” Link said to her.

“Also part of my job.” She offered a hand to him. “Name’s Aveil.”

“Link.” He took her hand and shook it. “Thank you for that.”

“After a display like that, I was impressed. Beat him without even laying your blade on him once!” She smiled. “You wanted to wound his pride, not his body. That could’ve been even more dangerous. Do you know who he is?”

“I know the name.” He closed his eyes for a long blink. “His father was responsible for occupying Outset during the war between Hyrule and Labrynna a little more than twenty years ago.”

“That was his son?” Medli asked. “Oh goodness…” She looked at Link then. “Surprised you didn’t actually try and wound him at the very least. You have to tell me what you did to get him so angry with you.”

“The way Remor told it, sounded like he seduced a zora princess in Hyrule.”

“I wouldn’t exactly say that…” Link said.

“Well, now I’m curious…” She offered a small smile. “Tell you what? I’ll buy you a drink and you
Link looked at Medli for a moment. “I haven’t checked the tavern yet for Linebeck.”

“No one’s seen him for a couple days, actually,” she said. “The harbormaster said he’d seen him get on his boat, but never left.”

“Did you check his ship?”

“Was going to find you first.”

“Then that’s where we’re starting…” Link looked at Aveil. “Thank you again.”

She nodded a couple times and folded her arms. “If your friend has a working boat, I’d be willing to pay for passage. I have another contract I’m trying to fulfil. One that could be incredibly lucrative if it’s fulfilled within the next month.”

“Tell him that he’ll jump at the opportunity,” Medli said with a slight laugh.

Chapter End Notes

Extra-long chapter this week! But I don't think anyone will mind it. All kinda important to go through and couldn't find a good point to break it into a more managable one. Oh well.

Devnotes:
- Writing Medli is fun. She's a very different character compared to how some of the others do.
- Remor is arguably the first OC for the entire series! I debated repeatedly on if I should include OCs in the list, but because this isn't an OC-centric fic, it made little sense to do so. I also was trying to limit the number and their influence. Though there will be some major ones, the first of the recurring ones will prolly show up in a few weeks.
- When I started writing this, didn't know there would be gerudo in Breath of the Wild, so had to edit in a specification for Aveil. I can promise that down the road we will see Urbosa too.
- I fully admit to taking liberties with the nature of the map of Hyrule and surrounding areas. If it's gonna vary from game-to-game (and even playthrough if you count TPHD's flipped map) I'm gonna too and make up my own map for it. Come to think of it actually... Stay tuned on that front.

And that'll do it for this week's chapter! A massive thanks as always to everyone out there who's taken the time to read, comment, leave kudos and bookmark! I'll see you guys next week! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome!
It was very easy to pick out Linebeck’s ship from every other one at the docks. There was no other one at Windfall that was a steam ship with a pair of great wheels on the port and starboard. A cabin on the back was the enclosed bridge and lead to the captain’s quarters. On top of the bridge was a single turret mounting a cannon. At the stern was a smokestack. A simple ramp lead onto the ship. A brief glance around the deck soon lead them into the hull. Aveil brought up the rear, watching carefully.

Link lit a lantern in the hull with his fire striker and handed it to Medli. She soon was lighting the other ones below. There were several boxes and two hammocks hanging from ropes. There were a few other crates as well on the other side of the room. The back door would lead to the engine room in the stern.

“So, he’s not here…” Aveil said, looking around.

“Doesn’t look like there’s been any signs of a fight though,” Link said.

“You know Linebeck,” Medli said, finishing lighting the last lantern. “He’ll only fight if there’s no other option. Apart from when he came rushing in after us when we were going after Vaati.” She opened the door to the engine room. “Nope, he’s not back here…”

Link took a quick glance around before looking at one of the crates. He walked right over to one and kicked it. There was no response, so he kicked the next one. He thought he heard a groan come from it, so he kicked it a second time.

“Confound it! What?!” a man grumbled. His voice was muffled from the wooden walls of the box.

“Linebeck! Did you do something to piss off Jolene again?”

“…Of all the…” The lid of the crate flew open and a middle-aged hylian emerged from it. A few spikes of hair stuck out the back of his head and he looked like he had struggled sleeping if the bags under his deep green eyes were any indication. He had a goatee and a thin, split mustache above his lips. His white shirt had a popped collar and he wore a waistcoat with it. “By the Goddesses golden garters! Link! I thought I recognized that voice!”

“Answer the question. Did you steal something else belonging to Jolene again?”

He cleared his throat as he climbed out of the box. He grabbed a long blue Labrynna privateer’s coat from the box and pulled it on. “I have honestly not seen her at all in the past six months… Honestly… I was merely inspecting the crate for its integrity as to holding hay and smaller crates to be filled with rum to be taken to Aboda and the Great Bay of Termina.” He pulled the sleeves down a little and then pointed right at Link. “But if she tells you anything it’s a filthy lie. She’s a pirate after all. And a little obsessed.”

“Not sure I’m believing this,” Aveil said. Her arms were folded. “Sounds too rehearsed.”

“Ah! You haven’t introduced me to your new companion.” He gave the gerudo a roguish grin and
offered a hand. “Name’s Linebeck. And I’m a real man of the sea!”

She took it and shook firmly. “Aveil of The Phantom Wastes.”

“Ahh… What would Zelda say, Link?” He pulled his hand away slowly. “Making nice with gerudo assassins? No matter how charming they may be?” Link gave the smuggler a look that only made him grin wider.

“You can drop the act,” Medli said. “Why were you in that crate?”

Linebeck coughed a couple times and planted his right hand in the pocket of his coat. “Well, if I’m being honest, it’s because I recently literally pulled some trouble off of the ocean floor.”

“You what?” Link asked.

“In my defense it’s not my fault. It was a wreck between Outset and the Star Archipelago. A Labrynnan galleon. Far bigger than that freighter you were looking for a few years ago. Hired a few of those boys from the Salvage Corps.”

“Worked with them before along the coast,” Aveil said. “Pretty good at what they do.”

“And discrete!” He held up a finger as he spoke. “And being discrete these days is incredibly important with Labrynna’s interest in the spice trade and the war between the Gerudo Tribes and Hyrule. Everyone’s looking to line their pockets! And I’m no exception. Only difference is I’m at least honest about it and not trying to hurt anyone…”

“So what happened with this salvage expedition that has you hiding in a crate?” Link asked.

“Well, we got to the galleon first. And because of agreements I have, I had the salvage rights. And being a big galleon, we were sure to have quite a haul. Imagine our surprise though to find the whole wreck… Picked clean… Apart from one stinking iron crate.”

“So someone beat you to it?” Medli asked. “Unless… That crate held something incredibly valuable.”

“Oh, it gets more interesting than that, Medli. The boys on the ocean floor found footprints. Big footprints. Too big to be a zora’s. And blins can’t stand water. So there was no chance one of them had gotten down there. But, we hauled that iron crate off the floor and when we got it on deck, pried it open. And inside? Statues. Squid statues. Some looked particularly impressive! Inlaid with gold, some of the finest emeralds and yellow jade… Exquisitely carved from single pieces of rock, polished to a shine. And I was sure that when I docked at Rafton’s Landing I could carry my cut of the statues to Lynna’s Archives and be rewarded like a king!”

“I’m sensing a but…” Link said.

“You sense right. For you see, after dropping off the Salvage Corps boys at the archipelago, they both vanished! Without a trace! Their foreman? The one who had spoken with me to hire them out inherited the statues and if the rito I was speaking with a few days following that incident was right, he too has now gone missing. Leaving the statues behind.”

“They’re cursed.” Link reached up to rub his eyes. “They wouldn’t happen to have just vanished into little black squares and were never seen again at dawn or dusk?”

He shook his head. “They are indeed cursed, but don’t know what black squares have to do with anything with this. Why else lock them in iron and leave them behind? At first I wasn’t so sure…”
He sighed deeply, any cockiness leaving him. “But one night, while sailing to towards Crescent Island, I heard a sound from my bridge. I looked out and saw them!”

“Saw who?” Medli asked.

“Fishmen!”

“You mean zoras,” Aveil said in a humorless tone.

“No. Not zoras. Too big to be zoras.” Linebeck shook his head. “Too much muscle, too hunched. Their heads as well were not like any known zoras too. They were rounder. And didn’t have the tail or… Bonnet-shark style heads you see some of the Royal Bloodlines have. The eyes as well were on the sides, of their head rather than facing forward like you or I. And they stunk. Not like that fish-smell you’d sometimes get from a zora. I mean they smelt like fresh, waterlogged corpses.”

“It sounds like you’re describing a geozard,” Medli said. “But those are myths.”

“These were no myths. I had nowhere to go, so I hid in a crate. They prowled the ship until dawn when I heard them dive back into the water.” He leaned against the box he had been hiding in and removed his hand from his pocket to stroke his goatee. “So, no matter how much I wanted the payment from Ambi’s coffers and how much it pained me, I threw the statues overboard and made my way to Windfall. A couple days ago I spoke with Medli who was looking for you, Link. I thought I’d escaped the curse, but… They appeared again just last night. A couple guards are missing now because of them and I hid in the crate again. Sure they got dragged into the sea…” He sighed. “Those poor bastards.”

“Hold still a minute,” Aveil said. She gripped the viper charm she wore. The wolf around Link’s neck shook slightly as it sensed magic being used. There was another piece of evidence to believe she was as him. “No magic… So the curse isn’t on him.”

“Could they be tracking the boat?” Link asked.

“I don’t know,” Linebeck said. “Just that this is the second time I’ve seen these creatures.” He looked up at Link. “You don’t suppose they like freshwater, do they? And I’m sure the Snowpeak Zoras could use a man like me.”

“Wouldn’t know.” Link stroked his chin a little and then let his arms drop to his side. “So, you’re looking to go inland I’m assuming until this blows over, right?”

“Well, yes. But I’d prefer not to leave my ship in some dock where it could be pressed into service! Or, Goddesses forbid, stripped for parts!”

“I guess the lucrative contract that Aveil mentioned needing to charter a ship for will go to someone else. And though I’m sure Medli told you I can’t offer the same fee I once did, knowing if you helped the Rito of Dragon Roost out with their problem they’d be willing to provide you with some form of payment from their treasury.”

Linebeck’s demeanor seemed to change in an instant. “Now, let’s not be too hasty here, Link!” His hand left his pocket. “There are people who may need some more help! And who says we can’t do some good and make a profit at the same time?” Link saw Medli snickering slightly at just how quickly it had all happened. He looked Aveil right in the eyes. “What kind of ‘lucrative contract’ are we talking about?”

“My client has tasked me with tracking disappearances in the South Seas,” the gerudo began. She
folded her arms and moved to lean against the hull. “A lot of people have been going missing recently and I can’t leave any stone unturned. There is a five thousand rupee bonus if we can find what’s causing them and stop it. It is yours if you help. If we don’t get the bonus, my client would be more than willing to pay still at least five hundred. I’m sure we could negotiate a little more as well depending on any number of factors we encounter on our journey.”

“Five… Thousand…” He looked at Link and Medli for a moment before clapping his hands together. “Well! What’re we waiting for then?! Get whatever supplies you need! We leave at dawn!” He walked right past them but stopped as he reached the stairs that would take him to the deck. He spun on his heel. “That is… If you are willing to accept it of course.”

“Honor your end of the contract and you will be paid. Just remember that five thousand is a bonus. Not your fee.”

“Fantastic!” He started up the stairs to the deck then, leaving Link with Aveil and Medli below.

“…Is he always like this?” the gerudo asked him.

“Only when there’s money involved,” Medli replied.

The sun rose over Windfall as a couple dock hands undid the ropes that moored Linebeck’s ship to them. Smoke was already starting to come out of the smokestack at the stern as Link pulled one of the ropes back over the rail. As the boat began to move, he pulled the other back on board. In the cabin, he could see Linebeck in the bridge’s main room and hands on the wheel. Atop on the turret with the cannon was Medli on lookout. He walked out to the bow and watched for a few minutes until they had cleared some of the harbor traffic and were soon on the open seas heading south. The waves beat against the hull and they bobbed in the ocean. Though he wasn’t overly fond of sailing, he had to admit the view of the skyline was incredible; even more so as the sun began to rise. He heard seagulls above as he turned to walk to the turret. As he pulled himself over the edge of the ladder and to the top, Medli turned.

“Hello,” she said with a smile.

“Hey.” Link leaned against the rail. There was a hopper to bring cannon balls and powder up from below deck. There also looked to be a set of controls that could turn the top of the turret for aiming the cannon. As it was though, it was capable of hitting the main mast of many larger ships to instantly cripple them in a fight. “All clear?”

“Looking that way. Feels like old times, huh?”

“It kind of does.” He smiled a little watching the gulls.

“Did you send your sister a letter? About all this?”

“Haven’t had a chance since the war was really getting worse.” He looked down. “Heard she’d gotten out of the country at least before The Tribes sent their raiders through the pass near Lake Hylia. That whole area in Lanayru Province is disputed now. So is the Castor Wilds and some of Western Faron. That’s all No Man’s Land. If she sent me a letter to The Tower, I haven’t gotten it though.”
“You think she’s safe?”

“I hope so. Link folded his arms and rested one of his feet on the back of the hopper. “I did think about trying to find her. But after getting Shad out of Castle Town, I’m pretty sure she’s already been questioned about me. Or they’re looking for her.”

“Oh no…”

“Yeah. I’m worried about her. I tell her any serious details and I risk making her a target though.”

It was quiet apart from the cries of the gulls overhead and the puttering of the steam engine. Medli looked out to the sea before back at him. “Well… I shouldn’t be telling you this because we have our own secrets, but… When the war started I did start looking into her movements.”

“Oh?”

“I wanted to make sure she was safe since I knew if we talked again you’d be worried. And when I checked in Windfall with one of our agents, he said he hadn’t heard anything since I had checked. She is at last report, on Outset.”

“She went home. Said in some of her letters she’d always like to see what it was like after we left.”

“Well, you were what? Five? Six?”

He nodded. “Yeah. In Aboda without our parents and the flood of other refugees.” Link clenched his eyes shut and shook his head. “Can we talk about something else?”

“Sure.” She dug into her bag for a moment. “While helping Linebeck clean up downstairs so we would have some space, found one of those bottles of spices you like.”

“Oh?”

Medli handed the small glass bottle to him. He took it and smiled a little. “Said it was part of his smuggling into the Desert of Doubt and Termina. Said I could have it too… He hinted at that he would lose a lot of money because of it, though his tone was not as sharp as it is when he’s serious.”

“Thanks.” He stuffed it into a pouch on his belt. “The one I had got taken.”

“Someone stole it?!” She looked surprised. “I know it’s valuable but who would…”

“Midna.”

“The same one you’ve told me so little about?” He nodded to her. Frustration appeared on Medli’s face. “Why would she…? Did she at least pay you for them?”

“She did.” He held up the wolf charm around his neck. “Works just like my old one only The Tower can’t watch my every move.”

“That’s very good. May I see it?”

“Sure.” He pulled it off his neck and handed it to her. The rito carefully took it in her hands and inspected it. “Just be careful with it it’s…”
“Magic, I sense it.” Medli held it by the chain and looked it in the emerald eyes. It was a little stylized and looked more like one of the twilit breeds, but it was still very clearly a wolf. “I don’t recognize the type, but it’s as potent as your old charm. “ She turned it over, finding a smooth back to it marked with an odd glyph. “This looks a little like the one Aveil has.” Medli handed it back to him.

“I’m pretty sure she’s a Chosen.” Link pulled the wolf back over his neck and carefully fit the chain around the collar of his shirt to help ensure it would stay on. “Or the gerudo equivalent.”

“Are you sure?”

He nodded. “When we were at Bandam’s shop, I saw her pick up a Venomblood, a Keaton’s Wit and a Farore’s Kiss. She has that viper around her neck and when we were talking with Linebeck last night, sent a pulse of magic through it.”

“So what about her enhancements? Or signs?”

“We’ll see in a fight… Don’t know if we can fully trust her though.”

“I’m inclined to agree. She seems on the level, but a good spy knows how to win someone’s trust.” She folded her arms, moving her wings to help keep herself warm from the winds.

“Very observant and pretty well-armed.” The ship’s bell rang repeatedly and they rolled over a great wave. The deck below the bridge was briefly submerged before it bobbed back to the surface. “Her cloak also bears the United Tribes.”

“Linebeck has a privateer’s coat and I know for a fact he doesn’t have a letter of marque anymore. He just liked the coat. Could have kept it because it was the only thing she had. Did you keep anything when you left The Crown?”

“Epona’s saddle and blankets. But they didn’t have the wingcrest or triforce on them. Unless you know the horse, you don’t know who she belonged to. And Lon Lon Ranch has a few Eldin Drafters so she’ll blend in fine while I’m out here. Malon said too that if things do get a little risky they’ll take her to a cousin’s in Ordon.” The bell began to ring again. “Maybe we should get below deck if these waves keep up.”

“Probably a good idea…” She sighed. “I just wanted to enjoy the skies some.” The boat bobbed again under the waves briefly as they crashed against it and washed over the deck. Unlike last time though, Linebeck began to ring the bell even more. They could almost hear him shouting from the bridge below them.

“What’s he on about now?” He looked down at the floor, pushing off the rails and removing his foot from the hopper.

“Link?”

“What?”

Medli pointed at the two creatures that were on the deck now. They matched the description of the creatures they’d heard last night and stood far larger than a man. Link heard one of them growl and pull a coral saber out of its belt as a third crawled up and over the railing at the ship’s bow. Another pulled a javelin from their back and threw it. They heard the glass of one of the portal windows of the bridge shatter and Linebeck shouting profanity.
And it's that day again people! With Linebeck joining the team!

Devnotes:
-When it came to picking companions, Linebeck was one of the top choices because of his character arc in Phantom Hourglass. Choosing how to develop him beyond the game too was tricky and what might've happened to make him the way he was when we meet him in Phantom Hourglass. Introducing him hiding in the box though was something I had to do though because it felt so in-character for him.
-One big thing I've learned in all my years of writing is sometimes the best thing to do is just let characters be themselves and breathe and interact. Even if it's not plot-oriented, sometimes having a 'slice of life' can be beneficial. Even if all my instincts are telling me otherwise.
-There was going to be a fight, but the length was getting long, so I kept it out. We'll see it next week though.
-I made a map! Actually it's been getting worked on for a while now but I finished it for this week. I've worked in several little nods to both Zelda and The Witcher into it. You can find it here.

Anyways, that'll do it for this week! Thanks to everyone as always for reading, commenting, leaving kudos and bookmarking! Keep being awesome people! I'll see you next week!
Not waiting, he jumped off the roof of the bridge, pulling his sword and shield from his back. Lin aimed down and landed right on one of the creature’s shoulders. The blade dove through the monster’s collar, but not deep as Link had expected. The geozard gargled and snapped, forcing Link to jump off as they fell on their back. He was shoved off then and into the ship’s railing. Link heard the door behind him open and a sword leaving its scabbard. He saw a harpoon on a chain punch through the chest one of the geozards. With a shriek, Aveil leapt past him and swung her scimitar into the creature’s neck, kicking its chest. The second swing caused dark blood to spill as she back-flipped off. The wound quickly began to stitch itself closed with dark energies.

Link saw another climbing over the port railing, sword already drawn. He rushed for it, jabbing the edge of his shield into its hand. One strike loosened its grip, while the second made it let go and fall back into the waves. “I’ll cover the rails!” he heard Medli shout. He glanced up to see her now perched on the cannon and wings spread. A second later, she jumped off, diving into another that was climbing from the starboard. She kicked feet out, talons like a bird of prey descending. He heard a splash as it fell back into the drink.

On the deck, Link and Aveil stood with their backs to one another. Weapons ready and surrounded. “Hide looks a little thick,” she said. She stowed the hookshot she’d used to make her entrance and pulled her other sword.

“Got anything that can pierce armor?” he asked. One of the beasts lunged for him. He ducked and deflected the blow with the shield, retaliating with a slash across its exposed chest.

One of the geozards growled as it slashed in an arc. Aveil deftly leapt over it to swing both of her scimitars into their gut. Again, the wound appeared to do little, forcing her to kick them back. “Do you?”

He took the opportunity and stabbed the first of the creatures with as much force as he could. The blade went through them entirely and a black spurt of smoke and blood billowed from the wound, making the monster drop to its knees. Link pushed his shield and shoulder into them to push them off. One came at him from the side, swinging its blade down. Link’s shield shrieked as metal met coral. A second geozard lunged forward, nearly taking his sword arm, but he was quick enough to parry the strike. “Bolts!” Link hopped back from another swing to slip the shield on his back.

Before he could get his crossbow free, Medli dove at one of the monsters. Her talons landed in it for an instant and knocked it to the deck. Another came for her side, but she swiftly thrust her hands out. A gust of wind magic snapped from her palms and knocked them overboard. “Other side!” she said, jumping off the geozard and beating her wings to get airborne once more.

Link saw one climbing over the railing while two came over the other end. His right hand pulled the crossbow from his hip. A quick aim for their head and he fired. The bolt landed in their cheek, causing a shriek. He stabbed his sword through its open jaws, piercing through. The geozard’s head exploded in black smoke and magic before the rest of its body fell apart and back into the ocean.

Behind him, Aveil kicked another back and stabbed forward with both of her blades into the belly
of one of the geozards. With a shout, she pulled them both upward and gutted the fishman. The black gore from the wound turned to smoke and ash as the body collapsed. “Cursed! Do you have any silver on you?” she shouted.

Link quickly loaded a silver bolt then into his crossbow. Another geozard jumped at him, knocking him on his back. The monster’s sword dove for him. He rolled to the left and got up, swinging his blade to cut into their ankle. As he did, he fired the crossbow again. This time, the wound inflicted on one of the monsters did not recover. From the wound, Link stabbed again, opening it further. That was all that was needed to kill the monster. Behind him another approached. He saw the harpoon of Aveil’s hookshot land in their chest.

She was pulled out of the way of another swing from one of the remaining ones on the deck and landed feet first in the harpooned geozard. From a bag on her back, she threw silver dust into its eyes. As it struggled, she turned to block a strike with both scimitars and kicked the attacker in the knee. The one under her started to get up, but she stabbed their neck before they could and flipped back. Another two jumped on the deck as Medli dove from the skies. She managed to knock one of them back into the sea with her talons. Aveil’s hand slipped into a bag on her belt. “Shield yourself, hylian!”

“What?” He saw her fingers swiftly move and white mist start to fall from her palm. Not risking it, he quickly ducked down and formed the crystal barrier around himself. Her hand flew forward and a cold stream of snow and ice billowed from her hand. It quickly enveloped the three surviving geozards, and Link. His barrier shrieked and cracked with the screams of the monsters. One was frozen solid while the other two were only partially frozen. The one closest to Link swung out with its sword. He parried it with a beat and stabbed it. As it fell, he fired a silver bolt from his crossbow into the wound. The creature’s body turned black and burned into ash and smoke.

The other partially-frozen monster fought to break the ice to free itself, only for an arrow to go through its body. Link turned and saw Aveil knock a second arrow in her recurve and let fly. The second shot embedded itself in the creature’s chest and it collapsed. Like the others, it vanished in foul magic. Medli landed on the deck and approached the one that was frozen.

“By Din... They exist,” she said. She quickly looked back at the bridge. Linebeck was nowhere to be seen. “Linebeck!”

“If he got taken by these things, I’m going to kill him,” Aveil said, slipping her bow on her back as Link sheathed his sword and holstered his crossbow.

“I had to check the engine room!” came a shout from the bridge. The man appeared, coming up a set of stairs quickly. “Needed to make sure they didn’t do anything to it!”

“Do you still have that pictograph box?” Medli asked.

“It was a gift! Of course I still have it.”

“Go get it!” Link snapped. “We need a picture of this thing before it shatters!” He pulled his sketchbook from one of the pouches on his belt and the pencil from the book’s spine. Already he could see cracks forming and scribbled faster. His hands were shaking still from the adrenaline as he recovered.

A moment later the smuggler returned, holding the primitive camera. He held it carefully with both hands and looked through the lens. There was a click a the shutter slammed shut. When he took a
step though the deck creaked and the frozen geozard slid slightly. The movement was enough to cause it to break apart like a glass. Its snarl broke away into pieces of ice. The left arm broke at the elbow and when it landed on the deck broke into hundreds of pieces of frozen gore. The rest of the creature followed suit. In moments, all that remained of it was a melting pile of frost, snow and cursed blood seeping into the wooden deck and black smoke seemingly steaming off the remains.

“Tell me you got a picture of that,” Medli said.

“I did,” Linebeck said. “Now do you believe me?”

“Never said I didn’t. We’ll develop it as soon as we get to Dragon Roost. We have proof these things exist.”

The ocean was calm as the moon rose over the water. The remains of the frozen geozard had been swept off and dumped into the ocean as Link stood at the bow and watched for trouble. Everyone was on edge after the attack so they were taking turns keeping watch. At least they’d be at Dragon Roost by mid-morning and could start piecing together everything. He looked down at his sketchbook for a moment before stuffing it back in the pouch on his belt as he heard someone approaching from behind. He glanced back to see Aveil coming out of the bridge. She had her cloak on and arms folded to keep warm. It looked like in spite of most of her dodging, she’d still taken a few hits during the fight earlier that day, just as he had. He’d even found a cut on his arm he hadn’t even realized he’d gotten in the commotion.

“Link, yes?” she asked, hood pulled over her head.

“Aveil,” he replied. “We need to talk.”

“That we do. I have questions for you.”

“I do too.”

She rubbed her arms a little and moved to lean against the railing. “Make you a deal then. Question for question. But if you come across something you don’t want to answer, you get an extra question.”

“So if you asked me one I didn’t feel like answering…”

“Then I’d keep asking until I got an answer to a question you did.” She looked at him from under her hood. “Sound good?”

“Sounds good.” He folded his arms and looked her in the eye. “Are you a Chosen?”

“That’s not the term we use for it. The Desert Vipers. The eyes and fangs of the Goddess of the Sand.”

The boat creaked slightly as it bobbed along the calmer waves. “My turn. Are you with The Crown?”

“Not anymore,” Link said. He watched the gerudo closely. She didn’t make any movements apart from occasionally trying to keep herself warm. “Are you with The Tribes?”

“I can’t answer that without giving you details that might harm my sisters. You may no longer be
with The Crown, but they’re the only family I have.” The response was quick and her eyes remained directly focused on him.

“That’s okay.”

“Ask again.”

“Okay.” He rubbed his tired eyes. “I saw you had an ice sign. Was it developed for The Vipers or was it something adapted from a mage’s spell?”

“Adapted. Gerudo war witches who mastered ice magic found a way to use it in such ways. Especially for hunting our preferred prey.” She motioned to the charm around his neck. “Do all Chosen wear a wolf around their neck?”

“No.” It was clear from how her brows rose that she was surprised at this information. “I’d assume though that your viper charm works by channeling magic into it to detect things as well as acting like an early warning for trouble. Can others see what you’re doing through it? Like a gossip stone?”

“I… Don’t know actually…” She took it from her neck to look at it. “Does yours?”

“Only if I want it to.” He thought for a minute on what to ask next as Aveil inspected her own charm. “You mentioned preferred prey. And you’d killed three lanmolas a season before the war. I’d guess then that would be the worms of the deserts?”

She nodded as she let the charm fall back around her neck. “Yeah. Anything dwelling in the sands that threaten people. Mostly the worms but there’s also other creatures. Like sand skates and moldaraches. What about you? What’s your preferred prey?”

“Don’t have one really,” he said. “Most of the time we just did what we needed for The Royal Family. Problem solvers with the authority to investigate and act as needed for the good of Hyrule.”

“Interesting, if dangerous to give agents that kind of authority…”

Link nodded a little. “Do the vipers hold any sort of authority like that?”

“No. We go where we’re needed and do what we must for the people who hire us. Most of the time it’s killing monsters for money. Worms, desert leevers. Occasionally some sort of horror or phantom. Especially closer you get to the Ikana Plateau.” She took a deep breath and yawned. “Even a man can be a monster though and that’s when things get complicated.” Aveil glanced over the bow of the ship. “So why are you here?”

“Simple. Medli’s a friend who needs help.” It was his turn to yawn. “Well, I don’t have any other questions at this time… Do you?”

The gerudo looked Link over for a moment and rubbed her arms again a little. “Not right now.”

“Then I’ll leave you to your watch.” He started for the bridge then, shaking his head a little to stay awake long enough to get to a hammock.

“Trust me enough to do that after all those questions?”

Link stopped and looked over his shoulder. “You honor your contracts. You said so yourself.” He pushed the door open and entered. The door was pulled closed behind him and he headed below to
find a hammock.

Dragon Roost Island was one of the larger ones in the South Seas. Though not the same size or as important as Windfall as a trade hub, it was still a vital location and home to one of the largest rito tribes. As Linebeck’s ship pulled into the northern docks, they saw at the top of the long cone-like mountain not far from them a great red dragon sitting on top of it. It was watching the activity below and let out a massive yawn. Link couldn’t help but think it looked a great deal like the dragon he’d slain back on Death Mountain. It was far larger than that one though, easily the size of some of the great whales of the sea. It jumped off the edge and crawled carefully down part of the mountain to get a better look at the new ship. Link glanced at Medli next to him. She was smiling and looking at the dragon.

“He’s glad I’m back,” she said.

“Valoo knows about the war?” He pulled some of his hair back and wrapped a small piece of black cloth around it, giving himself a small ponytail.

“He does.” Medli looked to Link then. “He worries that it will come to the islands soon. What with privateers for The Tribes and The Kingdom in the waters. The only thing preventing it though I think is Labrynna’s interests. No one wants to get them into the war.”

“Especially me.” He looked back at her as he finished tying the cloth. “You asked why Remor was so angry at me?”

“Avel said you seduced a princess that was supposed to be his bride.” She shook her head with a smile along the edges of her beak. “I just cannot picture you doing something like that.”

“It’s a little more complicated than that. The princess is worried that he’d start moving some of his own people upstream after the wedding. Meaning…”

“…Labrynnaan troops on Hyrulean soil. During a war.” The look on her face told him she’d pieced it together before he’d finished talking. Not to mention she’d seen what the consequences could have been. “Like you said in the letter. Try and keep this conflict between Hyrule and The Gerudo.”

“Exactly.”

She reached up to push a piece of hair in her face back. “Sounds like you made the best of a bad situation.”

He nodded. “I still have the stone too. And said I’d return it once we’d figured out a more permanent solution.”

“Do you have any ideas yet?”

He shook his head. “I’m sure Ruto’s thinking of something though.” Before either of them could say anything else though, the great dragon let loose a rumble far above. Medli looked up at him.

“Surprised to see you it sounds like.”
“He is? It has been years.”

“Yeah.” Medli stretched her wings. “I’m going to go see Komali and fill him in a little on our situation and see if we have any new information. I don’t know if he’ll be happy to hear Linebeck’s back though.”

“What about that diplomat?”

“Ambassador Tolec?”

“Yeah, him.”

She lowered her arms. “He’s probably still here. Do you need to talk to him?”

“If his people have been in the area that you marked on your chart, they could give us some extra information.”

“If he’s around I’ll send him your way. Or get what I can out of him.” Medli pulled the chart she’d marked out of her bag. “And since we’re helping him too, ask Linebeck to mark where he did that galleon salvage.”

Link took it from her. “Okay. Meet in the commons room when we’re finished?”

“Yeah.” She started for the bow, arms spread again and wings out.

He was about to let her go when he remembered the zora armor he had. Though currently magically sealed in a stone, it still needed to be repaired. Given it looked like he was going to be at sea for a while, he’d prefer to have it in top condition once more. “One more thing!”

Medli turned on her heel and for an instant, Link thought he’d seen her roll her eyes in frustration at the interruption. “What?”

“Is Zauz’s Forge still open? I need some work done!”

“Yeah. Hasn’t moved in years.”

“Thanks.”

“Anything else?”

He shook his head. “Just let me get a letter to Aryll again when you can.”

“I’ll check about her whereabouts too for you!” With that, Medli beat her wings and took off of the deck. When Link turned around, he saw Aveil and Linebeck standing by one of the railings as the ship was being moored by a pair of rito on the dock. The smuggler was talking quickly while the gerudo was merely tossing the dockhands the rope. Link walked towards them, the chart still in hand.

“Yes, yes, of course!” Linebeck shouted down. “If you’re so damn insistent, you can come up here and inspect my hold personally!” He waved a hand out. “I assure you though! Not a single item on this ship is stolen! I’m not some worthless pirate after all!”

Aveil kept her mouth shut, even though Link could see the slightly annoyed look on her face. The ramp to the deck was lowered and they were soon free to disembark. She looked up at Link as he
approached. “Medli off to see her chieftain?”

Link nodded. “Yeah.”

“Good. Maybe he’ll have some information I can use.”

“The Dragon Roost Tribe are the best couriers in the South Seas. They’ll have heard something.” He glanced over her. “Linebeck! Got a minute?”

He shook his head as he looked down at the rito on the dock. The smuggler waved a dismissive hand at them as he walked over, rubbing the back of his neck. He looked more tired than before as well, if only because he’d slept all night in that same crate he’d been found in, just in case the geozards returned. “We won’t be staying long, will we?” he asked. “There’s a bonus at stake after all and I’m sure that Chieftain Komali would be happy enough to pay us for resolving the missing courier situation quickly as well.”

“We’ll stay as long as we need to,” Link said. “You need fresh water after all and more coal. And it’ll take at least a day anyways to develop the picture.”

“Yeah, but still. We have a lot going on.”

Link handed him the chart. Linebeck took it and unfolded it. “Medli wants you to mark where you found the statues.”

“Any reason why?” Aveil asked.

“I’d guess to track the geozards using Linebeck’s path through the seas.”

Linebeck looked over the chart as he unfolded it. “Ah, of course. Find a pattern in it all. I don’t need to be told twice.” He stroked his goatee slightly before glancing back up at the two others on the boat. “Well, we meeting somewhere for a drink or is Medli coming back?”

“Aerie commons room. I need to see Zauz about some repairs.”

“Who?” Aveil asked.

“A smith. I need my zora scalemail repaired.”

She looked at him for a moment. “Does he happen to have any of those suits for sale? I could use one.”

“He really should!” Linebeck said. The two rito on the dock looked up when he spoke. “…At least I heard he did last time I was here. Termina-style. Lighter-weight designed to slice through bari swarms. Has enchantments on them to make the armor behave like an electric eel’s skin too. Not as heavy or restrictive in movement like Link’s.” He waved a hand at the hylian as he spoke. “Yours is what Labrynnan Marines wore during the war. Still do actually.”

“Getting those all the way from Termina can’t have been cheap with the war,” Link said.

“And they still haven’t caught the scoundrel who brought them in.” He studied the chart a little more. “I know exactly where I got that crate… Let me just compare with my other charts and I’ll get this back to Medli in the aerie commons.” Linebeck spun on his heel and walked back to the bridge. In seconds, he’d pulled the door open and slipped in. It swung shut right behind him with a clatter.
Whoo! Wolf of Farore day dudes!

First a little sad news. There MIGHT be some delays coming up here as things at work are picking up. And though I'd love to have more time to write and edit, I like having a roof over my head and food daily more. That said, chapters will for the foreseeable future still be weekly. It's just going to be a question of if it will be Wednesday. I'm looking at Sundays possibly being a sort of 'backup' post day.

Devnotes:
- Ugh, editing the fight was a bit of a pain and admittedly I got tired of fighting it. But we get to see Aveil in a fight!
- Developing her style was mostly looking at how the gerudo thieves and pirates in the N64 games behaved. Then just adding in a little more to make it more dynamic and unique. Part of her character actually came about the question I asked myself: 'what would a gerudo retelling of a story with The Hero look like?' Giving her some tools like Link in the games worked wonderfully. This was written long before we even knew gerudo were going to appear in Breath of the Wild, so I kinda just ran with the ideas. I'm quite sure though Aveil knows how to use a shield and scimitar and does have a couple other signs at her disposal. Not to give too much away, but the one who taught her was an expert at that style.
- The freezing idea came from the frankly incredible intro to Assassins of Kings. It also made a lot more sense for the setting rather than the seemingly 'mostly harmless freezing' we see throughout the Zelda games.
- Dragon Roost was one of my favorite places in Wind Waker and in no small part due to the music. I remember the first time I saw it while playing a demo version on a collector's disc years ago. Expanding the island was a fun developmental activity.

That'll do it for this week! Next week we get to see a new face!

As always, a huge thank you to all of you readers, commentors, kudo-leavers and bookmarkers! Keep being awesome! I'll see you next week!
“C’mon,” Link said. “I’ll show you Zauz’s forge.” They walked off the ramp and onto the island. The docks themselves showed signs of minor activity, but nothing like what had been seen at Windfall. Only a couple other ships were docked there, including what was unmistakably a Hyrulean frigate. It did not bear any marks however as being property of The Crown though, leaving Link to reason it had either been taken as prize or was a privateer’s vessel. He heard a woman barking orders on board it as a couple burly men rolled barrels of fresh water up the ramp. They passed a couple fishing skiffs as well, crewed by a mix of rito and zoras.

“Would be really nice if the war never reached here,” Aveil said.

“Yeah.”

“ Heard a little of what you said to Medli. Is it true you did all that with the princess to just keep Labrynna out of the war?”

He looked to her. “It was.” There was more to it than that, but he wasn’t going to volunteer the information. He looked back just in time to see a large crate run right into him. He stumbled back as the box clattered on the dock.

“Oh! I am so sorry!” someone cried. Link saw in front of him a hylian girl, probably only a few years younger than him. Her blonde hair was tied in a pair of pigtail braids over her shoulders. One fell forward as she bent over to pick the box up again. She wore a white shirt and a tanned leather skirt that went a little further than mid-thigh. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he said.

“Sorry, I was in a hurry.” She struggled with the crate.

“Here. Where you headed?”

“Do we have time for this?” Aveil asked.

“It’ll only take a minute.” Link picked the box up effortlessly. He heard metal rattling inside it. “Where to?”

“Oh, the frigate.” She pointed at the boat they’d just passed. “The captain was insistent on getting the weapons upgraded by the smith here. Said she knew someone who said his work was top notch.”

“Give Zauz a ton of metal and he’ll knit you a full set of darknut plate overnight.”

Her eyes widened. “Really?” She frowned then. “Usually it takes a lot of time to put

He chuckled a little. “Not literally, of course not.” He walked back down the dock followed by the girl and Aveil. “He’s very good at what he does though.” It was not long before he’d put the crate down again by the frigate that was being loaded next to a couple similar crates. Link recognized
the mark on them belonging to Zauz’s forge. The girl smiled warmly as he did.

“Thanks for the help!” she said.

“My pleasure,” Link replied with a smile.

She started up the ramp but stopped, hopping almost to turn back to face him. “Hey, are you looking to get to the mainland? Or Windfall? I’m sure I could talk to Miss Tetra into letting you come on. And you look like you’re pretty well armed. Long as you don’t mind a couple other stops along the way.”

“Actually, I’m heading further into the islands and already have transport.” He smiled a little and raised a hand, his instincts telling him it was one of the last places the most wanted man in Hyrule wanted to be. “I wouldn’t want to impose on your captain either.”

“Oh. Well, thanks for carrying the crate.”

“Be safe out there.” He waved and turned back to head up the dock. Aveil started walking with him again for the forge. It was easily identified by the anvil hanging over the door. Link pushed the door open and held it for Aveil. Inside were a number of armor and weapon racks, including tools and other metal works. They heard a hammer pounding metal into shape from the back. It stopped for a moment then. Behind the counter a door opened and soon a tall muscular man with purple tattoos on his body.

He smiled at them. “Vasaaq,” he said, bowing his head slightly at Aveil. “How may I help you?”

“I need a suit of zora scalemail repaired,” Link said.

“And I need one,” Aveil added.

“I’ll have to see the armor, but I can do that.” He looked to Aveil then. “I have a couple sets of Termina swarm-cutter sets. They’d probably need to be fitted, but that’s simple. Especially since you don’t look like you’re from Buliaaris.”

“You’re familiar with the Tribal Capitol.”

“Had family up there. Long ago.” He cleared his throat a little. “You’re a Desert Viper. Quite a long way from home.”

“Go where there’s work. And the war’s made it interesting recently.”

“Agreed.” He looked to Link then. “So, let’s see this armor that needs repair.”

Link pulled out the blue stone that was his armor. He put it on the counter and focused. The stone flashed for a second and turned into the battered scalemail and tunic. The smith looked it over once it had finished glowing. He carefully inspected the scales with his weathered fingers before shaking his head and looking back up at Link.

“Sorry kid, this is not going to be cheap….”
Link sat down at a secluded table with Aveil in the commons room. He let out a groan as he pulled his canteen to take a sip. The room was in the heart of the Dragon Roost Tribe and looking up he could see the numerous rooms above. The rock had been carved long ago to become a massive home for the tribe. He saw a couple rito come in and land before hurrying off again.

“Did you really think it’d be that expensive?” she asked, looking about the cavernous interior. She spotted a couple rito glide in through some of the open areas far above that helped let light in.

“No,” he mumbled. “Glad he took the spices at least as payment.”

“Those weren’t cheap to get I bet.”

If anything, Link was more annoyed at the fact that he’d never even had a chance to try some of them in a meal since Medli gave them to him the other day. Survival came first though and he didn’t like being at sea without the insurance policy that was the zora armor. “Yeah.” He took another drink, lamenting the fact he was probably not going to get another sample of spices for a long time.

“Did you know you could rip out the facemask part though and still use it for your breath?”

“I actually didn’t.” He tugged at the mask that was around his neck a little to make sure it was comfortable.

Linebeck entered then. He had a grin on his face and took large steps. One of the rito guards watched his every move. Link looked up as he pulled a chair over and sat down in it. “You look pleased.”

“And I have very good reason to be!” he said, putting the chart out. “Turns out, a couple of the zoras have seen those… Geozards? Gizards?” Linebeck waved a hand upward. “The fishmen!”

“Sure they’re not just humoring you?” Aveil asked.

“They had a weapon. One of those coral swords of theirs. Interesting thing though, wasn’t a coral zoras use for their weapons. Kind they’ve only seen once or twice before.”

“Where?” Link asked.

“The Abyssal Plains. So deep in the seas that not even sunlight reaches it. Where even the bravest zora warriors dare not go. It’s thousands of meters below the surface. Anything that deep is lost. Can’t salvage it. Least not with the current equipment available…”

“Can you walk on it?” Aveil asked. She waved Medli over when she saw the rito coming down the coiling ramp.

“You can. But yo’ud need special potions and armor. There’s stories of hexers doing it once or twice with the proper potions aiding their mutations but they couldn’t stay down there indefinitely. Armor would eventually warp and the potions would run out. Helluva way to go.” He shook his head a little. “Even zoras have trouble at those depths.” He looked at Link. “When you went after that freighter all those years ago, it wasn’t this deep, Link. You could still see daylight down there, right?” Link nodded as Linebeck’s features grew uncharacteristically grim. “You’d better make sure that armor can take the depth. The weight of the water that deep could crush a goron into dust.”
“Labrynnan scale is pretty tough,” he said. Link looked up as Medli came over. He gave her a small smile as she leaned against the wall with her arms folded. “Though I’m not sure I’d like to risk it without testing it somehow. I’ll ask Zauz about it when I go pick it up. Just in case.”

“What’ve I missed?” Medli asked.

“Some zoras have seen the geozards that are after Linebeck,” Aveil said.

“As I thought…” The rito looked over the group. “Ambassador Tolec said that his guard had run into a few when we were speaking with Komali.” She pulled out a chart from her bag. “And gave me a chart with the locations they’ve encountered them.”

“Let me see that.” Linebeck said. He nearly snatched it out of her feathery hands as he unrolled it on the table. The one he’d been given earlier was opened next and the marks were compared. They all looked at the maps and noted the familiar landmarks. “Link, your pencil please?”

“Huh?”

“You didn’t leave your sketchbook back on my ship, did you?”

“Oh.” He dug into one of the pouches on his belt and pulled the worn green book. A second later he handed the pencil from the spine to the smuggler, who started making marks on Medli’s chart, transferring them over. A big black ‘X’ was marked as well within the circular zone Link had noted the first time he’d seen the chart. An asterisk was marked for every location from the zora’s chart for where the geozards had been encountered. It wasn’t long before they all saw the pattern appearing. Link stood up and placed his hands on the table to get a better view. “Medli?” he asked.

“I see it,” she said. The majority of the asterisks had been noted within the circle of where the missing couriers had passed through.

Aveil’s golden eyes carefully studied the map. “What else did the zora ambassador say?” she asked.

“Said a zora had been captured by pirates recently while trying to find what’s happening to the couriers. He’s from Termina’s Great Bay and apparently is one of their monster hunters.”

“What’s the ‘X’?”

“Where I found the statues,” Linebeck said. “Right on the edge of The Plains.” He leaned back in his chair once he was finished, tossing the pencil on the table. “A lot of the old platforms there too have started to disappear if what I heard at the docks is true. Not even the ones in this area either. All over the South Seas the platforms are vanishing.”

“There’s no major trade routes going through that area,” Medli said. She moved to look over the map more. “Outset’s right near the northern edge. I was speaking with a courier earlier too that had just come back from there. I can ask him if he knows about the platforms.”

“Worth a shot,” Link said. He glanced back at the charts. “So we have missing rito couriers and geozards kidnapping people.” He cleared his throat. “I’m starting to have a feeling this is connected.”

“Glad it’s not just me,” Aveil muttered. “Don’t rito fly pretty high in the skies though?”
“We typically do, but we can’t fly nonstop,” Medli said. “That’s why the platforms were originally set up. Squatters and pirates like using them though, meaning they have to usually be cleared out by patrols.” She looked down at the table. “We’ll find out if they’re being destroyed.”

“Alright,” Link said. “And it looks like the geozards might be our prime suspects here for taking the couriers. What do they have to gain though?” He looked up at the others on the table. “They’re clearly intelligent. They have made tools and are actively hunting Linebeck even though he no longer has the cursed statues.”

“And there’s not a single magic influence on him either,” Aveil added. “Meaning we know that the curse was on the statues. “ She looked up, eyes widening. “…If it was ever a curse to begin with.”

“What do you mean, ‘if it was ever a curse to begin with’?” Linebeck asked, a brow raised and arms folded as he leaned back in his chair. “The Salvage Corps boys got taken and then their foreman. They’re still following me though even if…” He stopped, scratching his goatee then and looked back at the charts. “Mercay is on the southern edge of The Plains. Would be easy for them to get there. But it has to be a curse!”

“How many days was it before they found you again?”

“A few, but that was at Windfall.”

“Of course!” Medli said. “It wasn’t a curse! It was a beacon! They found the statues, but knew you’d tossed them. So they had to track you down again. If it was really a curse you’d have had them visiting you every day. Instead, it took them until you showed up at Windfall for them to find you again. It explains the iron crate too. To block the magic so it couldn’t be followed.”

Link spoke up then. “That means they’re probably going to be showing up here soon then.” He looked at Linebeck. “They’re after you because they think you know something.” He looked back to the handmaiden of Valoo. “Medli, what exactly is in the middle of this area?” He ran his hand over the circle area of the marked chart.

“Not much,” she answered. “It’s like I said. Lots of open water and some platforms. There are a couple islands but they’re so small they aren’t inhabited. Biggest two islands are in the southwest section here.” She pointed to Mercay and Ember. “Trade ships take the route around it though typically. South to Outset, then through the reefs to the Star Archipelago. Around it then to Harrow and finally Mercay and Ember. They make the loop then going north.” She drew her finger from Mercay. “Gust, then Bannan, finally reaching Horeshoe.”

“Then just a few days travel north to the Zuna Ports on the mainland,” Aveil added. “Have to watch out for the Forsaken Fortress though. It’s used by pirates as a base of operations. They’ve been a problem for any trade coming out of the ports for decades now.” She leaned back in her chair. “There’s no reason for them to cut through the area since no islands there are inhabited.”

“There is a reason though,” Linebeck said. “Sometimes, smugglers and rum runners use the deserted islands to hide supplies or goods. Especially the ones closer to Mercay. According to charts though, most of it is just incredibly deep.”

“Any islands of interest?”

“Well, there’s the tower…”

Link perked up slightly at the mention. “What kind of tower?” he asked.

Linebeck nodded. “If you’re smart though, you’ll stay away from it.”

“Why’s that?” Link asked.

“Nothing of value inside. And recently, some pirates have started to use it.”

“So this zora might be our best lead to find out what’s happening to the couriers. Any objections to if we start with the pirates at the tower?”

Linebeck raised his hand. “I have an objection. But more just the fact it would be directly dealing with pirates.”

“You’re just worried Jolene is going to be among them.” He looked at Aveil. “What happens if you don’t meet your timeline?”

“Minimum payment,” she said. Linebeck looked visibly saddened by the news. “I will still need to see your chieftain too.” Aveil dug into one of her bags. She pulled a paper from it and handed it to Medli.

She took it and unraveled the letter, glancing it over quickly. Link caught the broken seal on it for a moment. “Okay. Come with me then. I’ll do your introductions. You free now?”

“I am.”

“C’mon then.” She smiled a little as Aveil got to her feet.

“While you’re up there, can you get me some paper?” Link asked.

Medli’s eyes looked away from him. She knew what it was, but wasn’t going to say it in front of Linebeck and Aveil. “I have news actually about that… I’ll tell you when I get back.”

“Okay.”

He watched them leave before looking to Linebeck. The smuggler was looking over the charts carefully again and muttering to himself. Link took a sip from his canteen and sat back down. “Really glad you’ve dropped the act,” he said.

“What act?” Linebeck replied. “Who says it was an act in the first place?”

“The ‘Man of the Sea’ who looked out for only himself and ran out of a grotto just because a few keese got in his hair.”

“A man has to keep up appearances, Link,” he said. “Especially in my line of work. You of all people should know the importance of that. After all, you’re involved with The Crown and her courts back in Hyrule. The political arena can be just as brutal and cutthroat as any tavern on Mercay and Ember.”

“Was.”

“Ah yes, your defection. Medli brought it up when I was talking to her earlier.” He fully pushed his hands off the table. “I must say I am a bit shocked though. One of Zelda’s own Chosen turning against her. And yet, not going right into the desert to see Ganondorf.”

“You sound surprised.”
“I am.”

“Why though? You left the Labrynnnan Merchant Marines under suspicious circumstances. What makes this different?”

“Because you were a Chosen, Link.” He folded his arms. “You were supposedly someone who could have been The Hero of Legend reborn. Someone who was without question loyal to The Royal Family and thus, to Hyrule. You were raised in that tower to serve heroically and had the ideals of The Hero instilled into you form a very young age. You were a man of honor. A knight clad in royal blue who fought for King and Country on the most unconventional of battlefields! I’m a smuggler. And man of the sea. Whoever pays me and the ebb of the waves. That’s my loyalty. To be a man of honor of the seas is different from being a man of honor of the courts.”

“So why agree to help me again when I can’t pay you from the royal coffers?”

“Ah. Well, that’s a bit more complicated… But I know you. And I know how things will go with the war. You want to help people. If one side wins the war, they might turn their attention to the seas. My livelihood would be in danger. The people I can help and make a profit while helping? Well, they too would be in danger. Put simply, the freedom. The adventure. It would be at risk.”

“But if I bring stability, things might change for the worse for you.”

“That may be. But I know you, Link. And you know how I hate violence. Absolutely hate the pointless bloodshed.” He waved a hand towards Link. “You know how much I loathe pirates. Loot and pillaging ships or coastal towns… Kill a few people who resist. Me? I’m just part of supply and demand. And occasionally looking for things that others have lost and taking advantage of the generous Labrynnnan salvage rights laws in the South Seas… And I only ever draw my cutlass and flintlock when there’s no other option. Cornered. Or thinking I have friends who are in danger.”

He did have to chuckle a little bit, recalling the incident where the smuggler ran headlong into Vaati’s main fortification with him and Medli all those years ago. “I remember you saying you wanted to make sure you got all the good treasure.”

“Well, you did promise me the rights to the treasure other than the pearls you were sent to recover. Besides, my reputation was at stake! If word got out that two people I’d had a contract with were killed? I’d never hear the end of it! Especially from Jolene.” He shook his head as he dug around in his coat pockets. “Gods, I’m not going to hear the end of it for this job either too back on Mercay.”

“…I thought you said you hadn’t seen her in six months.”

“I may have… Intentionally stretched the truth for sake of appearances…”

Link folded his arms and let out a long sigh. He was surprised he wasn’t surprised by this turn of events. “Out with it, Linebeck.”

“She’s actually why I found that galleon.” He sat down, pulling a silver flask from inside his coat and unscrewing the top. “And no, I wasn’t following her ship or crew. Most of them have moved on recently. Gerudo and Hyrulean privateers are making it difficult for her to do that. So she’s started to look to other ventures. Relic hunting in particular. Just happened to be in the right place at the right time to see the galleon going down. Saved a couple people and said she was rewarded for it.”

“Uh-huh…” If it wasn’t for the fact that his own horse had asked him about his own tastes in women recently, he’d have been giving Linebeck more of an earful. The mention of survivors
though also kept him from speaking up just yet.

“It’s the truth though.” He took a drink before offering it to Link. The hylian politely declined with a single shake of his head. “More for me then.” He took another sip. “Man’s gotta eat too. So when she made mention of the galleon’s size and what some of the survivors said was on it, I thought it was an opportunity. Know as well she doesn’t have the equipment to carry out salvage operations so I was sure it’d be incredibly profitable. I may have also promised her a small finder’s fee from it as well.”

“Damnit, Linebeck.”

“What?”

“Just…” He shook his head a little. “You think they might be after her too because of this? And what of the survivors?”

“I don’t know. If what Medli said was true though and the statues were actually a beacon rather than cursed, she should be fine. But… She knows about the galleon… The location of the wreck…” He took another drink from his flask before stopping and looking inside it. He closed one eye and held it up to look inside. “And the survivors may have started disappearing as well if they saw anything now that you mention it.”

“Where has she been recently?” Link pulled at the charts on the table to look them over a little closer.

“Well, she’d come as the rito flies from the site to Mercay with the offer. Meaning she went right through the area that they’ve been disappearing in.” He lowered the flask and screwed it shut once more. “She might know something too actually.” Linebeck looked back down at the charts on the table. “Wouldn’t be surprised if she’s somewhere in that whole empty ocean,” he said, waving a hand onto the middle of the chart.

“We make for Mercay then when we’re finished at the tower?”

“Perhaps it is our best bet. I have my own contacts who may have heard things as well.” Linebeck pocketed his flask then. “I must say though, from what I heard on Windfall as well about you, you made quite a stir for Prince Remor and a couple other nobles who want their fins up the Zora River. Mercay may be the safest place for you right now too.” He pulled out a paper and handed it to Link.

Link took it and saw his face on it again. It was another wanted poster. The price on his head had gone up to ten thousand rupees. It didn’t list any specific actions of his at the bottom though, just that he was wanted for crimes against The Crown. “Damnit…” He folded it up and handed it back to Linebeck. “Where’d you get this?”

“Windfall notice board. Was the only one.” He took the wanted poster and stuffed it back in his coat. “The price right now though has more people thinking with their wallets than their brains. You put a price like that on someone, ordinary people won’t think too much on it. Maybe there’s a reason for that price after all. Have to be careful when taking contracts after all.”

“Every man has his price though.” He saw Medli coming back down the ramp and towards their table then.

Chapter End Notes
Happy Wednesday everybody! It's that time again!

Devnotes:
- Regarding something we see early on... Additional devnotes on why I went this way will be forthcoming.
- Here we get a tiny hint of the Gerudo Culture I've worked into the fic. And because we won't see it for a while, I'm gonna just toss out a couple little things here that I used in my worldbuilding: The first of those being for the sake of the fic, there is a long lost connection between the (in-setting) Ancient Cobble and modern Gerudo. There is also a connection with Ikana... But we don't talk about the hell that befell them so long ago. Why, Hyrule didn't even exist back then... We also don't talk about their "cursed bloodline..."
- Part of my goal with this project is as many little cameos from throughout the entire Zelda canon. So when I needed an artisan who lived on the islands, Zauz was the perfect choice. We'll be getting more of these throughout! Though not all of them will be directly named or mentioned.
- I worried about the conversation with Linebeck here, worrying it might be out of character for him. But decided to just go with it because this is, in essence, 'post-game Linebeck.' It's after he's gone through his character development and thus is a different person from who we see in Phantom Hourglass. To say nothing of the fact of his own history I've developed for the fic. Also, random fun fact for him: Linebeck has a very good singing voice.
- While editing, somehow this chapter gained like 300-500 words...

Special thanks this week to Aeldor for their bookmark last week! And as always, a huge number of thank yous to every reader out there for taking the time to take a look, leave kudos and comments and bookmarks!

That's it for me this week! I'll see you all next week! Keep being awesome people!
“True…” Linebeck replied. "And sometimes that price isn’t monetary. Sometimes it’s principle. That’s the price you had to pay for your defection.” He glanced over his shoulder to see the rito.

Medli pulled the chair that Aveil had been using and sat down in it and placed her arms on the table, slouching forward.

“You okay?” Link asked.

“That went a lot better than I thought it would,” she said. “Just the stress though. Komali wasn’t sure about speaking with a gerudo. Especially since we have some doubts about her.”

“Such as?”

“She may be an agent of Ganondorf.”

Linebeck shook his head and stood up. “I’m going to need more rum for this conversation, I can already tell,” he said. “I shall return.” He turned on his heel and headed out of the room. Once he was gone, Link looked back at Medli.

“The ‘Desert Vipers’ are independents,” Medli explained. “They take jobs from The Tribes. And this contract came from the heart of The United Tribes territory. I want to say around Kara-Kara.”

Link let out a long sigh. “She did say she couldn’t mention if she was or not at risk of compromising her sisters,” he said. “Question then is if she’s loyal to him or her contract?”

“I already talked to some of the other handmaidens before coming back down. They’re looking into it and will let me know. But we should be careful around her. She hasn’t made any moves yet, but she’s like you. A professional. I’m a little optimistic though. She broke her contract with Remor because of the duel on Windfall you got involved in. So maybe…”

“Yeah…” He shook his head. “Can we get a look at the contract she has?”

“Might be able to.” She sat up a little. “So… if she is…”

“I don’t know. I don’t relish the thought of fighting her after seeing how she handled the geozards. A fight might end with both of us dead. And I’m sure she’s smart enough to realize that.”

“If it comes down to it though, you can count on me.

“Thanks.” He smiled a little. “So… You said you had news.”

“I do.” She sat up a little more. “Aryll is here.”

His eyes went wide. “Here?! As in Dragon Roost?”

She nodded. “Quill saw her this morning. Said that she heard of our troubles and wanted to help somehow.”
“How’d she even get here though?”

“Managed to convince a crew of pirates that passed Outset to take her on. Sounds like she’s trying to help out with what’s going on. I think she’s working with some pirates and they’ve been talking about the war.”

He put his hand to his head. “She could know then about what I’ve done... Meaning I might not be able to trust her.”

“Maybe she doesn’t know.”

“I’d have to talk to her then.”

“And if she asks?”

“I…” He looked down at the table. “I have to be honest with her. I can’t tell her all the details, but I can tell her at least that I’m still acting in Hyrule’s best interests. The Chosen are meant to set Hyrule right and keep it that way. And I’m interpreting it as also meaning when The Crown is wrong they need to be set right.”

“I doubt they see it that way.”

He didn’t get a chance to respond as there was a loud boom outside. A couple rito guards quickly perked up and lifted their spears to rush outside. “…That was a ship’s gun.” Link got to his feet. There was a gunshot. He checked his crossbow, seeing a silver bolt loaded already. Medli was right by his side and they rushed outside. Guards were heading for the docks. A couple other rito swooped down even from above. Already they could hear blades clashing. “Where’s Valoo?”

“I don’t know.” She looked up to see the great dragon not atop his roost. When she glanced back in the direction of the docks, above she saw the dragon engaged in a fight with a giant flying creature. It looked like it was a dark sperm whale with massive eyes on its body and four long tentacle-like fins. A stream of fire erupted from Valoo’s mouth against the creature. Link could see geozards on the docks. People were fleeing, but a few guards and others stood fighting them. This was a far larger attack. He looked to Medli. She swung her arms out, stretching her wings.

“We get to Linebeck’s ship we can use the cannon and help Valoo,” he said. “It’s on a turret, so we don’t need to move it.”

“Let’s go!”

He nodded and pulled his sword from his back. The crossbow was in his right hand and loaded. They both broke into a run to reach the docks.

It was turmoil. One of the piers had already appeared to be sunk and numerous rito sparred with the massive geozards. Some of the pirates had flintlock pistols and were shooting at the creatures, but they shrugged off the lead and shot. At the edge, they saw a couple guards and the blonde hylian girl helping get people away. A geozard came up the path, large coral axes in its hands. The girl pushed a fisherman back and pulled her own hand crossbow. It had a small hopper on its top. She leveled it with the monster and opened fire. Each bolt landed in the creature’s chest with impressive grouping, wounding it, but not stopping it.
Link took careful aim. He waited for the creature to recover from the last bolt fired and followed the movement of their head with his sight. He lowered the weapon slightly as they started forward and fired. The geozard’s eye gushed and it collapsed, vanishing in ash and smoke. The girl looked at him.

“Nice shot!” she said, eyes wide.

“Do you have any silver bolts on you?” he asked. Another geozard was charging up the path. Link glanced to see Medli duck one of its swings. She kicked once in their knee and parried the next swing with her arms, avoiding the blade and going for their wrists. It was far stronger than her, but she was faster. Jumping back, she thrust her hands out and a gust of wind knocked it far back.

“What’s silver? Why’d I carry silver on me?”

Link dug into the small quiver on his hip and pulled out a dozen silver bolts. “Aim carefully for the heart or head. Otherwise it’ll take a lot of the steel bolts.”

“Heart I can do.” She took the bolts and quickly reloaded her crossbow. She pulled a second from her hip and loaded the other bolts in it.

As she was, Medli used her wings to get above the geozard and drove her talons into its chest repeatedly. When it moved again, she struck it with her open palm. With a shout and a flash of magic, the monster fell onto its back and turned black. Just as she’d finished with them, another came rushing. They lunged at her and she sidestepped it, even as her wing was glanced by their blade. Medli grabbed their wrists and beat it with her free hand, forcing them to drop the weapon. A third was coming up the path. As it neared, Medli ducked one of their swings. The two geozards came at her. A quick block of a haymaker from the one she’d just disarmed and jumping back from a spear stab resulted in them wounding one another. They both stumbled before she sent them rolling down the path with another gust of wind magic. “We have to move!” the rito shouted. Another geozard started up towards them when the back of its head exploded into smoke.

Link glanced back in time to see Aveil and another rito come running down the path to the aerie. She had her bow in hand and was knocking another arrow. She stopped with the rito by the girl as Link and Medli headed for the docks. One geozard came charging for him only to be taken down by a silver arrow from the gerudo’s bow.

The sound of battle rattled their ears. The pirates of the frigate were engaged with the geozards while the rito guards kept trying to drive them back into the sea. It was a losing battle, with no silver to counter the attackers. As Link and Medli reached the piers, they saw one a rito fleeing in flight harpooned by one of the fishmen. He was pulled back and instantly impaled on a coral spear. The chaos was enhanced by the smoke and smells of gore and black powder filling the air. Link readied his shield as he saw the frame of a geozard lunge out of the smoke. The shield slammed into them before Link stabbed their knee. Behind him, Medli helped a wounded guard to start up the path. A coral spear stuck itself in the wood of the pier. She quickly picked it up. Another geozard tore through the pier from below, leaping at her. Medli swung the spear upward to parry the strike.

Link on the other hand sidestepped the one he’d just stabbed and struck it through the back of the neck twice. Black blood gushed from the wound as the beast lay on the pier with labored breathing. Two more came at him, coral swords raised. One suddenly was hit by a slug from a flintlock and turned their attention to the frigate’s deck. Link heard a woman shouting orders but ignored it as
the other creature kept coming. Magic filled his veins for an instant and he was gone in a gust of green wind and light. He appeared behind his attacker. Before they even got a chance to turn around, Link stabbed at the back of their knee.

Medli blocked another swing of a sword, but it shattered the spear she had been using. She smacked the blade back with one of the spear halves and jabbed the other into the beast’s jaw. Using the instability, she kicked them back into the bloodied water. “Link! The ship!”

“I know!” he said. The geozard spun around with a roar. He wasn’t quick enough to react to the burst of magic that erupted from its mouth. The blast hammered into his chest. Link was knocked onto his back as his attacker leapt for him. Seeing the blade coming down, he quickly rolled to the right, nearly falling off the pier before a gust of wind knocked the geozard off balance. Link saw Medli standing in a defensive position, arms raised and hands open. The geozard turned its attention to her, giving Link the opportunity to stab the back of its knee again, forcing it to buckle. As it did, Link stabbed again, this time in the back of the neck. With a shout, he pulled his sword in an arc, opening the side of its neck. Black blood flowed from the wound and the beast gargled as it collapsed.

Link turned and pulled his clawshot as he slipped his shield on his back. Medli was in the air as she reached the deck of Linebeck’s ship. Link fired and the claw grabbed the guard rail. He was pulled off the pier and used the momentum to roll over onto the deck. “That was new,” she said. “The magic breath.”

“Yeah…” He winced a bit and stuffed the clawshot back on his belt. “I think it cracked a rib.” They heard another gunshot and Linebeck shouting.

Link focused on his training to put the pain out of his mind for the time and focused on the threats around them. The smuggler was backing away from a geozard, his saber drawn and a smoking flintlock in his left hand. The look of panic on his face didn’t change the fact that he was still fighting. The geozard he was facing, with its left eye shot out and black blood bubbling from the wound snarled and lunged with its sword. The smuggler beat-parried the strike and responded with a duelist’s swing to the creature’s crown. The wound bleed, but it didn’t slow it down. Link and Medli rushed to his side.

“Well, glad you two decided to come join me!” he said. “I’ve already had to fight off fifty of these horrors!”

“And let me guess?” Link said. The geozard belched a ball of magic at them. He swung with his sword like a bat and the blast flew right back into the creature. It let out a surprisingly high-pitched shriek as its joints burst into yellow light. “You were standing atop the mountain of corpses before the pier gave out!”

“Of course not!” He grinned madly as he began the process of reloading his pistol. “They’re so full of foul magic that they burn away!”

Link stabbed the stunned creature through the heart. He pushed his shield into them and pulled the blade out, knocking the geozard back in the process.

“Behind us!” Medli shouted. Another geozard jumped over the guard rail. Before it got close though, she swung her hands out and knocked it over again the edge with her magic.

Linebeck shoved the miniball and paper down the barrel of his flintlock with the weapon’s ramrod.
“I was honestly starting to get a little bored.”

Link nearly told him to shut up but remained focused. “We need the cannon,” he said. “We help Valoo, he’ll deal with some of the others.”

“If you two can aim and load my cannon, I’ll get you the powder and cannonballs.” He stuffed the pistol back in its holster once he had finished with it. “You know, I didn’t even need a cannon until I met you.”

“Are you glad you have it now?” Link sheathed his sword and started for the bridge. He climbed up the ladder, followed by Medli as Linebeck went below. A moment or so later, they saw the hopper turning and heard it clicking loudly. Smoke started to billow out of the smokestack. Link loaded his crossbow again with one of the few silver bolts he still had and kept an eye out for any geozards that tried to board. He could see the pirates fighting on their ship. A few were doing well, but they had clearly suffered casualties and he could make out the corpses or remains. Again, he heard a woman barking orders loudly. Link glanced back to see Medli starting to turn a crank near the cannon, making the turret swivel around. She started to grow tired and Link took over. He handed her his crossbow as he worked.

“In all our history we’ve only ever been attacked once,” Medli said. “And that was during the war between Hyrule and Labrynna. Wasn’t even a battle really, more of a skirmish. And Valoo made sure to stop it.”

“Huh.” Link kept turning the crank. The turret on top was nearly aligned now with the abomination that the great red dragon was fighting. “You have to show me how you do that thing with the gusts of wind.”

“That’s actual sorcery, Link. Not like one of your signs.” She looked down the cannon’s sights for a moment, fixing them. “It could be adapted though.”

He chuckled a little. “You should see what I picked up earlier.” The turret began to slow its turning. Medli moved behind the cannon and started to aim it.

“Little more,” she said. They were interrupted by another flintlock shot going off. Glancing over the turret, they saw a pair of geozards on the deck. Link flicked his hand out and there was a snap of shadow magic. A dark mark appeared on the deck and in an instant the creature was ensnared. He fired the crossbow at the one that was still advancing. It stumbled as the bolt hit it square in the chest and fell over. Link took the chance though to finish it off before it could get back up. He jumped off the turret, pulling his sword and landed on top of them. By the time the geozard he’d stabbed had begun to vanish in the dark magic, the other had freed itself from Link’s snare. It didn’t appear to have been in any pain from the trap.

The creature took a swing and crashed into his chain spaulder on his left. Link was knocked to the side by the strike, but was able to quickly dodge the following downward swing. forced the blade to remain on the deck before jamming his blade up and under the creature’s jaw. He pulled it out quickly and kicked the geozard back. It stumbled slightly before lunging for him with a clumsy swing. It was an easy sidestep followed a swipe into the back of its neck to behead the creature. He saw Linebeck in the bridge, reloading his pistol again as he quickly headed back for the ladder.

Medli was already aiming the cannon as Link reached the top. Valoo swung his claws into the floating whale, while it retaliated with a clear bite to his arm. The dragon roared and spat fire. Some of it struck the ocean water, causing massive clouds of steam to rise. “Got it close!” she said.
“You load it I’ll fire!”

Link nodded and grabbed the cannonball from the hopper and the sack of powder. Medli started turning the crank of the turret slightly and using a lever by the cannon to aim it a little higher. She moved aside as Link approached and went to watch for trouble as he unscrewed the breech. It only took a minute before he started screwing it shut once more. “Loaded!”

The rito moved back to finish aiming the cannon while he kept an eye out for trouble. “A little to the right!” Link turned the crank. A moment later, Medli pulled a fire striker and lit the fuse. She covered her ears. Mere moments later, even with his ears covered, Link heard a ringing. He looked to see Medli already back to kneeling behind the cannon. When he glanced up he saw the creature Valoo had been fighting take the cannonball in one of the six eyes on its side. The shriek it let out was so loud that they heard it from the docks. It ignored the dragon then and started gliding through the air for the island. “Linebeck! Another! And quick!”

The hopper started moving and Link unscrewed the breech. They cleaned it quickly and reloaded. Link glanced up to see the majority of the geozards on the frigate to start to jump off. They were coming for them now. He finished loading and screwed the breech shut. Link pulled a pair of bombs from his pouch and lit them both as Medli aimed. She flicked the fire striker and covered her ears.

He didn’t hear the shouting, from Linebeck below, but did see the second cannonball crash right into the nose of the strange otherworldly whale. It fell into the water with a bellow. Valoo glided overhead and landed on the frigate. It buckled and sank slightly with the weight and force he’d landed. The geozards still on the ship swarmed, but the dragon ripped them apart. The others that had already gone over the edge were scrambling back up to try and take the dragon down. A spout of flame erupted from the dragon’s mouth, incinerating them as they climbed over. Valoo beat his wings then, putting out any fires he’d started. The tide had clearly turned, but the geozards still attacked. Within moments though, they had been destroyed by the dragon’s breath and swinging claws.

The surviving pirates cheered as the dragon started to rise again. Before he had gotten in the air though, the whale emerged from the water, diving at him. The frigate’s center mast shattered from the impact. The sounds echoed in their ears. There was nothing anyone could do as the two creatures crashed into the beach and fought. Valoo spewed more fire and clawed furiously, gouging the eyes of the whale. He managed to get one claw in deep in the wounded eye from the cannon shot and pulled. A shriek erupted from the whale’s lungs and it started to dissolve into ash and smoke. Before it completely vanished though, it sank its teeth into the dragon’s wing and ripped the flesh away. Medli shrieked at the sight, hands clasped over her mouth; her eyes watering. Another spout of flame erupted out of Valoo’s jaws and the dragon began to limp away on all fours.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, bit late for this one, but still made it!

Devnotes:
-Originally there was going to be a fancy title as it was like a boss fight, but given that Link isn't exactly directly facing it, I decided not to.
-Those forthcoming notes will be coming next week. For obvious reasons.
-Yes, Linebeck is fighting! I originally considered having him hide in the crate when I first wrote this, but let's face it. The geozards here aren't interested in just dragging someone beneath the waves. They'd pull his entire ship now prolly under.
- Might come back and do some polishing to this chapter. No narrative changes, just little editings.

Special thanks this week goes to Kitsune_Robyn for their bookmark! That'll do it for me this week but I'll be back with another chapter next week! Thanks for reading, leaving comments and kudos and bookmarks! Keep being awesome people!
A couple hours had passed since the attack. Link sat in the office of Chieftain Komali along with Medli and Linebeck. Aveil, a couple guards, two of the pirates and the hylian girl with her hair braided in a pair of pigtails sat on the other side of the room. They all stayed in their groups along the walls and cahirs that were there, keeping quiet as they waited. Behind the chieftain’s desk was a pair of rito guards with their arms folded. The chieftain himself was out the door in the back of the room on a balcony, speaking with a far older rito. The chieftain wore a burgundy tunic with white slacks under it while the elder had a long red robe that dragged on the ground. It also bore stylized markings of runes along its hem.

Link glanced over to the others there. The guards who had fought at the docks were exhausted. One used his spear to prop himself up while a zora sat on a crate that had been dragged in bent over. He heard snips of their conversation, worry in the voices that this was just the start of something worse. He couldn’t hear what the pirates were saying, but the girl caught his eye for a moment as she removed bolts from one of her crossbow’s hoppers. Looking up, Aveil was leaned against the wall. Her left leg was propped up against it and she was watching the pirates.

To Link’s immediate right though was Medli, head in her hands. She rubbed her eyes a little, but made no effort to sit up. Next to her was Linebeck, who had seemingly fallen asleep against the wall in his chair. Link gently put a hand on Medli’s shoulder and gave a sympathetic pat. She looked up slightly, deep red eyes still watered with tears.

“He did it to protect everyone,” Link said. “Getting hurt like that was a real possibility.”

“I know,” she said with a sniff. “And I know he’ll recover, Valoo isn’t an ordinary dragon. But I still saw my patron mangled by a monster. And they attacked us in broad daylight.”

“They attacked us like that in the seas too,” Aveil said, not looking away from the pirates. “Middle of the day. Sun out.”

“We only had a few of them though to deal with. And… And that massive-eyed beast was with them! I’ve never seen anything like it!”

“We crippled the creature,” Link said. He pulled his canteen from his back and offered it to Medli. “If we hadn’t have done that, they both could’ve died.”

The rito handmaiden looked at the canteen for a second before taking it, unscrewing the lid. “Still… I wish we could’ve done more.” She took a drink then. “We’re going to need some extra help too if we’re going to the Tower of The Gods. Unless we leave quickly and are able to avoid another attack like this.”

“I’m still waiting on my armor to be repaired,” Link said. “And we’ll need to get some more silver and other tools to deal with the geozards.”

“I’m sure Komali would be willing to supply you.”

“Hoping so. But there was a lot of damage down there. They’re going to need supplies.”

“Gonna have to repair the piers too,” Aveil added. She watched as the girl came over to them. She
herself looked a little beat up from the fight with a bandage over her arm and dirt on her face.

Link glanced up at her, seeing she held two crossbow bolts. They were his silver ones. “Here,” she said. “I didn’t need all of them when help came.” She glanced at Aveil for a moment.

“Keep them,” he said. “Just in case.”

“Silver’s expensive though.”

“I can handle myself. And they might be coming back.”

“She can handle herself pretty well too,” Aveil said. “Took down nine of those things while we were holding the path up there with the other two guards here.” She motioned to the zora and rito guards who were also in the room. “If you could pull those sort of shots with a recurve, you’d be a heartseeker in The Tribes, Aryll.”

Link’s jaw fell open as he looked the young woman over. “I…” He smiled a little. “Do you have a telescope? With a pair of seagulls drawn into the top?” Medli had said she was there, but the last time he’d seen her was before he’d gone through The Change. Looking closer now though he saw the girl who’d hidden behind him so long ago.

“Yeah, but…” She glanced down and then back at him. “What does- Wait.” She tilted her head. “Link?”

He looked up at her. “You get my letters?”

She dropped bolts. She laughed, a massive smile across her face as the bolts clattered on the floor. The sister he hadn’t seen in over a decade threw her arms around him. “Nayru’s Love! It’s you! What are you doing here?!”

He hugged back with a grin on his face. “Helping a friend.” Link took a deep breath. “I’m glad you’re okay. When the war started it stopped any correspondence.”

“Did you get mine?” She pulled away, letting go, but still smiling.

“I didn’t. I was deployed to the Castor Wilds. Until…” He cleared his throat. “I’ll tell you later. It’s a long story.”

“Against the blins?”

He nodded and looked back at Medli. “Aryll, this is Medli.”

“Hi.” Aryll offered a hand.

The rito sniffed once and composed herself before shaking Aryll’s hand. “Good to finally meet you,” she said with a sad smile.

“Oh, he mentioned you in the letters! You helped him on a job for Hyrule out here.”

“More than one, but yes. Your brother has always been a friend to us. I’m glad to see wanting to help people runs in the family too.”

“Yeah. I heard something was going on with the couriers so I found a way to get up here to try and get letters to people. At least in the islands.” Aryll looked back to her brother. “So, what’re you helping them with?”
“Getting to the bottom of where the couriers are,” he said.

“The Crown wants you to do that?”

“I’m…” He let out a sigh and shook his head. Link was about to tell her that he was no longer with The Crown when two more pirates entered. One looked fairly ordinary with a striped shirt and bandana on his head. The other though, made him go silent. “I’ll tell you later. Meet me when we’re done.”

“Are we ready to actually talk about what happened out there?” the second new arrival asked. Link watched her very closely as Aryll walked to the woman’s side. “And what in Demise’s name those things were?” She wore a blue vest over her shirt and pants that looked they had once been white if not for the black blood staining them. She’d wrapped a bandana around her arm, blood staining it from a wound, and put her hair up in a messy bun.

“I heard one of the handmaidens call them geozards,” the zora said. He rubbed his nose and cleared his throat.

“Never heard of ‘em before.”

“Not surprised,” Medli said. “They’re supposed to myths.”

She turned to look at Medli, stopping briefly to look at Link. Their eyes met and he focused. He couldn’t let her know. He did see the captain’s jaw fall open slightly though before another voice interrupted them.

“Every myth has a grain of truth, dear Medli,” someone said. It was the older rito. He walked into the room followed by the chieftain. “They are primal zoras. Beings that live far deeper than their more amiable cousins.” He motioned slowly to the guard in the room. “They have had no need to change for they are content roaming the Abyssal Plains. The ones who attacked us however… Are unnatural. Altered by magic to the point they are tainted.”

“We figured that,” one of the pirates said. “So we got some witch out there making these things.”

“It’s too powerful,” Link said. “The skill needed to make something like that is intense. I don’t know of any mages who would be capable of it.” That was a lie and the pirate captain raised an eyebrow slightly when he’d said it.

“I’ve met a couple who could,” Aveil said. “I can count on one hand how many witches might be able to alter a creature to make it that dangerous and full of magic. Two of them are with The Tribes, one is dead and the third was last seen decades ago in the Castor Wilds.”

“You can never trust a gerudo though,” the pirate grumbled. He shook his head as he leaned back in his chair. “They’re just thieves, murderers and whores.”

Link saw the viper’s glare lock with the pirate. He caught Aveil’s hand twitch slightly and turn. If she had wanted to, she could’ve grabbed her hookshot and pulled them onto her sword. He was sure it’d all be in one fluid action as well.

“Hey, you wanna try pissing off one of the people who helped keep the island from being overrun?” the captain snapped at her companion.
“Captain Tetra,” Chieftain Komali said as he pulled the chair out from his desk. “If your crew
cannot be civil, I’m going to have to ask you all to wait in the commons room.” She elbowed the
man who’d made the remark. He looked to the elder rito, who thanked him and took a seat.
“Besides, one of your crew fought right beside her without an issue to keep the geozards from
reaching the caverns. Aveil has given us no reason so far to question her words.”

The elder cleared his throat. “If we may continue?”

“Please do,” Tetra said after glaring at her subordinate. Link fought the urge to smirk slightly,
knowing the look the pirate was getting too well. She turned a little then to face the elder, looking
relaxed, but he caught the tenseness and alert gaze.

Medli nudged Linebeck then to wake him up. He snorted and shook his head violently as he sat up.
“That’s my treasure!” he said. “I found it!” He blinked a couple times, seemingly realizing where
he was and cleared his throat.

“As I was saying…” the elder said. “The culprit is the grain of truth in the old myths. From the
evidence we’ve gathered we can reason it is Bellum.”

“Bellum?!?” Medli nearly shouted. “With respect High Priest Zepps, Bellum’s been dead for
thousands of years!”

“What is a Bellum?” the zora asked.

“An ancient demon,” Medli said.

“More than that,” Zepps said. “He was an old god; a being that predated the creation of the world
by The Golden Goddesses. He had a place in the depths of the ocean and a place in the natural
order of things. Because of the laws of nature though, he came into conflict with others. Namely
the Ocean King and Sky Spirit.”

“I’d assume then that Bellum was defeated,” Tetra said.

“At great cost,” Komali said. “The old stories passed down by The High Priest of Valoo to his
attendants are the closest record we have. They say that Bellum had a following on a great
continent. And his servants crafted suits of armor that would harvest the living for sacrifice. The
conflict grew. Lives were lost. The Ocean King and Sky Spirit had to do something as Bellum’s
influence spread through the continent.”

“If I recall the stories right, it was not just his influence that spread,” Medli said.

“You’d be right, child,” the elder said.

“What happened?” Link asked. He leaned forward a little and picked up the bolts his sister had
dropped on the floor earlier, but did not leave his chair.

“Well…” Medli began, “if I recall right, Nayru wept for the loss of life and her tears flooded the
continent. Washed away all the blood so that there could be a fresh start.”

“That’s one of the Hyrulean retellings actually,” the elder replied. “What happened was his
phantoms nearly cleansed the entire continent of life, absorbing it. In the end, the only thing the
Ocean King and Sky Spirit could do was undermine Bellum. The Sky Spirit taunted and distracted
him, while the Ocean King dove under the continent. Bellum had wrapped his many tentacles into
the continent so better to feed off of the life there. And thus, with just a little trickery, the entire
continent was brought down upon the god. All that remains of it are the scattered mountain tops
and some of the islands. Outset, Mercay, Gust… Most of the larger islands in the trade circle are the edges of the continent’s mountain range.”

Link saw his sister gasp and look shocked at the tale. “An entire continent?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“How? And if Bellum is under it all?” She shook her head and looked at the floor.

“What she means to say is how could this thing survive an entire continent being dropped on top of it?” Tetra asked. She bowed her head slightly at the question. Link caught it and remembered another time she’d done that. “Even if it did, it’d be buried under goddess-only-knows how many tons of rock.”

“A dead god can still dream, captain,” Aveil said. “Some of The Tribes believe that Demise’s tomb is in the heart of the Haunted Wasteland. It is his hate that makes the sands shift and why there are so many monsters in the region if you believe local legend.”

“Anyone actually been out to see it?”

“One or two witches have made it there.”

“Mmm…” Tetra looked back to the elder. “So why use the geozards then?”

“Simple, I’d assume,” Komali said. “He’s not at full strength. But strong enough to influence the things in the depths. He can’t make his servants yet so has to utilize the local resources as it were.”

“Meaning twisting the geozards,” Link answered. “Be simple for something like Bellum then.”

“Indeed,” the elder said.

“I had a feeling this was all connected,” Aveil muttered. “So… Bellum is in The Abyssal Plains in the center of the islands.”

“Looking that way,” Link said. “If not for the attack on the island, I’d say we’d need proof, but it looks like he’s trying to remove potential threats to his return. Logically, we can reason Valoo is a descendant of the Sky Spirit.”

“That’d be right,” the elder said.

“This is way out of my pay grade,” Aveil said.

“No one’s asked you to go after an old god,” Tetra said.

“Yet,” Linebeck added with a yawn.

“Actually, that is what myself and High Priest Zepps are asking,” Komali said. He walked in front of the desk, hands behind his back. “Before you arrived from the docks and cleanup below, we spoke at length with Ambassarod Tolec. We’ve agreed this is not something we can wait on. Bellum represents a threat to the entire South Seas. Regardless of what else is going on, he needs to be dealt with.” He looked at the collected group. “He is on his way back to the Craetor Depths and Labrynna to campaign for assistance. Before he left, we quickly drew up some contracts. I am willing to hire each of you to find a way to find the zora who was captured by the pirates in the region. Get information from him and then, if possible, find a way to stop Bellum’s raids from continuing.”
“You’re what?” Tetra asked. She had a look of disbelief on her face. “You’re asking us to go after a goddess-dammed demon god at the bottom of the ocean.” Tetra looked to the rest of the group there. “A group of pirates, a couple sellswords and a disgraced Labrynnan privateer after a dead god?” In spite of her tone, he caught the look in her eyes. There was a sparkle and a plan already forming in. He wondered if what Komali said had given her the idea or not.

“How much are we talking?” Linebeck asked. Link could already see some of the greed in his eyes. He shook his head at the smuggler. “What? I’ve said it before. There’s nothing that says we can’t do some good and get paid well doing it!”

Aveil began to laugh a little. “He’s got a point,” she said. “And if Bellum regains its power, we wouldn’t be around long enough to enjoy it anyways.” She looked back at the chieftain. “I’ll take a look. I make no promises until I’ve seen those contracts.”

“Medli brought me in hoping I could help,” Link said. “And you guys have always helped me. So you can count on me.”

“If the price is right, me too,” Linebeck said.

“You really thinking about your wallet after hearing all this?” Medli asked him.

Linebeck pulled his flask out of his coat and opened it. “You two are going to need a boat to travel still. And I have a contract too with Aveil.” He pointed at her. “Though we both agreed on ‘escape clauses’ in case we needed to make ourselves scarce…” He took a drink then.

“We did,” she answered. “Which is more than I can say for the one with Remor.”

The chieftain looked to the other side of the room. “What about you, captain?” he asked. “Can we count on your crew?”

Link watched her as she looked at the floor for a minute. He then saw her shake her head and look back up. For a moment, he caught a sorrow in her eyes. It was replaced with a mostly emotionless look. The same one he’d seen a couple times since the war had started, but he wasn’t going to let on. “We’re just pirates,” Tetra said. “It’s out of our paygrade and we’ve no interest in going after dreaming gods at the bottom of the sea.”

“So you’re not going to?” Ayrll asked.

“Look, Ayrll, you might’ve come here to do some work for the rito and we’d give you passage as you played mailwoman on the islands we passed, but this is not what we do.” She looked back at Komali. “Even if we wanted to help, our main mast got destroyed in the fight! We can’t go anywhere at any reasonable speed until it’s fixed. We also lost six people to those things.”

“I’d like a little payback, captain,” the larger of the pirates said. “Those bastards whipped us. Nobody gets away with that shit.”

She looked back at him. “I’d like to as well, but this sounds like a really fast way to die.” Tetra looked back at the chieftain. Link saw her expression slightly change and how she shifted her weight. She’d figured something but wasn’t about to say it in front of an audience. For a moment, she glanced over at him. Link tried his best to keep a neutral expression. “You really want our help, you’re gonna have to give us some incentive.”

Ayrll spoke up before anyone else could. “The fact that if Bellum gets out and threatens everything
“Isn’t incentive enough?!”

“Like our gerudo friend said. This is out of our pay grade.”

“You said you needed incentive,” Zepps said. “So how about you sit down and we discuss it?” He shook his head a little and rubbed his left side a little as he shifted his weight. The old rito looked the pirate captain in the eye.

There was a moment of silence as the group was quiet. “Well… No harm in discussing it at least,” she said. “I need to talk to you about getting some letters into Hyrule anyways.” Link smiled slightly at her words. He knew exactly what she was doing now. He held his tongue though as a small, sad smile came across his lips.

“When will we need to have a yes or no on those contracts?” Aveil asked.

“By tonight,” Komali said. “Time’s of the essence. We don’t know what some of his plans are or where he is.”

“What makes you think the zora’s still alive too?”

“We don’t know.” He looked down. “We need to find out. From what Tolec said though, he’s a tough one. Out of Termina’s Great Bay.”

“Well, we’re already heading into the area and the Tower of the Gods as part of our plan,” Medli said. “So we’ll be able to check there. If not, there’s Mercay. They’d probably be able to point us in the right direction.”

“You know how dangerous it is there,” Zepps said. “But be careful.”

“Of course.”

Komali looked to the rest of the group. “If there is nothing else, we must discuss things with Captain Tetra and see if we can come to an agreement.”

Chapter End Notes

So, I missed yesterday because work and this chapter needed a good chunk more editing. It got to the point that I thought bed was better than posting it without one last lookover.

But here it is!

Devnotes:
-Yep! The girl is Aryll! The choice to make her as such is a long story. But it started mostly because I felt her inclusion could be a good companion for him to work with and reflect on. We see in Wind Waker him going through a pile of stuff to save her. And yeah, though she is kinda a plot device there, I couldn't help but wonder what made them that close that he'd be willing to literally go charging over a cliff after her. Her and Link's story to a degree will be coming. The basic idea for Aryll here though was, like many of the other characters, an idea of how she might have grown up in the setting and adapted. -Yes, Linkle did offer a fair bit of inspiration for Aryll's design. (and to be completely
honest, first time I saw the character I thought "Huh, can't believe they're tossing Aryll in this.") Ciri from Wild Hunt also helped influence the design we'll see later on.
-Part of the reason there was such a delay was because I was quite worried over Tetra's portrayal. And I'm sure it's obvious, but yeah. Still not sure about it, but eh.
-Said it before, will say it again. One of the most fun parts of this project has been taking all the elements and putting them altogether.

Anyways, that'll do it for this week! As always, a huge thanks to everyone for reading, leaving kudos, comments and bookmarks! Next week there'll be a little more before we leave Dragon Roost. Also, a friendly face will pop up for a brief chat.

Keep being awesome people! See you next week!
An hour had passed since they’d signed the contract and Link was in one of the small guest rooms connected to the commons room, tending to his wounds. It had a single round window near the ceiling that let in the dying sunlight in as he sat on the simple and very low bed. He was no doctor, but was able to at least wrap some of the damage to his body in bandages and a red potion made his body repair any broken bones. As it worked, he buckled over, realizing that the blast of magic that had landed in his chest had cracked a couple ribs. Scabbed wounds healed over in minutes. He was thankful at least that he didn’t need the entire vial and corked it. In his head, he thought about how he was going to approach talking with his sister. How he was going to tell her he was no longer an agent of The Crown. One thing he knew though was there was no way he could tell anyone who Tetra was. He forced a huffed laugh and shook his head. If they managed to have a civil conversation, the first thing he was going to tell her was her disguise needed work.

He pulled at the wolf charm around his neck to look at it a little. Midna had said that it could be used to communicate with people only if he wanted to as opposed to his old charm which was open to anyone at The Tower. He was about to try it to see if he could talk to her if she had any advice on their current situation when there was a banging on the door. He let go of it and it landed against his chest once more. “Just a sec!” he said. With a little effort, he forced himself to his tired feet and pulled his shirt on over his head. He pulled the door open. Aryll stood there, arms folded and a piece of paper in her hand.

“You have time to talk?” she asked. Her face was in a state of surprise.

“Yeah.” He moved aside so she could enter. Instead, she handed him the paper. Link looked at it. He saw a drawing of his face on it. It was identical to the one that Linebeck had shown him earlier with a 15,000 rupee reward for his capture. “Well… This is what I did want to talk to you about…”

“That my brother, a hero of The Crown is now the most wanted man in all of Hyrule?” she growled.

Link took a deep breath. “It’s a long story and involves a lot of state secrets.” He folded the wanted poster back up. “But you remember some of the letters I sent? How you said sometimes it looked like pieces didn’t line up right? Or were missing pages?”

She nodded. “Especially after that whole mess with the monsters last year.”

“There are things that can’t be told to the public. Things that if they knew, it’d cause a panic. Like The Conjunction.”

“The what?”

“The monsters that fell out of the sky in some places.” He mentally kicked himself for referring to the incident by name. “I was directly involved in stopping it. And if the towns and villages all over Hyrule knew a lot of the details I do, there’d be chaos. One or two people is one thing. But a mob?”

“…I see your point.” She let out a sigh. “There was enough worry at the ranch when those
shrieking dark beasts started killing livestock.” Aryll looked back up. “Still, you left The Crown? Was it all those secrets or something else?”

“There was a massacre. Refugees fleeing the desert. One that could’ve been prevented if we’d looked at our information a bit closer.” He folded his arms and leaned in the doorway. “With everything else and feeling like I was just being used to keep the people in power and not actually helping the people who needed it, I couldn’t keep working for them.” He motioned slightly to her. “I’m sure you’d have seen some of it as well if you went to town. Especially before or during the early parts of the war.”

She nodded a little after a moment and looking away. “We took some cattle up to Castle town around the time a lot of the raids started near Lake Hylia. A lot of people were wanting to string some people up, calling them traitors and spies for The Tribes. And I saw some of the guards egging the crowd on even rather than trying to keep the peace.”

“I was there. Me and a couple other Chosen helped get some people out before the rioting started.” He looked down at the floor for a moment. “It’s become such a mess. But I’m still working. Trying to find a way to end this war.”

“By yourself?”

Link shook his head. “I’ve got help. But it’s an uphill battle I’m seeing.” He looked at the folded wanted poster in his hand. “They’re afraid I’m going to give state secrets to The Tribes I think. Among other things.”

Aryll looked like she had begun to relax a little. “Like with Medli.”

“Once I solve the missing courier problem.”

“Like when you two worked in the seas then?”

He nodded. “Yep.” Link looked back at her then and smiled a little. “I’m still trying to be that hero. But there’s people who need my help other than just The Crown.”

“Why I came here. Heard from Quill that they were missing several couriers. So I volunteered to come help however I could.” She yawned. “Besides, it was getting a little boring on Outset.”

“Glad you got there safe.”

“The letter you sent me said to get out before The Tribes reached the region. So I did just that. But only after we made arrangements with Talon to help keep the cattle safe.” She smiled. “It was good to see Malon again.”

“Saw her recently too.”

“You did?”

He nodded. “Had to make sure Epona was safe somewhere. Helped them out with a problem with their goats too.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. It was a sort of vampire going after the goats. Didn’t kill any of them.”

“You killed it?”
“No, actually… He was cursed. So I tried to break it. Doesn’t look like it worked, but it bought us
time to try and find another way.” Link rubbed his eyes then, closing them for a moment. “I have
someone I can talk to about this sort of thing too. Maybe they’ll have some ideas on how to break
it.”

“Aaah.”

Link glanced down at the crossbows on her hips. “Where’d you learn to shoot?”

“Would you believe Gorman’s Traveling Carnival?”

He shook his head. “No. The bows used in their shooting galleries have a lot less draw on them
than repeaters like what you have.”

“Well I learned to aim at least whenever they came through.” She smiled a bit. “Did so well, was
able to get entered in a couple competitions. Came in really helpful when we had to watch the
cattle and there were blin raiders or monsters though.”

Link smiled a little back, seeing how proud she was of her skills, but felt a little sad hearing the
news. He remembered the scared five year old girl hiding behind him in a torn blue dress with pink
flowers on it as they struggled to find shelter and food with the flood of other refugees fleeing the
war in the islands. Or the cold nights in the alleys of Aboda and stealing food. “I’d hoped you’d
never have to pick up a weapon, Aryll.”

“I know.” The smile became a little said. “But with everything going on around us, it may have
been inevitable.”

“Yeah.” He shifted his weight slightly to be a little more comfortable against the door frame.
“We’ll be leaving tomorrow. Guessing you’re going to stay here?”

“No, actually.” She looked to the left for a moment. “I talked to Miss Tetra. And because I’m
technically not part of her crew, I’m free to leave.”

It fit a bit with some of what he actually knew about her. At the same time, he was surprised she’d
agreed to let his sister go. Link instantly wondered if she knew the relation or if the other pirates
had brought it up while waiting for Tetra’s arrival earlier. “So, back to Outset or stay here and help
out the mail service?”

“I was actually going to go with you.”

He moved off the doorframe and instantly was standing at attention. “What? Aryll, you heard
everything they talked about in there and-”

“I know,” she interrupted. “But you’re going to need all the help you can get. And you even said in
some of your letters when you were getting frustrated with some of the rough days that you wished
more people would stand up and actually try and emulate the Hero of Legend.” Aryll waved her
right hand outward. “What does it say about me if I’m given a chance and I don’t take it? And that
my brother is one of those people that has spent his entire life working to live up to The Hero’s
Ideal?” Her hand dropped to her side. Link spotted Aveil emerge from her room nearby in her new
suit of armor, inspecting the fins on the forearms before he glanced back to Aryll. “There’s plenty
of things I could do that doesn’t put me in the fight too if that’s what you’re worried about. I can
handle charts, a steamship like Linebeck’s is going to need to have coal fed to the boilers, lots of
other things too. Could use a cook too I’m sure.”
Link let out a long sigh and shook his head for a moment. “Aryll, I’ve done all this—”

“I got that. I know. But you also kept saying how important it was in those letters to help people who needed it. And… And we’re the only family we have. I know we’ve not actually grown up together, but we did send lots of letters. And there were a couple times we did see one another in those early years.”

“Yeah.” He did smile a little at it. In the face of the turmoil in his home and what they were going to face, he was torn. On one hand, she had proven herself capable. On the other though, he still saw her as the little sister he’d vowed to keep safe. And Tetra’s crew wasn’t going to get directly involved if what he reasoned she was doing came to pass. Even if her actions might have ultimately stopped the creature. He glanced down the hall again for a moment. Aveil was there talking with Linebeck then. The smuggler had a box in his hands with supplies. She took it from him.

“Linebeck!”

“What?” he asked.

“When you’re done with that, go back to Zauz’s and tell him we need more silver bolts.” He looked Aryll over then. “Aveil, can you take my sister and get her some better armor?”

“She’s coming with us?” she asked.

“In a noncombat role, but I’d rather be sure she’s safe.” Aryll’s face broke into a wide grin and she threw her arms around him. He laughed a little and hugged her back. “Just promise me you’ll not actively try and get in a fight.”

“I promise,” she said, letting go.

“Allright.” He let go as well. “Go get anything else you might’ve left with the pirates too.”

“Right. I’ll do that right now!”

“Meet Aveil after though! You’re going to need armor.”

“Will do!” She waved as she ran down the ramp. Soon as she was gone, the gerudo and smuggler approached him. The smuggler put the box down.

“This a smart idea?” Linebeck asked.

“I’d welcome an extra hand honestly,” Aveil started, “she was damn good with those bows. Long as she stays directly out of a fight and plays support with those bows if we are in one, I think we’ll be okay.”

“I’m hoping that’s the case,” Link said. “I saw her perform an impressive grouping on a geozard’s heart. If she’d been using silver bolts she’d have killed it in a single shot.” He looked at Linebeck then. “What’re you worried about?”

“Well, Medli did say they could’ve been Hyrulean Privateers…” Aveil added.

The older man gave Aveil a look at her feigned ignorance. “They are. Seen plenty of other privateers in my days. Real pirates wouldn’t be negotiating like they are with the chieftain. They’d ask for the entire treasury and their ship repaired before going off. They might not’ve been so keen on your sister joining us too. And on the other hand, they could have been planning something.”
He glanced down at the poster in Link’s hand. “They clearly know who you are. And it’s probably only because of their captain not wanting to piss off the mailmen that they’re not trying anything.”

“Just another reason to get her away from them,” Link said. He was going to have another conversation with her later. He’d already decided it, but was going to have to make sure one of the topics was Tetra. Link looked back at Linebeck then. “Will we be ready in the morning to go?”

“No problem. Just need to get a couple more things now that we’ll have another. Medli said she’d be getting you two some of your drinks too.”

“Drinks?” Aveil asked.

“Our potions,” Link said. He looked at her for a moment. “I saw you get ones that’d kill someone if a normal person drank them back on Windfall.”

“If we’re going after something like Bellum, we need every advantage we can get,” she said.

“Agreed.”

Once the details were set, Link returned to his room with a yawn. He reached behind with his hand to rub the back of his neck and stretched a little before sitting back down on the bed. Given what they were up against, they were going to need every advantage they could get. Link looked out the window again, seeing the twilight peering through. He lifted the wolf charm around his neck to look into its emerald eyes before squeezing his fingers around it.

“Hello?” he asked through his mind and focusing magic into the charm. “Are you there?” He heard no response. “Midna?”

“Just a sec,” he heard her say.

“Okay.” He leaned back on the bed then and closed his eyes in time to see a flicker of light and shadow. It formed into a tall figure standing before him wrapped in silk robes while shadow wrapped around her arms, chest and right leg. The markings on her arms glowed brightly as her crystal floated over her shoulder. Her hair was up in a style he’d only seen once before, along with an elegant long hairpin in the back. Resting on her forehead was a spiral piece of jewelry with a precious stone in the middle of its top. He didn’t realize it, but his jaw had fallen open.

“Alright. Just got out of a meeting,” the Twilight Princess said, glancing through a parchment that floated next to her. “Been in them almost constantly with other clan diplomats since getting back and...” That familiar smirk of hers played on her lips as her eyes went to him. “Still speechless I see.”

He’d only seen her dressed as such once before and mentally kicked himself for repeating the same reaction. “Uh, y-Yeah,” he managed to say. Her grin only grew wider. “Sorry. I... you look good.”

She laughed for a moment as the parchment vanished into magic. “Well, I am a princess. Even if I don't look the part when running all over with you!”

“Fair. Fair enough.” Link smiled sheepishly.

“Mmm.”
He took a deep breath, composing himself. “You doing alright since... everything?”

“Yeah. I am,” Midna replied with a nod. The smirk faded from her painted lips. “There's... there's been a lot of stress though since I got back. Clans discussing The Light World all over again and what should be done.”

“Anyone ask the question you don't want to hear yet?”

She rolled her eyes. “Was one of the first damn questions today.” Midna shook her head and sighed as she moved to a reclining position. He wouldn’t be surprised if she was using her magic to float wherever she was. “Thankfully was shot down fast as not being a productive area of discussion.”

Given what they were up against, the possibility of having a sorceress with them was too great to not pass up. “Any chance that—”

“No. My father has made it very clear. Travel to other worlds is forbidden for the foreseeable future.”

“Oh.”

She smirked at him, even though her eyes looked a little more apologetic than the rest of her features, if even only for a moment. “Don't worry, I'll still get you your book.” She reached up and gently removed the hairpin and pulled her hood back. “He's worried that what happened could cause someone to come looking. Hell, when you and Ravio were with me in The Twilight, first thoughts were you two were the vanguard to an invasion.”

“Yeah.”

“I think too I can convince him that having someone who can communicate with some people in Hyrule and Lorule would be in our best interests. So the ban may end up just for people who aren't cleared.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Do you guys go back and forth often?”

“No. You've seen me set up the spellwork for moving between worlds post-conjunction. Takes a lot of training, time and magic to do it. Unless you have a damn good reason for it, a twili isn't going to hop between worlds. And since The Conjunction we've been watching the fabric of our realm for breaches. So if someone does try it, we'll know.”

“Smart.”

Midna chuckled a little then. “I doubt you called me up just to discuss transdimensional magic. And I know you didn't to talk politics. Soooo...”

“I need your help with some research,” Link said plainly. “And for better or worse, you’re the only person I know right now with access to a massive library of magical and mythological information.”

“Pfft. Well, let me get right on that like your girls in The Tower! I'll head right down to the library and get back to you in ten minutes with a complete history on whatever you’re looking for! Do you want it abridged or complete versions with cross references to the Ikanan Magic Codices?”

“Mid...” he groaned.
The smirk was back on her lips. “Heh. Had to. If only for the look on your face. Y'know. I really can't spend hours doing that though like they could’ve.”

Link nodded a little. “I know. But with what happened out here earlier today, we need all the help we can get.”

She noticed the change in his tone and how his shoulders slumped. How there was a flash of worry in his eyes even and she grew serious. “Gods, Link. What's going on over there?”

“Got some help from Medli getting out of the country,” he explained. “But the Dragon Roost rito are in a little trouble. Their couriers are going missing. And we were just today attacked by monsters. But these things were heavily altered by magic. Turned to smoke and ash when killed. Not twili magic though. Don't know of any of your ancestors ever turned a sperm whale into a flying monster.”

“That sounds like some insanely powerful magic. Like the sorts even one piece of The Fused Shadows could be capable of.”

“According to one of the rito elders, it was an old demon god by the name of Bellum.”

“Bellum?” she asked, brows rising.

“Sound familiar?”

“Vaguely from a class on deities predating The Golden Goddesses.”

“Lines up a little with what we were talking about earlier.”

“Oh?” The parchment appeared again and her crystal darted down from her shoulder. He could see teal light flickering through it as it worked, taking notes.

“Sky spirit and ocean king buried Bellum under an entire continent. Sounded like Din, Farore and Nayru were nowhere to be seen.”

“I see.”

“We're heading off to find someone who may know something about all this first thing in the morning. But we have so few facts to begin with.”

“How long you think it'll take you to get there?”

“Three? Four days if Linebeck doesn’t run the engine into the ground?”

The sorceress nodded to him as she casually waved a hand towards the parchment. It vanished once more. “Okay,” she said, looking him in the eye.

“Okay?”

“Yeah. I'll do some digging here and there while I fight your book. It's proving an issue. But I'm down there anyways.”

Link smiled softly. “Thank you.”
“Yep.”

“I’ll let you know when we’re there and what’s going on. See if we can get to the bottom of it. And hope it’s not as bad as it sounded like.”

Midna let out a small laugh as she shook her head. “What, Bellum breaking out of having a continent dropped on top of him?”

“Exactly.”

“Well,” she began, reclining back and slipping her hands behind her head. “We’ve both had instances of opening our big mouths before about stuff like this...”

“...Damnit, you’re right,”

“Why yes I am.”

“Heh.”

Her expression changed and she looked over her shoulder. “Hang on.” The twili vanished from his vision then. He was left alone with his thoughts, though still squeezing the wolf charm.

“Yeah?” The minutes passed. He began to wonder what was going on. “Mid?”

She reappeared to him then, eyes narrowed and a frown on her lips. It reminded him of the expression she usually had worn their very first weeks together. “Damnit,” she muttered.

“What?”

Her eyes looked up at him. “Sorry. I have to cut this short.”

“Everything okay?”

“Zant’s here,” she said bluntly and without any sense of humor.

He didn’t know all the details, but knew at least that she did not get on well with one of the most powerful clan lords of The Twilight. A million different theories had been in his head as to what had happened, but suspected many of them had to do with The Conjunction. “Oh.”

She sighed as she pulled her hood back up and slipped the hairpin back in place. She adjusted the sleeves of her robe carefully to make sure they looked straight before reaching up and making sure her jewelry was in place. “And I was having such a lovely morning.”

“So much for your sunny disposition,” he snarked, offering her a small grin.

The annoyance on her face left for a few moments as she snickered slightly. “Yeah, laugh it up, wolf-boy,”

“You already used that one, trough bather.”

“You used that one too earlier,” she said, pointing a finger at him.

“Darunia interrupted us before I could finish.”

“Alright fair.” Midna sighed and shook her head. “Well, time to go deal with the self-serving idiot.”
“Aren’t you so happy I'm a noble one?”

“Heh. Yeah.”

He smiled back at her then, thankful for at least getting some additional help on the upcoming mission. “So, see you later?”

“Yeah. See you later.” She waved a hand to him before her image vanished from his mind. Link opened his eyes then and was left alone in the small room once more.

Chapter End Notes

Holy cow guys. Over 100 kudos! You guys are seriously awesome! I have a special extra piece I'm writing as a thank you in relation to the story right now for everyone. It's over on the companion series to this one, The Hera Archives. You can find the link to it around here at the end of the chapter. That series only updates every now and then as I get little side stories or ideas, so don't expect it updated as regularly as this one.

Devnotes:
- HAD to address the elephant in the room so to speak. Namely how Aryll would react to learning some of the stuff her brother has been up to and the problems it could cause.
- Given that Aryll in Wind Waker has very little development and all, I tried to think what she'd do and how she'd act as an adult who had her brother being, well, The Hero.
- I have missed writing snark between Link and Midna. Given her importance as a character in the storyline, I had to find a way to get her to be worked in even though there's plenty of reason for her not to appear directly. Giving her the support role was a good option I feel to not only have Link put his charm to use, but also a chance to show off the characters interacting again.

As always, a huge thank you to you guys for all of those kudos and views and comments and bookmarks! Got two this week! Special thanks this week to ADK09 and mudaship39!

That'll do it for this week. Thanks for reading and keep being awesome people!
It was dawn when Linebeck’s steamboat pulled out of the docks and started southward. According to Aryll’s charting, it would take them a few days to reach The Tower of The Gods and the pirates that were using it as their base of operations. Link felt a bit better to be at sea with his repaired zora scale armor. The ship bobbed along the waves as the group was all above deck. Linebeck was at the bridge and wheel, directing the ship along. On the top of the bridge with the cannon were Aveil and Aryll. Link watched them for a minute, thankful that it looked like they were getting along. The gerudo was also it looked like giving his sister pointers on using bows. Medli approached him from the bridge’s cabin. She held in her hands a pair of massive biscuits with meat stuffed inside them and a couple mugs of coffee. He took one of each from her and looked back up at his sister.

“Thanks,” he said. “All settled in?”

“Yeah,” she said. “Your sister was pretty good with those charts. We’ll see too the damage to any platforms.”

“She’s surprised me.”

“You don’t sound happy.”

“I am. Just.” He looked back up to see Aveil showing Aryll her own bow. “I didn’t even recognize her. She never mentioned anything about her archery in the letters either.” He took a sip of the coffee.

“Maybe she did it so you wouldn’t worry?”

“Maybe…” He took another sip and then took a bite from the biscuit. “I know we all have to grow up but.” He swallowed. “But we were both kind of forced to a lot faster than most.”

“Wanted to try and give her a chance to hold onto that childhood a little longer?”

“Yeah.” Link finished the biscuit and took another sip of coffee. “This is pretty weak coffee.”

“Aveil made it,” Medli said quickly.

He looked at her nearly as quickly as the words had left her mouth.

“Okay, so she didn’t.”

Link chuckled a little. “Still struggling with it?”

She nodded. “Yeah. And Linebeck doesn’t have a press. I think I’m grinding the beans too fine.”

“Oh.” He finished it then. “I can barely make a cup of coffee. Just like I can barely make a mender potion.”

“Don’t know why. You can cook really well and cooking is pretty similar to alchemy.”

“It’s more the magical elements I’m thinking. Mix the herbs found in the right amounts and timing, couple with a little magic and it should work. You don’t need magic to cook. Speaking of magic
though, I have a favor to ask.”

“Oh?” She sipped her own coffee and leaned against the railing. Medli glanced up to see some gulls overhead. “Oh, the gust spells you mentioned.”

“Yeah. Don’t need anything fancy. Just something that’s adapted to my signs.”

“Wouldn’t be too difficult. And you already know an even tougher wind magic spell.”

“Farore’s Wind. Yeah. Not quite the actual spell. That’s more long distance. At best I can blink in a direction about fifteen feet at most. And it’s not even a real teleport.”

Medli nodded. “So, just a simple gust?”

“Yeah.”

“Shouldn’t be too tough. Most of the motions I practice with my martial arts are similar to your signs anyways.” She handed him her coffee and half-eaten biscuit. “Now, you know how you focus when you’re going to enter the jump? Rather than trying to put it through you, try projecting it.”

“Like when projecting Din’s Fire in a stream?”

“Sort of. But try not to prepare it the same way. Just focus on releasing the energy like when you use Farore’s Wind. Or whatever you did earlier when the docks were attacked.”

“Saw the snare then?”

“Yeah. That trap.” Medli stretched her arms a little, moving them in controlled patterns. “I’m thinking too that it might be best if you try and use the movement of your arm too to trigger the sign.” She took up a stance with hands raised defensively before stepping forward and chopping through the air horizontally with her right hand. There was a flash and a gust of wind that erupted from the movement. “This way you don’t have to place it too. You can just move and incorporate it as well to your normal swings and actions.” She swung her arm again, this one vertical and another gust of magic wind erupted from her hands. “I’m guessing you haven’t done any adapting of true magic to your signs?”

“That’d be right.”

She walked back over then and took her coffee and biscuit back. “Well, first thing you’re going to want to do is determine a fingering. Something quick, but not similar to what you use for your other signs.”

“Mmmnhmm.” He nodded a little and began to experiment with how to hold his hand out. “So, once that’s done, just focus and move the arm?”

“Yeah. It might take a couple tries to get the magic flowing right. Your body’s used to putting the energy through your body though with Farore’s Wind, so this is just projecting it rather than using it internally like you do.”

“What would happen if I kept it internalized like I was going to use Farore’s Wind anyways?”

“That’s… I’m not sure.” She stepped back to stand next to him. “Give it a try.”

Link took a deep breath then and swung his hand out in an arc, fingers in the shape he’d decided to
use. He tried to focus, but nothing happened. He tried it a second time, trying to channel the energy in his body like he was preparing one of his jumps. With a deep breath, he tried it again. A small burst of green flashed around his palm. It wasn’t powerful enough to knock anything down, but he could feel a little bit of the energy. He tried it again, lashing out. Again, there was another burst and this time he actually felt a little of the air moving around his palm.

“Keep at it. It’ll get easier the more you do it.”

He kept trying. Thrusting his hand out and focusing. The small bursts continued as Medli practices next to him, aiming her bursts out to sea. Link inspected his hand for a moment before trying again, this time like he was using his other signs. His muscles began to burn as he felt the energy in his arm, but there was no burst. He could feel the energy, but it wasn’t projecting. Link lowered his hand and rubbed his arm, still feeling the pain when there was a crack. Wind burst around him, creating a gust and knocking Medli over as it collided with the deck. In the center, Link was unaffected.

“You two okay down there?” Aveil shouted from the top of the bridge.

“Yeah, fine!” Medli said. “Just… Wasn’t expecting that.”

Link offered her a hand. She took it. “I wasn’t either,” he said.

“You were thinking too hard about it and not just listening to your body, weren’t you?”

He gave her a sheepish look. “Was the biggest thing I had problems with when learning the signs back at The Tower anyways.” Effortlessly, he pulled Medli back on her feet. “That could be incredibly useful against foglets I think.”

“Clear the fog they make?”

“Yeah.” He twisted his wrist in a few circles, stretching it. “I think right now though I’ll stick to practicing the other one.”

Medli shook her head with a small laugh. “Took us weeks to be able to do it well, but that was one of the first styles of magic we learned. Just don’t think too hard on it and you’ll get it I think.” She glanced over the edge again and watched the seas. “If we went southwest a little, we’d run into Outset.”

“Mmm.” Link looked in that direction. “Maybe on the way back we can stop. I haven’t been there since… Since I was six.”

“Sure we could.” She watched him going through the motions again, practicing the sign and actions to get used-to it, but not putting any magic into it. “So, what’s your plan after all this?” she asked. “You’ll have our information network at your disposal. But even one man can’t end a war.”

He nodded and finished another careful wave of his arm with his fingers in the shape of the sign. “I need to find people who want it to end and people who are going to lose a lot the longer it goes on. I have no allusions about how hard this is going to be though.”

“Think you can talk Zelda back into it?”

Link looked at his feet then. He almost told her. Almost let her know that the pirate captain was the Princess of Hyrule. But he didn’t. He looked back at Medli then, her arms wrapped around her
to help keep warm from the wind and cool seawater. “I… I hope so actually. But I don’t think she’ll listen to me after recent events, so I’ll need a better plan.”

“What happened?”

He was quiet and looked away again.

“Link? What did you do?” She sounded like a mother coaxing a confession out of a child.

“I… Broke into the Royal Palace to help a friend and almost ended up having to steal The Ocarina of Time.”

“You what?!” Her arms fell to her sides and she’d shouted so loud that it had gotten the attention of his sister and Aveil. The rito glared at him with shock. “By Cyclos and Zephos, who would you do something like that for?!”

“Other than you and Linebeck?”

She started to nod, realizing. “Must’ve been someone really important.”

“If we hadn’t, another group could’ve entered the war. A magocracy you could call it. But yeah. I saw her while we were escaping. And she called for the guards. We ran.” He shook his head and then looked back at her, steadying himself with a hand on the rail as the boat dipped in the waves. “I almost took it, but, something told me that we couldn’t. That it was too risky. So, used it and left.” He glanced at her. “It was exactly where I’d left it before all this.” He smiled sadly a little. “When I got back from the front, we played together. She had the harp and since I didn’t have my old ocarina with me, so she pulled it out of the vault. Long as it didn’t leave that room, it would be okay.”

“You did mention you used to play it even when you visited her in your youth. Even before you both realized what it was.”

“Yeah.” He chuckled a little, shaking his head. “I’m aware of the irony a bit too there. That we were using a musical instrument that could warp the very fabric of time just as a musical instrument. But neither of us were aware of the kind of power that thing held until we were older.”

“Sounds like something I did when I was younger.”

“Oh?” Before either could say another word though, they heard Aryll’s voice.

“Hey!” she shouted from the top of the bridge. “Isn’t there supposed to be a platform over there?”

“Where?” Medli called back.

Link looked to his sister. She held her telescope in one hand and was pointing directly ahead of them. He looked at Medli as she pulled a chart from her bag. “When we were charting the course, we should see one! And the sea is too calm right now to hide it behind waves.” Link watched as Medli pulled a sextant next. “I can hold the chart,” he said.

“Thanks.” She glanced at it before working with the sextant.

“By dead reckoning we should be seeing it now.”

“Dead reckoning isn’t always accurate though,” Aveil said.
“Yeah, but I should still be able to find the platform on the horizon.”

He looked back at the chart Medli had him hold. The rito was looking over it now. She drew her finger along the path they were traveling and had marked. There were locations on it which clearly marked where each platform was. Link looked back to the horizon then and couldn’t find the platform. He remembered seeing them years ago scattered throughout the seas. They were typically very tall and had bright red flags with the Dragon Roost crest upon them in white. “How far are we?”

“I should be able to see the flag,” Medli said. She looked back at the bridge. “Linebeck! Take us a couple degrees starboard! We should pass right past one of the towers in the next half hour!”

“Can do that!” the smuggler shouted back. Link saw through the windows Linebeck spin the wheel to the right a little. They felt the steamboat lurch slightly as it started to change course.

“We should see it well before then.”

“And if it isn’t?” Link asked. He glanced up to see his sister scanning the horizon with her telescope still.

“Then… Then we know what’s happened to some of our couriers at least.” She took a deep breath then and stuffed the sextant back in the bag. Her eyes remained glued to the horizon as the boat bobbed along. Link went back to practicing his sign, occasionally throwing magic into it. Each time he did, he felt his muscles burn slightly. The gusts from his palm were getting stronger though with each action. After about fifteen or twenty attempts, he stopped to catch his breath and sat on the deck with his back against the railing. He pulled a canteen from his belt and took a long drink. He was confident though that he could put a fair bit of force into it now and could knock a man off their feet with that action. When he’d held onto it after all, he’d knocked Medli over by accident. He’d need to experiment on a target later though to be sure.

“I still don’t see it!” Aryll shouted.

Medli shook her head and moved to the bow. Link watched as she pulled the sextant again and looked through the lens before lowering it. “It’s not there.”

Link got to his feet when he heard that and walked over. He took another drink from the canteen and put it back on his hip. Covering his brow with his hands to help block the sun, he scanned the horizon. There was no bright red flag bearing the mark of the Rito Couriers waving from a set of stilts. No evidence at all that there ever had been a platform there. He started to the bridge then. “Linebeck! Drop anchor when we get close.”

“Why?” he asked as Link pushed the door open. Linebeck was already pulling the levers and checking the gauges to bring the ship to a slow halt.

“I want to check the platform’s base. See if it’s still there. Should only be a quick dive into the water anyways.”

Linebeck nodded a little. “Alright. We can do that.” He put his hands on the wheel once more, turning it slowly. Link pulled the facemask for the zora armor over his nose and mouth before pulling the mask on the hat down over his eyes. He secured it all before checking his crossbow and grabbing a rope out of a crate behind Linebeck. He walked back onto the deck and wrapped it around the railing. Medli assisted, knotting it tightly. The other two had come down from the
bridge’s tower and were watching. Aveil pulled on her own mask and checked the fins of her armor then as Medli explained to Aryll what they were going to do. Link heard his sister voice worries, but blocked it out slightly to focus on the dive. At the end of the rope, he tied his lantern.

“See what you’re doing,” Aveil said. She pulled a bottle from her belt and handed it to him. “Use this instead of the regular oil. It’ll create a light.

“Thanks,” he said, taking it. He pulled the cork out and poured the dark fluid into the lantern. As they approached the location of the platform, Linebeck rang the bell a couple times. They heard a clank and a chain rattling as the anchor dropped. As they scanned the ocean’s immediate vicinity, they saw no driftwood or bodies. Whatever had happened to the tower, it had been well before they’d arrived. Link snapped his fingers a couple times and created a small set of sparks to light the lantern. A bright green flame appeared in it and he dropped it into the water. He looked back at Aryll. “We won’t be long,” he said.

“Shouldn’t be,” Aveil added, mounting the railing with her back to the water. She took a few deep breaths and adjusted the mask over her face. A moment later, she fell into the water. Link followed suit, jumping in feet first, but hands over the mask on his face.

It was cold, even with the armor’s insulation as he felt the gentle flow around him. As he treaded water, Link glanced down at the glow of the lantern’s magic. He sank beneath the waves then with a pulse of magic through his armor. As he descended, he saw Aveil already swimming downward towards the barely visible ocean floor. Link followed slowly, letting himself sink more than deliberately swim. He didn’t see any wildlife out here, or signs of the platform at all. There should have been a single long pillar of steel and wood that reached upward and into the sky. Instead, there was nothing until he reached the darker depths and his feet touched the ocean floor. Looking up, he could see the glow of the lantern. Around him and Aveil though was a pit of sand and twisted metal chains that had once been used to help tether the platform. The entire foundation of stone that had been placed there long ago was completely missing. He walked carefully into the pit of sand with Aveil practicing swimming and using the fins of her armor to investigate as well.

She landed next to him. Link noticed the mask looked like a stylized zora’s face in a snarl. “Can you hear me?” she asked.

He nodded. “Takes some getting used-to doesn’t it?”

“Yeah. Kind of strange.” She looked around the sands. “So, what should be down here?”

“The pillar and chains. And a buried stone that the pillar would be placed in.” Link looked around as well. There were no aquatic plants either around them. The thought of whatever had been strong enough to rip the very foundations of one of the platforms out made him stop and wonder just how big and strong Bellum or his servants were. He knew plenty of the land-based monsters and creatures that roamed Hyrule proper, but the depths of the oceans were a mystery to even the zoras. He glanced over to see Aveil floating well above him and shouting, though it was muffled by the water. He kicked off the ground and floated up to where she was.

“I see something over there!” she said, pointing. “Looks like that might be our foundation.” Before he could say anything, she kicked forward and held her arms to her sides. Link followed carefully, glancing back up at the lantern to orient himself. Sure enough, several yards away was the foundation of the tower and the shattered steel and wood pillar. Chains drifted still in the water that
were still connected to it even. He stopped next to Aveil. “The only thing I could think of that might even have strength like this is one of the great worms of the desert.”

“Like a molgera or the twinmold. Maybe a desert manhandla if it got big enough…”

“So we could be looking at a giant eel or something.” He glanced back at the lantern again. “Let’s get back topside. There’s nothing down here.”

“Agreed. And maybe that zora we’re looking for will know more.” She kicked upward and began to swim for the lantern. Link was right behind her.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, in by the wire for this one! Admittedly, lots of distractions tonight made it unlikely this would be posted, but here it is! Still more or less on schedule!

Devnotes:
-Adapting the signs/spells was a fun side project. We'll see others too!
-Thinking on all the platforms we see in Wind Waker in the ocean, they had to serve a purpose. Of course, from a gameplay purpose, they serve to help break up the gameplay and flesh out the world, but when looking at it from a worldbuilding perspective, what purpose could they serve other than either a place for rito couriers to rest and recover or as strategic defensive locations.

That'll do it for this week! Next week we get to The Tower! As always, thank you to everyone who reads, leaves kudos, comments and bookmarks! Keep being awesome everyone! I'll see you next week!
“You are telling me something literally ripped the foundation of one of our platforms out?” Medli said, looking in shock at Link and Aveil as they sat exhausted on the floor on the hold. “And that it was capable of hauling it several dozen feet and broke the support apart?” She ran a hand over her face and into her hair. “I…” She shook her head. “How are we going to handle something this big?”

“If it’s like one of the worms of the desert, we need to find what it eats,” Aveil said.

“If it even eats,” Link said. “Remember what Zepps said. Bellum is an old god. How do you go about killing a god?”

“Even Valoo has to eat though,” Medli added. “He hunts the seas and skies usually. Some of his prey involves kargarocs or juvenile helmarocs.”

“Wait,” Aryll said. “We don’t even know if it is Bellum who did this.”

“You sure?” Aveil asked. “All this evidence is looking like him. It… Whatever.”

“No, I meant it might not be Bellum itself. Gods have servants, right?” She hopped up on the crate that Linebeck had been using as a bed back in Windfall and crossed her legs. “We saw that big whale-thing too and the geozards. Could one of those big whale-things have pulled it off? Ripped the platform’s foundation out and then carried some of it off?”

“She’s got a point,” Link said. He looked back at Medli. “There’s other servants of Valoo too other than the handmaidens. We could be looking at other leviathans like that emerging.”

“I see what you mean,” the rito replied. “We already know too that Bellum was able to warp geozards. And High Priest Zepps mentioned that he once made his own servants. Phantoms they were called.” She pushed some of her hair behind her ear. “And with how little we know anyways about the creatures in the Abyssal Plains, we could only be seeing the amphibious forces.”

A look of dread covered Aveil’s face. “Great eels or squids. Or something we haven’t even seen before.”

“Last time I was in the depths,” Link began, “I found this… It looked like a frog. But was massive and. And it had these tendrils coming from its legs. And dozens of eyes. Was almost as big as one of those skiffs the pirates south of the zuna ports use and had tentacles instead of a tongue.”

“Din’s fire, that sounds horrible,” Aryll gasped. Her face lost any color to it.

“It was worse than the gyorgs its blood attracted.” He looked back at the others. “Anyone tell Linebeck about this yet?”

“I can hear you just fine up here!” they heard shouted down from the bridge. “Just really don’t want to have to deal with whatever we’re going to run into! You know I didn’t even need a cannon until I met you, Link.”

“Just think of the money,” Aveil said. “And what you said earlier too. That there’s nothing that
“Still, I’m not relishing the idea of finding something that can snap courier platforms like that in half.” He came down the stairs from the bridge and pushed the door to the engine room open. For a moment, they heard the hissing of the boilers as he worked briefly. He soon stepped back out and closed the door. He wiped sweat off his face with the red cravat around his neck. “Sun’s going down and from the charts we’re still on schedule. If what it sounds like is true though, we’ll need to be very alert. Something is out there. And it could very well be stalking us now. I’d prefer if we found something we can do to help make sure we’re not literally sunk.”

Medli raised a hand. “In the daylight I can circle the ship. Anything big enough to pull those platforms out is going to be big enough that I can see it when it starts to get close to the surface.”

“We’re gonna need someone too under at night then,” Aveil added. “It’ll be too dark to see anything below the surface from the skies. And if they see something they can alert the surface guard.”

“Me and Aveil can handle that,” Link said. He looked at his sister. “Aryll, can you manage night watch with Linebeck?”

“I can,” she said. “Wish I had Rupert with me though.”

“Who?”

“My sea eagle. Trained him to help spot things. He’s back on Outset, safe.”

Aveil chuckled. “You are full of surprises, aren’t you? Falconry too I’m guessing?”

“Yeah. Did a little on the ranches The Crown owned. An eagle would keep some of the other raptors away from the cuccous.”

Link let out a yawn then. “Alright,” he said. “We’ll handle all this then. I’ll take first evening watch.” He forced himself to his feet. “How many days until we reach the tower?”

“At our current pace?” Linebeck asked. “Four? Three if we keep up this pace and we don’t run into trouble.”

“Good. Sooner the better.”

The days and nights were difficult and Link was sure that if not for the insulation of the armor coupled with his own mutations, he’d have hypothermia for spending at least four to six hours in the cold water every night. Most of the time he and Aveil were asleep in the hold due to the exhaustion of just being in the water. He was awakened by the ringing of the ship’s bell when they arrived, throwing him out of a dream about Hyrule at peace. Link forced himself to his feet and grabbed his sword and crossbow. The zora armor was mounted on a rack and the fabrics of it were hanging on a line to dry out, leaving the hylian in his shirt and slacks. He pulled his boots on as he heard Medli and Linebeck talking on the bridge. The ship began to slow down. Link glanced once more at Aveil as she lay curled in a hammock under her deep red cloak. The symbol of the united
gerudo tribes was on the back of it in a bronze tone. He decided to not wake her just yet though due to how she took the morning before dawn for their watch.

“There it is,” Medli said to Aryll on the bridge. Linebeck was behind the wheel directing them. Out the window, Link saw the ancient tower of white stone that stuck out of the ocean. It was easily taller than the main keep of The Tower of Hera or Kaer Tarm in Holodrum.

“Tower of The Gods,” Aryll said. “Only ever heard stories about this place. Just that most people avoid it ever since pirates took over.” She looked back at Linebeck. “Surprised we haven’t run into any yet.”

“Me too, actually,” he said. Linebeck glanced over, realizing Link had joined them. “Good morning! See you got the wakeup call today.”

Link merely grunted a response and looked back to the tower that they saw in the distance. A mug of coffee was put under his nose and he took it. Medli smiled a little at him. “Thanks,” he said. “So… No other patrols or anything from the pirates?”

“Not a one.” Linebeck shook his head. “And we should’ve encountered some earlier as well. Wondering if they’re too busy elsewhere or have found something.”

“Or maybe they’ve met the same fate as Medli’s couriers,” Aryll said.

“Yeah…” Medli sighed. “I can fly out of cannon and bow range as well and get an idea for what we’re expecting.”

“Do it,” Link said. “Aryll, come with me.” He watched as Medli stepped outside. He followed with Aryll behind him. Medli spread her wings and within moments took to the skies. Link sipped his coffee after climbing the ladder to the top of the bridge. “Aryll, we’re going to likely be seeing some fighting soon. And it might very well be against other humans. Not tainted creatures like the geozards that attacked Dragon Roost.” He turned around as she reached the top of the ladder. “Are you okay with this?”

“I’ve fought people before,” she said. “Cattle rustlers and a couple highwaymen.”

“But have you ever actually killed any of them?”

“I…” She shook her head. “No.”

He looked her right in the eye. “Be ready. That may very well happen here.”

Aryll took a deep breath. “Okay.”

“Linebeck can take care of the ship so you’ll be with me and Aveil when we get in the tower. Depending on what Medli tells us, it could be you’ll wait on the boat until we’ve secured a place.”

“I can swim.”

“But you don’t have zora armor in case the only way actually in is a hundred feet down and through some passages in the tower. You’d drown before you could get in”

“…Good point.” She pulled one of the hand crossbows off her hip. “So. What if the pirates are friendly?” Aryll began to load six steel bolts into the hopper.
“Then this should go a lot easier. But I’m not expecting them to give up their zora prisoner without a fight.” He looked to the horizon. “If we’re really lucky, Linebeck might be able to talk this all out.”

“Is this the infamous Jolene I’ve heard mentioned?”

“It is.” He rolled his head on his shoulders a little and stretched. “They were together. Or not. It’s…” Link shook his head with a groan. “Far as I know it’s a bit of a mess and neither of them are really clear on it, but Medli is convinced they just can’t spit it out.”

Aryll laughed a little and stowed her crossbow back in its holster. “Really?”

“Yeah.” He narrowed his eyes and looked to the horizon. “Wait. Pass me your telescope.” Link stuck his hand back and soon felt it land. He pulled it to his eye and focused on the tower on the horizon. “Something’s wrong… They should have ships out. I don’t see any.”

The Tower of The Gods had long been an oddity in the South Seas. A great ivory pillar that stuck out of the ocean but was left mostly abandoned as only the top levels were actually dry. The rest was flooded below and had long ago been looted by zoras and other scavengers. Link remembered Shad once saying it was an archeological mystery left behind by the ancient Cobble Kingdom. He would have to tell him about his discoveries when he returned. An hour had passed since he’d gone below with his sister and discussed some of their plans with Aveil over breakfast. Once he’d washed up and shaved, he was back on the deck, wearing the zora scalemail. He adjusted the gauntlet on his right arm a little as he saw Aveil emerge from the bridge with Aryll behind her. Both had pulled on their armor. Aveil in the zora armor she’d picked up at Dragon Roost and Aryll in leathers and a dark green tunic. A heavy kidney belt was wrapped around her waist and gave the illusion of a corset. She wore gloves as well that went nearly to her elbows and held a full-sized crossbow already loaded with a bomb arrow.

“We really should’ve run into the pirates by now,” Aveil said.

“Yep,” Link said. “But there’s nothing out there but the tower.” He saw as Medli glide back in and landed gracefully on the deck. She quickly came over.

“No signs of anyone having been in or out of there in a while now,” she said. “Didn’t see any boats. Didn’t see any signs of life either in the tower.”

“Ever get the feeling we’re always late to the tragedy?” Aveil said. “First the towers, now this.” She knocked an arrow for her bow. “You thinking drowners? Or more geozards?”

“I hope we’ll find survivors and no monsters,” Link said. “But since we’re not seeing boats.” He looked at Medli. “Any signs of battle? Floating debris? Movement?”

The rito shook her head. “None. Not a single soul I saw.”

Link let out a sigh. “Okay. We need to stay alert then.”

“Agreed,” Aveil said. “When we get close, I can dive in and check the lower levels.”

“That was my plan for infiltrating,” Link said. “Go in through the lower levels with the bombs we
picked up from Dragon Roost. The visco fuses should work underwater fine. But it’s sounding like we don’t have to. Anything else you find, Medli?

“I did get to the top. Looks like there was a lot of supplies set up there,” she said. “If I had to take a guess, they were planning a last stand.”

“Great,” Aryll said. “That’s not good for us.”

“But maybe we can take the supplies,” Aveil said. “They’re not going to need them.” She watched the horizon as the tower grew ever closer. “Did they have any way to get them up there easily? A magic lift or crane?”

“I didn’t see one,” Medli said. “And dropping them all that way might damage whatever’s inside. Or set off any explosives.”

“Meaning they likely carried everything up there,” Link said.

“That’s going to take time to get down. But I can go up and find anything that we might be able to use to bring down. If it’s light enough, I’ll be able to just fly it down. But anything bigger would be a little trickier.”

“Sounds like a plan.” He looked at Aveil and Aryll. “If it’s clear and when we’re docked, you’ll come with me and we’ll work our way up the tower.”

“What about survivors?” Aryll asked.

“If there are any, we get them to safety.” He let out a sigh then. “That said. You brought up a good point, Aveil. “We could run into drowners. And if what we’ve seen Bellum is capable of, they could be heavily mutated. So we’ll be using silver. I’ve got my bolts. So do you, Aryll. And Aveil has her dust and arrows. If they react violently to it, we know.”

“That’s going to mean getting close. Or shooting them.”

“Well, let’s hope it’s obvious.” The boat’s bell rang again and Link saw Linebeck turning the wheel a little as they began to slow down. Still they encountered no resistance or greeting. Eventually they reached the great ring that arced out of the sides of the tower to create what may have once been a massive courtyard. Now it looked to serve as a small bay to the large entrance. The crew stood ready as Linebeck carefully brought the ship inward.

The inside of the tower was massive and had looked like it would be able to hold a few Hyrulean frigates. Most of it had been converted with simple floating piers and moorings. The pirates had clearly been busy, but so had something else. Bloodstains smeared the once alabaster walls and weapons lay on the floor. Whatever had happened, it didn’t look like the pirates were still around, even though there was a ship docked there too. Link hopped over the railing and landed on the pier as Medli tossed a rope over to moor the ship. The chain to the anchor dropped into the water and a ramp was lowered so they could board back if they needed to. Aveil was off first, followed by Aryll.

“Wait a second!” Linebeck said, emerging from the bridge once they were docked. “That’s Jolene’s frigate!”
“Why am I not surprised?” Link asked, sounding almost bored. He looked up at Linebeck as he came down the ramp, checking his pistol. “You’re not going to go hide in your crate?”

“Don’t be daft.” He grinned at him. “She’d have spotted us the minute we came in. I’m just going to… Make sure everything is in order on her ship.” The grin vanished. “Also, to make sure she got her cut of the deal we had.”

“Right,” Medli said, following him down. “Wait, what deal?”

“Jolene is the reason why he found the statues in the first place,” Link said.

“Oh.” Medli shook her head. “So you lied to us back on Windfall.”

“You knew I was lying though,” he said, waving a hand upward. The rito looked slightly infuriated by his behavior. “You know whenever I’m oddly specific like that, you know I’m lying.”

“You know that doesn’t make it better.”

“Guys, it doesn’t look like anyone’s been on the ship,” Aveil interrupted. “I’m seeing no lit torches or movement.”

“Guess that’s where we’re investigating first then,” Link said. He pulled his sword from his back and his crossbow from his hip. “Everyone stay alert and if you see something in the water, don’t keep it to yourself. A geozard might jump out and pull you under. Or worse.”

“What could be worse than one of those things?” Aryll asked.

“An octorok, some breeds of bari, stone-head gyorgs… Oh, and masked terminan gyorgs,” Aveil said dryly.

“Water’s too cold for terminan gyorgs,” Link said. “They like it warmer. Hence why they’re found in the Great Bay of Termina. More tropical so they don’t need the thicker blubber to stay warm.”

His sister sighed. “You two are not making me feel less nervous about this,” she said, pulling her crossbows from her hips. Aryll brought up the rear with Linebeck while Link was in front. He led them across to the other side where the frigate was docked. There was more signs of fighting. To their shock though there were also a pair of pulsing pods of pink flesh, slime and viscera latched to the hull. They were the size of a man and quivered as they approached. Link glanced back to see Linebeck pull his sword from the scabbard on his hip while Medli visibly tensed up. The ramp to the deck was clear and they still saw no signs of anyone having been there.

“What the hell are those things?” Linebeck asked. “It looks like those parasites the zoras were trying to get rid of back in Labrynna.”

“What the hell?” Link asked. He turned back to look at the smuggler.

“One of their guardian spirits, a Jabun, was infected with parasites. Some of the filth it threw up looked like this.”

“A barinade. It’s a very big bari breed,” Aveil said. “I’ve encountered them before.” She looked at the growths and poked it with a scimitar. “Those typically though grow inside another creature. Not…” A gasp escaped her lips and she took a step back. The growth pulsed and stretched in strange ways from the irritation. A strange noise rippled from the growth and Aryll shrieked in
Happy Wednesday everybody! Hope you're all well this evening as we get another chapter up!

Devnotes:
-As I think I said in one of the replies to a comment, a lot of this arc was inspired by Lovecraftian horror. Things like Bloodborne or, obviously, Call of Cthulhu, went a long way to some of the ideas for this entire arc. Kinda because if you stop and think about it, Bellum, Majora, and even DethI from Link's Awakening could fall into the 'old god' category. We know just enough about them that they are incredibly strange and alien. I really wish too though they played up that unknown aspect more in the games. Alas...
-Thinking on similarities of some of the creatures and how they could be related to one another is a fun activity, as has been incorporating some of the monsters from The Witcher series. Even seeing the different incarnations of the creatures in the Zelda games (like the numerous different kinds of octoroks) can be seen as different breeds or species of the same family.

That'll be it for this week! There'll be hopefully another piece of The Hera Archives in the coming days too so if you're looking for more set in this AU, check that one out! It's mostly worldbuilding and events before this story. As always, thank you to everyone who reads, leaves comments, kudos and bookmarks! I'll see you next week and keep being awesome people!
Late to the Tragedy

Chapter Notes

Small warning this time around. This chapter may contain content that is disturbing to some readers in the form of the 'body horror' trope. Reader discretion is advised.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“A face!” she cried. “There was a face there! Someone is inside that thing?!”

“Quiet down,” Link said, trying to be calm. He saw how shocked Aryll was. None of them were expecting whatever this was and he was beginning to think that it might be better to have her wait on the ship with Linebeck. He looked at Medli. She was already carefully inspecting it. He noticed Aveil’s viper charm rattling on its chain. When he glanced down t his own, he saw it reacting as well.

“There’s a magic taint in it,” Medli said. “You’d need an actual mage to get any more than that though…” She looked at the others. “Doesn’t appear to be cancerous though. More like an egg than some boil of pus.”

“Or a cocoon,” Aveil replied. She approached it again, inspecting carefully. “Anyone object if I slice this thing open?”

“I do!” Aryll said.

Link looked back to Medli. “Will it release any sort of spore or anything?” he asked.

“Shouldn’t,” she said. “Not seeing anything that could spray or target… But let’s puncture it first and drain it of any fluid into the water. We don’t exactly know what this is, so we need to treat this like a surgery.”

“Alright.” He looked over the growth for a moment before stabbing it near the bottom. Pink fluid started to spill out of it into the water. Link poked another hole and it began to drain quicker. It began to deflate. As they did, Aryll quickly stepped past them to board the ship with Aveil and Linebeck. Link glanced up as Aryll came back over to the railing.

“It’s all clear up here,” she said. “Nothing around, but looks like there was fighting.”

“Doors are open too!” Linebeck said.

“If you go inside, stick together,” Link said. He carefully began cutting the sac on the ship’s hull with a knife. He suppressed a gag at the sickening smell that came from within and was thankful his gloves were closed. There was a squelching sound as he finished splitting it open. The bottom of it gave way and a bloated naked human body slid out onto the dock. It was covered in the same pink fluid that had been drained from the sac. It was not perfect though. The left arm had been replaced with several tentacles with suckers on it. There was no sign of hair and the skin was a pale blue. Barnacles had appeared along the scalp and spine. Link noted the webbed fingers on the right hand and toes.

“It’s a drowner,” Medli said, kneeling down. “This looks… This looks different though from the
“No it’s not,” Link said. “It’s too big. Drowners usually far shorter. This was one of our pirates.” Link nudged it with a boot before kneeling down to wash his hands and knife off in the water. The corpse twitched slightly at the touch and started to blacken. Only the tentacles did though and burst away in smoke and ash.

“Well, I think we know how Bellum alters his servants now.” Medli carefully examined the body more. “More muscle mass was added it looks like. Victim was a male if the hip structure hasn’t been altered… And we might’ve interrupted the transformation process.” She pulled on a pair of gloves from her back and pushed the corpse over onto its back. “Sexual organs are completely atrophied and…” She squinted as she looked at their bloated gut. “Cyclos’ wrath… Something’s moving in the stomach…”

“Back up, quick.” Link pulled the face mask over his nose and mouth. Seeing this, Medli’s hands went over her beak. A second later, the stomach split open. Putrid gasses escaped the body. Even with the mask over his nose, Link could still smell it. Like before, he wanted to vomit, but fought the urge. Medli however, was coughing up her breakfast into the water behind him.

“The water and magic rotted the body’s insides,” she said as Link offered her his canteen. Medli took a drink and washed her mouth out before spitting it into the water. “But… But because it hadn’t finished, it’s not going to completely dissolve away like the geozards did.” She took another drink. “How are you not throwing up?”

“Not the worst thing I’ve smelled.” Behind the mask, he smiled slightly, remembering the autopsy on the dragon’s head back on Death Mountain. “It’s a bad sign, I know.”

“Well, maybe not given your job.” She looked at the other growth on the hull. “We should probably empty that one too. Make sure they aren’t fully developed so they won’t be a problem later.”

“Agreed. Head up to the deck. I’ll take care of this one.”

“Gladly.” Medli started walking up the ramp to the deck. Link looked to the sac and stabbed it three times. The growth pulsed and drained before he sliced it open. The mutated corpse fell into the water as he pushed the other one off the pier. He walked up the ramp then and sheathed his sword. The door to the cabin opened and Link saw Ayrll emerge with Linebeck behind her.

“Where’s Aveil?”

“Six pods down here!” she shouted. Link turned to see an opening in the hull that was used to lower cargo in and out. She waved up at them through the grating. “It’s a real mess down here. No bodies, but we did find some of those pods. Opened pods. They’re rotting too, but the ship still looks seaworthy!”

“Meaning we’re going to be running into those things, great.” Link pulled the grating open and she jumped up to grab the side to pull herself out.

“Six pods down here!”

“Plus the two on the hull,” Medli said. “So that’s five.” She looked at Linebeck. “How many in Jolene’s crew?”

“Full compliment for a frigate of this size,” he said. “Least last I checked. Not exactly something we usually discuss.”
“A frigate of this size would have over a hundred people as crew complement. Not counting marines.” She gasped a little. “Accounting that a pirate crew might not be as big and—“

“We could have an entire tower filled with turned pirates,” Link finished. “We need to see if we can find any clues anyways to if the zora was turned.”

“If he was smart he’d have swam off,” Linebeck said. “Starting to look like we’ve walked right into a ghost story. All we’re missing is one phantom ship occupied by four creepy ghost girls.”

“Wait, I think I’ve heard that one before,” the gerudo said. Link looked at her as she stood with her arms folded. “Wasn’t the pirate who found it turned to stone?”

“I wouldn’t know…”

Link looked back to the rest of the tower then. There was a clear way that lead upward and into the rest of the structure. He pulled his lantern out and lit it with a flick of his fingers. “Aryll, I think it’d be best if you stayed here with Linebeck and the boat.”

“Change of plans?” she asked. Aryll did look a bit nervous with the recent developments and news. In spite of it, she was removing the steel bolts and replacing them with silver.

“I’m not staying down here!” Linebeck said. Medli gave him a slightly surprised look. Link had to do the same at how quickly. They glanced at one another, having both noted that in spite of the slight tone of panic, there wasn’t anything that suggested it was his usual cowardice. “What?” He took a drink from his flask before stuffing it back in the blue coat. “I’m one man and staying with the boat might be smart, but we know things are in the water. Further in the tower there’ll be fewer chances of things jumping out of the water at us! I’m going with you so I’m not down here alone!”

“Oh, no problem. Back to Dragon Roost?”

“If we fail, they need to know,” Medli said. “Let’s get going.”

It was brighter than expected and Link had soon extinguished the lantern. The windows let in the sun and there were plenty of magic-based lights along the walls. He was reminded of some of the magic work that the twili had created. He wondered even if there was maybe something like a sol was powering this place. Some of the patterns and glows of light in the walls made it even more apparent. They soon had come to a great hallway that split into four directions and numerous more empty fleshy sacs. The stench of corpses filled the air, causing Aryll to cough. Again, there was evidence of fighting in the area, but no bodies. Counting quickly, there were seven of the empty sacs. Link already had his sword drawn as they advanced. Link noticed as well that the floor surrounding it looked like a sick purple slime. Aveil was eying it carefully as she stepped forward.

“That’s not good…” she said.

“You recognize it?” Aryll asked.

“It looks like a form of poe soul. A huge amount of them and rotten.”
“Poe souls?” Link asked.

“If it’s bottled too long, it starts to decay. Some of the death witches of the Phantom Wastes do it deliberately and use the slime as a way to speak with the dead.” As she knelt down to get a better look at it, a bubble seemed to form. It split apart and a great orange eye emerged. Aryll let out a shriek of surprise. Linebeck looked ready to bolt back down the stairs to the ship.

Link looked back at his sister for a moment. This was not what any of them had signed on for, but they were stuck now. He squared his shoulders and looked back to Aveil. “That doesn’t look good.”

“I had to take some one time to try and find a worm that was swallowing up caravans,” the gerudo said. “But I’ve never seen it so…” Some of the slime suddenly lashed out in a tendril. Aveil rolled back, scimitars leaving their scabbards. It looked to behave just like the Morpha Link had encountered back in the Lakebed Temple. Some of it behind the eye began to rise and twist around into similar shapes.

“Get back from it,” he ordered quietly. A moment later, the eye sank back into the slime and the tendrils followed suit.

“Bellum’s watching us through it,” Medli said. “I’m sure of it.”

“How do you deal with this stuff back home, Aveil?”

“Silver,” she said. “We’d throw silver dust into it to destroy it. But I don’t have anywhere near enough. And even if we were to grind down all the silver we have, I don’t think we could even put a dent in this. It’s also not acting anything like the decayed souls. It shouldn’t form like that or have eyes. Obviously.” Aveil sheathed her blades and got back to a standing position. “Any theories?”

“None,” Link replied, shaking his head. “Though it was acting like something I’d dealt with back in Hyrule recently.” He scanned the room, spotting the stairs upward. Medli was already near them and carefully looking up them. “Anything over there, Medli?”

“No, it’s all clear to the next level it looks like,” she replied. “Let’s get moving.”

The group reached the next floor and came to a sickening sight. Well over a dozen more pods sat in a large room among more of the purple slime. Some of the sacs had yet to open, but looked far larger than the others they’d initially encountered. Link put the crossbow back and pulled his sword. He dug in the pouch for cursed oil, finding it and quickly applying it with a rag. Aryll’s jaw fell open as her face lost color. The group’s gaze was soon though was drawn to the large door at the other end of the room. It looked like the only way forward, and on it was the slime and a body.

They looked like the same turned pirate that they’d found in the pod down on the ship, only his legs were fused with the slime along with his forearms. He did not struggle and had his stomach split open. Long dark tentacles reached out over him and burrowed into the corners of the door, like a sickening lock and chain. They breathed slowly, a purple mist escaping their lips and nostrils.

Aveil was checking over more of the slime, only giving the poor soul on the door quick glance. She looked back at them. “It looks like this might’ve been being used as a sleeping quarters or
commons room.” she said. “I think I see a couple beds behind the sacs.”

Link looked about as well, spotting a couple desks and charts. It had definitely been a common’s room for the pirates. He went to them and picked up one of them. It looked like someone had started to map the tower out. The writing was in gerudo as well as hylian, but he knew how to read both so it wasn’t an issue. He rolled the map up and stuffed it in his belt before looking to the slime.

A long wheeze came from the man fused to the door then, grabbing the group’s attention. They looked as it tried to cry louder. More tentacles shot out from the gaping hole in his stomach, each one with an eye on them and sharp barbs around them. They flailed wildly, reaching out and taking a swing at whoever was closest. Given they were all still far enough away though, it merely waved angrily at them. The man’s dead eyes bulged and purple mist seeped out of every orifice. Aveil quickly pulled an arrow from her quiver and her bow and knocked it. As she did, a flicker of magic ran down the string and the arrowhead glowed blue and dripped with frost. Her fingers let go and the arrow struck the man in the heart. In a flash of magic, the body was frozen solid. The flailing tentacles snapped with the momentum they’d had and writhed on the floor as they turned to ash and smoke. A shot from Linebeck’s pistol echoed in the room and shattered the thing’s frozen head.

One of the pods began to squeal and contort. Another followed. Then a third. “Everyone get back!” Link shouted. “Away from the pods!” He pulled two bombs from one of the pouches on his belt, lighting one fast, and threw them. As he did, one of the sacs opened and the twisted cursed creature emerged. It looked much like the ones they’d found underdeveloped, but had clearly developed coral armor growths over its chest and legs. Both arms were now completely replaced with long tendrils as well. It let out a groaning howl and ran for them. Two silver bolts pierced its chest and a third its head before it’d gotten too close. Another emerged, this one looking like it had once been a woman before being twisted and charged, followed by two others that had been men. At that instant, the bombs went off.

Two of the monsters had been caught in the blast and there was a shriek that seemed to reverberate out of the slime. One of the sacs had burst like a balloon, gore and slime mixing. Link swung his sword upward in an arc and sliced the tentacles of one of the attacking dead off before stabbing it through the chest. Another came from the left and he flicked his wrist outward. A burst of green light and wind erupted from his hand, sending the monster toppling into Aveil’s scimitars.

She swung one blade, splitting them up the middle as another lashed out with its tentacles. Its sharp barbs skewered into her arm. Before she could slice them off though, a shot echoed in the chamber and the creature’s head burst apart. Aveil glanced to see Linebeck with his pistol raised before he stuffed it back in his coat. She gave a quick nod and turned back to see the last two monsters coming for them. Medli swept her hands out in an arc and a great gust of wind knocked them both back into the boiling slime. Six bolts flew into them then; three for each and with excellent grouping in the hearts. Neither actually fell, but rather burst into ash and smoke as they began to collapse.

“Nice shooting, Aryll!” Aveil said.

“We still have the slime to worry about,” Medli said, watching the remains vanish. “Those bombs didn’t really do much to it.”
“If I had some inferno grenades we might be able to boil it all away,” Link said. “I could probably cut through some of it with my Din’s Fire, but with how much there is, I’d exhaust myself before even getting through all of this.” He saw Aryll reloading the hoppers on her crossbows before looking to Aveil. “Unless you have other ways we can destroy it.”

She shook her head. “Freezing it would only temporarily disable it,” she said. “And shattering it while frozen could spread it around. But containing it like that could be a good way to get around some of it.”

“So we’re out of luck there,” Linebeck said, reloading his pistol. He packed the ramrod down the weapon’s barrel before pulling it back out and putting it back where it would wait. “Well, let’s keep looking! I see you got a map, Link.”

He nodded. “I’d prefer we look at it though somewhere there’s not that slime,” he said. “Back down?”

“Agreed,” Medli said. They turned to go when they heard an echoing groan from the stairs they’d come up. There was the clinking of metal. The light and shadows coming from below suggested something massive. As it reached the top of the stairs, the group readied their weapons and looked upon the hulking figure.

Its rusted armor was covered in seaweed and barnacles. The large rectangular shield on its left arm had shown signs of wear and damage, but still appeared battle worthy. It looked a little like a darknut’s armor. The horns however, looked like tentacles, as a pair of orange eyes glowed through the helm’s slits. Aryll pulled the crossbow off her back with the bomb arrow loaded and aimed. The suit marched towards them, shield raised. Behind it, more of the turned pirates came rushing up the stairs. A couple had claws in place of hands, while one or two seemed even more mutated. One was far larger and crablike, while another had its upper half almost completely replaced by long tentacles with a single long scythe on the end of each one.

Link thrust his hand out, coiling index and pinky towards his palm. Fire shot in a stream at the cursed, catching some of them only for the armor to step forward and plant its shield to block him. Aveil swept her blades around and quickly sliced one open, followed by another. Two more took its place though, jumping over to the group, pushing them towards the slime. Linebeck’s hand pulled the pistol from his coat and fired again into the swarm.

“Towards the door!” Link shouted. The armor advanced then, swinging with each step. Link pulled a bomb from his belt and lit it with his fingers. Before he could throw it though, one of the turned crew jumped on top of him. He was on his back in an instant and head nearly touching the slime.

Sound faded away around him as he began to hear a whispering. The slime began to rise in tendrils, just like the Morpha had. The rest of the world seemed to slow as his attacker opened his mouth. In place of a tongue, dozens of tendrils shot out, some with eyes upon them and barbs on others. He slammed the side of his sword’s crossguard into the creature’s throat, knocking it away enough that he could roll out from under it. He rolled the grenade out of his hand. It clattered with the foot of the suit of armor and went off. Limbs and gore flew into the smoke from the blast as the sounds of the world returned to Link’s ears. Looking around, it appeared they’d stopped the mutants.

But the suit of armor pulled itself back together. Long stringy strands of the slime within it, pulling the arms and legs back into the torso. A couple small globs splattered out and began to move on their own with single large eyes in the center. The sword flew back into its hand along with the shield and the glow in the slits of its helmet returned. A rumbling echo came from it as more of the mutants rushed up the stairs. There was only one way out, but they needed some space first. Link
glanced upward. “Aryll! Bomb to the ceiling!”

She didn’t need to be told twice. Her finger squeezed the trigger and the bomb collided with the stone. Rubble fell from above, crashing into the monsters and armored suit. In the commotion the group rushed through the door. Medli kicked one of the mutants as it got close as Link pushed the door open. He held it above his head as they ran through. Aveil was last to go, firing a frost arrow into the group. Link let the door drop once he was with them and watched the stone shake as their assailants threw themselves against it.

Chapter End Notes

Oof, fair warning, next week might be delayed. This one had some problems and the next one does too. But here it is!

Devnotes:
-Running with other mutations of how they might change humans. With the octorok-style of Bellum and the sheer prevalence of tentacles and other nasty things in Lovecraftian Horror to begin with, making them like aquatic zombies like Davey Jones’ crew from Pirates of the Caribbean or the draugr from The Secret World felt like the best way to go.
-The idea of making the purple slime being essentially an aspect of Bellum came from his little 'slime minions' as well as how it seems to cover and permeate around the Ghost Ship in the boss fight.

That'll do it for this week! As always, much thanks to every reader, commenter, kudo-leaver and bookmarker! I'll see you guys next week! Keep being awesome!
The group had walked up the stairs, finding blocked off doors and occasional signs of battle the further they went. They found more open pods and slime on the walls as they climbed. There was no evidence of life though and no more of the turned pirates. Eventually, they reached the highest part of the tower and found a maze of barricades and simple totems made from driftwood. Link saw some simple symbols carved into them. They served as a warning system, but the magic in them was faint. Much to their surprise though, they saw a short man and a massive goron behind one of the barricades. The human raised a flintlock pistol at them. There was a fizzle from it though and it failed to ignite the powder. The shorter of the two pulled his saber from his side.

“Nayru’s love!” the man cried. “You’re not one of those mutants! You’re alive!”

“You nearly shot us!” Linebeck shouted.

“Lower your gun, Pelen,” the goron grunted.

The man did so slowly. Link saw he was young, but was incredibly worried and worn. Black blood stained his white shirt and pants. The goron was shirtless, wearing dark pants and had numerous tattoos along his arms and bulky torso. He also held what looked like a small cannon in his arms that had been modified to act like a rifle. He also had a massive axe on his back that, though looking crude and about as sharp as a cobble crusher, Link was sure could split a man in half.

“You’re… You’re not with them, are you?” he asked.

“What? Yes, we’re the pirates!” the man replied. “And we’re not going back with you to…” He tilted his head for a moment. “Wait, are you pirates too? You’re not Labrynnan marines.”

“We’re not.” He sheathed his sword on his back again. The rest of the group slowly lowered their weapons. The shorter pirate put his blade back as well. There was a rumbling they all heard from below them. “We’re looking for a zora. Weren’t expecting to find anyone alive up here after the evidence of fighting downstairs.”

“Aye,” the goron said. He looked around a little. “Been here stuck for better part of a month now. And we’re runnin’ out of food and water.”

“How many survivors?” Aryll asked.

“Left? About half of us. If we could get to the ship without the phantom finding us.”

“We’d probably all be dead if it wasn’t for that zora too,” the man said.

“What exactly happened?” Medli asked, folding her arms. They all heard something echoing in the depths of the tower then.
“We need to get back to the main barricades. It’s safer there.” He examined his pistol then, trying to fix it so it would fire. “With more of us here, we might stand a chance to get out. How many in your crew?”

“This is it,” Linebeck said, eyeing the others suspiciously still. Link noticed his hand was still in his coat, probably holding the grip to his pistol.

“Is the zora still alive?” Link asked.

“Aye.”

He looked to Aveil and Medli then. “We can get to the bottom of this then.”

“Agreed,” Aveil said.

He looked back. “Lead the way.”

Before they could though, they heard the same rumbling louder. The shorter of the two bolted for the stairs upward. Link looked to the stairs down. The same suit of armor that had faced them below lumbered towards the clearing. The wolf around Link’s neck began to dance as it sensed powerful magic. Given how quickly the pirates had fled and the nature of things, he didn’t ask questions. Pulling a grenade out, he lit it. “ Everybody move!” he shouted.

He threw the explosive out at the armor’s feet. The rest of the party began to rush up the stairs as the bomb went off. Link glanced back to see the armor collapse into several pieces, but it was only brief as it pulled itself back together. He saw through the smoke dozens of long strands of the violet slime pulling the armor back together. Any damage that had been done to it was repaired and in moments it was lurching forward once more. He began to bring up the rear, throwing out a snare of magic behind him just before he started up the stairs. He could see the others already well ahead of him, but he soon caught up with them as they entered another large opening like the one below. Aveil was waiting at the other set of stairs on the other side of the room with her bow drawn. Link threw out another snare at the top of the stairs as he passed and ran past her.

The next floor was another maze of barricades and improvised explosive traps the goron and pirate guided the group through. There weren’t signs of fighting or any of the slime or fleshy sacs around, but rather crates and defenses. At the other end near the stairs was a barricade set up with wood and stone that had been gathered around the temple. A pair of statues with large eyes stood on either side of the entrance. Link noticed one of the sides was opened, revealing incredible clockwork and machinery. The short pirate was shouting and banging on the makeshift door. It took a moment, but the door opened and the group was let inside.

“Be very very quiet,” the man said in a whisper. “It’ll go away and leave us alone as long as we don’t go back down.”
“Did you try and escape?” Link asked, keeping quiet as they went up the stairs.

“The other crew did, but were slaughtered by the phantom and those… geozards.”

Aveil perked up along with Aryll. “Sounds like we’re in the right place then,” she said. “You have any silver?”

“Do we look like we have any silver?” the goron asked in a hushed sneer.

“Shh!” the short one hissed. They heard the armored figure marching outside the barricade downstairs. Link realized something then as they crept up to the next level. Like the one below, it had been set up as a defensive point with crates and what looked like traps around. Link spotted a few people as well. They were clearly pirates due to a lack of a standard uniform and mixed numbers. A couple humans, a hylian, two gerudo women, there was even a beat-up goron sitting on the floor missing an eye. His face had deep marks in it that looked like they’d been caused by a claw.

“Pelen, Lurch,” a man said. “Did you find what…“ The group saw a zora walk into the room then. “What caused the commotion?” He wore scale like Link’s but didn’t have the sleeves, hat or mask. His right arm was covered in ornate tattoos. A cursory glance suggested it was some old epic of a zora warrior. His forearm fins were long and bore what looked like specially-designed armor over them and what was unmistakably a razor’s edge. He raised a finger and pointed at the new arrivals. “Who are you people?”

Link glanced at the others in the group. “We’re apparently here to rescue you,” Aveil said. He glanced back at her. “You’re the zora Ambassador Tolec mentioned?”

“Ambassador Tolec sent you?” He looked surprised as he took a couple steps forward. “That’s… Surprising.”

“Why?” Link asked.

“I’d honestly thought he’d given up on my warnings.”

“Don’t know about that, but here to get information.” He folded his arms and glanced around the group. “We know Bellum is responsible for the missing couriers.”

“You’ve seen the platforms then?”

“Yes,” Aveil said. She found a place to sit on one of the boxes. “And the mutated pirates. And geozards. And the slime.”

The zora nodded a little. “So you’ve seen what the phantom is doing here too.”

“What phantom?” Aryll asked.

“That armored monster!” the short pirate said. “Th’ thing that came up th’ tower!”

“I was thinking it was more of a poe or ghost,” Link said. “Not an animated suit of armor.”

“It’s insides are comprised of the slime you saw earlier,” the zora said. “And that energy is what keeps it together.” He looked at the others. “We don’t have a way to destroy it though. Only slow it down. And we’re cornered up here.”

“Did you try to make a break for it?”
“We lost a ship that way. They detonated their munitions outside the docks. From what one of our watchmen said, there were geozards all over it.” The zora let out a sigh then. “But with you here, we might stand a chance to stop Bellum entirely.”

“We can?” Link and Aryll asked at the same time. Medli watched with surprise. Linebeck was talking to one of the other pirates at the moment then.

“Using the information I gathered before the pirates captured me, I know where the tomb is... It’s about two days sailing from here.” He looked at them for a minute. Some of them looked a bit sheepish at the fishman’s glare. “If you’re going after him too, I think introductions are in order then.” He looked back. “My name’s Mikau of Pinnacle Rock. And you?”

“Link, of Outset.” He motioned to Aryll as he shook the zora’s hand. “This is my sister, Aryll.”

“Hi,” she said with a slight smile.

“Aveil of the Phantom Wastes,” the gerudo said. She shook his hand next. “The others with us are Medli and Linebeck.”

“What?” Mikau’s eyes went wide. “The smuggler? The captain has been cursing his name ever since this trouble started!”

“Jolene’s alive?” he asked, quickly dropping his conversation with the one-eyed goron.

“Wounded but alive.” He looked to the smuggler. “Not as badly as the others either.”

“Where?”

“I’ll show him,” the first goron said. He waved a stony hand at Linebeck and started for another room.

“I’ll… go with him,” Medli said. “Someone has to make sure they don’t kill each other.”

Link had to chuckle slightly at Medli’s remark. He looked back at the zora then. “So, Bellum. These phantoms. Are they his servants from the old stories?”

“They are.”

“And no way to really deal with them,” Aveil said. A yawn escaped her lips as she kicked her legs slightly off the box. Aryll hopped onto it next to her, crossing her legs and leaning over. “Any other things we have to deal with if we try and get out of here?”

“The turned pirates. There’s at least a couple dozen roaming the tower. And I think they’re trying to build another phantom.” Mikau looked at her. “They were trying to salvage the old armos that the tower had. Reactivate them or find a way to convert them into a phantom. Not that they need to. It could come through that barricade we set up downstairs if it really wanted to.”

“So the question is why hasn’t it come up at you?” Aryll asked.

“Two possibilities I’d reason. It’s wanting us to convert more of us so it’s waiting for us to grow weaker and then be able to take us all with minimal resistance or...”

“Or it’s waiting for reinforcements,” Link said, pulling his hat off. “You have any plan to get everyone out of here?”

“I was planning on causing a distraction to lure the phantom away while the others made it to the
ship. But we’d first have to deal with the slime and turned. And with how many are already in bad shape, we had limited options.

“You know that slime has the eyes in it, right?” Aveil asked.

“Bellum.”

“I knew it.” She hopped off the box. “He’s probably watching our every move through it.”

“We had some inferno bombs earlier, but used them to clear the upper levels of the slime, though it turned to this purple mist. Couple of the pirates inhaled it and aren’t looking too good now. The one who got the worst of it I think expired and was put in a room down the hall.”

“What do you have then?” Link asked.

“Mmm… Two crates of frost bombs. Were going to use them as a last-ditch effort to try and clear the way so we could escape. Also smoke and cluster in the munitions we were able to salvage from the pirate’s stashes.”

“So, lots of explosives,” Aryll said. “Any small enough to attach to bolts?”

“Easily.” He smiled slightly. “How do you think we were able to drive the phantom off a couple times?” Mikau glanced over his shoulder. They heard a woman shouting obscenities and Linebeck’s voice as well. A rumbling voice was heard then urging them to be quiet. When he looked back, he looked to Link. “Is Linebeck going to be a problem?”

“Shouldn’t be,” Link said quickly. “But we should probably leave sooner rather than later. What other resources do we have to get out of here?”

“Follow me then.” He turned to the hallway to the right and pushed the door open. Link followed with Aryll and Aveil behind him. “You don’t seem like simple sellswords though. Wouldn’t need simple to get past the phantom and survive the turned pirates. You also know a lot already.” He glanced back at the gerudo for a moment as they walked down the corridor. “You’re a desert viper too.”

That caused her to stop dead in her tracks. “You… You know of me and my sisters?” she asked. “Not many people outside the desert do.”

“Back home a couple worked with the Great Bay pirates. From my sources it sounded like they’d come through the Ikana Canyon.” His gaze shifted to Link then. “And you. You wear a wolf around your neck that looks like her viper.”

“So I’d assume you’re like us then,” Link said. “Only from Termina.”

He nodded as he pulled a necklace out from under his armor. It was three shark teeth, separated by a pair of pearls. “Serve the Great Bay Regency as a knight of theirs you could say. I don’t have the special gifts a hexer does though.” Link was silently thankful that he hadn’t called them mutations with his sister in earshot. He feared what she’d do if she knew what he’d been turned into. Mikau walked to the end of the hall and opened another door. The wind of the outside quickly grabbed them in a cold burst and blew down the hall. They stepped outside onto a platform and followed another set of stairs up and around to the top level. “I also don’t have the same kind of upbringing you did. I began being trained as a teenager. Not a youth. You didn’t know about us?”

“No,” Link said. “Then again, Termina is all the way across the Gerudo Desert and beyond the Ikana Plateau. And last time I was in Termina was in Ikana and the southern swamps.”
“Last time I was in Termina was during The Conjunction,” Aveil said. “But never reached Great Bay.”

There were dozens of crates and supplies set up there, bathed in the glow of dusk. It looked like a couple tents as well were worked into the stone floor to be used. Mikau pried one of the crates open, revealing dozens of small frost bombs within. Another was marked munitions and within were the cluster bombs he’d mentioned along with a couple small boxes of bombs ready to attach to an arrow or crossbow bolt’s head. Aryll quickly, but carefully, removed one of the boxes and started to attach a few of the bombs to her full-size crossbow’s bolts so they’d be ready. Link took a few of the cluster and frost bombs, handing some to Aveil as well. She set to looking at the other equipment and weapons that had been gathered there as well.

“I’ve got an idea,” Link said. “We need to lure the phantom out and then knock it into the sea.”

“It’ll come back,” Mikau said. “It’ll march right back out and come up the stairs to the tower’s docks and then come for us.”

“But how long does it take?”

“When we knocked it into the docks, an hour?”

“What if we were to knock it outside the tower?” He picked up a longsword that was in one of the crates. He instantly recognized it as a goron blade, crafted from silver instead of steel. Link pulled it from the scabbard to confirm it. The markings along the blade suggested it was from a tribe in Termina. It was surprisingly lightweight as well and he noted how the scabbard had been modified much like the arming sword on his back. He knew it was impossible, but couldn’t help but wonder if this was what ancient Chosen carried on their backs with a steel blade before the sheikah artificers began crafting white swords for The Tower. He slipped it back into the scabbard and removed his own blade’s strap and baldric over his head.

“It would still probably take an hour.” The zora’s eyes lit up. “But most of the tower’s Western side is on a cliff’s edge,” he said. “It should sink a good ways before it can start walking. If we can do that, we’d just have the dead to deal with. And those things are far easier to handle than the phantom.”

“We just need to lure it over and then find a way to knock it out.” Link fixed the longsword to his baldric and then pulled it back on. Two swords rested on his back side by side. He tried pulling the goron blade out rather than the subrosian one, finding the scabbard’s modifications made it perfect and suited his fighting style. He slipped it back in and then looked at Aveil and Aryll. The gerudo had pulled out a quiver of arrows. Each one had blue fletching and crystals lining the head that matched.

“Frost arrows,” she said. “Specifically ones from the Anouki all the way in the Tabantha Frontier. These are a lot nicer than mine.” Aveil slung the quiver over her shoulder. “Could be useful though if we’re going to try and knock the phantom out of the tower though.”

“Can hold it in place for a second or so,” Link said. “Then we can hit it with the explosives. Me and Medli will throw a gust at it then and send it over.” He looked at Aveil then. “What about your frost sign? If we could make the floor slick as well that could give us an advantage.”

“Good idea.”
“That still doesn’t solve the problem of how we are going to get it to one of the side walls,” Mikau said. “A loud enough noise would grab its attention but it might come with help this time.”

“Great.” Link cupped his face with a hand. “We expecting the mutants or geozards?”

“Both.”

“Okay.” He began to toy with one of the cluster bombs. Unlike the smooth round grenades or vials with clockwork and metal encasing it, this was a number of small ball bearings wrapped in a cloth with a small explosive in the middle of it. He glanced back up from the bomb. “How concerned are we about collateral damage to the tower?”

“I can think of a few scholars who’d probably burst into tears about you destroying the tower,” Aveil said. “Even if it’s just a little part of it.”

“I can too, but I’m thinking luring it out this way or blowing the wall and floor out from it. And if it’s accompanied, we’re going to need to deal with those monsters too.”

“I don’t think it’ll be an issue,” Mikau said. “You have an idea of where you want to lure it to?”

“We already blew a bit of a wall downstairs in that nest. Maybe there. It’ll be weaker.”

“I thought I spotted a doorway down through the slime there.” Aryll suggested. She grabbed a short sword from one of the boxes as well and fitted it to the belt around her waist.

“I know the one you’re talking about,” Aveil said. “If we can at least clear some of the slime there to get through it, we can get to that room and knock it out of there.” She stuffed a few arrows into her quiver. “And that door didn’t look blocked, or that there was any slime really on it.”

“We’ll have enough room to maneuver I think too, long as we can avoid the slime its sounding like,” Link said.

“That’s the issue we’ve been having,” Mikau said. “Getting rid of it safely.”

As if by fate, the wolf around Link’s neck began to shake. A pirate came running up the steps. “Oye! Fishboy!” he shouted. “Nath’s awake!”

“Awake?” Mikau asked.

“Not in good shape but if you wanna hear anything he has to say, better do it now!”

Link looked at the zora. His charm rattled slightly on its chain again. “Who’s Nath?”

“One of the people who helped try to clear the slime earlier. Not as bad as the one who died, but still. He’s not in good condition.”

“The rito said she might be able to do somethin’ for him,” the pirate added. “And wants to look at Noro. Somethin’ bout knowin’ our enemy.”

“An autopsy,” Link said. “She’s no surgeon, but she knows what to look for and it might give us an idea of better ways to deal with the turned and Bellum’s servants.”

“Alright,” Mikau said.
“Uh,” Aryll began. Everyone looked to her. “I’ve done some doctoring on ranches before. I know some of the tools.”

“You sure?” Link asked. “You didn’t look too—”

“I-I know, Link,” she said, taking a deep breath and hugging herself a little. “But it’s sounding like we’re stuck here. And Medli might need help. Not really what we were expecting either but we’re here. And they need our help.”

“Very brave girl,” Aveil complimented. She gave her a small smile, which Aryll returned upon seeing. “Seriously. I know some gerudo warriors who would drop their blades and try swimming back to the desert seeing those mutants.”

“Okay,” Link said. “I’m gonna go through the inventory a little more I think then.” He reached up to grip the wolf around his neck before it shook again. “And check something else.”

“Sounds good,” Mikau said. “I’ll go fill the others in on what’s going on then.” He looked at the gerudo hexer then. “Aveil, yes?” He saw her nod. “Maybe you can help answer some of the crew’s questions too about the plan and what you’re doing here?”

“Sure,” she said. They started back down the stairs and into the tower once more. Link looked to Aryll as she adjusted the small belt with her short sword on it.

“Let us know if you need help, okay?” she asked.

“I will,” Link replied. He watched his sister turn and quickly head back down the stairs with the pirate. Once gone, he glanced at one of the opened crates and then squeezed the wolf charm. There was a slight pulse of magic through it as he closed his eyes. “Hey, I was just—”

“Don’t touch the purple stuff!” Midna snapped. Her eyes were a little wide and he recognized the attempt to mask fright in them. There was a bit of relief though as well. She was not in her royal robes, but rather a simple blouse and skirt. Her hair back in a ponytail and held in place by her ornate hairpins.

“Wh-“ he began. They already figured that, but he was wondering if she’d found out and was trying to contact him earlier in the day.

“Don’t touch it! Don’t breathe in the mist it releases either! Try not to even be in the same room as it!” Her red eyes locked with his. “And don’t listen to the whispers!”

Chapter End Notes

And another Wednesday! That means another chapter!

Devnotes:
-This chapter had a bit of editing to it due to some pretty big changes in the original version. The entire second half was where we saw the most of it.
-Given some of the horrifying things in the oceans and aquatic enemies we see in the Zelda games, someone like Mikau would make perfect sense for the zoras. In a past version he actually even had mutations like a witcher.
-And now Link has a pair of swords! Silver for monsters, steel for humans! Funnily enough, in the very first versions of this entire story, he was going to get a second sword anyways, but it'd be more like the Biggoron Sword.

That'll do it for this week! As always a big thank you to everyone who reads, leaves comments, kudos and bookmarks! Special thanks to Hylian_Knight for their bookmark of the series this story is a part of! I didn't even notice it last week, but I did now and thank you to you! I'll see everyone next week. Keep being awesome everyone!
Link reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose, squeezing his eyes shut tighter. “…Nice to see you too, Mid.”

She sighed, reaching up and pushing a strand of hair back behind her ear. The panic appeared to have faded a little in her features. “Where are you?”

“We're at the tower. The pirates?”

“Right. Okay, and...?”

“There's a lot of that purple slime around. And undead or mutated crew that've been converted. I've never seen something like this before.”

“They're still alive, actually. Just warped. Like the shadow beasts but...” She shook her head, eyes still fixed on him. “Has anyone there touched that stuff?”

“Sounds like a couple pirates might’ve breathed it in. And I think it’s alive. Saw an eye on a stalk pop out of it.” He moved to lean against one of the crates, feeling the wind against his skin a little as he watched through the magic his friend dig through some of her notes.

She stopped after pulling one piece of paper out from a stack on the table in what he could only assume was one of the Twilit Archives. Her eyes quickly skimmed it. “That matches up with what I found on this end. But it’s more like a hexer’s mutagens. The kinds used to turn someone into a hexer. Alters creatures that come into contact with it.”

“Never known a mutagen to do that on its own. You need a catalyst. Something to activate it. And if it was, it should’ve gone inert not long after activation.”

Midna put the paper back down on the pile and leaned back in her chair. He spotted the small crystal she used floating over her shoulder and spinning. “It gets worse.”

“Well, that's typical for us. How bad are we talking?”

“The mutants can turn into carriers. From the records I’m finding, three bodies in a keep were enough to turn the entire place into a stronghold for Bellum’s agents. It says that the bodies exploded and spread a mist that turned into the slime.”

His eyes went wide. “They explode?!” Link gasped. “Like rotfiends?!” He immediately realized that might’ve been what the phantom below had been hoping or waiting for all along and what might've happened if the first mutant they’d cut out of a pod could’ve done to all of them. And given how much slime there had been, it’d only be a question of time before someone in the holdout here would get infected. “I'll be right back.” Link let go of the charm, hearing the sorceress begin to say something but was cut off. He rushed down the stairs and back into the tower.
Aryll stood near the edge of the room as Medli, wearing gloves made especially for a rito’s feathery hands, carefully began to inspect the corpse of the pirate. Had she anything in her stomach, she’d have likely thrown up from the stench of decay. The dead man on the table didn’t look entirely human anymore. His skin was a faded blueish green and had already lost all his hair and he looked bloated. His veins had marbled as well, giving him the appearance of a freshly reanimated and waterlogged redead. Medli pulled one of his eyelids back and inspected carefully. Mikau was next to her, noting the elongated fingers and nails. He lifted the dead man’s hand, finding the bones were where he’d expected them on a normal human, but the rest of it felt like a tentacle.

The door burst open then, causing all three of them to look over. Link stood in the doorway. “Get away from the body!”

“What?!” Medli cried.

“They explode!”

“They what?!” Aryll cried.

“Diseased. It’s diseased. Everyone out of the room!”

“Link what-” Medli began, but was cut off as the pirate’s belly expanded with a gargle and a twitch. That was the entire group needed. They rushed out, Link holding the door as they did. Aryll looked back to see her brother turn, just as the corpse burst. It was not like the geozards that had burst into smoke and ash, but more like something hit by lightning. The hiss of boiling liquid and violet steam bursting out of the body as Link pulled the door shut. Some of it began to leak out of the cracks. Mikau rushed over, stuffing a cloth in the bottom. He coughed a little as he did.

“Get back! Both of you!” Aveil shouted. The two men quickly obeyed as she raised her hand and a stream of ice and frost flew from her fingers. She moved it along the cracks of the door and quickly sealed it entirely. She didn’t stop though until the entire door was covered in ice and blocked off. A few other pirates had appeared to see the commotion, including their captain followed by Linebeck.

“Don’t breathe the mist in!” Link shouted to them. “Someone help block off this door. No one goes in here!”

“What is going on here?” the captain asked. Link looked over to her and saw she was nearly exactly as Linebeck had described her. She looked like she might have had some gerudo blood in her due to her features looking similar to Aveil’s, though her hair was black. She looked a little tired and annoyed, but he assumed it was merely having to deal with Linebeck.

“The mutants explode apparently,” Mikau said. He looked at Link. “How did you know?”

“I had help,” Link replied. He slipped his thumb into the silver chain on his charm and heled it up

“One of your sorceress friends?” Linebeck asked.

He glanced down at the charm for a second before letting it fall back on his chest. “...Yeah.” He was thankful at least Linebeck hadn’t asked which one.

“So one of the twins?” Medli began.

“No. Different one. You haven’t met her.”
The look on the rito’s face told Link she had quickly reasoned which one. She closed her eyes and bowed her head slightly. “Ah. Well, send her our thanks.”

“Nayru wept,” Aryll gasped. “I’m gonna gave nightmares of that now…” She reached up and ran a hand through her hair back over her head, shaking a little. A flask appeared in front of her, offered by Linebeck. Link gave the smuggler a bit of a glare, but understood it was just his way. To his surprise though, Aryll grabbed it right out of his hand and began to chug it.

“Just offering a… Sip…” Linebeck started, but Aryll merely held up a finger as she finished the entire flask. He looked back to Link then. “I hope your sister can hold her liquor.”

“Me too,” he replied. “What did you put in there back at Dragon Roost?”

“Mmm, just keeseblood rum.”

“Oh. Good.”

“I learned not to put lava juice in them during our first job together.” It got a small laugh out of Link. He turned his attention though to his sister then. She wasn’t shaking as bad though was still clearly frightened by what they’d just witnessed. “Aryll are…”

“Yeah,” she managed, wiping her mouth and handing the empty flask back to Linebeck. “I... just that was terrifying.”

“Jolene, how many more did you say were afflicted?” Mikau asked.

“Six,” she replied. “Least from when we tried to clear it. I think a couple of the crew touched the stuff when it first appeared down on the docks, which was when the pods and phantom appeared. Then it just spread and we started losing people.”

“We didn't find any bodies when we checked the ship,” Aveil said. “Just that purple slime on the sides and some flesh pods on the dock.”

“That might be good for us.”

“What happened next?” Medli asked, pulling the gloves off.

“It was quiet at first,” she said, leaning against a wall. “One or two of the crew would go missing in the tower. And when we went looking for them we just found more of the slime. Some of the people we sent out to look started complaining of headaches and got jumpy. But this is a really old tower. And we did see one or two poes around before things got really bad.” She looked at the zora then. “We knew something was wrong though. And started to prepare to leave. That’s when the phantom appeared and the first ship got sunk.”

“Then what?” Aveil asked.

“Then we got cut off from the boat, lost more people and retreated up here. Found that the phantom wouldn’t go beyond a certain floor and held up here. Started to prepare defenses and listened to Mikau to prepare to try and get out.” She looked at Mikau. “With what he says now though, it sounds like it’s just waiting for us to die off.”

“Maybe Link's friend has more they can tell us,” the zora reasoned. “They clearly have better records than Great Bay about this stuff.”

“I can go do that right now.”
“Let us know,” Aveil added.

He nodded. “Of course.” Link looked to Aryll then though again. “I'll be back soon. You gonna be okay, Aryll?”

“Yeah. Yeah I'm gonna...”

“It’s okay not to.” Medli said, putting a hand on her shoulder. Aryll looked to her. “You haven't seen a lot of this stuff before. Your brother and I have and were here to help you too.”

“I-I know.”

“Hey, I know. Why don't you tell me about the farms you grew up on while your brother calls on his sorceress.”

“I... yeah. I'd like that.”

“Be back soon, I promise,” he said.

His charm started to shake as he was halfway up the stairs to the supplies when the wolf charm began to shake again. Link gripped it tightly and stopped for a moment. “Sorry, when you said they explode...”

“I figured as much,” Midna said in his mind. “Everyone okay there?”

“Yeah. Everyone's okay.” He started walking again. “Medli was going to do an autopsy on one of the pirates who'd been affected.” He reached the top of the stairs and went back to the crates. “Anyways, she says thank you.”

“Who? Medli?”

“Yeah.”

“Good.”

He leaned against one of the crates and closed his eyes. Once more, she appeared to him in his mind. She was looking a little more relaxed at least now. “So, you find anything else out?”

“Yeah, I got a lot while that book you gave me is getting looked over.”

Even though he knew and trusted her, he still wasn’t sure about some of the other people in The Twilight and if they could be trusted. “Midna, that book belonged-”

“I know. I made sure the person helping me was one I knew would keep it quiet.” That all too familiar smirk played across her painted lips then. “It required a big favor though, so you'd better be grateful!”

It gave him a bit of comfort and a small laugh escaped him. “I already am, believe me.” Her only response was a playful grin. Link felt the corners of his mouth tug slightly in response. “So, you didn't just call to warn me about the slime I'm guessing. Or give me an update on your translation.”

“No. I did some digging on Bellum since our last chat. Though, that’s probably obvious.”
“Gonna need all the information we can get on him.”

“Well, you know how he ended up on the bottom of the sea?”

“Yeah. And about how he alters his servants with magic. Which is why the slime is kind of surprising. Shouldn’t it make a body burst into smoke and ash like other beings so twisted my magic?”

“It’s the mutagenic properties I’d guess. I mean, a hexer doesn’t burst into ash and smoke when they die even though you’ve got all that magic and mutations in you. And I think it’s coupled with Bellum’s intent. He wants to spread. So he creates carriers. What all have you encountered so far?”

He went through everything they’d run into. “Primal zora called geozards the mutants, an animated suit of armor called a phantom, and this massive-many-eyed thing that looked like a sperm whale.”

“Ah-ha.”

“That’s good?”

“Are you familiar with the Ballad of The Wind Fish?” She saw him glanced down to his left, looking away from her. She didn’t say anything even though she was sure what was going through his head at mention of it. “Well, one version we have has the nightmares win. Where the wind fish’s dreams began to manifest as abnormalities on its body. Twisting it into a monstrosity. As opposed to an ambivalent spirit.”

“Mid, there are no modern records of a wind fish sighting.” A realization hit him. “But sperm whales can dive very deep. One could’ve easily been captured by the geozards.”

“And if your oceans are anything like the expanse of The Twilight, maybe only your Goddesses know what lurks just out of sight.”

It made sense. They’d so far only encountered servants of beings Bellum had altered. They hadn’t run into actual creatures directly from their master. The geozards, the mutants and even the phantom were all clearly things that had once been and then repurposed. “I really hope we don’t…” He cut himself off. “Actually not finishing that thought.”

“Because now you’ve-”

“Mid.” She began to laugh at his frustration. He shook his head and had to chuckle a little at least as he pointed a finger at her. “I am going to blame you now if I run into some other leviathan now!”

“Well, consider it a little extra payment for having to do all of this digging for you!”

“Heh.”

There was a quiet moment then between them as the realizations faded. “Well, I got a lot more and we have maybe half an hour before... is it dawn or dusk there? Eh, not important.”

“Dusk.”

“Well, you got some pen and paper handy?”

“Yeah. I have my sketchbook I can use.”
“Good.”

He opened his eyes and quickly pulled it out. He kept one hand on the charm as he opened it. Wind blew the pages, causing him to move to a place where he was sheltered from the wind. With the pencil in hand, he found a blank page. “Priority is gonna be getting out of here though. Before the slime completely cuts us off.”

“Hmm.” She began to dig through the papers in front of her. A book slid over, causing her to glance up for a moment at some unseen figure to him. She spoke quickly in Twilise before looking back to the notes.

“We need a way to get rid of the slime without it forming a mist and spreading or infecting us.”

“You have a dedicated mage with you?”

“No.”

“Well, what about dimeritium?”

“Might be a few dimeritium bombs in the arsenal. But the blast might send the slime flying anyways. We could use the dust in them, but there’s a lot of slime. Not much silver either.”

“Frost bombs?”

“Two crates worth. But it might dilute the slime once it melts and given the temperature it could melt pretty quickly. We have a gerudo hexer though who can use a sign like my Din’s Fire, only it’s ice and frost. We sealed off the place with the body with that and covering the cracks as best we could in the door. It’s only temporary though. It’ll give out I’m sure.” He sighed as he checked his notes more. “And the slime itself behaves a little like the morpha that me and Ruto dealt with.”

“Funny you should mention that. It might've been one of Bellum's agents.”

His jaw fell open. “You're kidding.”

“Nope.” She shook her head. “One of the books here is going through all of the servants of beings from before the Goddessess came to your world. And there's some stuff in here that is downright terrifying.”

“Damn.”

“I even found a reference to something like Majora.” There was a name he did not want to hear anytime soon again. The look in his friend’s eyes suggested she felt the same. “Anyways gimme a sec.” She began to go through her notes more.

“Heh. You could hop over and give us a hand briefly.”

“Never been able to set up what's needed to warp safely between worlds in under half an hour. You know that.” She glanced up. “I do have an emergency method, but it only works when going to The Twilight. Not from it.”

“Which is why it could’ve worked with the guy who stole the mask.”

“Yeah.” She glanced up again as she saw someone bring her a clay cup that steamed along with a jug. She spoke again in her native tongue to them and picked up the cup. “And you know things have been a bit crazy too here. Since I got back. There's the whole investigation on just how that
mask got out of the vault. And I've had to defend my decisions during The Conjunction again. That we're not ready for any sort of reconciliation with The Light World. That we dodged a bolt with that entire incident. In no small part thanks to you.” He smiled a little at her words. “Couple clans are taking it as a sign and its opened up debate about how much we should interfere with other worlds. And, I am trying to convince my father that I need to go to Lorule to make sure something similar didn't happen there.”

“He doesn't want you to?”

She nodded as she took a sip from the cup. “Yeah. Until we're sure no other artifacts are missing he doesn't want anyone going anywhere.” She let go of the cup and it floated for a moment before slowly drifting back down to the table. “And Imren is insisting he goes instead.”

That didn’t make any sense. “Why? You're the one Hilda and Ravio know.”

“It’s just his big brother instinct kicking in. He found out about the imp mask and is worried something is going to happen again.”

“I can understand his worry.”

“Heh. I figured.” She went back to skimming some papers.

“Yeah.” He opened his eyes to look down at the couple quick notes he’d taken of their resources. “Especially now. Aryll is with us.”

“Ah.”

“She wanted to help the rito when she heard their couriers were going missing. So she hopped a boat that had some crown privateers on it and made it to Dragon Roost. And that's where I found her.”

“So you brought her along.”

He closed his eyes again, leaning against the pillar as his ears heard the wind pick up. But he could not look at her. “I almost said no. But we needed the help and. Heh. You should see her with a crossbow. Could probably take the wings off a keese with one shot.”

“Nice. Could've used her against that griffin.”

“...heh...”

“Try not to sound so disappointed.” He gave her no response, merely still looking away from her as memories he’d long buried seeped into his thoughts. “Okay, what is it?”

“I'm remembering.” He finally looked back up at her, a neutral expression on his face, but his eyes betrayed his thoughts. “We were on Windfall. The Imperial Navy had a blockade but the ships were moving. Me, my mother and Aryll were all trying to get on one of the ferries trying to leave the island for Aboda. We'd just heard too that Outset had been taken. That it was under Labrynnan control. And it was looking like Windfall would be next.” He could sense the sounds and smells of the docks then. He could remember the other men, women and children fighting as they struggled to get on one of the ferries. “There was shouting and shoving as people tried to get on one them. We heard the shore guns open fire and the Labrynnan ships responded. My mother. She then knelt down. Said something to Aryll as the shore guns fired again and put her hand in mine. She. She hugged us. Looked me in the eye and said.” He finally was able to look at her. She’d known that, like most Chosen, he had been orphaned but she’d never heard him tell this story. “Said 'Take care
of Aryll. I love you.” He took a deep, shuttering breath as he composed himself, feeling a hint of tears in his eyes from the memories but did not weep. “We got pushed onto the ferry and I never saw her again. Labrynna shelled the island.”

“Everything I’ve done,” he said, looking right at her, “has been to try and keep that promise. To keep her safe. Keep her from having to pick up a weapon and fight.”

She looked down at her notes, nodding in agreement a little. “Yeah,” she said. “I can see that. But just remember.” She looked back up at him. “I’m a little sister too with two brothers. As the little sister, I can safely say that an overprotective sibling can be a real pain in the ass.”

“I’ve tried not to be.” He shook his head a little then. “Heck most of the time she was on her own growing up. I. I haven't actually seen her since I underwent The Change. So, I didn’t even recognize her.”

She relaxed back into the chair. “Aah. So you're worrying now and given you're both here and she's the only family you have you're kinda falling back on your instincts.”

“Yes. And The Tower really enhanced them with everything else with the mutagens.”

“Well... look on the bright side? You have never embarrassed her.”

“True.”

She smirked at him. “You've also never scared off any boyfriends when she was a teenager. And that'd be easy to do for you.” It got a chuckle out of him. “Just drink a venomblood or two and- “ he began to laugh at the thought. Cruel as it was. The smirk turned into a grin as he looked up at her.

“Heh. Yeah. Yeah you're right there.”

“If you ever do tell me how it goes.” Midna waved her fingers and the cup of tea floated to her hand. “I just wanna hear about the look on the poor guy's face.”

“Done.”

“Eheeheeheehee.”

A realization struck him as he sat there. Opening his eyes for a moment, the sun was still setting, but wouldn’t be there for long. Admittedly though, just chatting a little about anything other than the horrors they’d encountered so far was a welcome change He remembered a time all him and Midna had done was exchange stories after a particularly nasty battle during The Conjunction. “Wow.” He closed his eyes once more.

“What?” she asked, putting the cup back down.

“I just realized how off-topic we got.”

The smile faded. “Damn, we did. And I can already feel a little strain as our worlds fall out of alignment.”

“Yeah.” Link cleared his throat and glanced to the books. “So... Bellum's slime. Before we run out of time.”
“Yeah. Um... okay.” Midna began checking her notes again, pulling a book over that had its pages marked so she could quickly get to them. “Given your resources...” He recognized how her eyes went a little wide and the faint, suppressed laugh.

“What?”

She looked back up at him, tilting her head a little to the side and smirking. “How much booze do you have and how flammable is it?”

“It can't be that simple...”

“It might be that simple.” She flipped a page in the book and began skimming it.

“How, Mid? The pirates already tried burning and boiling it away and all it did was spread the mist.”

She raised a finger to quiet him, not looking up from the book. “A consistent element of these records is how an ancient dragon would burn Bellum's filth from the earth. It would hiss and squeal and become white smoke. And not become the mist that spreads his influence.” Her eyes glanced up at him. “That's why it didn't work for the pirates. You said you didn’t have a dedicated mage, so no magic fire.”

“Aaaah. So, should other magic work too?”

“You’re thinking of using the frost bombs.” She skimmed a little more. “I don’t know. But it looks like any fire started with magic will handle it. Use something like lava juice or lantern oil as fuel and start it with your Din’s Fire and it should work.”

He already had an idea for where they could test it and he’d have to ask Aveil about any other signs she knew. Perhaps she knew one that could be used for setting a fire as well. “Well, don't know how much we have, but should have enough resources to at least keep the slime at bay as we get everyone back downstairs to the ships. Just leaving the phantom. But I already have some ideas there.”

“Haven't run into any of the spikes or ropas yet?”

“Spikes, maybe back in Lake Hylia. Ropas... no. Describe them.”

She waved a hand at him. A second of her crystals appeared and it spun. “A mass of tentacles from a nucleus. One record says they've got a single massive eye in the center.” The crystal projected a creature that looked like a sea anemone. In the middle of it was the eye, which looked like one of the ones from the slime.

“Terrific.”

“Taking that as a no then.” She flicked her fingers and the crystal vanished again.

“Yes. Can hardly wait.”

“Keep in mind too, these are old records. Bellum may have adapted and changed his minions.”

“So could run into some sort of other monstrosity. Great.”

“Yes.”
“Got anything else?”

“Like I said at the beginning. Don’t listen to the whispers.” She looked right at him then.
“According to two of my records here, that was how entire armies have been lost. The voice of Bellum himself projected through the slime or his servants. Starting in dreams and working their way into the real world. Enough exposure and it’ll turn anyone into a mindless puppet.”

He felt a chill go down his spine. It reminded him of stories of The Inquisition and the darker arts of The Interlopers of that age. But that was possession. The victim would have a chance at recovery. This didn’t sound like it gave such an escape. “Any treatment options?”

She dug through the notes some more for nearly a minute. Link watched a worried look appear on her face. I’ll get back to you. I’d say the usual though as a precaution. Dimeritium. iron and silver.”

“We’ll have to dismantle the bombs, but that’ll be simple. Long as we’re careful.”

“Good.”

“Anything else?”

“Mmm... nope. Nothing else in my notes.” She hefted the lid of one of the biggest books in front of her closed. It crashed shut with enough force it made the cup of tea next to it shake. “Now,” she began, looking at him with a smirk. “Let's talk payment.”

Link chuckled a little and knew exactly what to offer. He was sure he could convince Linebeck to get him “Half a dozen bottles of spices.”

“Done!”

“Might take me a bit to get them all though.”

“Long as you're around to hand them to me.”

“Heh. That's the idea.”

He was quiet for a moment, opening his eyes to look at the sunset. “Yknow I used to talk to people at The Tower a lot like this,” he admitted. “Got kinda lonely on The Path. So, some nights I'd spend hours talking to The Twins. Wasn't work though. Just, yknow? Kind of winding down.”

“It was nice to go off on that tangent,” she said. “Reminded me of that barn we were stuck in after that damn twilit lynel.”

“Well, with us both in pretty sorry shape, wasn't a lot we could.” He closed his eyes again to see her. “Was a nice break too. Just swapping some stories.”

“Yeah. Another time though. It’s getting hard to keep the little door to talk open.”

“Yeah. And you need to get this information to everyone. And finish your inventory.”

“Yeah.” He smiled a little at her. “Now though... See you later?”

Midna laughed a little. “See you later!” She vanished from his vision. Link opened his eyes in time
to see the last few moments of sunlight and got to his feet.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Wednesday everyone! And another chapter!

Devnotes:
-The talk between Link and Midna here was actually a lot longer, and even then this chapter could probably be removed, but I couldn't pass up another chance for interaction.
-The biggest part that was cut out was the autopsy scene. It felt redundant given Medli's previous analysis and was gore for the sake of gore as opposed to something specific to the story and showing just how horrific a being like Bellum can be when it wants to warp the human form.

So, that'll be about it for this week really! As always, huge thanks to everyone who leaves, kudos, reads, comments and bookmarks! Another chapter next week as usual! See you all next week and keep being awesome!
The collected crew of pirates was in the main room. Some chairs and crates had been moved to form a circle around the center where Mikau stood with Link and Aveil. To the entrance they’d come in a couple guards stood. To their right was a couple more pirates including the captain, Jolene. Her dark hair was back in a ponytail and arms folded as she leaned against a crate. Medli stood between her and Linebeck looking exasperated from dealing with both of them. The Labrynnan smuggler was to Medli’s right, Link’s left, and had his back to the pirate captain. He dug his flask out of the pocket of his coat, which he’d draped over Aryll, who looked like she’d fallen asleep lying against the wall and another crate. She stirred a little as Linebeck got his flask and looked over to listen.

Some of the other pirates were eating the few rations they still had. Another pair passed a bottle back and forth between them as Mikau outlined the plan. Some of the pirates looked particularly skeptical of it. Link couldn’t exactly blame them given what they were up against and the horrors they’d seen starting to creep into the tower. He was sure they’d be facing more than just the one phantom soon. As the zora finished talking, he took a deep breath.

“Anyone have any ideas to add?” he asked. “Ideas? Things that could go wrong we should plan contingencies for?”

“So, lemme get this right,” Jolene started. “The slime, like the Malice we’ve heard stories about from when Demise walked the earth, is a mutagen? And our burning it didn’t work because… Magic?”

“Pretty much,” Aveil said. “Most mutagens react pretty quickly when exposed to magic and then become inert. So that might be what we’re looking at.”

Link nodded in agreement. With what he knew from The Tower and what Midna had said, it was looking like only a little bit of magic would be needed to completely remove the slime. They couldn’t do all of it due to lacking a mage, but between him and Aveil, they were sure they could at least clear enough to get them out of there. “Very few people know how mutagens work,” Link said. “And those that do are not going to give up that knowledge readily.”

“So you both can light fires with your magic,” Medli asked Aveil.

“Like Link, I have a couple signs at my disposal,” she said. “I can’t shoot fire from my fingers, but that frost is still holding it looks like. And I do have the fury of Naboris at my disposal as well.”

“How soon would we be doing this?” the goron Lurch asked.

“If we’re doing it,” Jolene added. “This sounds like it’s a really quick and messy way to die. And we’re not interested or even equipped to handle a god at the bottom of the sea.”

“And hiding in a tower is accepting that you’ve already given up,” Aveil said. “That you’re going to stand here and wait for that phantom and its servants to come marching up here and drag all of you into the depths.”

She pointed a finger at the gerudo. “Never said that! You speak of facing monsters like it’s just another day’s work.”
“It is for us,” Link said dryly. “I’ll admit though that going after a dead and dreaming god at the bottom of the ocean is a little out of the ordinary even for me.” He stopped talking when he recalled how just a maybe a month ago now he had stopped a madman wearing the mask of some ancient and unknowable horror. The thought that this was going to become the norm did not comfort him and he cleared his throat. “But this is the best chance any of us have for a chance at surviving and possibly stopping Bellum. Mikau knows where the tomb is.” Link looked at the zora. “When there, I assume you have a plan to deal with it?”

“I do,” the zora said. “We need to get out of here first, and need I remind each and every one of you that you’d be dead had your captain decided not to listen to my advice in dealing with the geozards.”

“And you’ve done an admirable job at that,” Jolene said to him, her tone softening to one that was more diplomatic. “But now you’re asking for us to attempt something that is crazy. Crazier than what the former merchant marine would even try.”

“Never said I was actually going to be directly involved in the fighting,” Linebeck said, still not looking at her. “Just moving the people who would be from place to place.”

“No wonder you never cut it in the Imperial Navy as a privateer.”

“Merchant marine.”

“Because you were too much of a coward to join the real marines.”

“Conscientious objector!” He spun on his heels then and the two were finally facing one another. “I can fight just fine! I’d just prefer not to, you know me. And I’m not cut out for the life of a pirate! Or even a privateer.” He waved a hand outward before stuffing it into his pants pocket. “I’d rather just sneak off with treasure.”

“Yes, you’re very good at that,” the captain sneered. “And the second it gets too hairy for you, you turn tail and run.”

“Will you two give it a rest?” Medli snapped in a tone Link had never heard her use before. “Seriously, you had a long argument and made up and now you’re at it again! And Bellum is bigger than all of us. He manages to come back, we’re all going to be in trouble. It’d be like Demise rising from the grave.” She looked back at the pirates. “None of you are going to be actually facing this thing directly unless Link, Aveil and Mikau fail. They’re equipped and prepared for it. All they need is support so they can do their jobs and ships to get there.”

Link was secretly thankful that she hadn’t mentioned the elixirs or other dangerous parts of his job. Especially with Aryll listening to the plan coming together. He saw his sister was on one of the crates leaning over with her arms on her legs, watching the others. A yawn escaped her mouth given the hour and events earlier of the day. Jolene looked to the group once more. “I still think you’re all crazy for thinking to try this,” she said. “But…” A smirk appeared on her face. “You are right in that if someone doesn’t do something about this, we’re all going to be in serious trouble. And you three look to be the ones most prepared for it and might have the right amount of skill and stubbornness to pull it off…” She looked at Linebeck then. “Even he’s got that same stubborn look you do, hylian.” She looked at the rest of her crew. “We’re not going to stay up here anymore like yellow-bellied rats! Lurch, Pelen, go get the gear from the roof! We’re packing up. I want our ship underway within an hour after that monster is dealt with! If the geozards and
other horrors come up from the depths while we escape, I want us to all be on deck to fight them off!”

“Aye!” the goron said. He waved to the pirate that had come downstairs and they started for the corridor.

“Keleil, Soltrou. Get them any rum or oil and anything else that can burn. We need to boil away as much of that slime.” The two gerudo pirates were off as soon as the captain had finished speaking. “Rest of you, load your muskets and crossbows. Sharpen and oil the swords. And if we have any silver left load it into smoke bombs!” She clapped her hands together as the rest of the crew went to work. Jolene turned with a grin to Linebeck then. “And that is how you command a crew!”

“Well, maybe a pirate crew,” the smuggler said. “But you gotta have to have a laid back approach with some other people…”

Link walked over as the group dispersed. Aveil was talking with Mikau now as Medli continued to play mediator between Linebeck and Jolene. The rito gave him a look that was asking for help and he complied by clearing his throat.

“Are you two going to be doing this the entire time?” he asked.

They both stopped their arguing to look at him. “Ah… And you’re the infamous Link,” Jolene said. “Chosen Agent of the Crown of Hyrule…”

“Former, Chosen Agent of the Crown of Hyrule,” Linebeck corrected with a smug look on his face. “Why, with a war on, would you expect him to be working with someone like Aveil?”

“Could be a honeypot, but the question is who is doing who.”

Link just shook his head with a sigh. “Look,” he said. “I know you two have some sort of history, but if we’re going to survive this you two need to be able to work together.”

Jolene laughed a little then. “He’s definitely got your stubborn streak, Beck.” Her lips curled into a smirk. “And those proud blue eyes, like a feral wolf. Bet you’re pretty strong too since you’re carrying all that scale and steel. Tell me, is it true that Chosen are just hexers with a pension?”

Linebeck cleared his throat. “We were talking the plans once we were at sea… I trust your zora has plans to deal with Bellum as opposed to just escaping?”

“He does,” Link said. “We’ll head to Bellum’s tomb and drop down. Him, me and Aveil since we’re equipped for it. One thing at a time though, we need to get out of here.”

“You three going after the phantom then?” Medli asked.

“We are.” He looked at her.

“Okay. While you’re doing that then I’ll help them get supplies down and run escort. We’ll go after you guys have cleared some of the slime. That’ll get the phantom’s attention I’m sure.”

Link nodded. “Take Aryll with you.”

“Already was going to ask her.” She smiled a little then. It vanished though as she looked back at
Linebeck and Jolene. “Can you two behave yourselves while I’m helping them move things?”

“Oh, I was going to help you too with that!” Linebeck said, arms folded. He turned around to put his back to Jolene. “I think we can discuss our tactics later for dealing with anything we may run into.”

“You started this, remember?” Jolene argued. “By just showing up here.”

He turned around. “I was worried you wouldn’t get your cut of our agreement! Was on my way to Mercay to find you when we just happened to find your ship downstairs!”

Link let out a long sigh then. He put a hand to his forehead and turned away. “Oh, sweet Farore, just find a bunk already you two…” Though the other two didn’t hear it, his sister sure did and stifled her giggling as she hopped off the crate.

“So…” she said. “You want me to help Medli?”

“I do,” he said. “That thing is incredibly dangerous and is likely going to be accompanied by other monsters. I’m thinking you’ll be safer if you’re running escort and helping the pirates load their ship.”

“You know I can fight though. And you saw how I took out those mutants.”

He looked her right in the eye. “I know. But this thing took a bomb like it was nothing while we were retreating up the stairs. The area is going to be cramped and we need to maneuver it around to the window. I know you want to help, but this is what I was trained for. I deal with monsters like this every day.”

“And if you end up needing help, what then?” She put her hands on her hips.

“Aveil and Mìkau are there too.” He smiled a little at her. “You’ve seen her fight. And Mìkau kept everyone else alive up here. We can handle this.”

Aryll didn’t look happy about it. She puffed her cheeks out and exhaled through her lips in such a way her bangs flew upward. It did make Link chuckle a little as he remembered her doing the same thing when they were children.

“You wouldn’t want me doing falconry, would you? Or tanning at the ranch? Or cooking?”

“You cook fine though Medli tells me.” The annoyance was partially washed away by his comment.

“Okay, you definitely wouldn’t want me putting together a chu jelly potion then. It’s like cooking?”

There was a small giggle. “Oh?”

“Yeah, alchemy was never my strong suit at The Tower.” He grew serious once more. “A cramped room like that is going to be tricky for your bows. And how well can you use a sword?” He looked at the one she’d taken form upstairs.

“I was going to use it more like a knife. It’s one of those short stabbing ones anyways. Just in case.”
“Okay.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re going to have to teach me how to handle some of this other stuff too. If I’m going to be helping the rito, I’m going to want to be able to handle myself.”

“Looks like you already can though.”

“I meant with some of this monster business.” She glanced back as some of the pirates came down with the crates from above. Lurch carried two of the biggest ones on his own with one on each arm. Link recognized one of them as the crate with the frost bombs. “A couple thugs and brigands are one thing,” Aryll continued. “As are a couple raiding blins… But… Undead? Those geozards and these poor pirates getting turned into those things? I’ve heard stories about the gohmas in the woods. Giant chus? There were these things too we had to deal with during The Conjunction too. These… They looked like humans? But were too big. And moved on all fours…”

“…Did they have plate-like masks on their faces and long tendrils?”

“And they screeched something terrible! Every time we’d managed to finally take all of them down, one would still be standing and bring the others back.” She hugged herself a little then.

“And you didn’t have the proper weapons or equipment to handle them.” In fairness, Link could think of very few people who would be properly equipped to deal with shadow beasts. Even in his initial encounter with them, if not for Ravio’s quick thinking they both would’ve been killed.

“We lost six cows to them. And Icho lost his leg to whatever it was doing to him…” She let go of herself and then looked back at her brother. “World’s getting more and more dangerous. We can’t just sit and wait for some hero to show up to fix our problems.”

She had a point and Link found himself nodding with her statement. “Alright,” he said. “But still, one very important thing to remember is to know when you’re up against something you cannot beat. I’ll teach you some of the things I know from my training later. Right now though we don’t have the time.”

Aryll smiled brightly then. “Okay.” She looked back at Medli as she looked ready to give up on dealing with Linebeck and Jolene. “…I’m gonna go help Medli then. She looks like she could use a hand with those two while you prepare for the phantom.”

“Sounds good.” He watched her turn. “And Aryll?”

“Yeah?” She glanced over her shoulder at him.

“I’m happy to have family with me on this. And that you didn’t read me the riot act when I told you everything. Still some more to too, but… After all this.”

“Hey, you’re my brother. We didn’t really have much of a childhood together, but we’ve done pretty well.” Aryll smiled wider. “And now we can catch up for lost time anyways!”

“Yeah.” He smiled a little back as she went, but it vanished. Fear began to churn in his stomach. If she was going to remain with him, she would find out about the elixirs soon. Seeing him with it running through his system and toxic was something he was sure would terrify her. Link took a deep breath and went back to one of the other boxes to inspect his equipment and prepare for tomorrow. He wouldn’t have to worry about it
After a meal and a night’s rest, Link was awakened by Mikau and Aveil. The zora handed him a canteen and he took a drink as he woke up. It was just before dawn and it looked like the pirates had prepared as much as they could for what was going to happen. The others were starting to wake and prepare as well. Link saw some of them with blunderbusses and muskets, but most of them had sabers and clubs or some bows. Medli looked tired, but she was standing ready and adjusting a leather jerkin over her robe. She was wearing thick gloves and her hair was pulled back tightly and out of the way. Once she was done she began to do some stretches. Aryll was still asleep, curled up against a box and with a blanket over her. Link gently nudged her awake after getting some coffee and some rations.

“Huh?” she asked.

“Wake up,” he said. “We’re getting ready.”

“Keep quiet,” Jolene said, slowly sharpening her saber. “Lurch said there was some activity at the barricade last night. They probably know we’re up to something here.”

“We’ll go first,” Link said. “Clear the way.” He glanced at Aryll for a second as she got up and loaded the hoppers on her crossbows, one silver bolt at a time. She slipped them on her hips and tugged at her armor slightly, clearly not used-to it still. “And we’ll draw the phantom out. It’s big and noisy, so you’ll know when it’s coming.”

“It’ll probably have an escort of mutants,” Aveil added. “But a group could come down and deal with them as we deal with the phantom.”

“I’ll let Jolene know,” Mikau said. “We deal with the phantom and its mutants, the other group moves and stops anything else from getting to the phantom. Then, they can keep it clear as the other goods and the wounded start coming down. While that’s happening, the three of us will deal with the phantom. Once it’s done, we’ll help escort and bring things down.”

“And we’ll be ready,” Linebeck said.

“Good,” Aveil said. She looked at the pirates. “Any last details before we go?”

Link shook his head as he loaded a silver bolt into his crossbow. He checked to make sure it was secure and then slipped it on his hip. He pulled his new longsword from his back and inspected it. The silver diamond pattern along it shined a little brighter than the rest of the blade in the light and he could make out in them terminan goron glyphs in greater detail. He went to the door to the stairs then. Aveil and Mikau were right behind him.

“Going to try out your new blade?” the zora asked.

“Mnhm. The phantom’s sword looked like it could go through my shield anyways. And I’d like to keep my shield intact.” Aveil pushed the door open. It lurched upward and the three headed down. When they reached the bottom, the goron looked up at them.

“So,” he said. “Here for the fuel?”

“Yeah,” Aveil nodded.
He grabbed one of the glass bottles filled with a pitch black liquid. A soaked cloth was stuffed in
the mouth of it. Link too one and inspected it. It was crude, but would be effective for what they
needed when it came to the purple slime and the eyes within them. Link sheathed his blade. Mikau
took one too. “Be careful with those,” the goron said. “They’re not whatever’s in those inferno
grenades we had earlier, but it’ll still burn.”

“How long do these burn?” Link asked.

“I dunno. You just need to throw them, yeah?”

“I meant the improvised fuses.”

“Just a little dip of the lantern oil to get it started.” He shrugged as he pushed the barricade’s door
open. “I’m not an explosives expert. I just lug the cannons and smack the idiots who need it.” He
slammed his fist into his palm.

“Alright.” He looked to the others then and pushed the barricade’s door open.

Chapter End Notes

What's this? A Sunday update? Well, a lot of things happened recently that prevented
an update. For the foreseeable future though, it's looking like Sunday updates as it
matches my schedule a little better.

No devnotes this time. Not really lot to say and it's very late here. I must admit I do
enjoy doing the devnotes because I love seeing the thought process of other writers
when it comes to their stories too. Also, a small apology if there are some errors here.
It's late and I swore I'd get it out before I went to bed.

As always though, huge thanks to everyone out there who has taken the time to read
this thing that, before this chapter, has ballooned to a whopping 147,206 words! There
is still a lot left that's on its way, though we're getting closer to the end of the second
season! Extra special thanks goes to brinechugger for their bookmark last week!

See you guys next Sunday and keep being awesome!
They started down then, checking the floors below them more thoroughly than when they’d rushed up. As expected, it was mostly deserted, but one room was another chamber that had been converted for the dead and captured pirates to mutate in. Aveil took her bottle and poured it onto the slime. A second later, she snapped her fingers and a bolt of lightning jumped form them into it. A single eyeball bobbed out of it for a moment before dropping back in.

“…I think we’ve been made,” she said. The fuel burst into flames instantaneously, followed by squealing and screaming form the slime.

“How to disappoint it then!” Mikau said. “Let’s get down there!” He lobbed his bottle into the fire. In moments it ignited and shattered as well, destroying more of the slime. They quickly ran out of the room and down the stairs. When they reached the floor they’d stopped in with the other pods and their initial encounter, Link quickly threw his hand out, curling his index and pinky into his palm. Sparks flashed and fire spurted outward, evaporating the slime. Aveil and Mikau were right behind him. With the way clear, Aveil rushed to the door and forced it open. The next room wasn’t as large as Link would’ve liked, but there was a window they could see out into the waters with.

Already they heard the same rumbling of the phantom, coming up from below. Two of the mutants came rushing up the stairs. Unlike the ones they’d previously encountered, they had long spines in place of their forearms. Barnacles clung to their faces and bodies as well. A harpoon skewered one of them in the chest and reeled them towards Aveil. Before it could even try and impale her, its head flew from its shoulders and vanished into black smoke and ash. The second had closed the distance but was quickly taken down by Mikau. The blades on his right forefin sliced through their side. He kicked them back and a second after it had hit the floor it vanished in a puff. They had no time to rest though. Three more came charging up the stairs and they heard the rumbling of the phantom again grow louder.

“Go torch the other slime!” Mikau shouted.

Link didn’t need to be told twice and started for the other room. He pushed the door open and watched as Aveil ran past him followed by Mikau. The zora threw out a glass vial. It shattered on the wall and smoke and silver dust filled the air. The mutants struggled against it, some stumbling and falling to the ground as the silver burned them. It didn’t directly stop them as Link saw one struggling to get up. It would buy them time they needed though. Soon as Link was in the other room, he lit the cloth with his sign and threw the bottle into the slime, aiming for the wall so it’d shatter. The second it did, the entire puddle went up in flames and white steam. He saw one of the eyeballs jump out of the goop and explode in smoke in time to glare right at him. Aveil and Mikau rushed in a moment later, weapons drawn and ready. Link pulled the longsword from his back and a cluster bomb from the bag on his belt.

“How?” the zora asked. Link barely heard him shout over the sound of the boiling and screaming slime behind them. Aveil twirled her scimitars in a couple circles before raising one over her head and the other aimed outward. Link lobbed the cluster bomb to the door then. The fuse was still burning as the mutated pirates came charging in. One stepped on top of it just as it went off. Ball bearings flew and cratered the walls while scything through the dead men. The one that had stepped on the explosive vanished in smoke and gore. Two came charging through after the blast, wounded but still alive followed by three with tentacles. They saw the phantom marching as fast as
it could down the hallway now.

Link took the sword with both hands and stood defensively, feet apart and blade pointed slightly downward. The second one of the mutants was in close, he swept the blade upward with a step forward. Silver cleaved tentacles away and the return stroke sliced through the chest and stomach. Next to him he saw Aveil leap, blades spinning in an arc. As another two ran into the room, she went low, slicing the feet off of one before kicking them into one of the new arrivals. Her kill vanished from foul magic as the other charged in to be gutted.

Mikau leapt forward with a kick, fin blades slicing through another of the mutants. Barbed tentacles lashed out towards him. He grabbed them while ducking down and pulled their owner forward. With a punch, his blade arced forward and pierced clean through their chest. Before the magic destroyed the tentacles, he swung them outward and tripped another attacker. In a heartbeat, he stabbed his left fin through their neck and slashed. He parried a strike from one of the spines and kicked them away.

Link spun around fast enough to stab the longsword through the creature’s chest as it stumbled from Mikau’s kick. As he pulled the blade out, he ducked down to avoid another and flicked his hand out. A flash of green came from his palm and they were knocked straight into the phantom’s blade. He could make out a trio of geozards with it now. Unlike the ones they’d previously encountered though, they seemed far larger. One had a giant pincer claw for a hand while another was more hunched and spindly crab legs coming out of its side. Four more mutants charged for them, some on all fours. He quickly thought as they were going to be overwhelmed either way. Aveil was to his back, Mikau to his flank. An idea hit him. He spun around and flicked his hand outward again. The gust of wind and magic cleared a path out. Aveil and Mikau saw it and took it fast. Link pulled his right arm back as the dead leapt for him. A fast flick of his fingers and a red light glowed in his palm. As they came down, he slammed his palm into the floor. Fire flashed in a dome around him and flew in a small hurricane. The dead were thrown away and ablaze. He saw his companions swiftly cut down a few that had been thrown their way.

He barely recovered fast enough to raise his sword to parry one of the geozards. It roared as it brought a massive coral axe down. A silver arrow landed square in the creature’s skull, followed by a second as it stumbled back and began to smolder into ash. Link raised the longsword defensively again and backed up. A bladed boomerang spun around him and sliced cleanly into the gut of the second geozard while Aveil harpooned the third and stabbed it in the chest with one of her scimitars. The pincer claw swung downward as she leapt off, ripping the harpoon of her hookshot with her. She wasn’t fast enough and Link saw the claw grab her hand. It began to squeeze. She didn’t cry out but rather stabbed it again. It took Mikau’s boomerang to lop the geozard’s arm off before it claimed her hand. Aveil stabbed forward then twice before forcing the sword outward in a slash. Gore splashed from the wound on her armor and the beast collapsed with heavy heaving breaths.

The third geozard was smashed out of the way by the phantom as it lumbered into the room. It was the same one as they’d seen earlier and stood with its shield forward and sword raised over its head, ready to strike. Link was instantly reminded of how darknut mercenaries would stand ready to fight from it. The three moved together to see as it took a step forward and slashed downward. All three scattered as the blade slammed into the rock. It was with such force that even after Link’s feet found the floor again, he could still feel the stone reverberating from the shock. A small crater and cracked stone remained as evidence of the entity’s strike. Link didn’t need to imagine what
that blade would do to a living creature as he remembered the cobble crushers turning shadow beasts into smears of gore. At least it was slow and the wide swings made them easy to watch for movements and avoid. The challenge came from the fact that the swings covered so much space. He watched it move as fast as it could for the zora. Mikau jumped to the side as the sword came down again.

Link swung the longsword into its back and grabbed its attention. They needed to lure it towards the window, but he needed it away first so that Mikau wouldn’t be cornered. He had never met a zora who couldn’t swim, but was sure that the fall from that height would still kill him. The phantom swung in an arc this time, forcing Link to roll under the sword. Aveil’s hookshot harpooned its shoulder and in seconds, she was on its back. Her legs wrapped around its head and she tried to steer it towards the window. The armor split open and the slimy tendrils that held it together shot out. She jumped off, kicking it hard as she could as she did. It had worked a little though as the phantom stumbled towards the open window. Link rolled one of his grenades towards the wall, between the phantom’s legs. Just as it clattered against the stone, it went off. The phantom was blown forward to land on its hands and knees. The armor shattered in places from the blast, revealing more of the purple slime. Unlike the puddles they’d found though, it looked stringier and more like tendons. It quickly pulled itself back together inside the armor. Cracks and sears to the metal flashed away and the phantom stood tall once more.

Aveil flicked her hand outward, fingers moving fast and holding outward. Frost, snow and ice formed in a long stream of wind. Most of it hardened against the armor, but some also collected on the ground forming a slick layer of ice. It lifted its blade again to swing as Mikau jumped forward with a kick to its chest. The phantom slid back, but the impact also shattered some of the shell of ice. It swiftly dug its sword into the floor, sending flecks of ice flying and slowing its slide towards the open wall and window. It began to stand once it had slowed, faster than before. It beat its sword against its shield and shattered the remaining ice that had formed to slow it down. A glow of orange billowed from the slits in its helmet. It took one step forward when an explosion rocked its chest. It would’ve been a perfect shot to the heart if the phantom had one. The blast knocked it back and it tumbled out of the tower. The group looked back. There, with a full crossbow in her hands was Aryll. She’d started loading another bolt with a small bomb attached to it into the weapon’s rail. The threat had passed though and she carefully removed the arrow before uncocking the weapon with a sigh.

“I thought I told you to help the others,” Link said. He inspected the longsword in his hands before sheathing it on his back once more.

“There were more coming for you,” she said. “Medli was holding them back with Lurch while I rushed to get you guys!” Aryll slung the crossbow on her back. “There’s a couple geozards down by the ships. Linebeck and Jolene are trying to clear them, but they could use some help.”

“Got it,” Aveil said. She winced a little and inspected her hand.

“You alright?” Mikau asked.

She shook her head. “I’ll be okay, but I’m gonna be stuck using only one sword. Just a sprain.”

“I’m sure we can get some ice or use the cold water to treat it when we’re done here,” Link said. “I do have a couple bandages on me if you need them.”

The gerudo gave him a look. If not for the smirk on her face, she’d have clearly been annoyed by his concern. “I’m a lot tougher than I look, Link. I can handle it for getting us out of here.” She pulled one of her scimitars from its scabbard. “Let’s go.”
With that, the four of them rushed into the main room to see the goron pirate holding one of the mutants up by the throat. Two other pirates rushed forward and stabbed a single of their turned comrades together. A third pirate pulled two of their wounded away from the center of the fighting. Link saw a geozard charging up the stairs. In an instant, he leapt for them, the silver longsword leaving his back as he flew in the air. The steel cleaved down into the creature, knocking it into the wall. Before it could react, Link stabbed it straight through the heart. He pushed it off and quickly glanced back down the stairs as the geozard burst into smoke.

“That’s really working well,” Aryll said.

“It’s silver,” Link replied. “Like the bolts.”

“And it’s terminan-style,” Mikau said. “So it’s forged in there with the steel. Won’t break as easily as a pure silver sword.” He started down the stairs with the others behind him. It wasn’t long before they were at the docks. Thankfully the fighting appeared to have ended and the pirates were quickly loading crates onto the ship. Linebeck was already on his steamboat with a couple pirates working at preparing for departure. He shouted orders as two were already on the top of the bridge and preparing the cannon for the inevitable counterattack. Link moved past one of the pirates and started for Linebeck’s ship.

“Keep your eyes open for more of those things!” Linebeck shouted. One of the pirates grunted and shook his head. Link walked up the ramp then. He saw Medli come gliding in from the outside with a large bag in her talons. Carefully the rito landed on the deck and picked up the bag.

“Managed to handle things it looks like,” he said.

“Yeah,” Medli replied. Aveil and Aryll were coming up the ramp behind Link now. They moved out of the way of a pirate who went back onto the dock. “We should’ve been a bit more careful moving things. Lucky I got the frost bombs out before one of them got damaged in the fighting.”

“That’d ruin our day real fast.”

“So, the phantom?”

“Sinking to the bottom of the sea,” Aveil said. She sheathed her scimitar. “Just have the grunts to worry about now, but we should still hurry.”

“Agreed,” Medli said. “I’m gonna be tired, but I’ll keep flying some of the lighter stuff out from the top. Think we’ll be another hour to take all we need. Then we’ll be underway.” She glanced around. “Where’s the zora?”

“Talking to Jolene it looks like,” Aryll said. She pointed across the docks to the other ship. Mikau was on the dock following Jolene. She turned around to face him after reaching the bow. A moment later the zora gave her a couple nods and jumped into the water. A pirate emerged from the bottom with a bucket and mop and started to swab the upper deck then.

“Okay. Let’s get finished loading up and get out of here then,” Link said.
Wow, look at me not able to maintain a schedule. Lol.

Anyways, it just got too late last night to post, so here it is today. This is probably the shortest of the chapters I've done so far.

Devnotes:
-Coming up with the chapter names for the boss fights so to speak is a lot of fun.
-Oof, I fought so much with the passive voice in this, sorry if it's still there. I'm like 80-90% sure there's a good chunk still there.

There may be another week long delay for another chapter in the very near future here as I have to COMPLETELY rewrite it to fit with my vision and ideas and making it fit will be difficult, but worth it I hope. Just so you know.

That's all I got this week. As always guys, huge thanks to every reader, commenter, kudo-leaver and bookmarker! And on that note, up to 20 bookmarks! You guys rock! Special thanks to TokarevTT33 this week for being the 20th bookmarker for the story! I admittedly never thought I'd get that many given how kinda niche the fusion fic genre as a whole is. And I am incredibly thankful to everyone who has enjoyed this so far.

I'll see you all next week! Keep being awesome!
The escape had gone far smoother than anyone expected and the Tower of the Gods was almost a
day behind them now. All around them was just the ocean. No signs of the platforms that Medli’s
tribe used for their courier work or other ships. It was completely empty apart from the steamboat
and frigate that moved together through the vastness. They’d expected trouble from the escape as
the other ship in Jolene’s small fleet had been lost to geozards and the mutants, but they met no
resistance. For the moment, he stood on the bridge next to the cannon, watching below as Medli
demonstrated to Aryll some of her martial arts. His sister had started to practice them as well and
he could hear the rito correcting her as they went. She stopped as Medli pulled a stick to mimic a
sword and handed it to her. A moment later, she demonstrated how to disarm an opponent with it.

They were still a ways from their destination though, and he was sure there was more they could be
doing to prepare. Given the hour though, he reached up and squeezed the wolf around his neck.
Any other last pieces of information on what they were up against would be invaluable. Especially
given how she’d saved them a world of hurt when learning that the mutated corpses could become
carriers. He turned back to look to where they’d come, leaning against the rail and squeezing la
little tighter.

“Hey, you there, Mid?” he asked.

There was a long pause before he heard her voice. “...hang on...”

He realized then the time differences between their worlds. “I didn’t wake you did I?”

“No. I’ve been preparing for my trip to Lorule. Got the okay from my father to check in.”

He closed his eyes, focusing. “Ah. Making sure something didn’t happen there like with the
mask?”

She appeared in his mind’s eye then. “Yeah.” She ran a hand through her hair. He could make out a
couple books and a bag too.

Her red eyes glanced in his direction. “So. What’s up?” she asked.

“We’re preparing our dive,” he said. “We found Bellum’s tomb. And its looking very dangerous.
Just because of the depths we’re going to.”

“To say nothing of the fact it’s a god from before The Goddesses ordered your world.”

“Yeah.” He took a deep breath. “Really nervous about it. Good chance none of us will come back
from it.”

“Well, did find a couple other little things. Least from one of our texts.”

“Oh?”

She grabbed one of the books. He saw papers sticking out of it she’d used to bookmark it and
quickly skimmed through them before stopping on one page. “Looks like your goddesses may have been partially involved.” She pulled it up and showed it to him. He recognized some of the symbols, even though he didn’t know any of the specifics of what they meant. Shad would’ve known, he was sure. “Nayru specifically.”

He nodded a little. “Well, one old tale says she created the sea by weeping into it and submerging an entire continent.”

“That could very well be part of the tale. She used it to hide a prison buried under the rock so that something would remain there until the time was right.”

Only one answer to what would be there given everything. They both knew it. “Bellum.”

“I don’t have enough to clearly tell you one way or the other what’s down there, but Bellum’s tomb could have been made by The Goddesses and sealed away by your sky and ocean spirits. Hoping to keep him down there until eternity ends.”

Though going that deep and into the unknown was something particularly worrying, he was sure that at least he might be okay now and that they had some small thing in their favor against the old god now. “Alright.”

“There’s something there too. Something keeping his servants from opening the door to his cell, but most of these texts don’t have a whole lot to go on.”

“Oh?”

She furrowed her brow as she flipped through the book some more, eventually putting it aside and taking another one. “They’re deliberately cryptic. Why I can’t reason with something this important.”

“Heh.”

She glanced up at him. “What?”

“Twins say the same thing with some of their research. Especially about The Inquisition.”

“Aaah.” She gave an understanding nod before looking back down at the page and the paper she’d stuffed in it. “There’s a note here though that...” For a brief moment she looked surprised then.

Suddenly, she vanished from his sight. The magic was still working though, he could feel it in his charm. “Mid?” he asked. There was no response though. He let go of the charm for a moment before looking back down at his sister and Medli. They were practicing kicks now as Medli played the instructor for Aryll. He was glad she was getting along so well with everyone. Maybe it would be okay to bring her along. He bowed his head a little then, looking back to the stern of the ship. The life of a Chosen was brutal and though many a tale painted them as great as The Hero, he knew all too well that they were still very much mortal. Their mutations, a secret to the world apart from those few in power, did let them perform legendary feats, but there was a host of things that came with it. Before his mind could dig further into it, his charm shook. He reached for it and closed his eyes again. Midna appeared once more, this time, eyes narrowed and a scowl on her face. One he had seen her wear countless times during The Conjunction.

“You okay?” he asked
“Zant’s here.” She said plainly.

“Oh. You have to go?”

She shook her head, sitting back down and slouching in her seat. “He’s not even supposed to be here today. One of the new servants let him and his entourage in.”

“Aaah. And now he’s demanding to speak with you.”

“Yep. I have a couple people delaying him right now. Though I don’t know how long that’ll last.”

“Know what he wants?”

Her gaze scared him a little at the look in her eye. Though he’d seen it before, it still was something that scared him. She was clearly unhappy with the events that had occurred. “Yeah. Me.”

“Ah.” From what little she’d told him on him, he assumed whatever had happened in their past was something that had caused her to loathe him. At that moment though, he immediately realized she’d always disliked him as long as he’d known her. Or at least as long as... “... oh.” Midna glared at him. She figured out what he had just learned as well. He saw her lip curl down and her gritting her teeth. Link held up a hand to her then and shook his head. “Say no more. I won’t pry. But if you want to vent I won’t tell a soul.”

The sneer faded as she closed her eyes with what sounded like a forced chuckle. “You’re too noble for your own good sometimes, y’know that?” she asked.

“Didn’t you want me showing you more chivalry?” he replied, a slight smirk on his own lips.

It was her turn to smirk back at him. “Wasn’t expecting it to show up right then with that Griffin. And be remarkably difficult to tell the difference between that and your usual noble idiocy.” The smirk turned into a sweet smile as the mischief left her for now. “Thanks though. Seriously.”

“Of course, Mid.

She sighed a little and sat back up in her chair, tugging down the vest she wore. “It’s... Kind of a touchy topic.”

“So how about to one less touchy?”

“Yeah” Midna’s eyes glanced over the book again “Like old gods at the bottom of the ocean.”

Her bluntness made Link chuckle. “Like that. So. That note you mentioned before Zany Zant so rudely interrupted us.”

That got a small snicker out of her. “Uh... ah.” She began to skim the book again, looking for where she’d left off. “It looks like for some of it that the prison designed follows the same laws of Nayru. So. This could’ve been during The Ordering.”

“Anything specific?”

“That no divine hand or ones touched by divine hands could open it,” she said, not even looking up.
Given what he knew about mythology and legends in their world, virtually everything had been made by divine hands. “If that’s the case someone or something has opened it enough that Bellum is trying to change the world.”

“I have a theory on that actually. But it’s a lot of speculation.” She closed the book then.

“What is it?”

“The Conjunction put cracks in the prison. And it has allowed Bellum’s influence to leak out. But he can’t break the prison to free himself. Because he’s a ‘divine being’ or counts as one at least as far as I can tell by these texts.”

“But his servants can still carry out his will. Use the slime to give him a better look at things, which is his influence leaking out of it. Given a physical form and mutagenic properties like The Malice of Demise.”

“Exactly.”

Guilt washed over him then, much as he’d learned with some of the creatures twisted by The Twilight energies during The Conjunction and then again when him and Midna had encountered the refugees turned into shadow beasts. He always hated these instances. “So those geozards could be as much victims of his mutagens as the pirates were.”

“Definitely possible.”

He shook his head, focusing on her theory. “So... why The Conjunction?” he asked.

“Mmm.” Midna tilted her head and looked at the ceiling. “If I were a goddess...” She stopped when she heard Link stifle a snicker and gave him a look of mock annoyance. It vanished as quickly as it had appeared and was replaced with a smirk. ”If,” she continued, pointing a finger at him. “And if there was a being I couldn’t kill, like Bellum, I’d try and trap him somewhere he could do no harm to my followers or plans.” Her brow furrowed as she looked down at the desk and bit her lower lip. “Which might mean making an entire little pocket dimension to stuff him in. We have theories on how to do that even.”

“Mmm?”

“Making new realities. But with our current understanding of magic, they’d be literally the size of a needle point and flash out of existence faster than the blink of an eye. To say nothing of just how much magic would be needed to do even that in the first place.” She paused for a moment as he nodded, at least understanding some of it. “But for a divine being, they could easily and have laws applied to it like Nayru did to your world.”

He could see where she was getting. “And then The Conjunction happens and the worlds collide. The prison gets cracked just enough the inmate can peak out and try to influence things In your world.”

“Yes. And so Bellum starts whispering to anyone who will listen and people fall under his influence.”

“Yes.”
“Huh...”

“What?”

“Didn’t know they taught transdimensional magic and theory in The Twilight.”

She laughed at little at it. “I had to track down a couple people after The Conjunction. People far smarter and with more time on their hands than me. One of them helped me get the stuff together on how our worlds are still pretty connected.” She glanced to her right then. “I hope you have a good plan for sealing up whatever cracks are in that tomb. ‘cause I haven’t found anything that suggests how you could.”

“So, this could all just be for nothing.” He took a deep breath then. “But we have to try.”

“You do have a plan, right?”

“Mikau is working on it with the frost bombs we recovered, I think.”

She nodded a little. “If you can make it red ice with the alchemy, it won’t melt down there. Real patch job but it should at least buy the world time. Close it off enough that you should be fine for a while.”

“Yeah.”

She glanced to her side then before sighing. “Aaaand I’m out of time.”

“No more distraction?”

“Yeah.” She closed the book. “I won’t be available for a few days too, so really make sure you don’t do something stupid.”

Link chuckled a little. “Well, you know me.”

“Heh. You still owe me for all this extra work. And I expect you to pay in full.” The smirk was back on her face.

“Alright.”

Midna composed herself, taking a deep breath and sitting up straight. “Good.”

“Good luck with your trip.”

“Thanks.” She smiled at him. “You too. See you later.” She vanished from his sight then and he let go of the charm.

The waves beat against the bow of Linebeck’s ship as they traveled. Black smoke billowed out of the stack in the back as Link sat on the floor with his back to one of the many crates that had been loaded in the hold. Knowing what was coming, he prepared himself mentally and practiced his breathing. Deep dives had not been something he’d been formally trained in, but he had done it
before. Just not to the depth that Mikau had mentioned as they left for what was ominously named ‘The Dreamer’s Tomb.’ Before him were the elixirs he’d picked up in Windfall and another one the zora had given him and Aveil. He remembered what the zora had said about it and picked up two other vials. One was another Kaepora’s Vigil, while the other was a Red Ice. He pulled another bottle from the bags he had next to him. It was empty and particularly large, but was meant for mixing. He uncorked both of the smaller bottles and poured them into the larger one. Once done, he mixed the one Mikau had given him, using a stick to get the last of it out and stirred it together. After a minute, he placed it on top of his lantern and lit it to ensure it would mix properly.

Across on the other side of the hold was Aveil. She was essentially doing the same thing, muttering a prayer in her native tongue as she poured the syrupy blue mix into a larger bottle. It had been the first time as well he’d seen her out of her armor. She was in leather pants and was wearing a white shirt much like the one he had, but cut more for a woman. The sleeves were rolled up and her left wrist was wrapped in a couple bandages to help keep her from injuring her sprained wrist any further. He noticed numerous scars along what skin was showing on her arms. They weren’t as bad as his, but from their talks, it sounded like the desert viper’s preferred prey was the kind that wouldn’t leave scars if it managed even to land a single blow. He’d only encountered moldorms when working with Shad in the desert and was amazed that she’d been able to kill things like the lanmolas she’d mentioned back on Windfall.

She inhaled sharply, holding the bottle to her nose that held the now pitch black liquid in it. Aveil placed it on her lantern to heat it to finish the mixing and looked over to Link. “Amazing how similar our rituals are too,” she said.

“You said it,” Link answered. He looked to the scabbards that held his swords next to the bag. “So, you never met a Chosen before me?”

“Nope.” Aveil carefully unsheathed one of her scimitars and produced a whetstone. “Heard stories here and there, but nothing that could be said to be true. You guys usually stick to Hyrule.”

“Explains why we never heard of your sisters either. We’re both so focused on our regions and the troubles there.”

“Speak for yourself. The Vipers were independent. Not agents of Ganondorf. At least until the war started to get worse…”

Link instantly looked up at her. His muscles tensed and he felt his fingers coiling around the grip of his arming sword on the floor next to him.

“Technically we still are…” She ran the whetstone along the scimitar to sharpen it. “We’ve been forced to take some contracts from The United Tribes though. You know all about the counter invasion I’m sure.” Aveil let out a sigh as she continued sharpening her blade. “You’d be surprised at what you do when your entire culture is at stake.”

He picked up the longsword then and pulled it from its scabbard. “I was on the Northern Front. Against the blins. I’d heard though that an incursion was successful though. Captured a couple forts even.” Link inspected the weapon carefully again before getting a vial of oils to treat the blade. “The Chosen were meant to prevent a conflict like this.”

“Prevent it how though?” She was watching him closely with her gold eyes. The sound of the blade being sharpened echoed in the hold. They heard voices and the pirates working with Linebeck discussing things.

“Depends on who you ask.” Link started to rub the oil along the blade with a cloth. He worked it
carefully to make sure the blade was treated right. “Some would say that we should’ve attacked the second Ganondorf proved himself a threat and could’ve united your people. Others would say we would have waited until later when the invasion started…”

“And you?”

He slowly ran the cloth along further and shook his head. “I’d have liked if we could have found a solution that’d prevented a war and avoided any bloodshed. I was standing guard in some of the negotiations before the war. Seeing the diplomats trying to find something but…” Link shook his head again. “I wanted to grab them and just shout at them to find something to avoid the slaughter that was going to come.”

“Did you?”

Link shook his head. “I didn’t realize just how bad it was. How much our people hate one another…” He ran the cloth back up the blade again. “I got reassigned just after Ganondorf arrived to try and work through the negotiations.”

“Tarey Town Summit?”

“That was it.” He coughed a little. “I’m guessing too then you heard about the trouble.”

“Only a little. Someone tried to kill the Labrynnan Empress?”

“Yep. Prevented it, but it didn’t do well for negotiations I heard.” Link inspected the blade carefully then, watching the reflection. He could make out his face almost in the silver diamonds along its flat sides. “I was sent off to help oversee work with an archeological dig on the northern end of the Haunted Wasteland.”

Aveil’s face lost its color and she stopped sharpening her blade. “That was Arbiter territory…”

“Yeah. A storm had revealed some ruins and we wanted to take a look since a couple zuna traders had talked about it bearing marks of the Royal Family and the Sheikah. Was there… Six months before The Conjunction.”

“That mess with the monsters.” She started sharpening her blade again. “That was pretty profitable for us. Talk of a swamp that could be found if you went in the right caves…”

“Lorule.”

“Huh?”

“It’s…” He tilted his head and looked at the ceiling. “It’s another world.”

“Really?” She sounded disbelieving.

“Really.” Link looked back to her. “That entire event with the monsters was our world colliding with the space between dimensions and a parallel to our own.”

“You must’ve been there then.”

“Yep.” He finished with the oil and inspected the blade carefully again. Each of the goron glyphs were incredibly clear now. He held his wolf charm tightly and moved it carefully along the blade. It vibrated as it got close. There was magic, but he couldn’t tell any specifics. “We called that entire thing The Conjunction. Worked with some people to try and close every door we could find.”
“Given how vast the world is, that must’ve taken months.”

“Almost a year. But we did it.” He put the longsword back in its scabbard and started treating his arming sword. “Y’know, I’m a bit surprised we’re not at each other’s throats after what you said. Working for The Ganon.”

“We’re hunters.” She ran the whetstone along a little more before inspecting the edge of her sword. “We’re about as far from normal as you can get. What with the enhancements seared into our bones and spending most of our childhoods being turned into killers of the world’s filth.” Aveil winced a little as she twisted her wrist in a way that wouldn’t have if it wasn’t injured.

“You going to be okay?”

Her gaze glanced up at him. “I’m fine.” Aveil looked back at her wrist then. “A potion won’t fix that. It needs time.” She inspected the bandage before looking back at him. “Going to put us at a disadvantage, but we don’t have a choice here. Do or die time.”

“The water at that depth is going to help a little I think. Mikau said it’d be near freezing apart from some of the thermal vents.”

“Been that deep before?”

He shook his head. “Not that deep. But deeper than when we looked at the platform the other day.” The elixir on the lantern began to bubble and white steam started to rise out of it. With a thick cloth, Link removed the bottle from the lantern and placed it on the floor. “So… Do we have any idea really of what exactly Bellum is going to look like or its abilities?”

“Well, we know the statues Linebeck picked up were squidlike. If they were anything like the idols of the Sand Goddess or your Golden Goddesses, we could assume that Bellum’s avatars or greatest servants are like that. Or could be like the phantom we encountered.”

“And we don’t have anything that can scratch a phantom…” He let out a sigh as he oiled the arming sword. “So our goal is going to be I think more to contain this thing. Seal it in its tomb.”

“Which is what the frost bombs are going to be for.”

“Yeah. Sounded like Mikau wanted to make some undersea glacier there… Or at least use it to damage the tomb and hold it together so that when it finally did thaw it’d make the entire place collapse in on top of him and leave him even more trapped than he already is.”

“Mmm…” Her eyes widened and a small smile played across her lips. “What if he’s preparing it?”

“Preparing how? I’d guess with some sort of alchemy?”

“He said he was an agent for the zoras out of Great Bay in Termina. They could have others. He’s been sent ahead to help prepare and clear the way. Make sure any witches or sorcerers that come along later can do their work in peace without Bellum causing problems.”

“That’s a pretty solid plan, actually. Was something they taught the mages in the tower back home.”

“Your order had mages?”

He nodded. “Yeah. Yours didn’t?”
“Sort of.”

“Ah.”

“Most of the time we’d have tribal witches for help with magic. Would be worked out in the contracts usually.” She sheathed her scimitar then and leaned back against the ship’s hull. “There were a few times though we’d have liked to have had our own witches to do our work… Let me tell you. Especially when it came to setting traps for things like tracking the stalks of a desert manhandla. Oh. Or finding the nest of one of the thousand-year moldaraches and then holding its claws and stinger away so we can kill it quickly.” They felt the boat dip then and rise. There was a creaking sound as someone came down the stairs. Link glanced over to see Medli there. She was soaking wet and looked ready to collapse.

“You okay?” Link asked her.

“Just exhausted from flying between the ships,” she said. The rito stumbled a little before collapsing over the crate Linebeck used as a bed. “Mikau said he’d be over shortly to make sure you were ready for the dive.”

“We’re just waiting on him now,” Aveil said. She picked up her glass bottle with the mixture in it and eyed it carefully.

“Drink it before you go down. So you’ll have the most time before it works through your system and can get back up. You don’t want a case of the bends.”

“It’s actually supposed to prevent that,” Link said. “Mikau said it would allow us to adapt to the pressure differences like a zora does between the layers.”

“I figured, but… What about the time until it is worked through your body? What would happen if it ran out when you were still at a lower level?”

“Shouldn’t. It should last at least two days with how thick it is.” He picked up the bottle again. “… I’m still not going to drink this until I’m in the water though.” Link looked back at Medli as she lay over the box. “I don’t want Aryll to see the change.”

“Is it that toxic?”

“Looks it,” Aveil said. “Someone without our enhancements drinks it, they’ll be throwing up their stomach. And lungs… And liver…”

“Geez. I know that those things can be nasty but.”

“Be happy you’ve never seen an idiot highwayman drink a venomblood potion,” Link said.

“There’s gotta be a story behind that,” Aveil said.

“If there is I don’t think I want to hear it,” Medli said. “You two need anything to eat or things to prepare for the dive?”

Link shook his head. “Just that if we fail that we have some plan in place and word to get help.” He looked right at Medli then. “And… And please keep an eye on my sister.”

“I will.”
“Thank you.” He slowly got to his feet then. “Mikau say how long it would be until we reached the point to dive?”

“Couple more hours Linebeck says.” She eyed the black mixture in the bottle. “So, you have the one he gave you. What other two did you mix in?”

“Kaepora’s Vigil and Red Ice.”

“I can guess what the red ice does,” Aveil started, “but what does the other one do?”

“Endurance. Keeps me awake. And if it’s that dark down there, it’ll be hard to see. So it lets me see in the dark.”

“Sounds like the ones I mixed too.” She glanced at her armor that was hanging on a rack next to Link’s. “That thing doesn’t have a lot of insulation, so it’s going to be really cold down there. Then again, Termina’s waters are a lot warmer than out here.”

“I’m more worried about the pressure. Even with the potion. Going to the bottom of a lake or as deep as we went for the platform was one thing. But this…” He shook his head and looked to Medli. “When I went for the freighter, it was deep enough I was feeling the weight of the water on top of me. I can’t imagine what it’s going to be that far down. Hope the armor can take it.”

“Hope so too,” Medli said.

Chapter End Notes

Another week, another chapter! Nearing a big confrontation here! Just a little warning too. This might not be what a lot of people expect. But when it comes to things like old gods the ordinary is the first thing to go out the window.

Devnotes:
-A lot of this chapter is kinda going back and forth, but also lots of information to set up other things. Kinda disliked doing it, but with how it worked out, it could work I thought after the intensity of the previous fight against the phantom.
-Thinking on potion types for the characters to use, especially with the mutations Link and Aveil have, to adapt to such depths has been a fun exercise. To the best of my knowledge, there are no equivalents in the Witcher world. And though things like Zora Armor seem like they'd be fine for the depths we see Link usually goes to in his games, going to the deepest and darkest places on earth hold a wide number of other dangers.
-The biggest of those not being the creatures and monsters they might face, but the pressure and temperature at such depths. Because sunlight doesn't reach there, it's going to be VERY cold. Not counting geothermal vents.
-As for the water pressure... From the Encyclopedia Britannica website on the topic of pressure: "Pressure increases by about one atmosphere (approximately 14.7 pounds per square inch at sea level) with each 10-metre increment in depth; thus, abyssal pressures range between 200 and 600 atmospheres. Pressure presents few problems for abyssal animals, however, because the pressures within their bodies are the same as those outside them.” Meaning when his boots touch the ocean floor and can't see sunlight in The Abyss, that's, at minimum, a whopping 2,940 pounds per square inch spread across his frame and armor while experiencing temperatures around ZERO to
FOUR degrees Celsius (Between 32 and 39 degrees Fahrenheit)! But, clearly because of everything we have in the setting already, we can just BS it away with 'magic armor and mutations and a magic potion that keeps Link being turned into a frozen bloody smear on the ocean floor.'

Special thanks this week to draconianDarling! For their bookmark! And as always a huge thank you to everyone who takes the time to read, leave comments, kudos and of course bookmarks! I'll see you all next week! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome everyone!
The Abyss

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The sun was long gone when they reached their destination. For miles around, they couldn’t see any landmarks. Link stood on the deck, adjusting the armor he wore slightly. Mikau was sitting on the railing performing a last minute inspection of the blades on his fins while Aveil performed some stretches. Aryll came out from the bridge as they got ready. She still had her weapons on her and looked ready to fight if something emerged from the water, but also was carrying a large rope. Some of it dragged behind her.

“You ready?” she asked, worry written on her face.

“Yeah,” Link said. He handed her his lantern. “We’ll do exactly what we did last time when we dived for the platforms and use the lanterns as beacons to guide us back up.” He tapped the wolf charm around his neck. “I’ll be able to find it, don’t worry.”

“Hope so.” She reached for him and the brother and sister shared a hug.

“If something does happen, go with Medli.”

“Was planning on it anyways. They’ll still need help with how this has all gone.” She let go and slipped the rope from her shoulder. Aveil glanced over for a moment as she looked at the bottle of her potion.

“Let me know how that tastes.”

“Like boar shit I’m sure,” Aveil said, uncorking the bottle. She sealed her lips around the lip of the container and tilted it back. Her eyes clenched shut and she held her nose. Link could see tears slipping out of the corners of her eyes. As the last of the thick mixture left the bottle she dropped it and forced a swallow. She coughed twice as it took effect. Her skin grew paler and Link could see her veins starting to appear on her face. She pulled the facemask up and the faceplate down over her eyes before climbing over the railing.

“Time to go,” Mikau said. “It’ll take at least an hour for us to drop down to the plains. Then we’re walking.” He slung a large bag on his back as he finished checking his armor over.
“Okay,” Link said. He saw Aveil slip over the edge and drop into the water. He took his own potion then and uncorked it. It smelled chalky as he brought it to his lips. The second it touched his tongue, he felt it burn. Closing his eyes, he swallowed as much of it as quickly as he could. It tasted like fermented fish and eggs with too much salt as it boiled in his throat. He felt his eyes tear up and the elixir go to work. His heart quickened and he could feel his own pulse through his neck and wrists. He pulled his canteen to wash the taste out of his mouth as he climbed over the edge. Link left the canteen near the railing, where Aryll grabbed it and pulled the facemask up over his nose and mouth.

“Good luck down there big brother,” Aryll said.

He glanced over his shoulder for a moment. “Thanks.” Link took a deep breath then and stepped off over the railing. His feet broke the surface of the ocean. He treads water for a moment, seeing the zora and Aveil not far off. Mikau kicked his legs and dove like a porpoise below the surface. Aveil looked to Link and gave him a thumbs-up before she dove under as well. Link took one last look at the stars and a last gasp of the world above before activating the gems on the armor. He sank beneath the waves and looked into the blackness that was The Abyssal Plains.

The minutes passed. He could see Aveil and Mikau drifting nearby and into the depths. The zora was actively swimming down, while he and Aveil were allowing their suits’ magic and alterations to do most of the work. He felt the current gently pushing against his armor. Several minutes ago his breath had run out and he was breathing the water through the facemask and armor enchantments. The potion was doing it too, letting him avoid the sort of exhaustion that he’d felt when he’d done his first dive into the deep several years ago. Link looked down again, seeing the darkness coming towards him. Looking up, he could still make out the glow of the moon in the sky. Thinking back, he realized that by the time they were at, he’d have been on the floor of when he was looking for the destroyed frigate on his first solo assignment. Though it had been a dull dive, he had his charm and had spent some of the time talking to the twins back at The Tower. Here though, the others were silent. Aveil was focused on watching below her, as if expecting some monster to swallow her up.

It had been more than half an hour when the moonlight had gone and he couldn’t see any evidence of the surface. The only way he knew what way was down was how the potion mixture had let him see clearly in the near blackness and feeling the pull of gravity as he sunk even deeper. He watched the flickers of the bioluminescent life forms that swam in the dark moving about. Sometimes he got a glimpse of a passing angler fish or hatchetfish scurry by, but the further they went, the fewer creatures they saw. He felt the water grow colder and colder with each passing minute and he felt his armor creak as the weight of the water pushed against him.

It had been an hour by the time his feet touched bottom. His vision adjusted to see clearly around him. If not for the elixir, he’d have not been able to see a thing and have been so cold he would not be able to feel the weight of the water on top of him. Aveil landed not far off and he spotted Mikau
swimming cautiously nearby. Here he stood on what may as well have been on a barren alien world. Occasionally they’d see a perfectly transparent octorok or even massive isopods crawling along the plains, but other than that, there was not a single plant or animal. He took a couple heavy steps, the pressure from uncountable tons of water before he grew used-to it. Link gripped the wolf charm around his neck for a moment as he grew used-to moving and sent a small pulse of magic into it. The sand was kicked up slightly and he felt the pulse reach towards the surface. A minute later, he felt a small trace of energy return; the lantern hanging off the rope from Linebeck’s ship miles above.

“This way,” Mikau said. His voice was distorted from the water, but still clear enough to hear.

Link kicked off the ocean floor and flipped the fins of his armor out to start swimming in the direction of the zora. Aveil did the same and followed through the darkness.

“This is more barren than the Phantom Wastes,” she said. “You’d sometimes see a boar or two or wormsigns. But… Here…”

“Watch for some of the larger anglers and fangtooths,” Mikau said. The fangtooths are especially aggressive.”

“Fangtooths?”

“Big fish with teeth so large they can’t even close their mouths.”

“Been this deep before?” Link asked.

“Only read about it. Even I’m having trouble with this depth. Geozards are right at home though.”

“Sure we’re going to be running into those too…”

They kept going, soon coming to a dip along the ocean floor. Looking around though, it was clear this was not a natural valley, but rather a moat. Long covered bricks and rocks with sand appeared to have a ruined bridge across. Looking further, Link could barely make out broken spires, ancient temples and clay buildings. Most of it was long ruined, but there was also evidence that there had
been recent activity. After crossing the ruined bridge, Link set down on the ocean floor once more and looked about. Aveil landed next to him as they stood along an ancient road, leading to a massive city. Link started walking, cautiously forward. “Zepps was right,” he said. “It looks like there was an entire continent here at one point…”

“And now it’s a god’s tomb,” Aveil said. She pulled one of her scimitars as they walked along and came to the long destroyed walls of the city. Bones of dead whales and other massive oceanic life lay in some locations. As they passed a particularly large collection of bones, they noticed coral. Mikau stopped and landed on the floor to inspect it as the other two approached. Link recognized it as they’d seen it used by the geozards already. Some of it also looked like it had been broken off in careful, deliberate ways.

“I think we found the armory,” Mikau said. His fins flickered slightly. “Stay alert, we’re going to have company soon I’m sure.”

“Great,” Link said. He pulled the silver longsword from his back. The shield was left on the boat because he was sure it wouldn’t survive any impacts from Bellum when they found him and the pair of swords were lighter. In his other hand was the small crossbow. Watching Mikau, he saw the zora stop a few minutes later walking on the floor. They came to a great plaza. It looked like there had been a fountain in the center of it at one point and several other buildings. Link assumed one was a bazaar and another looked like it had a fancy face above its doors. Many frames were broken and he saw clearly as well what was unmistakably a triforce symbol in the center of the fountain. Tarnished and beaten, maybe even deliberately defaced by whatever power now called this place home, but he recognized it clearly. A little to the north was what looked like a ruined chapel, while to the West was unmistakably a massive castle up a hill that lay in ruins.

“We’re being watched,” he said. “You hear that?”

The two surface hunters shook their heads. Both were having trouble at this depth. At his remark though, they quickly moved to have their backs to one another and watched the ruined buildings. The ground began to shake and the distant castle broke apart. Looking over, in the darkness they saw a shape emerge. It was impossible to tell what exactly it was, but they could make out a massive shape and long tentacles. It was bigger than any of the three had ever seen before and moved with a great deal of speed, heading upward. Orange bioluminescence glowed along its tentacles and it kept swimming away.

“Was that Bellum?” Aveil asked.

“No, but I think we’re in the right place.” He removed the bag from his back and opened it. Within were several of the frost bombs they’d picked up. To his surprise, Link saw the fluid inside was red rather than blue. “Take a few. We need to find exactly where his tomb is and then seal every
entrance we can find.”

“You modified these,” Aveil said.

“Not easily.” He pulled four from the bag and slipped them into a set of leather rings along his belt. Aveil grabbed four and Link took the last set then. Once done, Mikau just let the bag sing to the floor slowly and looked about. “Since we’re working underwater it’ll freeze the entire blast solid as opposed to just the outer layers and creating frost like on the surface. And because it’s a red ice, only a cold flame will melt it.” He took a deep breath then, gills quavering slightly. “We’re going to get company soon… I can feel the vibrations in the water. They’re coming.”

“What are?” Link asked.

“More geozards I’d assume.”

Link’s grip on the longsword’s handle grew tighter. “And the water is going to make it difficult when the blood starts spilling.” His fingers holding the crossbow tensed and his index finger rubbed the trigger of the weapon.

“Just keep moving. Use your wind sign too to clear the water if you have to.”

“Okay.” The ground shook again and they saw another massive creature emerge from the ruined castle. Like the other, it was larger than anything any of the three hunters had seen before and numerous long tentacles that glowed with orange light. It started for the surface. Link at that instant had wished that the wolf around his neck would let him communicate with anyone above and warn them of whatever those monsters were.

As they started to head for the castle, Link spotted something moving in the water. Its shape suggested it was a geozard, but as it got closer, he saw it was bigger than a goron. Its skin was pale and he could clearly see most of its veins filled with black blood and thick massive bones. It wore shell-like armor, clearly crafted from the giant isopods that roamed the ocean floor and held a halberd made from the dark coral. Its milky eyes didn’t seem to do much, but Link realized it could never close its mouth either due to the massive numerous long fanged teeth. Gills on its neck flickered with every move. And it was not alone. Four others were with it.

“Phantoms coming from the ruins!” Aveil shouted. She turned in time to see one of the massive
translucent geozards fly through the water for her. She was barely fast enough from the liquid to avoid getting speared. Aveil stabbed its back with her sword as it passed. Black blood billowed from the wound like ink from a squid. Link ducked down as another came after them, stabbing the longsword upward as they went over his head. The blade’s puncture and the creature’s speed was all that was needed to slice it’s stomach open. He moved out of the way in time to avoid being covered in the blood that drifted in the water, but not fast enough to avoid being grabbed by another of the monsters. He had to fight the instinct to try and smash his fist into its jaw thanks to the sheer number of sharp teeth. Instead, he got the knife from its hiding spot in one of his bracers and jabbed it into the gills on their neck.

As he tumbled out of its grip, he saw Mikau swim upward, chased by two of the creatures. The zora gracefully spun around and swam right between them, the blades on his fins cutting his opponents open. Aveil was adapting as best she could underwater to avoiding strikes. He was shocked as well though at how fast such massive creatures were in their home environment.

Another was coming for him. Link thrust a hand outward as they got close and a pulse of green light and magic wind erupted from his palm. A flash illuminated the darkness, briefly blinding him from the way the air had snapped into existence from the magic. The geozard was knocked back violently and Link was disoriented as he tumbled in the opposite direction from the force of the sign. He managed to right himself though quickly. Aveil took the opportunity of its disorientation and swam into it. She skewered its back with her hookshot and made sure to drive the scimitar into the back of its neck. With a slash outward, she gutted the creature and let go as the blood filled the water.

Two more geozards came from the ruined plaza. One was caught by Mikau, who sliced through its legs to get around it. He kicked it away as the other grabbed him from behind. A flash of blue light arced around him and the geozard that had grabbed shook violently. The zora kicked the monster off him and watched as it vanished from the foul magic. He somersaulted in the water and dove back to the other two. Link blocked a swing from one of the creatures as it stood on the ocean floor with him while Aveil had her back to him, flipping in the water to avoid another of them that dove at her with a spear. As it passed, she fired her hookshot into its back. The creature swam violently, trying to shake her, but her grip held and she was reeled in to stab it repeatedly in the back.

He threw his hand out again, this time creating a snare with his magic. As the geozard took a step forward, the orange bands wrapped quickly around its ankles. It refused to stop though and made pained steps forward. Link raised his crossbow and fired the silver bolt right into one of its milky eyes. As its head snapped back, he stabbed through its heart and kicked off its body. Another tackled him into the ocean floor, sending sand flying upward and obscuring them both. Link kicked hard, forcing them to let go of him for an instant and he rolled out of the cloud before kicking off the floor and swimming up a little bit. From his position now he could see the phantoms coming from the castle. They moved slowly, but looked far nastier than the one they’d encountered in the tower. They carried massive axes and were far larger. Their armor looked ancient and with each step he could see strange growths along their bodies. It looked like they were eyes from the purple slime, but encased in odd growths. Knowing they didn’t have anything that could stop the phantoms, he quickly thought of a plan to stop them and pulled one of the modified frost bombs out and swam for their path.
He got a better look at them as they approached. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw Mikau dive into two more geozards with blue energy crackling around him. Black blood darkened the area around him and Aveil. It was quite clear their attackers would keep coming and he saw the zora grab her to pull her away from the growing number of geozards. Link turned back to the phantoms. They carried long heavy swords that looked far more ornate than anything he’d seen before. As they neared though, it became clear that they looked more like living organisms and their pommels were living eyes like the ones that had come from the slime. One raised its sword as it got close. Link jumped back and lobbed the frost bomb. He kicked his legs and swam as fast as he could. A few seconds later, the glass cracked and there was a red flash. The mixture in the vial was released and the animated armors were frozen solid in a thick red flowery explosion of ice. They’d be in there until some sorcerer was able to free them. Link saw Aveil and Mikau swim past him then. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw three more geozards coming their way. Link started kicking and sheathed his sword.

The zora spun around in the water with surprising grace and dove past him. “Keep going!” Mikau shouted at him. “Get to the castle!”

Link watched as he went head first into the geozards, the magic barrier around him flashing brightly as he sliced cleanly and suddenly through the abyssal beasts. He kept kicking and soon had caught up to Aveil. The two dove down into what had likely been the castle’s moat and landed on the ground.

Chapter End Notes

So, been a bit since one of these, huh? Well, a lot of things came up that prevented posting. But for the foreseeable future, it looks like posting will be every other week. I'll be trying for weekly, but if not, well, every other week until the end of the season. The plus side to this though is that this may mean the 3rd Season is far closer than we realize...

Devnotes:
-Bit of editing here and there. Old versions had that the elixirs changed their eyes to this blackness. But changed it because it felt like it didn't work well.
-Though we don't see a lot of it here, I did a lot of research into wildlife at the Abyssal Zones before writing this part. Some of the stuff down there is downright terrifying!

That'll be it for this week. See you next week, or the week after that with the next one! Thanks for reading, commenting, bookmarking and leaving kudos! And as always, keep being awesome everyone!
“Nice work with the ice,” Aveil said.

“Thanks.” Link pulled the crossbow from his belt again and looked carefully upward. “How’s the wrist?”

“Better from the cold water actually…” She inspected it for a moment. Mikau darted overhead at that moment and dropped to the floor with them, landing on his feet. “Still coming?”

“Of course,” he said. The zora pulled his necklace out and carefully ran his fingers over the shark teeth of it. “We’re close.”

“How can you tell?” Aveil asked.

“Your charms sense magic, yes?” He stuffed his necklace back into his shirt under his armor. “You probably haven’t noticed them shaking or reacting due to the water.”

Link gripped the wolf around his neck. It was faint, but indeed it was shaking in reaction to the magic surrounding them. He let go of it. “So… Bellum is here.”

“It looks like it.” The ground shook violently around them. The bricks that had lined the moat appeared as the sand that had settled on them rose from the vibrations. The three quickly kicked off the ground and saw most of the hill’s slope be ripped apart from long tentacles. Another leviathan had emerged, but this time they got a far better look at it. It looked like it had once been a whale, but the size was far larger than any whale Link had seen before. It had long clawed arms in place of its flippers and instead of a traditional tail, several dozen tentacles. Each one ended in a tentacular club and held a giant orange and yellow eye that had the sucker around it, to say nothing of several smaller suckers that were scattered about the spindly limbs. It opened its mouth wide and started to swim for the surface. Unlike the others though, it appeared to head East, gliding over them in the water. If not for how twisted and strange the creature was, it might’ve been awe-inspiring to see it swim overhead. Instead, Link was sure one of these leviathans was the reason why the platforms had been ripped out.

“What is that thing?” Aveil asked. “That’s bigger than the largest worm ever seen…”

“I don’t know,” Mikau said. “But we know it’s just a sample of Bellum’s power. Even in his current state.”

“Bellum is in the castle then?” Link asked.

“I’d believe so given those monsters.”

“Let’s get to it then before more geozards show up.”

They had entered the ruined castle. Most of the ways were blocked off from time and shifting of
the ruins, but they could still make out plenty of where royalty had once lived. Link saw a couple more defaced triforce symbols on the walls and he couldn’t help but wonder if this had once been part of Hyrule. The ruins were ancient, yet some of them did look a little more contemporary than he’d like to admit. There were no signs of life there, though as they continued, Mikau informed them that the geozards were still coming and now prowling outside.

They came to a shrine in what had likely been the throne room. It was an extravagant hall with stone columns that ensured the ceiling remained in place. Link saw at where the throne was an altar stood. Dozens of small statues stood on it along with bones and a couple gutted fish. He’d seen strange cults before and their rituals, but was surprised they hadn’t found any of the geozards there worshiping their god.

“Don’t touch them,” Mikau said. “We shouldn’t disturb the altar.”

“Something terrible will happen if we do, I’m sure of it,” Link said.

“Glad we’re in agreement,” Aveil said. “These must be the statues that Linebeck got in trouble for. Well, ones like them.” She inspected them carefully, but did not touch them.

Link gripped his wolf and looked around the throne room more. Something was going on with his vision. The columns seemed to move on their own slightly. As if they were of rubber rather than marble. His hand went for the swords on his back and the crossbow on his hip, but stopped. He couldn’t tell why he’d stopped when his instincts told him to go for them, but every other part said not to. He could swear he saw people walking about now as well. But his instincts stuck with him. His eyes shifted to the right and he turned back to the other two. Mikau seemed to realize it too and kicked off the ground. Aveil then did as well as the floor began to quake. Link grabbed his head as he floated there. He saw the castle and the land in its prime. Bright green fields and dozens of people who walked the streets. Then the clouds darkened and tentacles ripped through the land. The people were in a panic as they were driven mad. The entire city and rest of the nation where the monarch once ruled form this room was pulled beneath the waves.

When he opened them again, they found themselves drifting in the throne room, but it was covered in the purple slime. Dozens of orange eyes followed their movements and seemingly swam on their own there. The wall behind the altar was broken. What they saw made no sense. Orange light glowed from a sun eclipsed by a moon that was shattered. Rocks drifted in the abyss of the stars. The water around them didn’t feel right. It was warmer.


Link felt something scratching on the back of his neck. He reached his hand back, but there was nothing there as it intensified. He opened his mouth to speak, but the only sound he heard was thousands of whispers. Mikau stared at the impossibility before them, perfectly still with eyes wide. Aveil clenched her eyes shut and reached back as well. The world grew dark and the two hexers collapsed, the voices pulling them into unconsciousness.

There was the sound of rain in his ears and cold on his face. When Link opened his eyes, he found himself in a cave. He slowly got to his feet, finding he wasn’t in the zora scalemail but rather the bright blue of his Chosen’s tunic. He still had his swords on his back.

*You've come… thisss-far. Don't need to sttttoooop now, Champion.*
He quickly glanced around, seeing nothing but darkness. “Hello?”

_You aren’t alone, Champion. We are... here? Here to show you truthfully... the truth. You should... walk out. Here._

He slowly reached for the sword on his back, but he felt something hold his hand in place. Like a rope that kept getting tighter the more he tried to fight it. “Where are the others?”

_Sssaaaafse. We need. Them. Like you. We waited for this day. But. This. World moves so slowly. So. Simply. They wanted it... that. Way? They. Wanted ordered. Unnaturally. Imperfect-ly?_

He was sure he knew who the voice belonged to now and it made him freeze. His instincts kicked in and he watched carefully. His focus seemed to become sharper and he could feel his muscles tensing, ready for action. Even though he was sure nothing he could to would stop it.

_You are. Imperfect. Unnatural. Like the weeping sad sand... ch-child? They did not order you. or.... her. They did not pre... pervert you. They did not think their own would bastardize their work. Their unnaturally natural ssss-servants?_

Seeing there was no other way to go in the cave, he reluctantly took the voice’s advice. In moments, he saw the night sky in the rain. There wasn’t a cloud in sight though. What he did see was the moon in the sky, shattered open with pieces of it drifting next to long dark tendrils. At its exposed heart was a great orange eye, watching the world below. The land was familiar, though strangely smaller than what he was familiar with. He could see Castle Town below, even though he saw he was standing on a mountain. The rain landed in puddles, but when he looked, the water did not ripple with impact. He felt the cool wetness of it on his skin and clothes, but it did not stick and remain.

_Yet. You. And her. Yes her. The ones abandoned. Alone. Perverted by Their creations. Are... can... bring a great justice to creation._

“And they will thank you for it,” a woman said.

He spun around, seeing a face he hadn’t thought about in a long time. Only, it wasn’t her. He didn’t see the beauty mark under her left eye, or small scar on her neck. Her arms and legs were too long and waist too thin. Her nose was too straight and eyes too big. Her vibrant red hair wasn’t bright enough either and she didn’t have the accent he’d once adored. Every instinct of Link’s told him this wasn’t right. “You’re not Marin,” he said in a level voice.

“They can return me to you though. They can undo all the suffering in this world. Every injustice you’ve seen and read can be undone in an instant. I know you don't want to see the wars continue. To see more innocents killed.”

He turned away, taking a single step and suddenly finding himself in Castle Town. Like everything else here, his mind was shouting that this wasn’t real. His instincts told him to grab the sword on his back and cut through, but as he tried, he couldn’t. Just as before. In spite of the dark, people were cheerful. They were talking and singing and trading. Hylian and gerudo side by side and a clear peace in the world, but each wasn’t natural. Just like the woman still at his side, their arms and legs were too long. Their eyes were too wide. They lacked the blemishes and scars that punctuated normal beings. The fountain didn’t bear the old crest of the Royal Family though. There was something else there that he did not recognize. It looked like a sun. At its heart was the pulsating nucleus of a morpha. Just like the one he and Ruto had faced. “This isn't right.”
See how nothing needs to change. We can undo. Undo Their curse. Undo Their o-oh-ordering.
And be a hero to this world. Make this world natural once more. How it should be. And once
natural. No more pain. No more suffering.

“I know it's what you want, Link,” the false-Marin said. He didn’t turn to face her. Instead looking
up at the shattered moon and the great tendrils spiraling out from the center of it and the great
orange and yellow eye looking back down at him. “That you've spent so much of your life trying to
help people. And you have! You've done so much. And been so badly hurt too... I hate seeing you
get hurt. But we can change that. Make it better.”

Fix. Fix everything. Safe. Save everything,

Link was having none of this. He tried again to reach for his sword, but his arm refused. He felt a
pain in his wrist as something clenched around it. “This isn't real. Stop showing me this.”

Yes. It isn't. But it is your dream. And. And hers? And his. And his. And hers. And theirs and
they dream of this too.

“Isn't it amazing?” she asked, moving closer next to him. “We're all dreaming this together. The
whole world. Dreaming of peace. Prosperity. No more war.”

“But I know what you want! What it means! I've seen the mutants! And the Leviathans!”

We can. Can fix that. Change that, Champion.

He shook his head. “Not like this. We'd be bending our knees and giving up our freedom.” The
pain in his left wrist tightened as he felt something else clenching around his right. He struggled a
little against the invisible force.

You speak as if that is a joy. A... a gift from Them. Its a lie. They. Did it. Did to escape Their
responses? No. No, responsibility. No accountability. No peace. No joy. Just the curse they
placed. On their imperfect servants.

“You speak of The Goddesses...”

The voice hissed in his mind. The world rippled around him for a moment. He saw patterns and
swirls and eyes and faces where there shouldn’t have been. Yet, the way they fit in with the world
made sense. The look of the false-Marin next to him rippled with it. Her nose seemed to become an
eye for a second. The folds of her dress for an instant flickered with faces. We See. See the flames
cut the rock. Slaughter the true And perfect. Perfect silenced. Suffer under unjust laws from
Their Their... false wise? Charlaton? Fake? And And joy extinguished. Reshaped by Them. To
follow. Uphold the unjust, imprison the truth.

“They did it so they could leave this world, Link. They destroyed it and moved on in such a way
that they abandoned what they did.” With the blink of an eye, the streets became empty. It was
him, Marin and the voice of the dreaming god.

They. They've done this to countless worlds. Countless. Aeons. Upon aeons. Unnumbered souls.
Souls burdened by Their... c-c-cruses?

Link shook his head. He was always sure that there was another side to the legends he’d heard.
“Even if that's true,” he began, “your alternative isn't better.”

“But it is how we're supposed to be. All of us. All a part of a perfect order.”

He turned from her, starting to seek a way through the streets and away. There had to be some way out. The rain continued. Puddles failed to ripple as the water hit them. Then he saw a figure. Tall and slim, almost like a twili, but its skin was pale. The arms were too long, as were its legs and even its neck. It wore no clothes and had no characteristics to define it as male or female. With a shriek, it ran at him. Again, he tried to grab his sword, but could not. Thinking quickly, he wondered and swept his hand out, fingers in the sign of the wind. The world rippled like water and the shrieking figure was knocked back. It drifted, as if it was in the water, spinning head over heels and slowly away. Link grabbed the crossbow from his hip, finding he could at least use that and fired. The bolt found home and the figure vanished in smoke and violet slime. He heard clanking behind him then, and more shrieking

_The Truth of Creation. The Truth They didn't accept. And in turn... turn hurt so many. And though you are not bound by those laws, you choose still to follow them. P-perhapsssss... Your hand merely is needed to o-o-open the way and not the will..._

Glancing over his shoulder, Link saw a phantom. This one looked polished and shone brightly. Gold trim covered the seams of its armor, while its eyes in the slits of its helm glowed orange. It pulled the sword from its side and lumbered towards him. Two more of the slim, inhuman figures came charging past it, towards him. Link quickly reloaded and fired the crossbow again, skewering one in the head. The other got close and swept its claws into him. They tore at his tunic, yet no damage occurred to it. He still felt the claws dig into his stomach and the pull of the fabric and mail. Link kicked and struck it with another wind sign, knocking it away and into the phantom. A second phantom emerged to his right, swinging its blade towards him. He rolled back, knowing there was nothing he could do to stop them and fled deeper into this strange world.

_The offer remainssss for now... Fight your curse, Champion._

The city twisted around itself. He would go down one alleyway to find himself at the start of it again. The creatures would appear in front of him one moment and behind him the second he turned. There was the clanking of the phantoms still, growing louder. Falling back on his training, Link quickly looked for a way to lose them. He doubted it’d be possible, but it might at least buy him some more time. Glancing around, he spotted something that looked like vines on the side of a building. He wondered if they’d actually hold as he pulled his clawshot from his belt. He nearly fired, but saw the vines move. An orange eye rolled out from the center and the vines began to wrap themselves around each other into five long, ropy purple tentacles. Two more of the strange creatures appeared on the vines as well, emerging out of the waving patterns. At the end of each tentacle was a single long scythe. These had to be the ropas Midna had referred to when he’d talked to her at the tower. One immediately jumped for him, its scythes planting firmly in the dirt where he’d just been.

He flicked his fingers, a gout of flame shooting from them. The beast squealed as the flesh boiled as a second jumped for him. Link rolled back, sparks jumping from his hand as he grabbed his crossbow. The third was nearly on top of him then as he fired. It flipped, one talon remaining in the ground as it turned itself upside down. There was no way to tell though which part of it was its top and which was the bottom. The glowing orange and yellow eye only gave him an idea of which way it was looking. By the time he’d loaded a second bolt, it jumped on him, wrapping the tentacles around his arms. One talon rose up and stabbed towards him. He jerked his head left,
getting his cheek slashed open instead of the scythe being driven into his throat. His hands were still free, even if the crossbow had been knocked out of it. With it, he threw his weight against the wall of the building and slammed his palm into it after flicking his fingers. Another burst of fire erupted from it, causing the ropa to squeal in pain. It let go, falling into the dirt and flailing wildly. The tentacle closest to his palm split apart and fell to the ground with it.

By that time the others had caught up with him and one of the thin figures jumped for him, howling. On instinct, he rolled to the side, grabbing the scythe that had once been attached to the ropa’s tentacle and stabbed it into the humanoid abomination. Black blood spurted out of the wound before it collapsed and vanished in smoke and slime. The phantom that was accompanying them was getting closer. Looking around, Link saw he’d be overwhelmed in moments as another ropa fell from the side of the building. He glanced around, quickly looking for a way out, only seeing one. Link readied one of the modified frost bombs that Mikau had given him and primed it. He began to count, channeling energy to be ready for an attempt to jump past the monsters. He got to three before the phantom and ropa went for him, followed by the others. Link dropped the frost bomb and rolled between the phantom’s legs in a flash of green magic. He kicked off the ground and ran as he got to five. A flash of red light and wave of ice billowed out of the blast, freezing the entire mob.

“Too close,” he said aloud to himself. He took one step when the world began to quake around him. The buildings shook, the patterns in them becoming even clearer and bizarre. Slate stones began to look more like patches of flesh and circles looked more like eyes. Cracks looked like sick worms. He felt the scratching on the back of his neck again. Along with the pain in his wrists. He reached back, feeling the pain in them as whatever force held them in place fought back. As he did, he began to hear the whispers again and a pain along with the scratching. His hand reached the back, feeling something wet and sticky on his hand. Barbs ripped through his palm as it made contact. He gripped it, the whispers growing louder and more numerous in his ears as he tugged whatever was on him off. The strange patterns that made the world warped again as he pulled it off and heard a loud squealing. The world seemed to fall apart around him then entirely. Looking at what was now in his hands, it looked like one of the ropas, only it was far smaller. The center of it, where the wild waving tentacles were all connected also appeared to be in a hardened shell of sorts, with a single long bone spike in the middle of it that was coated in blood. Gravity vanished and he felt as he was falling into darkness.

Link fell for moments. It felt like hours one moment and seconds the next. He let go of the small ropa-like monster and watched it dissolve away into the black as his feet landed. It was strange though. The speed he had been falling would’ve killed him, yet it felt more like he’d just dismounted from Epona with how his boots touched the ground. He looked around, seeing nothing still. Looking at his hands, they were fully illuminated though. As if he was in the sun. But there was still no source of light around him. Cautiously he took a step, feeling and hearing the creaking of wood before making out he was standing on a ship. The world became clearer and once more, he could see the shattered moon above him and the great orange eye looking down at him as the tendrils drifted in the dark. There were dozens of other ships there as well. Ravaged and broken and trapped in a sea of the violet slime.

You merely delay the inevitable, Champion. You are not bound by Their laws and your choice has been made. We made the offer and you have... refused it. Refused to see the truth of Their desires and Their selfish actions to create without consequence. You and the sand child were but one opportunity. A billion stars may be born, live their lives and die in the space between worlds before we are free once more. But one day we will be free of this prisssssson.
The slime began to bubble and rise, acting like one massive morpha. The ruined ships were consumed, ripped apart by great tendrils one by one. Link saw it was rising as well on the ship he stood. The mast was grabbed by one slimy tentacle and snapped like kindling. It seeped through the deck, slipping around his feet and ankles. He struggled, but failed to free himself. The boat was pulled down, with him. He struggled more, fighting the tug of the slime before his head was pulled under with a sickening sucking sound. He felt fluid in his lungs and began to cough.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everybody! Been a bit since one of these got posted, huh? Thankfully things are getting a little calmer and I can start posting with a degree of regularity again. There'll also prolly be another of The Hera Archives pieces posted pretty soon here as well.

Devnotes:
- Google DeepDream software gave some of the ideas to how to describe the "prison" itself. If you want to see some really trippy and in some cases downright terrifying imagery of just normal things, go look it up. That said, I take zero responsibility for any cries of ‘WHAT THE HELL?!’ or variations thereof that you may shout or react to upon seeing these things. Though it can create some pretty interesting images, it can with alarming ease create the stuff of nightmares.
- Something with the power of Bellum for the fic (like seriously, the only things that are even on his level are The Goddesses themselves) would, even in his state here of not quite being in the world, would prolly easily be able to influence things so close to his prison to the point of even pulling the consciousness of anyone close enough into it and play merry hell with it! I also felt that, though it would never happen, Bellum could have been one of the most terrifying villains in the entirety of Zelda canon up there with Majora if they'd just kept playing up the eldritch and unknowable aspects of him. But we get Oshus explaining everything in a neat and tidy package at the end of the Phantom Ship dungeon, reducing him to pretty much a Saturday Morning Cartoon villain as opposed to an unknowable horror from The Abyss.
- Part of the idea also behind this chapter came from, ironically enough, the very old Warcraft 3 art book. I remembered a quote in it starting for The Horde section and it started "when bad guys look in the mirror, do they see bad guys?" So, that kinda went along with Bellum talking here.
- Changing the ropas up to be these nasty five-tentacled things was kinda the same reason why the dead hand became something that looked more like it could've crawled out of Dark Souls. The regular ropa, though freaky as hell, just doesn't look all that threatening. They were originally gonna be a bit more like the regular ones from A Link to the Past, as an anemone can move to a degree, but the change to them came from, well, not to give too much away, but they need to move in an environment that isn't in water...

That'll do it for now. Special thanks this week goes to hehehe426 for their recent bookmark and comment on the last chapter! As always though guys, a huge thanks to everyone who reads, leaves comments, kudos and bookmarks. You guys rock! Keep being awesome! I'll see you soon with another chapter!
In the blink of an eye, he saw darkness, wheezing and struggling to breathe in the chilly water of The Abyssal Plains. His hands shook as he struggled to get oriented. His arms and legs felt like they’d fallen asleep as he suddenly realized his face mask was down. His instincts kicked in and he grabbed at the mask, pulling it back up over his mouth and nose. Once there, he began to hack and cough, finding himself drifting in a room. He forced himself to breathe, expelling as much fluid as he could thanks to the magic of both his armor and his face mask. After a minute, he was breathing normally and his vision had cleared enough that he could see where he was. Drifting not far away was the same ropa-like creature that he’d seen earlier. It showed no signs of life. He wasn’t in the room that had the strange portal to the stars and broken world. Instead, it looked like a holding cell of some sort. He still had his weapons but there was no sign of Aveil or Mikau. A large block of red ice had formed over a window out of the cell.

_We will be free of this prison one day… But we can still make… Pr-Pr-preparations…_

Link jumped slightly as he heard the voice in his head. He had to get out of here. There would be no victory against Bellum. There was no way to repair the damage that had been done to the prison. The only comfort was that he was clearly still weak and trapped under the ocean and the continent that had been brought down on top of him and the way into his prison. It was clear to him though that he needed hexers to truly completely free the old god. He could get this information to Zelda and others as well as long as he still was breathing. More immediately though, he had to find Aveil and Mikau. Looking about his cell, Link saw a small hole that had not been completely blocked off by the red ice. He immediately pulled a bomb from the bag on his belt and lit it with a flicker of his magic. Sparks flew from the fuse as he stuffed it into the hole and backed away as far as he could, throwing up his barrier as well. A muffled blast and flash of vaporized water erupted from the bomb and rippled outward. It made a hole that he could squeeze through, even if it’d take a second. He pulled himself out, the old bricks crumbling slightly at his touch before the ruined wall began to collapse. Link kicked and got free, floating about a foot off the floor. He drifted to the floor, looking carefully and alert. The bricks and ground didn’t seem to react like it had before. There were no strange patterns in the surroundings.

A couple minutes passed before he saw a couple large patches of red ice. A trio of geozards were trapped in it, with one of them having a limb sticking out of the block. Not far off, he spotted another cell that had been ripped open and another of the strange ropa creatures floating in it. It was missing a tentacle it looked like as well. A moment later, he saw the head of a geozard floating by. He broke into a run, pulling his sword from his back and turned to what had once been the main guard room. There was Aveil. She stood with a scimitar drawn and the headless corpse of a geozard slowly dissolving. Her head shot up, hand going for the hookshot on her hip.

“Aveil!” he shouted.

The gerudo hexer’s hand stopped and fell slowly to the side. “Link? That you?” she asked.
“Last I checked.” He watched her carefully, looking for any signs that she was something like the false memory of Marin. “Are you, you?”

She nodded a little, sheathing her blade. “I think so.” Aveil looked back. “Have you found Mikau?”

He shook his head. “I just woke up in a cell with something like a ropa on my back.”

“Great.”

“Any luck?”

“Not yet. There was evidence of fighting when I managed to get that thing off, but, no sign of him.” She signed a little. “I haven’t even been able to get a trace on him with my charm.”

Link immediately tried it then, knowing his own charm might be able to given who had made it. His fingers clasped around the wolf and there was a pulse that echoed from it. The water rippled a little around him, but he sensed nothing other than something incredibly strong in the cells they’d just came from and another above them. “How much have you looked around down here?”

“The cell I was in and the west wing.” She pointed to her left. “No sign of him. Though I don’t think there’s any more geozards around at least.”

“We’ll probably run into some more soon enough. Let’s go upstairs then.” He started for the stairs.

“We have another problem too.” Aveil started right behind him. “I’m feeling my elixirs starting to wane.”

Link stopped at the top of the stairs and focused as well. She was right. His were as well. Already, he was noticing he wasn’t seeing things as clearly as he could with the Kaepora’s Vigil in his marbled veins. He started to feel the nipping of the cold a little more through his armor of The Abyssal Plains. “How long do you think we have?”

“Maybe an hour or two?”

Link felt his heart jump a little. He immediately began to wonder just how long they’d been at this depth. “It’ll take us at least an hour to get to the surface.” He turned to face Aveil again. “Does he have any kin or people we could contact if we can’t find him in time?”

“The ambassador was looking for him back on Dragon Roost.” She glanced down one of the halls of the dungeon as they heard something gargling. “I have a couple people in Termina too that could get a message to Great Bay. Someone there has to know him.”

“Okay. Good.”

“Still going to try to find him?”

“Yeah. But we do need to leave before the elixirs completely fade. We need to get this information to people who will be able to better prepare against Bellum.”

“Agreed.” With that, they quickly went up the stairs and found themselves in the ruined courtyard of the castle. The ruins were different now. Though Link could see how they were still influenced by Hyrulean designs and architecture, there were small places that looked off. Some places looked more like gerudo architecture while others he didn’t recognize at all. Two doorways were sealed
off with red ice, and there was evidence of a fight as well. Broken coral blades littered the ground along with shattered isopod armor. In the center though, partially encased in red ice was a giant pulsating pod. It looked almost identical to the ones that they’d seen in The Tower of the Gods, apart from its size. Link looked at Aveil and then up.

“Get above it and drop the last of our frost bombs I think,” she said.

“That’s what I was thinking.” He pushed off the ocean floor and kicked, pulling himself upward with his arms as well. As he reached a good height, he could’ve sworn he’d seen the shattered moon and stars of the dream world. The eye in the moon was looking down at him as the pod began to gurgle. Link grabbed one of the frost bombs out of its pouch and looked down just in time to see it split open. Black ink and violent slime clouded the courtyard. He found himself disoriented and unable to see which way was up. Suddenly, he was struck by something. The unarmed frost bomb flipped out of his hand, drifting in the water and slowly falling. Pinned against a wall, he saw it was a massive tentacle. A single great eye was on the end of it, twitching and watching. As the cloud cleared a little, he could make out a massive octorok. He’d only read about ones this big that prowled the oceans. It was easily the size of Linebeck’s ship, with a second long tentacle with an eye on the end of it sweeping around. Its mantle was covered in bone and rather than the point and fins at the top of it, was a massive opening that had smaller eyes around it. A ropa crawled out of it, sticking close to the top. In place of the snout most octos had, and under a massive eye, was a massive jagged beak. When it opened, Link saw another ropa crawl out of it, its scythed tentacles creeping up the creature’s mantle and onto the bone.

As the eye inspected him, the harpoon from her hookshot skewered it. It pulled back, swinging wildly and letting Link free. Dark blood billowed like a cloud in the water as it backed away. Link looked up as his feet landed on the ocean floor once more. The wounded tentacle fell fast towards him. He rolled out of the way as it crushed the wall he’d just been pinned against. He grabbed his silver sword off the ground and immediately put a plan together. He dug into the pouch again, finding another of the frost bombs. Feeling around, he counted two. “Aveil!” he shouted. “How many bombs?!”

The gerudo hexer kicked upward as a glob of slime was spat at her by the creature’s beak. One of the ropas jumped off, swinging its limbs to swim towards her. She dropped in the water as it got closer and checked her own bomb bag. “Two!” she shouted back. “Freeze it in place and take that big eye out?”

“What I was thinking!”

“Getting close is gonna be tricky!” She pulled her scimitars as the ropa neared. With a swing, she hacked into one of its tentacles. With her other, she stabbed it into its eye. The monster squealed and twitched wildly. Aveil hopped back, the water slowing her movement but just enough to avoid being dismembered by the scything blades of the beast.

He pulled the hand crossbow then and held it up as he sheathed the sword.

“Hope you got something to tie the bomb to the arrow with!” She ducked another swing from the ropa to cut it apart with her blades.

He didn’t need to be told twice and pulled a found one of his regular bombs. He pulled the fuse from one of them and quickly tied one of the modified frost bombs to a bolt. Link was sure as soon as it was hit, it’d realize what he was doing. That would mean keeping it from moving easily. He glanced up to see Aveil was who it considered the biggest threat at the moment. One of the
tentacles swept at her, but missed as ropa jumped for her.

She expertly blocked one swing from a ropa to catch a tentacle. Another stab to the eye and the creature burst into smoke and slime. She raised a hand, shooting ice and frost through the water. It not only froze solid in front of her, but caught one of the ropas as well. It drifted upward moments after her sign ended.

Link loaded the bolt into the crossbow and twisted the cap of the bomb to arm it. Carefully, he aimed, holding it with both hands at a tentacle. He waited for it to come down, crashing into the ocean floor and fired. The bolt pierced its flesh effortlessly. It didn’t even notice until the bomb went off. A flash of red light and ice solidified near-instantly around the midsection of the tentacle. It jerked in shock, struggling against the ground, but it was held fast. It still had the second tentacle though and swept it wildly towards Link. A trio of ropas shot out of its top, quickly swimming down towards him. He ran, quickly getting his second frost bomb ready. He spun around in time to see the first of them nearly on top of him, only for it to get stabbed by Aveil’s hookshot. The chain pulled the monster away. Link dropped the crossbow to grab the silver sword. As one neared, the blade left its scabbard in a single, fluid, pirouette as he shouted. It cleaved through the ropa’s core, slicing its eye in half.

“Link! Tentacle!” Aveil shouted.

He didn’t need to be told twice, quickly grabbing the crossbow and rolled out of the way as the mutant octorok’s tentacle slammed into the ground where he’d just been. He twisted the cap and threw the bomb rather than attach it to a bolt. In seconds, there was another red flash and ice encased most of the tendril, pinning the monster in place. Realizing it was trapped, it began to scream. The water rippled around it and with it, the skin of reality warped. Link saw the walls of the courtyard ripple away for a moment. The watery world was replaced with the rain and barren land of the nightmare he’d escaped. Its cries were silenced though as Link saw a flash of red obscured by the beast. He assumed Aveil had thrown one of her bombs into the creature’s beak now that it couldn’t use the main two tentacles. The monster struggled against the ice, but remained trapped. Link swam to the front of the beast, finding a cluster of red ice holding its beak open along with what looked like two ropas caught in the blast. Aveil was already at work stabbing the eye with her scimitars. Link joined in, driving the silver sword all the way to the hilt over and over. In moments, it had ended. The creature stopped moving and the body began to slowly dissolve into ash and slime.

The two hexers caught their breath and looked about the ruined courtyard. They looked, seeing no signs of any other geozards or ropas. Not even a single phantom had come to investigate the commotion. Their minds immediately turned though to the one who had brought them down here. Without a word, Link pulled the sword out of the monster’s eye socket and sheathed it. He hooked the crossbow to his hip once more as Aveil placed her weapons back where they belonged.

“Okay, now we find Mikau,” Link said. Aveil nodded in agreement.

“We stick together though.”
They began to search the ruined castle. It was strange though. They didn’t encounter any monsters. They found phantoms, standing silently and unresponsive. Like some of the sets of knight armor he’d seen at the Royal Palace before the war. Link stood in front of one, looking it over carefully. There was no glow in its eyes. No reaction when he tapped its chest with his sword’s pommel.

“Link! Down here!” Aveil shouted.

He turned immediately and headed in the direction of her voice. There was an archway encased in red ice. Link recognized it. “This was where we found the altar,” he said.

“Through that ice,” the gerudo said.

Link could swear he heard a whispering in his ear again. It was unclear what it was saying, but he was sure it was the voice of Bellum once more. “Not sure if we should go back through if we could.”

“I’m inclined to agree, but I haven’t found any signs of Mikau, other than one geozard that looked like someone had shoved a frost bomb down its throat.”

He bowed his head. Already he could feel the potions that let him function at a depth that not even zoras dared go beginning to fade. The chill of the water was starting to penetrate his armor. “Think he could be behind there?”

“Or anywhere else in the ruins.” She gave his shoulder a pat. “Maybe he already headed up?”

Link glanced up at her, shoulders still slumped. He appreciated the gesture, but they both knew it was unlikely. Without a body though there was no way to confirm he was dead. At that thought, the whispers grew in his ear once more, as if they recognized it. Mikau didn’t have the mutations like him and Aveil that offered some degree of protection it seemed. He pushed the thought from his mind. Though he hadn’t known the zora long, he was sure that he’d rather die than allow himself to become a puppet like the mutated pirates. After a moment, he took a deep breath. “Let’s go,” he said.

She nodded in agreement. The two started back for the courtyard and began their ascent. As he drifted higher and the Abyssal Plains vanished in the darkness, Link prayed silently that the zora was somehow safe.

The whispering, though fading in his ears, reminded him how unlikely that was.

It was a relief when he breathed fresh air again, even if the night air was chilly. Aveil burst through the surface next to him and they looked around. They saw the lanterns of the two ships a short ways away. On the top of the bridge of Linebeck’s ship one lantern flickered in a pattern to the ship across the way. Link’s vision was still adapted to the dark from the elixir and he easily managed to get over to Linebeck’s ship, Aveil right with him.

“Hey up there!” Link shouted. “Can you drop us a rope?”

“Link?” Linebeck called back. “Where are you?” A light shone over the edge. Link heard Aveil swearing in gerudo as she shielded her eyes. He did the same but without the foul language.
“Careful with that light! Our eyes aren’t suited for brightness yet!”

“You all alive down there?”

“Mikau didn’t make it. Can you just throw us a goddess-damned rope already?” Aveil snapped. “These potions are going to wear off soon and I’d rather be already in a hammock when they do!” A second or so later, a thick and knotted rope was dropped into the water. She grabbed a hold of it and climbed up. Link was right behind her.

“By the Goddesses Golden Garters… What did you three do down there?” Linebeck asked.

“Killed a really big monster,” Link said. He was blocking the surreal dream out of his mind. Merely thinking of it made him wonder if he could hear Bellum’s voice whispering again to him. He pulled himself over the railing as Aveil nearly collapsed on the deck. He saw smears of blood on it as well. One of the pirates who had joined the ship to help out was using a mop to try and swab some of it off into the sea. He quickly looked to Linebeck. “What happened up here?”

“We saw these three big things break the surface,” Lurch the goron pirate grunted. “One right between our ships!”

Link and Aveil immediately looked at each other. “…The leviathans.”

He nodded. “You saw them too then.” He folded his arms.

“What about them?” Aveil asked. She forced herself to stand upright.

“They tried to attack us!” Linebeck cried. “Some of the pirates went nuts too when they surfaced! Pulled their weapons and started fighting and shouting about a dream!”

“But you drove them off?” Link asked. He pulled his hat off and the facemask down. The goron and the other pirate that was on watch gasped as they saw him not as a man, but rather a monster; pale skin clinging to his bones and bulging dark veins were visible even in the low light of the lanterns.

“You look like one of them…” The pirates were staring. He could see them having tensed considerably. The goron clenched his fists. “Your eyes aren’t black like theirs with no white. But you both look like them.”

“It’s the potions,” Medli said. Link glanced over in time to see the rito emerge from the ship’s cabin. “Hexers have mutations that allow them to use special potions.”

Link nodded as Aveil slouched against the guard rail. “Is Aryll okay?”

“A little shaken from seeing the guy she was playing a game of cards with suddenly turn gaunt and screaming, but she’s fine.”

He breathed a sigh of relief. The goron slowly unclenched his fists. “What else happened with the leviathans?”

“Jolene hit one of them with a broadside when it came after her ship,” Linebeck said. “All six guns hitting it.”

“And it just went off?” Aveil asked.
He nodded. “It dove under the waves and blew us a little off course, but the other two we just spotted.”

“Which ways were they headed?” Link asked.

“One went North. The other two went East and West.”

“What could they possibly be…” He looked up then, remembering the story from High Priest Zepps. “Dragon Roost is north of here, isn’t it?”

“You’d run the Star Archipelago first,” Medli said, worry suddenly appearing in her eyes. “And Outset.”

“Outset?!” Link’s eyes were wide. He looked right at Linebeck. “We need to go after it!”

“It’s going to attack them?” Aveil asked.

“If it’s like the one that attacked Dragon Roost, I think that’s where it’s headed.”

The goron nodded a little. “If what I’ve heard, that’s probably right,” he said. “Maybe we can stop it before it gets there.”

“Whoa, you’re actually going along with this shit now, Lurch?” the other pirate asked. “This is crazy.”

“If that thing lives, it’ll go after anything it can probably. Meaning we’ll get blamed for it probably. This is making sure we can keep doing what we love.”

Link clenched his eyes shut and suppressed a yawn as he listened. “We need to get going, but… But I think me and Aveil need to rest after that swim.” His stomach growled. “And eat.”

“Sleep first,” Aveil said. “If not for this damn potion, I think I’d pass out right on the deck here…”

Chapter End Notes

This was meant to come 2 weeks after the previous chapter, but a computer snafu forced me to write this entire chapter from scratch again! Let this be a lesson, folks: Always back up your files!

The good news though, is this should be the LAST time there is a delay between chapters because the other chapters were backed up. So we'll be back to a weekly posting schedule for the remainder of Season 2! And as an added bonus, Season 3 will start 72 Hours AFTER the end of the second one!

Devnotes:
-Originally, there was going to be no boss fight. Link and Aveil would wake up in their cells, break out, find one another and then scour the ruins around the castle. That dragged a bit, and it felt like there wasn't a kind of closure to the 'dungeon' so to speak without the boss to cap it off. So, this was written. The funny part is, I ORIGINALLY planned for them to encounter Bellum's avatar right at the point where they all fell
unconscious, but that felt like it was doing a disservice to the insanity and power of such a being. So, an abyssal monster served the role better as it wasn't a, well, avatar of Bellum (and thus nowhere near as powerful) but still plenty strong.

-The fight nearly was going to end as well much like The Call of Cthulhu ended! Where Link and Aveil would have done a number on it, but the monster would just start to regenerate, showing that it was not something they could stop. The choice not to though I felt kinda went against the tone of the Zelda stories. And even though this entire arc has been heavily inspired and influenced by eldritch horror, I felt that it was still very much a Zelda story. And it's quite clear that Bellum is just mildly inconvenienced by all of this, if his words in the last chapter are anything to go off of.

-Random trivia time: The fight with the boss was written nearly entirely to the DOOM (2016) soundtrack. Most often the Argent Combat track. Yes, I'm as surprised as you are.

Very special thanks goes to sadmac356 and TheLastSonOfPluto for their bookmarks! And as always a very big thanks to every reader, bookmarker, kudo-leaver and commenter! I'm still humbled and amazed that this is still something people are enjoying. That'll be it for this week. See you next week with the next chapter! And baring any issues, I'll prolly have another chapter for The Hera Archives up later this week. Or next week.

Thanks for reading everybody! Keep being awesome!
The sound of a cannon firing and the ship shaking from the shot rudely woke Link from his sleep. His eyes shot open and he grabbed the edges of his hammock to keep from falling out of it. He heard shouting above deck and looked around. Aveil had just been awakened as well. Unlike him though, she was lying on the floor now and muttering angrily as she forced herself to her feet. They heard the cannon fire again.

“What’s going on out there?” she asked as she pulled her boots on.

“Hell if I know…” Link said. He pulled his boots too. Not bothering with his shirt, he grabbed the scabbard to his arming sword and the crossbow before starting for the stairs. Again, the cannon fired. He saw Lurch the goron on the deck with Aryll next to him, full size crossbow at her shoulder and aiming out to sea. She fired a bomb arrow into the waves. Link glanced over to see the monster him and Aveil had seen emerge from the Abyssal Plains. The massive armored eel was visible off the starboard, diving into the water. The armored fins on its body flickered above the waves as it dove. He saw the pirate ship launch a large weighted keg into the water from a catapult. It splashed near the leviathan and sank beneath the waves. A second later, it exploded and a plume of white water erupted from the ocean. A second was launched moments later and the cannon atop the bridge fired again.

“How long?”

“Two days?”

“And no one woke us?” Aveil asked.

“We tried!” Lurch rumbled. “You two were completely out!”

“Ay!“ She shook her head and looked back to the sea.

Aryll glanced back to her brother again and her jaw fell open. “Oh Goddess, Link… What
“Huh?” The cannon fired at that moment. Medli flew higher as the cannonball struck the leviathan as it emerged from the water once more.

“You’re all beat up!”

He looked himself over quickly. The scars of his battles were there for everyone to see. “Just old scars.” The pirate ship launched another weighted keg of powder at the leviathan. As the others, it splashed down and exploded. A roar erupted from the waves and a stream of black blood began to flow from the creature. A cheer erupted from the pirate ship as the monster dove under the water. “I’m okay, Aryll.”

“Those… Those look painful…”

“You should see some of mine,” Aveil said. Link glanced over his shoulder to her and the cannon fired again. The leviathan dived under once more; the trail of blood floating in the water provided them with a guide.

“Focus on the leviathan right now,” Link said. “We need to stop that thing.”

“Least we can follow it now!” Lurch said. “Linebeck! All ahead full!”

“We’re already at full speed!” the smuggler shouted from the bridge. “And who’s the captain here?!”

“I’ll be right back then,” Link said with a groan. He turned back to the bridge and walked towards it, still feeling a little groggy. “Do we have any coffee?”

“And breakfast would be nice…” Aveil added.

The trail had gone cold after an hour and Link was standing on the top of the bridge’s tower with the cannon. They were still heading north though and making their way to the Star Archipelago. He’d heard Linebeck say that he hoped they’d be able to get there before the creature and maybe get some fresh supplies. Link was already planning with Aveil how they’d deal with the creature as it seemed like one of the giant worms of the desert. Link took a deep breath and leaned over the rail, both hands on it as he watched the bow of the ship dip down. He heard the beating of wings behind him and glanced over his shoulder to see Medli land. She panted a little and wiped her forehead to remove a layer of sweat and seawater.

“Any luck?” he asked.

“No,” she said. “Completely gone.” She folded her arms and her feathers fluffed up as the wind picked up around them. “Can’t find the blood in the water and it’s too deep now for me to spot.”

“Which way was it headed last when you saw it?”

“Still north. We’re about a day from the islands, so maybe we’ll run into it in the shallows.”

“Something that big could beach itself too, meaning we might have an advantage there.” He turned around so he could face her. Her wings puffed a bit more and she huddled a little around herself.
“Did you get any look at it while you were playing spotter?”

“I did. Looks like a deep python that’s just been completely… Changed. Never seen anything like it with all the tentacles around its head. Or that armor plating.”

“That plating is going to be a problem to get through then…” He scratched his chin a little. “The bombs weren’t working?”

“The modified powder kegs were doing a good job when they hit, but because it has so much of it, we’re just chipping away at it.”

“Hmm…”

“What about Aveil? She’s fought worms in the desert before. Could they have similar plates?”

Link nodded quickly. “That might be our best bet. Treat this like one of those things rather than some other animal.” He pushed off the railing, he had an idea. “When you were playing spotter, how good a look at that thing did you get?”

“Better than I’d say I’m comfortable with.”

“You do look pretty nervous too…” He chuckled slightly. “Remember seeing you all puffed up like that when we first met.”

“Well, I’d just crashed into an agent of The Crown and we didn’t know what was going on with the winds…” Medli shook slightly. “And now no one back there knows what’s going on with these things because there’s been no communication.”

“Hey, deep breaths.” He reached out and put his hands on her shoulders. “We know it’s headed for the islands, and we’re going at full speed. Between all of us who saw it, I can get a drawing and from there a plan of attack. Aveil’s handled big worms in the desert before. So a picture might help there too.”

The feathers lowered slightly and Medli let out a sigh of relief. “Okay… If you’re sure… But… What if we’re too late? Or…”

“We get to the islands, you can use your rank to tell a courier there to make haste to Dragon Roost, yes?”

She nodded.

“Go write that letter then.”

The rito nodded, still with puffed feathers. “Alright.” She started down the ladder. Link was right behind her.

“We’ll get this done. We’ve faced worse.”

“I don’t think Vaati counts.”

“Why not?” He slid down the ladder once she was on the ground.

“Because for all his faults, he at least realized how much trouble he’d caused. Because he didn’t completely understand humans and the desire to classify things. He said himself he was fascinated with the entire concept of evil in men.”
“He still wanted power.”

“But didn’t understand I think what he’d do with it.” She looked to the sea as they walked around the bridge’s tower to the door. “He just… Wanted it to win Zelda. Didn’t realize what sort of trouble it’d cause along the way. And if his other experiments in the seas were anything to go by, he just was insanely curious about how humanity behaved… Bellum though, it doesn’t care. It doesn’t seek to understand us through experimenting. It has its own goals and desires and it doesn’t matter. Vaati at least was amazed and hasn’t been causing problems since.”

That stopped Link in his tracks. “He’s working with The Crown now.”

“He is?!” Medli’s feathers fluffed even more.

“Yeah. But I am pretty sure Impa’s keeping him on a short leash. He’s in a Chosen’s room at the palace and guards are everywhere.” They walked around the bridge and into the cabin. Linebeck was at the wheel, watching the horizon like a hawk. Link noticed the dark circles under his eyes looked even more pronounced than before. They went downstairs into the hold to find Aveil and Aryll talking a little. They both fell silent when they saw Link and Medli arrive. Aveil had her arms folded and was leaning against a crate while Aryll was sitting on it, leaning over a little.

“Any luck topside?” Aveil asked.

Link shook his head. “Though, do want to talk to you.”

“Sure.” She pushed off the back of the box.

“Stay there though.” He went to his belongings. “We’ve all seen it, so I’m going to draw it and we’re going to see what we can figure out about it.”

“Should I go get Lurch and Harry?” his sister asked.

“Did they get a good look at the thing?”

She nodded.

“Do it.” Link dug about the bag he had by his hammock. The ship rocked slightly as it was struck by a wave. A moment later he pulled his sketchbook out and sat down. “Okay, Medli. Describe this thing…”

“It was segmented,” Lurch said. “Kinda like a spine…”

Link carefully sketched out pieces of the creature, recalling it as well from what he’d seen at the bottom of the ocean. It had taken the better part of an hour, but the drawing was finally coming together with everyone’s feedback. Medli peeked over his shoulder as he worked, along with almost everyone else. Aveil was pacing back and forth, listening to the description.

“Fins were like a terminan gyorg,” Medli said. “Clawed on them…”

“Alright,” Link said. He sketched the strange appendages on the worm’s fins. Eight long tentacles ending in eyes were around the strange vertical mouth of the creature now on the paper as well. A small stick figure of a human was next to it indicating that the creature could swallow a man with
ease if it had the desire. He wiped a little bit of dust away as he detailed some of the segments.

“Tentacles moved kind of like they had a mind of their own,” the other pirate, Harry was his name, said. “Jolene was trying to get one of our powder keg charges ahead of it so that it’d eat it.”

“It does that?”

“It might’ve,” Medli said. “When they first engaged it, they saw it plow into a barrel from a ship it’d sunk and swallow it whole.”

“Getting any sort of nasty enough explosive in its mouth will kill it in an instant,” Aveil said. “From the description and look of it, the mouth is very soft. Hence why it has that heavy carapace over it with the extra fangs. When not feeding, it closes those around it to keep it from being injured.”

“So all we need to do to get rid of this thing is crack that shell,” Aryll said. “We can do that with explosives.”

“Aye,” Harry said. “But depends on how many of those kegs we still have. And the shot from the guns aren’t doin’ anything really to that shell.”

“We know it’s surprisingly fast too,” Link added. “So would have to seriously lead the target. Can’t swim up to it either probably.”

“I can swap out the harpoon I have on my hookshot,” Aveil said. “Have one specifically designed to punch through a worm’s carapace since they have to be pretty hardy to live under literal tons of sand. Could get on top of it and plant some smaller explosives at the segments to crack it open. Riskier though. Even if I’m wearing my zora armor, one smack from that thing and I’d be a goner or at least out of the fight.”

“What about handling it like a whaler would?” Lurch asked.

“Their harpoons aren’t going to be strong enough to get through that armor,” Aryll said. “Old man Orca on Outset used to do a little whaling when he was younger. Those things are more designed to pierce flesh and blubber. Not shell.”

“Besides, we’d need to shoot it out of one of the cannons,” Harry said. “All our harpoons have wooden shafts. They’d be incinerated probably if we did it that way. And we can’t all chuck ‘em as hard as you can.”

“So it’s looking like our best bet is to feed it a bomb,” Link said.

“Yeah,” Aveil confirmed. “Given the look of its fins as well, we could reason it might be able to crawl a little on land as well, dragging itself along. If we work from the theory that it’s Bellum trying to send someone to destroy the rito, then we can reason he’s made it amphibious. Or possibly even capable of flight like the mutated whale that attacked the island when we were there last.”

“That’s the other thing actually…” Medli said.

“What?”

“I saw a couple… Things on it.”
“Describe them,” Link said, ripping the page out and handing it to Aveil for a closer inspection. The gerudo took it from him to look over. As she did, she went back to pacing, eyes focused on the picture with a couple nods.

“Like… Like a pile of tentacles bound together? Kind of writhing and moving on its own?”

“Ropa!” the goron said.

“No, ropa have a base. They’re like sea anemones. These didn’t have those.”

Aveil turned on her heel and looked at the rito. “Did they have a big orange eye kind of at the center?”

Medli nodded quickly.

“…And looked almost like they were made out of the slime?” Link asked.

“Uh-huh.”

Link looked at Aveil then. She nodded grimly as Link began drawing the strange creature. He had only gotten a basic sketch done when Medli had her feathers puffed up once again. Link showed the rest of the group the picture. Aryll gasped while the two pirates muttered to themselves. Link was sure he’d caught one swear when they saw it.

“That’s no ropa,” Lurch said. “Looks kinda like when the slime would stick an eyeball out though. Only with tentacles.”

“My sorceress contact said Bellum could’ve altered his servants,” Link said. “And me and Aveil ran into a few of them already on The Plains.”

“So this monster could be producing those as well,” Aveil said. “Some worms of the desert like the molgera have larva in their scales they sometimes release. And when we were on the bottom, we were seeing similar creatures from the big octo.”

“So how do we kill those?” Lurch asked.

“Enough force will kill them. The eye looks like the most obvious weak point too.”

“They did move around an awful lot though,” Link said. He’d soon finished the sketch of the mess of tentacles that was wrapped together. Some of the edges had barbs on them that looked like they could hook a man easily. The large eye was in the center of it. Link drew a line at the top of it and noted the rough dimensions of the creature through it. “Landing a hit will be difficult. Especially with how fast they can move.”

“We’ve got explosives, those’ll work fine,” Aryll added. “Enough of a blast and the shockwave should hit the eye.”

“So we just have to track this thing now,” Aveil said. She stuffed the drawing Link had done in a pouch on her belt and walked back over. “If this thing is anything like the desert worms, it will have a pattern to its actions. Some will burry deep once they’re finished with a meal to digest. So they won’t be bothered. That’s typically the best time to get them though.”

“But we don’t have another set of elixirs that’ll let us dive that deep,” Link said. “So we are going to have to attack it closer to the surface.” They heard the bell ringing then.
“Hey! You’ll wanna get up here Link!” Linebeck shouted down. “I think we’re in trouble here!”

He closed the sketchbook with one hand, covers slamming shut. Link stuffed the pencil back in the book’s spine and dropped it on his back as he got to his feet. “What’s going on?” he shouted as he started up the stairs. Aryll hopped off her crate and followed, shortly by everyone else.

“You’d better see this,” Linebeck said. He pointed out the windows to the smoke on the horizon. Link stepped outside and quickly climbed the tower. He couldn’t clearly see, but there should’ve been islands dead ahead of them. He saw Aryll climb up behind him, pulling her telescope out and bringing it to an eye. A moment later she passed it wordlessly to him. The last time he’d seen the look of distress on his sister’s face they’d been six years old and they’d been abandoned on a ferry heading for Aboda. Through the telescope, he could see shattered huts and a fire on a small clump of dirt. There should have been a port. There should’ve been several ships. Instead, there were ruins and destroyed ships. Link could barely make out people on the shores.

“How soon until we get there?” Aryll asked.

“An hour? Maybe two?” Link handed his sister the telescope again and she closed it.

“I’ll… I’ll tell the others to get ready for wounded.”

Chapter End Notes

And here we are! Finally on the surface again! As to just how bad it is for the crew, we’ll find out next week!

Devnotes: 
-Not really a lot of devnotes for this one actually! Just kinda a small transition chapter between parts here with little bits of character interaction, so I guess I’ll talk a tiny bit about Vaati. Developing him for the fic was a bit of an adventure and I regularly kinda went back and forth on some of his aspects. I wanted him to be very much a trickster of sorts, but still keeping true to his character. The idea of him being intrigued by the concepts of good and evil in the hearts of men felt like it could be a very interesting thing to explore. Especially since in The Witcher, there isn't a clear-cut good or evil like in the Zelda games. So, the idea came to have him exploring this entire concept more through some of his actions. Which then eventually brought him into conflict with Link. More specific details about their meeting and his first solo assignment as an Agent of The Crown will be one of the first things covered in Season Three. Though, in a kinda... indirect method let's just say.

Special thanks this week to Maraleaf for the kind words and the bookmark! Also to FitzLemur for being the 150th kudo! This project has been an adventure and I just want to state again how thankful I am to people who have enjoyed it. Every comment, read, kudo, bookmark and so forth is humbling. So again, thank you to everyone for taking the time to do those.

That'll be it for this week! See you next Wednesday and keep being awesome!
The Star Archipelago was at one time seven islands with three of the largest close together enough that one could walk between them with ease. There had been once great buildings along them and a towering lighthouse on the southernmost island in the chain. The island in question was no longer there. Instead, Jolene’s frigate floated where it had once stood. Link waded along one piece of the ruined island, seeing a couple of the survivors being talked to by his sister and Medli. A couple of the pirates as well were helping, much to his surprise. Link let a sigh out as he walked further along. Rubble and driftwood was in the water along with several bodies. Aveil was kneeling near one of the edges, looking over into the water. She jumped in as Link went past, approaching Aryll and Medli.

“Did you see it? The creature?” Medli asked, feathers puffed up again.

“Aye,” the woman said. She was bloodied and her clothes were torn as they were soaked through. “We’ve never had quakes long as I’ve been here. Then this big one happened and the lighthouse. It just fell into the sea! An eel came out where was. Bigger than a galleon. Huge teeth and tentacles. Eels don’t have tentacles. Should know. Daughter worked with the fishermen. Lil’ garden eels sometimes appeared in the shallows too. Good if you fried ‘em up…” Link saw her eyes were glassy, constantly staring at the ocean.

“I’m sorry that this thing attacked you, but we need more information,” Aryll said. She was kneeling next to her and had a hand on the woman’s back. “It’s important. We can find it and stop it. Make sure it doesn’t hurt anyone else.”

“It dove… Dove into the banks… Then came up through the docks. Sank the ships. Militia… Militia’s bolts from the ballista did nothing.” She shook her head slowly. “Grabbed men, screaming into the water. Vanished… Then the land broke apart. Flooded. Holes in the ground. Like…”

“Sinkholes?”

She nodded a little. “Rest of the… The islands fell. Nowhere to run. Rafts knocked to sea from the waves. Homes collapsed. Some people still inside them. Hiding. Hoping it’s winds…”

“How’d you survive?” Link asked.

The woman glanced up at him. Link got a better look at her wrinkles and weathered skin. “Goddesses I’d guess. Not my time.” She looked back at the sea. “Crawled… It crawled too… The fins… Dug with them…”

Aryll squeezed the woman’s shoulder. “We’re here to help.” she said. “You’ve been very helpful. Thank you.” She gently helped the woman to her feet. “You said you saw some things from your home that survived. Do you want some help gathering them?”

She gave the hylian girl a nod and they walked along the churned and soaked sand.

“Don’t think she’ll be able to tell us anything else,” Medli said looking at him. “Link, this sounds
like it’s trying to expand Bellum’s kingdom.”

“Or targeting anything that could be a refuge to his enemies,” Link said. “The story Zepps told us was that an ocean spirit and sky spirit both worked against him. One of those leviathans could be going after the zoras.”

“What about the third then?” Medli glanced to see Aryll helping the old woman pick up some of the few possessions of hers that looked to survive the calamity. His sister picked up a heavy iron pan, before dumping water out of it. The woman seemed to just shuffle along, sometimes stopping and picking up scraps of cloths and shattered pottery.

“If I had to take a guess, Labrynna. They’ve got the biggest navy after all. Would be wise to remove any impediments to a god’s return.”

“Oh no… Imperial Navy is strongest in the world. And we’ve barely been able to do anything to it.”

“Only Crescent Isle between where we were and Labrynna too… If it destroys that island like this chain was…”

“We have to get back to Dragon Roost.” The feathers puffed even more.

“It’ll reach Outset before that.” He scratched at his chin, feeling the days of stubble there. A creaking caught his ears as he saw the rubble of one of the few buildings suddenly collapse into the sea. The islands were more like a couple small sandbars in the middle of the ocean now. Link looked back to Medli and put his hands on her shoulders. “We’ll stop it somehow before it gets there. Outset is a lot larger than the Star Islands. It’ll take it a lot more work to sink the island, meaning we’ll have time to fight it and stop it there.” He looked her in the eye. “Medli, can you fly to Outset? Getting there might let you get a message to Dragon Roost and help them prepare. Maybe even some evacuations given how bad it is here.”

“Would be tough but… I can make it.” She looked to Linebeck’s ship nearby in the waters. “I’d have to leave within the hour if I was going to get there by sundown.”

“Okay.” He nodded a little. “Go then. Warn them and make sure we are prepared.”

“If I recall our schedules right, there’ll be a courier there on his way home again. Not all our routes were affected by Bellum.”

“We’ll leave here and go full speed to Outset. I’ll make sure Linebeck knows it.” He offered her a little smile. “Now, unruffle the feathers.”

Medli took a deep breath. The feathers on her arms lowered slightly as she did. “Okay.”

“We’ve got a plan already to how to handle it. And you can help make sure we have more chances of success at it.”

“You’re right. We do…”

“Know how not having a plan or something you can do makes you spin your wheels like this.”

“I know.” She shook her head a little and glanced back to him. “But still…”

“So why do you do it?” He gave her a pat, smiling still. “Get to Outset, get to your courier if they’re there. We’ll be there this evening hopefully or by tomorrow morning and stop this thing.”
“You sound so confident.”

“Well, we did just stop a god…” He closed his eyes for a long blink and shook his head. “Even if we lost Mikau.”

“You two haven’t really told us a lot of what happened down there anyways.”

“Kaepora’s Vigil always knocks me out it seems when it runs out. Or at least makes me really lethargic after.”

“Would it do that if you took it earlier in the day and not tired?”

“I don’t know actually… And now’s not the time anyways.”

She nodded in agreement. “Right. I’ll prepare on the ship and take off.”

“Good.”

Medli took a deep breath then. “So… See you tonight then if we’re lucky?”

“Yeah.” Link let go of her shoulders then and folded his arms. The wind began to pick up a little.

“Okay.” She managed to smile a little. “I’ll see you guys soon then. If it does attack there though…”

“We’ll be there.”

She turned and spread her wings then. Flapping her arms a little, Medli took off and soon was gliding towards the steamboat. Link looked back to see a couple other people who had survived the leviathan’s attack were now helping Aryll and the older woman pick up what few belongings had survived it. The big goron Lurch had come over and was pulling rubble away from one of the few buildings that hadn’t completely sunk into the sea. Link took a deep breath and inspected some of the rubble. Most of it looked like it had been smashed and knocked down. Given the size of such a creature, knocking a house over or even a large tower would be simple. He turned slightly to see Aveil emerge from where she’d dived in, pulling herself up out of the water.

Soon as she had, she looked to Link and started walking over. The scimitars on her back rattled slightly as she knelt down next to him as he dug about some of the rubble. “I have some good news,” she said.

“We could use some,” he said, looking to her. “The islands had at least five hundred people living on it. And now there’s not even a dozen.”

“The worm is resting now.”

Link looked right at her. “And how do you know?”

“For one, the damage done to this place. It sank all seven islands. The little bars we’re on right now are the highest points. Or at least what survived. I saw the old charts too.”

“There should be a big one north of here a little bit. We could wade through the water and get there no problem.”

“Been here before?”
“Yep. With Medli and Linebeck actually.” He dragged a support beam out of the rubble. Another chunk of the ruined building collapsed slightly into more of a heap than it already had been. “So how else do you know this thing is resting?”

“Given the amount of energy it probably exerted destroying these islands, it probably needs a break. Though we also have all the destroyed ships. Found some of the sunken remains in what was the harbor. One was a big fishing boat. There aren’t any nets remaining intact and I did find a few remains of some fish and shellfish.”

“The woman we talked to did say it went for the ships soon as it’d destroyed the lighthouse. Was thinking it was a deliberate action to prevent people from escaping.”

“I’m more inclined to believe it’s hungry.”

One of his brows raised slightly. “Even after we’ve seen how Bellum was able to alter geozards to be his servants? To do that means Bellum knew exactly what he was doing. I wouldn’t put it past him to make his servants want to leave as few witnesses as possible. We also have the geozards who deliberately went after ships and those who came into contact with the statues.”

“The geozards could’ve been like a cult though. We found that shrine after all before that insanity. Clearly they had intelligence. But that whale creature didn’t appear to be so. The massive eyed whale likely was just trying to feed itself in its mind, going after prey.”

“Then why’d the eel attack the lighthouse first?”

“Was in front of the harbor. An obstacle. Most worms in the deserts don’t care what’s in the way of them and their next meal. I’ve seen small moldorms charge headfirst into clay walls they have no hope of breaking. Lanmolas will do the same thing but with more success as the mandibles are better suited to breaking through things. Not to mention their saliva is like our blood after drinking a venomblood potion.”

“Mmm… So for all we know it was instilled with a goal and desire for a meal. Then why sink the rest of the island?”

“That I can’t answer.” She looked at the rubble he was digging through. “But I can tell you that it probably was looking to nest afterwards and digest. And can tell how it burrows through the sand as well.” Aveil stood back up as she heard Aryll talking with the old woman and some of the other survivors. “Get anything out of the locals?”

“A couple things. How it happened, it crawls on the land with its claws too. Island militia didn’t do anything to it either. The ballista bolts failed to pierce its armor. And last time I was here, they didn’t have any cannons or explosives. Admittedly that was years ago though.” He got back to his feet. “Its next stop is Outset if it continues on this path.”

“Home.”

“Sort of… Can’t let it do this to there.” He looked back to the sea. “We’ll get the survivors to Outset, then to Dragon Roost or Windfall. Least make sure they’re safe.”

“Yeah…” She looked to the water as well with him then. “I’d have left them. If this was the desert.”

Link immediately turned to her. “Why? These people need help. You’d just abandon them?”

“Tribal law. You have to survive out there.” Her eyes glanced at him for a moment. “But we’re not
in the Gerudo Deserts. These people are not part of The Tribes. Their laws and beliefs are
different. You’re from the islands, so I’ll defer to your judgment.”

“Do they do that with everyone they come across?”

She shook her head. “No. We’re not the thieves and murderers that Hyrule thinks we are. Only way
we survive the deserts is by being pragmatic. Using what limited resources we have to the greatest
extent. There was nothing here. There are wounded who would be a drain on our group’s
resources. Nothing of value to take with us either. It looks like anyone who could fight was killed
in the attack and I’ve not seen the ballista that was mentioned at all. Or even its wreckage. As we
hunt this monster too, we need to press our advantage while it rests.”

“I see…” Though Link didn’t exactly like how she’d described it, he knew she came from a
different culture than his own. He was thankful though she was letting him head some of this to
help these people. “So… What if the people had something to contribute? To help us?”

“Then they’d be given a chance to prove their worth.” She turned to face him. “Simple as that. But
if they failed, they’d be left on their own once more. The tribe’s security and survival must come
first.” Aveil folded her arms. “If you’re this curious, I’ll tell you more later. Right now though, that
thing is out there and digesting its meal. Not using a lot of energy. Too much water to actually find
it and no ways to track it with the water. If Mikau was still with us though, I’m sure he’d have
something we could do with it.”

“Yeah… We know where it’s likely to go next though. And we can cut it off there. Prepare.”

“Yes.” She chuckled a little. “Going to be a hell of a trophy to haul back for my payment. I’m
thinking I’ll take one of the fins.”

“Heh.”

“The rito going to pay you for this?”

“With a favor.”

“Going to be a very big favor then.”

“Yeah. I’m gonna need it too.”

“What for?”

He took a deep breath and looked back at Linebeck’s ship. He spotted Medli taking off from the
bow then and heading out to sea; to Outset. “Pays to have a good information network.”

Chapter End Notes

Kinda a short chapter this week, but what the heck? A bit more of a transition and
showing the world and setting up what will be the final part of the season!

No devnotes this time as admittedly I’m kinda in a hurry with other things. But, had to
Extra special thanks this week to the recent bookmarkers! LyoAquila, Void_Home,
LxJaque and PurpleFireDrake! Don’t think I’ve ever gotten four in a single week so
more reason to celebrate and give thanks! And as always all you readers out there rock! Huge thanks to everyone!

I'll see you next week as we go... Home. :P Thanks for reading and keep being awesome people!
It was midafternoon by the time they left the ruined islands. Linebeck was not happy with how they’d taken on a few of the refugees, but Aryll had insisted they at least not have all of them on Jolene’s frigate. Link had to chuckle slightly at how she’d been able to manipulate him with bit watery eyes and a quavering voice. Even Aveil admitted that if she’d done that to her she’d do whatever the girl wanted. The smuggler kept checking below deck though to ensure that they weren’t in the engine room or digging about his belongings. It had been hours ago now though and the sun had begun to set. Link leaned over the railing and looked skyward. A couple seagulls flew with the ship. When he looked to his right, towards the stern and the bridge, he saw Aryll sitting on the railing of the bridge’s tower, a few seagulls at her feet and fighting over some hyoi pears she’d dropped for them. Her telescope was to her eye and she was watching the horizon. She lowered it after a minute and shouted, “I see Outset!”

Link glanced to the bow. Dead ahead of them on the horizon was the island. He could barely make it out, but breathed a sigh of relief that it wasn’t in ruins like the Star Archipelago. It was larger as well, having towering cliffs with small forests on the tops. Most of the coastal area was occupied by a harbor and numerous huts that came into view several minutes later. When Aryll shouted again, the few refugees emerged from the hold below and breathed a collective sigh of relief.

“Oh, Thank the Goddesses we’re almost there,” a man said, walking past Link to the bow.

“We won’t be there long, will we?” another refugee asked, a woman.

“How do they live with so many cliffs?” a child asked. His question appeared to go unanswered among the few other refugees aboard. “How do they live with so many cliffs?” Link glanced their way then. He was trying to get the attention of the older woman Aryll had helped, but she still seemed so disoriented and distraught that she didn’t notice him at all.

“They have caves,” Link said. “There’s a large network that is in the cliff faces.”

The child turned. He had dirtied dark hair and big green eyes. His rounded ears indicated he was human. “How do you know that, mister?”

“I was born there.” He looked back to the island. The glow of lanterns and torches being lit for the night were coming into view. “Haven’t been back in like twenty years.” Link’s thoughts turned to the conflict between Labrynna and Hyrule that had orphaned him and Aryll. Even when he’d been on his first major assignment, he’d not come to the island. Mostly because there was no need to and he wanted to make a good impression for The Crown.

“What’s it like?”

“Like I said, I haven’t been back in a while.” He looked at Aryll as she fed another seagull. “Ask my sister. She was there recently.”

“Oh.” He seemed to look away from Link then, to his feet. “Didn’t know she was your sister…”

He’d seen that look before. He’d even worn that look on his face a few times when he was that age and chuckled silently.
“The other grownups seem kind of afraid of you.”

“Why?”

“You carry two swords. Helis says you’re a gerudo. Astrid thinks you’re a hexer.”

“I’m no gerudo. You can tell by the ears.”

“But he says all gerudo carry two swords.”

“Has he actually ever been to the mainland?” Link knelt down in front of the child. “Almost all gerudo met outside the desert are women. Men are very rare among them. Their swords are curved as well.”

“Like that… The gold-eyed woman?”

“Yeah. Like her.”

“She’s scary.”

“Why?”

The child looked Link carefully in the eyes for a second. He could tell they were getting frightened. “Her eyes. They looked like a snake’s earlier.”

“Only if you’ve done something to anger her is she actually scary. Trust me.”

“…Why?”

He looked to the adults for a moment. “Well, she came to help you. Just like we did. Just because someone looks scary doesn’t necessarily mean they are.” Link smiled a little. “And we’ll get you all to safety.”

“…So you’re not a hexer either?”

Link cocked his head slightly. “What’s your logic behind that?”

“Astrid thinks you are.”

“…And what’s her thinking?”

“She just said you were. I don’t know. She said that a hexer as going to kill the monster. Because that’s what they do. They’re like The Hero of Legend. But don’t work for free. They take people as their payment.”

“Usually they just take money. Can be used for a lot of things.”

“But they do take people?”

The question caused Link to stop. He thought on the Chosen and how they’d operated. Almost every member of the order had been an orphan or lost their parents in some circumstance. He thought of how he could word it to make the child understand. In the end though he just sighed and shook his head. “There are… Stories. Not all stories are true though. Some hexers might do that. Some might not. Just like people, you can’t judge an entire group or profession on one person. Have to take it on a case by case basis.”
The boy looked at Link closer then. He leaned in a little and looked him up and down. Link was still kneeling in front of them, wearing the Labrynnan zora scalemail and his arming sword and the silver longsword on his back, grips on the left so he could quickly draw them. The small crossbow on his hip was loaded with a silver bolt while a bag that held some of his potions in it was near his back. Another held the small grenades he used. The boy cocked his head to the right then. “You’re not as scary as the stories say you are.”

“You should see me before I’ve had my coffee.”

The child was dragged away shortly after that by one of the adults and told to stop bothering him. Link said he hadn’t minded, but they weren’t having any of it. Maybe it was because of the armor. Many people in the islands had little love for Labrynna or Hyrule due to the war that’d been fought there. He went to the tower then to watch as Outset’s small harbor came into view.

“Had an interesting talk with the kid?” Aryll asked.

“Yes, actually,” Link said. “He thinks I’m a hexer.”

“Wow, really?”

He nodded.

“Aren’t you though? Kind of?” She closed her spyglass and stuffed it back in a bag.

“Kind of…” Link looked to the island. “Haven’t done enough reading or heard enough to say if I really am or not.”

“Aveil is though. She said so.”

“Mmhm.” Link leaned over the edge, hands on the railing as he saw a couple small trade ships docked at the northern harbor. There was also a frigate. One Aryll recognized as it came into view.

“Wait, that’s Tetra’s ship,” she said. “What’s she doing here?”

“…I don’t know.” Link had a very bad feeling swell in his chest as they approached. In the dying sunlight, he saw a bird flying for them. As it got closer though, he realized it was Medli. The rito landed on the deck below, surprising a couple refugees. “Up here!” he called to her. She quickly rushed to the back of the ladder and climbed up.

“Am I glad to see you guys!” she said.

“What’s going on?” Link asked. “What’s Tetra’s ship doing here?”

“They came from Dragon Roost a day ago. Komali managed to convince them and they’ve signed a contract of some sort… I’m not sure what the details are though.”

“We could use the firepower against the leviathan,” Aryll said.

“That’s true, but they’re privateers. For Hyrule.”

“…Oh.”

Link looked at Medli. “We kind of suspected that,” he said, “but that could mean any deal they cut was involving the war possibly…”
“Exactly. And I won’t know until I get back to Dragon Roost. Quill was getting ready to leave when I got here a couple hours ago though, so he’s taking what we know to Komali at least.”

“That’s good,” Aryll said. “Can we start evacuating the island?”

She shook her head. “Storm’s coming. Going to be impossible to load all the refugees on Linebeck’s ship since it’s the only one that’s not going to be at the mercy of the winds. And if that thing attacks while we’re in the middle of loading, it’ll sink the boats like it did on the archipelago.”

“So it’s really do or die then,” Link said. He pushed off the back of the railing. “I’m going to go talk to Aveil. See if we can figure some things out on how to handle this.” He walked to the ladder then.

“Link, there’s something else.”

“What?” He turned to face Medli as he’d neared the latter.

“There’s a bounty on her. The privateers thinks she’s a spy for Ganondorf.”

Aryll’s eyes went wide at that. “You mean we’ve had a spy for an enemy of The Crown with us the entire time?!”

“No, she’s a mercenary. Whoever pays her has her loyalty.”

“She’s just doing a job on a contract,” Link said. “She was working for Remor when we met after all.”

“That’s not going to stop the privateers though. Especially with the price. Six thousand rupees.”

“I know.” Link shook his head as he slid down the ladder then. The bell on the ship rang a couple times as they began to approach the docks. Link spotted a few people from the island there, along with a couple of the privateers. He instantly spotted Tetra among them, a large dark red coat over her arms as she spoke with one of the workers. Link turned though and entered the bridge, heading down below.

Aveil was apparently meditating with her back to the hull. Her scimitars were drawn and on the floor in a cross. Her hands were on her knees as she sat cross legged. A couple vials of elixirs and oils were there as well. A recurve bow and quiver sat as well there with her hookshot. Her eyes opened slowly as Link approached. “Have we arrived?” she asked.

“We have,” he said. “But we have a problem…”

“What kind of problem?” She immediately picked up her swords and sheathed them on her back once more. Aveil plucked each potion with her index and thumb finger and quickly packed them away then as well.

“The pirates from Dragon Roost are here.”

“They are?” She finished with the potions and picked up her hookshot. The chain rattled as it looked like she’d released it so she could work on it. Her thumb pressed into a button on the back and it quickly reeled itself back in. “We could use the extra power.”
“No, I mean they’re Hyrulean Privateers.”

She stopped for a moment and stuffed her hookshot in its cover. Link saw what the child had referred to though that moment. Her pupils shifted then, becoming like slits rather than normal. Her lips parted and her teeth were clenched.

“We’ll be docked shortly, but Medli said there’s a bounty on your head because they think you’re a spy.”

“Why didn’t they make a move then while we were at Dragon Roost?” She let go of the grip of her hookshot then and picked up her quiver and bow.

“Chieftain Komali wouldn’t have allowed it. They’re trying to stay neutral in the war. But it might’ve changed…”

Aveil slung the quiver over her back along with her bow. “I see.” She adjusted the straps over her chest slightly. “And I’m betting they won’t turn a blind eye to me because I helped deal with Bellum. And given your status and all, soon as we deal with the leviathan, they’ll want to hang us both. Y’know, I suspected their captain too was a noble. She carried herself a little more higher than the others… And overheard her talking with her crew when I took your sister for her armor. She doesn’t swear all that much compared to some of the pirates I’ve known.”

Link closed his eyes and sighed. “I think you’re right.”

“Did you know her? When you were with The Crown?”

He nodded slowly. He wasn’t about to tell her the truth, but felt that at least he could trust her enough to understand his actions without him saying it.

The small smile on her lips confirmed it. “Just like why I didn’t give specifics on my main contract.”

“Yeah…”

Her arms folded under her chest. “So, why tell me all this? Why not just wait until we’re docked?”

Link thought for a minute. He was already in deep trouble with The Crown anyways for his defection, but this could also be seen as an action of high treason; warning a potential spy. But he knew her enough to know that she wasn’t one. Or at least enough evidence to believe she wasn’t a spy for The Tribes. She was just a hexer completing a job. Her client merely was that of The Tribes at the moment. He chuckled slightly and looked back at her. “A matter of honor let’s call it.”

Aveil smiled a little at the remark and joined in a little laughter with it. “Professional courtesy then.” She let her arms fall to her sides then. “Look, if you’re going to deal with that thing without me, you’re going to need some extra help.” She pulled out a couple of the vials of her potions. A red ice vial, two red potions and a bright green one he didn’t recognize.

He took them. “What’s this one do?”

“Lynel’s Blood. So you really can fight all day.”

“Ah.” He chuckled slightly. “So Kaepora’s Vigil without the forcing me awake or vision changes.” Link pocketed the potions then.

“Yeah.”
“I’ll cover you to get out of here so you don’t get found out by the privateers.”

“Thanks.” She took a deep breath. “Y’know, I used to think a lot of hylian men were useless outside of politics and the temples as priests and mages.” There was a smirk on her lips then. “But now that I’ve seen you. Worked with you. I don’t think so anymore.”

“Happy to change your opinion,” he replied with a smirk of his own.

“Yep.” She gave him a pat on the shoulder and walked past him to grab her cloak out of a hammock. She pulled it over herself, having turned it the other way so the gerudo symbol was not visible before grabbing a bag nearby.

“Any other tips if I’m going to have to fight this thing solo?”

“Soften it up as best you can with the ship’s guns. As much as possible. Feeding it a bomb I think is a good idea too. If you’ve got something particularly potent, I’d say use it.”

“…What about a frost bomb?”

“I thought we used all those.”

Link pulled the other one from his belt. The blue vial glowed slightly in the light. “From when I ‘seduced a zora princess’.”

She chuckled slightly as they felt the boat come to a stop and slung the other bag over her shoulder. “Been one interesting contract, I’ll say that, Link. Never thought I’d need a suit of armor that’d let me breathe underwater. Or face a god…”

“Face a god at the bottom of the ocean.”

“Yeah.” She nodded a little and pulled something from her vest. “Here. Take this to Medli. Make sure it gets back to Termina. He gave it to me before… Before the dive.”

“I will.” He cleared his throat and folded his arms. “So… Plan to get out of here?”

“Better safe than sorry. I trust you enough that you won’t sell me out, but…”

“Plausible deniability. I got that.”

“Heh. So if you are asked, you don’t have to lie.”

“Exactly.” She pulled at the strap on her bag. “Well, suppose this is farewell then.”

“Yeah.” He turned to the stairs back to the deck. “See you later then.”

“Probably not but.” Aveil smiled a little. “Wouldn’t say no if we had to work together again.”

Link gave her a nod and headed up the stairs. Already they had pulled into the dock and a ramp was placed to let people off. Linebeck was busy talking with the harbor master. A couple other people were there as well. Many of the refugees had piled off already, leaving Link seemingly the only one there. He heard Aveil behind him and glanced over his shoulder. She looked back at him before waving with her right hand simply. Link gave her a nod and the gerudo leapt gracefully over the rail and went into the water hands and head first. There was a splash, but only he seemed to notice it.
With Aveil gone, Link took a deep breath and walked for the ramp. Aryll had moved so she was between the harbormaster and Linebeck. Medli was there as well, but swiftly pulled him aside. Link noticed how her feathers were still a little ruffled and puffed even though they now had a plan in place.

“You okay?” he asked.

“Just worrying about what’s coming,” she said. “The merchants are leaving tonight even though it’s risky to travel with the storm coming. They’re heading for Windfall.”

“That’s good. Safer there.”

“Yeah.” He looked to the Hyrulean frigate. A couple of the privateers were at work on the deck. “Do they know what’s happening?”

“They do. When I brought the news to the mayor, he immediately asked for their help.”

“So, two frigates, and a steamer against this thing. What about local militia?”

“There’s not much, but they do have a couple old cannons from when Labrynna occupied the island. So it’ll be more of a fight than with the other islands, but still. I don’t like our chances. You and Aveil are going to have to be ready to find a way to stop it if we can’t get close.”

“She’s left.”

Medli looked at him. “She what?!”

“Quiet.” He put his hands on her shoulders and pulled her away from the frigate. “Too much of a risk for her here. Especially since I know Tetra.”

“You know her… Then…” Her deep red eyes went wide. “Oh… Oh… You’re…” She shook her head in disbelief. “That’s…”

“Yes.”

“And then…”

“Royal Guards. Wouldn’t be surprised if a couple Sheikah are there too or she’s in contact with them.”

“No Chosen though?”

“I’d need a look around. See if they have their charms. But I didn’t recognize any of the crew when they were at Dragon Roost.”

“Would Aryll know?”

He quickly shook his head and wave a hand in front of her. “No. I’m not asking her. I’m not going to get her involved in this. She may have seen them, but I’m not going to ask her. They might’ve known too. Might’ve…” Link gritted his teeth then.

“Calm down, you don’t know for sure.”

“Right… Just…” He shook his head. “First with the incident with Vaati, then The Conjunction…”

“You felt used. They didn’t tell you everything.”
“Incredibly. And not like I was actually serving The Crown or The Kingdom. Like I was deliberately sent to do these things so they’d have an advantage. Like…” He glanced up, seeing Tetra on the frigate’s deck. She was shouting at one of the others about ensuring the cannons were cleaned and ready for use. That stopped him from talking, but the look on his face told Medli everything she needed. “I understand why they did some of what they did. I can’t blame them for that. Just… We were supposed to be the most important agents of The Crown.” He started to walk from the docks to the huts around them and looked to the cliff face. A couple small huts were along the cliff face as well and he saw the glow of light coming from them.

“Demise’s advocate here, but…” Medli started following him. “Could they have not given you all the details because you were a rookie? And the risk of giving it to you when you hadn’t proven yourself could have been dangerous if you had gotten captured? Or if something did go wrong you didn’t put your fellow Chosen at risk?”

Link stopped as he reached the edge of the pier and looked back to her. He didn’t say anything but listened to what she had to say. He folded his arms.

“Like this entire massacre. They might not have had all the information they needed to make one call or another but they couldn’t do nothing because it was the risk involved. If a couple assassins did get through it could put all their generals and nobles in jeopardy.”

“I know that!” He turned around to face her. The surprised look on his friend’s face immediately made him regret snapping at her. “I… I know, Medli… Sorry. I tried to talk her out of it. And if I’d have gotten there in time, I could’ve prevented it.” Link shook his head slowly and looked back at the frigate. “Just… Just a bad situation and stuck between two evils… I’m used to that by now. We’re supposed to be the most trusted agents of The Crown though. To know the secrets needed to keep people safe. And I understand the chain of command and seniority, but there has to be a line that we don’t cross. And it has always been avoiding civilian casualties. Regardless of the side. This is more than just being used because of compartmentalization of Chosen, Sheikah, Knightly Orders… Army…”

“Someone has to be held responsible then for the problems.”

“Exactly.” He looked at the frigate then with a deep breath. “So… the mayor… Did they have a plan to deal with the leviathan?”

“Defense cannons on the coast. Use the ships to herd it into range and catch it in a crossfire. They’re moving the cannons down right now so they’ll be ready in the morning. Anyone who doesn’t want to be here is getting on the merchant ships which will be leaving tonight.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t attack before then.”

“Before she left did Aveil give any last minute advice or tools?”

He nodded. “Some extra potions. Red ice, two menders and a Lynel’s Blood.”

“Haven’t heard of that one.”

“Must be one of the ones her group uses. Works like Kaepora’s Vigil without the forcing me to be awake and the low light sight.” Jolene’s ship was pulling into the docks now. Link glanced at pirate’s ship and then back to Medli. “Did you tell them actual pirates would be here?”

“I did actually… And I’ve already volunteered to work to make sure there’s no misunderstandings or fights between them since I’ve got the appropriate background.”
“Gotta use that diplomacy training for something, huh?”

“I’m hoping it’ll be easier than moderating between Linebeck and Jolene…” Medli looked to him.
“What are you going to do to prepare?”

“After dinner? I’m going to have a talk with Captain Tetra…”

“That smart, Link? You’re a wanted man. And she’ll probably not be without a guard at any time.”

He clenched his eyes shut for a moment. “No. It’s not. But I need to talk to her. So she knows that I didn’t just go off half-cocked like I’m sure she’s thinking. Or fearing that I’m actually working with The Tribes.”

“Okay. But don’t get caught. And make it fast so that if it does go wrong, you can get out.”

“Of course.”

Chapter End Notes

HOLY COW! FIFTY CHAPTERS! And still a fair bit to go! Though we're nearing the end of the Second Season.

Also an extra long chapter this week as I don't know there'll be one next week due to prior plans. If there is, there is. If not, then it'll come on the 26th. And hoo-boy. That coming chapter? I have literally lost sleep over it. That is not hyperbole. Why will become clear when it does show up.

Did you guys miss 'em last time? 'cause the devnotes are back!

Devnotes:
-Another little bit of worldbuilding and all in this chapter.
-I think I mentioned this in a previous chapter's devnotes, but there's a lot happening behind the scenes that we just aren't seeing since we're following Link's exploits so much. This choice is sometimes annoying, as there is a LOT I want to cover, but keeping it this way keeps things open and doesn't negate alternative interpretations of the events. Which is admittedly something I kinda liked in pieces of Wild Hunt. For instance; there is an early quest that has you seeing a farmer getting in trouble with the invading Nilfgardians for providing them rotten supplies. But you also see beforehand when the commander and the farmer both agreed to things and worked out a deal. Was it sabotage? It very well could have been since the locals really don't like The Empire. It could've been an honest mistake given how quickly some supplies and things can spoil. Was the commander pulling a charming act to win over the locals? He says it wasn't, but in Geralt's position we know how easily people can lie. The sheer ambiguity of the situation gives several valid possibilities as to what happened.
-Though I try to avoid spoiling too much in these things, I can't resist this one. We have not seen the last of Aveil. We shall be seeing her again when Link makes a poor life choice. Well, one could argue that he's made LOTS of poor life choices leading up to this point, but this is one in particular that will appear soon.
Special thanks this week to Eilisy for their bookmark! And as always a huge thanks to everyone who's read, left comments, previous bookmarks and kudos! I'll see you (hopefully) next week! Keep being awesome everybody!
He’d had a good meal at the small tavern that’d been repurposed almost like a barracks for the two pirate crews. Link was thankful at least that Medli was doing a good job keeping the two sides separate and not going at one another. The last thing anyone wanted was a brawl between them; especially given how Lurch had effortlessly lugged one of the cannons for Jolene’s ship onto Linebeck’s for the coming battle. The local Outset Militia as well was there, crossbows being tuned and weapons being prepared for what they hoped would be easily taken care of by the ships. Link slipped out the back of the tavern and headed back for the docks. He’d already had a plan to get onto the Hyrulean frigate and was still wearing his zora armor. In the low light from the torches, he soon reached the piers and waded into the water. Soon as it was up to his waist, he pulled the face mask over his nose and mouth and the goggles down from the floppy hat. He kicked off the bottom and dove in silently. Occasionally he’d peek out of the water to get his bearings, but soon had worked his way to the stern of the frigate. He pulled his clawshot out and aimed for the top of the captain’s cabin. A single shot and soon he was pulled out of the water. He climbed up the side until he reached the windows. Looking inside, he saw her.

She was pacing back and forth in there, alone. She’d undone the bun that was in her hair and looked more like the royalty she actually was. The deep red coat she’d had on earlier was over a chair she soon walked to sit in and undo her sandals. While she was occupied, Link carefully pulled his knife from his bracer and found the latches. He opened it and slipped inside. Once there, he stowed the clawshot and folded his arms. “You really need to work on your disguise, Zelda,” he said. “Second you came into Komali’s office, I knew it was you.”

She inhaled sharply and quickly looked over to him. A hand crossbow was leveled with him. Link raised his hands but kept them close to his body.

“We need to talk.”

“Talk about how insane you are for doing something like this?” she said in a hushed and sharp tone. Zelda slowly lowered the crossbow. “Talk about how you somehow got out of your cell and vanished before showing up a couple weeks later at the palace with Interloper Magic so tightly wrapped you it’s a miracle that you weren’t choking on it? Or about how you have been traveling with someone who could be a spy for Ganondorf?”

“Because of her help, Bellum isn’t a problem right now. All we have to deal with is that leviathan that’s headed this way.” Link lowered his hands once she’d put the crossbow on the floor once more. Zelda went back to undoing her sandals.

“You know I could call for the guards any moment, so why risk this?”

“You know me.”

“All too well.” She pulled one of the sandals away and tossed it along the floor. “Always a bit reckless and going more with your heart than your head.”

“We were trained to act on instinct. Was part of what got enhanced when we were put through The Trial of Grasses too.”
“You’ve admitted your instincts have been wrong before though.” She got the second sandal off and threw it over with the other one. “And we have proof as well.” Zelda stood up then. She pushed a lock of hair back behind a pointed ear. “So… What do you need to tell me?”

“Did you meet the knights and soldiers who were sent after me? After I left?”

She nodded slowly. “They said you said you were doing what you were trained for, even though I’m not sure I can completely see it.” Zelda walked over to the desk. She looked over a couple of the trinkets and books on it. “They called you a monster. Wanted to have you hanged for hurting them. But you didn’t kill any of them. And they should’ve had Irim and Pipt with them rather than to try and take you themselves.”

“They were part of that massacre?” Link looked shocked at it.

“They were the closest Chosen when we realized where you were.”

“Did any of them take part in it?” His voice was sharp now and he fought to keep it quiet to avoid raising suspicion. “Did any Chosen or Tower Mage take part in that?”

“…No.”

He breathed a sigh of relief. “Good…”

“That can’t be the only thing though…”

“You’re right.” He looked her in the eye. “I needed you to know that I’m not actively working for The Tribes or Ganondorf either.”

“Just working with someone who may be one of his spies.” She ran her hand back through her hair. There was a long silence then. They just looked to one another. Link felt he almost didn’t recognize her. The idealistic and warm princess he’d once known and cared for so well had been changed by the war and realities of working as a ruler of a world power. There was still wisdom in her voice, even if he noted the stress in it. “Why’d you do this, Link? Why’d you run off like this instead of coming to talk to me?”

“I tried! You told me about the risks and time of it and how with other information from The Sheikah it was too great a risk. You told me specifically that sometimes being the one in charge means sometimes good people do bad things for good reasons.”

“That what this is all about? You knew that.” She shook her head. “And sometimes… Sometimes it doesn’t pay off. Every action is a gamble when it comes to this war and the lives in it. Like when we broke the Gerudo’s codes. They still haven’t realized we have. But that sometimes means not stopping them at places.” Zelda slowly picked up a flask off the desk and unscrewed the top. “We need to make sacrifices. As much as I’d love to stop them at every point, the second they realize their coddled missives have been cracked and we’re able to intercept them without them realizing it, they’ll change it and we’ll have lost months of work. Or deliberately send false messages to be intercepted.”

“I see…”

“Did you think about this? At all before you went off on your own?”

“I did.” He shook his head a little then and glanced back to her. “Zelda, this is the hardest thing I’ve ever done. But I’m not trying to destroy Hyrule. I’m trying to find a way to stop this war without more of this fighting.”
“What do you think we’ve been trying to do through The Sheikah, Link?”

“Wouldn’t know.” He held his tongue, even though he wanted to remind her of the entire incident with The Conjunction. Link knew it wouldn’t be productive and if it got her angry, she was sure to alert the guards. “They keep their secrets incredibly well. If I had to take a guess though, you’re trying to find Ganondorf’s location so you could assassinate him. And you probably contacted them about this entire mess with Bellum and had people ready in case things went sour.”

She nodded slowly. He could see she was relieved a little, but a hint of worry was still there. How she held herself wasn’t like the princess, but just a young woman feeling the weight of her duty. “I’m hoping that won’t be the case.”

“You aren’t?”

“I want this war to end, Link. Just like you.” Zelda took a sip from the flask then. She licked her lips a little once she’d finished. “I want to have a peace treaty, but the raids have to stop. There’s other agreements and arrangements we need to make. But we can’t do that until we are able to stop the fighting.” She looked down for a moment. “I’d really like you to come back to us. We need all our Chosen. We need our Hero. Link, we’ve made mistakes. And I’m willing to find a way to fix them. I don’t want a massacre like what happened at the valley to ever happen again.”

“You have a plan then…”

“I do. And I want you to be in charge of it.”

He’d not expected to hear that. That the Princess of Hyrule wanted him to be in charge of making sure they didn’t become as monstrous as some of their enemies. That she wanted him to ensure they were working to the standards they were supposed to be held to. To truly be worthy of the Triforce of the Gods they were said to possess. Link immediately began thinking about how he could use this position and looked back at Zelda. “So… You’d pardon me.”

“I would,” she said.

“And then have me in charge of making sure something like this doesn’t happen again. To stop any actions of The Crown’s forces if I feel like they might compromise our standings. And prosecute those who do not follow it?”

She nodded. “War criminals. You’d be an arbiter. Able to pull people to a court so they can be tried and determine if they are guilty of it. Just like before, you’d answer to The Crown.”

“Okay…” Link nodded a little.

“There will be some work to set it up, but I can get the ball rolling.”

“If I say yes.”

“You’re already reconsidering my offer, aren’t you?”

Link groaned and gritted his teeth. “Zelda, can you blame me though? How many times has information not been shared with me? How often did The Crown try and manipulate me. The entire thing with Vaati and the pearls. Those things held hexer mutagens. And you knew more about him than you let on. Was I sent out to handle it because I was the right agent for the job or because of what…” He looked down slowly. “What you meant to me?”
It was quiet again for nearly a minute this time. Link pushed his hand up and through his hair. Zelda looked up at him for a moment, but then back to the floor. She hugged herself a little and then looked to him. Her blue eyes were saddened by his words. “Have you always thought that?”

“I don’t know what to believe with it.” He sighed a little. “I don’t know if I was used or if you really needed me there or if it’s both for why I was chosen for it. And hearing Impa questioning my worth as a Chosen didn’t help either.” He looked up to her then. “Did you know?”

“I…” She sniffed slightly. “I admit… I did suggest it to The Sheikah at the time… That you might be more ideal to handle it because I felt you would do the right thing. But I never told them to send you explicitly.”

“I see… And now he’s standing at the castle.”

“Under careful watch. Everyone knows what Vaati is capable of. When you broke in though, I had to be moved. We couldn’t take the risk.”

“And so you came out here… Disguised as a noble and her privateers for Hyrule.”

“Yes. But now I’ll have to leave again.” She looked at him harder now. “Especially since you have made contact with someone who could be an enemy spy.”

“I wasn’t planning on this, Zelda.”

“I know. Neither was I…” She shook her head. “So you’re going to leave then? Let the monster you’re chasing take this place apart?”

“No.” He let his arms fall to his sides. “I’m going to stay. And fight it. I was born here. So was my sister.”

Zelda chuckled a little, in spite of tears welling in her eyes. “Managed to talk to her a little. She’s absolutely adorable. Reminds me a lot of you too with how you want to do the right thing. Even if it’s kind of hard to figure it out nowadays.” She sighed and looked straight at him. “What happened to us, Link? What happened to the way things used to be?”

Link just avoided her gaze, at a loss for an answer. Maybe he had one, but dared not voice it.

“It used to be so much simpler… Maybe the world was always this way and we only realized it when we grew up.”

“Maybe…” He looked to her then. “My head wants to believe you, Zelda. That you really want me back to serve, and that this was all just an accident…” It was his turn to start to have tears in his eyes. “I fought for The Crown and you. But if you can’t show trust to one of your Chosen, how can I return that trust? How can I believe that things will be different this time? I just… I feel like I can’t trust The Crown anymore. Or you… No matter how much I want to. I feel that if I did accept your offer, it’d just be an empty gesture. That nothing really would change because of the nobles and members of the court.” Link glanced at the doors to the captain’s chambers. “I’ll help deal with the leviathan that’s coming. Just as you and the others are. But then I’ll be gone again.”

“Okay…”

He turned for the window. “I’m sorry for how this has worked out… I really am.”
“So am I."

Link pulled the mask back up over his mouth and nose and jumped out the window then back into the water. The conversation had felt more painful than he’d imagined it would be. As he surfaced, he heard voices above and quickly looking around the chamber. He heard Zelda’s voice as he hid against the side of the ship in the dark. He didn’t catch all of it, but did catch one thing. She didn’t mention him at all. Link dove under the water then to ensure he wouldn’t be discovered and swam back to shore. There was still work to be done though and he had to prepare for the leviathan’s arrival. In spite of how difficult it had been to talk to her again, it had helped clear his head to be prepared for the coming conflict.

Chapter End Notes

And now, the chapter I literally lost sleep over! Still kinda unsure about it, but... It's done. And huge thanks and an apology to those I tormented with my fears and worries over this chapter for well over a year.

As to why, well, this was kinda the first time actually SHOWING Zelda speaking and her point of view a bit. And I had some serious concerns and fears about this piece. The goal was NEVER to make Zelda actually look like a villain. If people think that then I have failed in what I've tried to do. And though, yes, there are some pretty horrible rulers in The Witcher and it'd prolly be par for the course, but the rulers in The Witcher as well are more complex than they initially appear. Even Emperor Emhyr, though I would not call him a good man due to his actions both in the books and the games, is a complex individual and can see the logic behind his choices. With Zelda I wanted to try and convey that sort of nuance as well with her. This is someone who is under an incredible amount of stress and might sometimes follow cold logic a little too well and mistake it for wisdom.

Other Devnotes:
-This entire fear actually kinda pushed me to start doing some of The Hera Archives, which would let me explore the characters in different areas and interactions. Something that would let them act far differently than what we see in the story and give us more insight into them.
-It's another short chapter, but still. I almost included the next part of it all here, but opted not to as the previous one was a little longer than my usual around 3k words.

And that'll be it for this week! I'll be back next week with more! Special thanks this week to RxVesper for their bookmark! And as always a huge thanks to everyone who's read, left comments and kudos and all! Keep being awesome people! I'll see you next week!
He sat in the hold of Linebeck’s ship, sharpening his sword while a concoction boiled on his lantern. It was midday and he could hear Medli playing her harp from a hammock nearby. Link finished on the sword and picked up the bottle with a black mixture in it.

“What’re you using for this one?” she asked.

“Farore’s Kiss, Red Ice and Venomblood,” he said. “I’ll only drink it if I really need it though.”

“That’s going to make you look really terrible…”

“I know. My veins will be marbled like a corpse and you’ll really be able to see my eyes stick out. And if it eats me I can make sure it chokes on me.”

“Your plan isn’t actually to get eaten though, right?”

“Of course not, but have to prepare for it.” He put the bottle aside to cool and grabbed his crossbow. He loaded a silver bolt into it and cocked it before slipping it to its place on his hip.

“How’d your talk go?”

Link just shook his head. “Soon as the island is safe, we’re leaving.”

“Have a plan already?”

“Get back to the mainland. Hopefully before she does. And then back to helping people and ending this war.” He looked back to his weapons and continued preparing. “How’re the evacuations?”

“We got lucky. The merchants were able to take on a few others. But there’s no way we’ll be able to get everyone to safety, even if we loaded everyone on all our ships and abandoned the island. And if it does what it did to the archipelago, hiding in the caves on the island will be a death sentence.”

“No choice then…” He left the shield there, knowing that against something so large, it’d crumple instantly under the beast’s strength, opting for both blades on his back instead. Link got to his feet as he adjusted the scabbards on his back. “What about the shore cannons?”

“They can’t be moved.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

“There are two twenty-inch coastal guns up there. I’m not sure how the Labrynnans got the up there in the first place. You should’ve seen Linebeck when he saw them.”

“Oh?”

Medli nodded. “He used to be a merchant marine during the war, so he knows how they’re supposed to be kept in ready to fire condition.”

“Are you telling him about those poor Talus-forged cannons?” they heard the smuggler shout from
above.

“Yeah!”

Linebeck came down the stairs then. He rested his hand on the pommel of his saber and carried himself in a manner that looked far prouder and noble than he really was. If neither Link or Medli knew him better, they’d have mistaken him for a captain of a Labrynnan destroyer, or even one of the rare ironclads that were the pride of their navy. “Talus Province in the peaks has some of the finest forges in the entire world. And it was there they forged the costal cannons that line the harbor and finest forts in Labryna. And here are, painted! Rusted and overgrown! Why, if they had the proper pulleys and cranes, they’d be able to bring them down from there to where they could be of better use!” He waved a hand wildly as he spoke. “And the insides of them! So much buildup! Why, if you fired them in their current state, they’d explode like a powder keg!” He paced towards the bow, past Link and Medli. “I told the mayor and the militia commander! Get scrubbing those insides or else they’ll kill the militiamen rather than that overgrown sea snake!”

Link let out a sigh as he grabbed one of the knives for his scabbard. “So we can’t even count on those.”

“And that’s to say nothing of those concrete supports they’re attached to!” Linebeck spun on his heel. “Not a single coastal garrison commander would even allow those to stand in their current condition! One shot with them in their current state and the supports would break under the recoil! Told them to try and shore it up with some wood and support it against some rocks they’ve been able to roll out of the Fairy Woods. But I don’t know if they’ll work!” He shook his head and stroked his chin slowly. He took a sudden move and the hand left the pommel of his saber to flick a finger at Link. “Why, the firing team in charge of that gun would be tied to the grating and given fifty lashes from the cat o’ nine tails!”

“Fifty?!?” Medli cried.

“Not as bad as getting clawed in the back by a king dodongo,” Link muttered.

“Some of the knots in those whips actually used the claws of smaller dodongos,” Linebeck said. “Of course, Empress Ambi has outlawed the use of those ones for maritime punishments.”

“So, no one gets flogged anymore, that’s good.” Medli got out of her hammock and slipped the harp on her back once more.

“Oh, didn’t say that, Medli.” He turned slightly to face her then, arms folded under his chest. “Just that she’s outlawed the use of the ones with claws. They’re still knotted.”

“Wonderful…”

“Another reason I left their service.”

“So we can’t count on those cannons at all then,” Link said.

“Well, if the captain and militia is able to clean them well and the supports they installed hold when firing…” He looked back at Link. “But I’d regretfully not count on them. We might get a few shots out of them all the same though.”

“We’ve still got a few guns on the ships though,” Medli said. “And we can still surround it.”

“We can. And mine is not at the mercy of the winds. We’ll be able to keep moving more effectively. Can depart as soon as we’re ready.”
“Let’s get going then,” Link said. He pulled the hat on to complete the armor. The facemask was pulled up next over his nose and mouth. “Everyone aboard?”

“Lurch is topside with Haro and a few others from the crew. They’ll be down to feed the boilers and man the turret. Medli, playing spotter for us again?”

“What I’m good at here,” she said. “Aryll was able to get us an old balloon from a wandering cartographer. I’m going to tie it to one of my grappling hooks and we can use it as a buoy to track the creature.”

“Oh?” Link asked.

“Yeah. Aryll suggested it while you were talking with Tetra.”

He was thankful that he hadn’t revealed the captain’s true name to Linebeck or her importance. Link gave her a slight nod and then looked back to Linebeck. “Signal the others then. We’ll head out to sea and be circling the island until that thing shows up.” He grabbed the bottle of his mixture and corked it, praying he wouldn’t have to drink it.

“Of course,” Linebeck said. He headed back up the stairs. “Alright! Prepare to cast off! We’ve got a giant eel to kill, boys!”

“Still find it a little hard to believe he’s changed enough to be willing to go along with this entire crazy plan.”

“You’re telling me,” Medli said. She picked up her grappling hook from near the hammock she’d used and slipped it over her shoulder. “I’m sure we’ll be able to take care of this thing.”

“Confident now?”

She nodded. “We’ve got a plan. We have people willing to fight. And we have a good idea of the creature’s methods. I do kind of wish Aveil could help here too still, but I’m also glad she got away before Zelda had her privateers try and take her into custody. Don’t think that would’ve gone well for anyone.”

“Yeah.” Link started for the stairs then, Medli right behind him. “Aryll staying on shore I’m guessing?”

“Said she’d be more help playing spotter at the docks. I told her not to take one of the skiffs too and get too close to the leviathan if it’d appear.”

“Smart.” They reached the bridge. Linebeck was already at the wheel. Out of the windows, they saw the other pirates from Jolene’s ship moving quickly. Lurch was already loading one of the cannons they’d borrowed and mounted on the bow aimed forward. One of them was undoing the moorings and two others were pulling the ramp up to let the ship depart from the docks. In mere moments, they were free.

“All hands prepare about face!” Linebeck called. Link glanced at him for a moment before heading for the deck outside. The ship pulled out of the docks and was soon in open waters. Outset was still visible from the boat as the two frigates pulled out a couple minutes later as the wind picked up. Link watched for trouble on the horizon and Medli took off to circle.

The skies were clear, though the wind had picked up considerably. Far on the horizon, Link could
see stormclouds boiling. They looked like they were at least a day away though. His hopes that the leviathan would appear in the clear day were granted when he saw Medli stop to flutter far above the sea. He rushed to the bow and looked. She waved the large red balloon wildly before dropping it into the sea. Link could barely make out the rope that was attached to the end of it.

“Over there!” he shouted, pointing.

The crew quickly turned their attention and Linebeck began ringing the bell. One on the tower above the bridge started flashing a mirror towards the two frigates. A minute later, they’d taken a turn and started to head around. Jolene’s moved towards the stern, while Tetra’s the bow. A second later though, the forward guns of the frigates opened fire, white smoke erupting from their bows. Link spun around to see the beast. It emerged from the waters, breaching high before diving back under. He spotted the speck floating above it that was his friend, hurl the grappling hook into a spot on its back, between the segments of its shell. She let go of the rope and quickly gained altitude as the creature dove back under the waves. The balloon remained floating on the surface as the creature went under. The waves from its dive rippled outward, soon crashing into the hull of the ships. They were knocked slightly, but were in no danger. The balloon bobbed in the water for a minute or so before it started to float forward, pulled along the surface, heading right for the ships. They saw the shadow of the creature under the waves before it broke through. The spine of the beast sliced through the water and the cannons opened fire.

The turret on Linebeck’s ship turned and the two pirates on top quickly fired. Moments after, they’d already opened the breach and were loading a second round. Lurch picked up one of the two cannons on the deck and quickly moved it to the side so it could open fire. Link’s ears rang as he heard the shots. White smoke began to cloud the decks.

“Where’d it go?!” shouted one of the pirates.

“Check port!” Lurch ordered. One of the pirates quickly went to the side and let out a scream.

When Link looked, he saw a ropa crawling up the side, having skewered the pirate with three long tendrils. It flicked them slightly and the pirate was torn into three pieces that fell into the water. Two more of the beasts crawled up. The silver blade left his back and in an instant the hylian had closed the distance and stabbed the creature through the massive orange and yellow eye. Another came from the back, swinging its clawed tentacle into him. Link was knocked over as the other pirates pulled blades and began to fight the creatures. He got to his feet quickly and swept the longsword in an arc. One of the creatures backed away from them, but it had given Link the space he needed to lunge and stab its eye. The beast burst into black smoke and ash, leaving only a puddle of slime as evidence it had ever been.

Two more of the beasts emerged from the side, swinging their tendrils wildly. A pirate shouted a warning before one scythe of the creature cut his head cleanly off. Lurch took a quick step forward and grabbed it by the tentacle it had just used and hurled it back into the sea. It made an inhuman screech as it flew back into the waves. The next one crawled up, swinging at one of the pirates. They parried and ducked, but were impaled in the leg. The creature raised two more tentacles to slice through it, but Link intervened, leaping down and slicing the tentacles away. As the beast reeled, he stabbed it through its eye, killing it. Another two appeared as the cannons from the frigates fired at the leviathan. He saw the flash of fire from the costal cannons on Outset then and plumes of white water erupt. The goron grabbed another of the creatures and gouged its eye with his stony fingers. In an instant, it burst into smoke and ash.
Link took a quick breath and pulled the bottle with the black mixture in it. He bit into the cork and ripped it out. It fell on the deck and he drank it back. The heat of the elixir burned as it sank down his throat. He could only inhale as his veins marbled. His skin paled. He felt his muscles burn and finally he coughed, dropping the bottle on the deck. A white gasp of cold air billowed out of his mouth and a couple droplets of blood sizzled on the deck, burning a couple tiny holes into it. He gritted his teeth as he looked up to see another of the creatures lunge for him. A flick of his fingers, a flash of green burst with a crack sent the creature flying overboard.

One of the monsters climbed up the bridge, aiming to kill the two manning the cannon. Before it had even landed a tentacle on them though, Link had appeared in another flash of green to take the hit. One tentacle skewered through his chest, but quickly began to melt as his transmuted blood ate at it. The pirates parried more swings, but failed to land any blows, leaving it to the former Chosen to kill the beast. When another appeared, he flicked his hand out again, sending it back into the seas with a crack of wind. The pirates didn’t get a chance to say thanks or voice their terror at seeing the monster that had saved them.

On the main deck, he saw Lurch grab another of the beasts and throw it out to sea. A second had gotten on his back and was wrapping its tendrils around his arms, making it difficult to move them. A third leapt out of the water, stabbing at his tough hide. Even though gorons were tough, Link knew full well they weren’t invincible, especially since he saw chips of their skin fly off. Link climbed over the edge of the tower and leapt, kicking the one on his back off. It attacked him, swinging wildly. He caught one tentacle with his free hand and kicked it in the eye. It stabbed at his leg, shattering the armor there. As it wrapped around the wound though, his blood bubbled and gushed enough from the wound that it began to sizzle. Taking the discomfort caused by the venomblood’s effects, he stabbed it twice through the eye then. It collapsed and vanished in a flash. Link turned around to see Lurch rip the other one in half, having dug his fingers into its eye and using it as a point to do so. As the two halves flew away from his hands, it vanished. The goron looked around quickly, seeing that most of their attackers had been dealt with. Link took a moment to catch his breath. He heard the sizzle of his blood burning into Linebeck’s deck between the shots from the cannons. There was also the clash of blades and shouting. Glancing over, he saw the other two frigates fighting with more of the tentacle-monsters.

“Linebeck!” he shouted. “Pull us alongside!” Link looked at the goron then. Lurch took a step back and had a look of horror on his face.

“What the hell happened to you?!” he nearly shouted.

“Can you jump?”

“Yes, but answer my question!”

“Another potion.” He pulled one of the red vials Aveil had given him out and uncorked it. The ship turned and they started to near Jolene’s frigate. Already they could see the pirates aboard frantically fighting off as best they could. As he downed the potion, feeling his wounds sealing, Link saw one of the monsters impale a pirate with all of its tentacles, leaping off and climbing the mast. He pulled his crossbow and took aim. Lurch backed away from the side and curled up before rolling forward. Link fired, striking the creature and causing it to fall. Glancing to his side then, he saw Lurch roll through the railing and flew through the side of the ship, smashing one of the creatures crawling up the side as he did. Link jumped across a second after. A couple of the crew glanced back to see the two there, but swiftly turned back to their cannons. One shouted to fire and Link heard a ringing briefly in his ears as the gun rolled back and strained against its ropes.

“Any luck yet?” Lurch shouted.
“None!” one of the gunners said. “Got a couple hits! It’s headin’ right into those shore guns though!”

“We’ll take it,” Link said. He glanced to see the way to the top deck and rushed up it.

The chaos reminded him of the Northern Front. Four of the crew lay dead on the wood, slick with blood. Another joined them, in pieces from one of the creatures. Jolene barked orders as she parried swings from the monsters. Another pirate fell as one of the monsters broke his legs with their tentacles. His screams were silenced by it stabbing him through the heart and throat at the same time. Link leapt forward and stabbed through it before it could free itself. Two jumped for him, seeming to realize he was the greatest threat. As they did, he flicked his fingers and formed a crystal of magic around him. Their barbs clashed against the barrier. If it wasn’t for the Farore’s Kiss turning his veins, he’d have burned through his magic by now. Instead, it felt like second nature for him to use the signs. A spin, holding the longsword in its grip by both hands, he sliced through them as they tried to break through the barrier. As they struggled on the deck, he leapt onto one, driving the blade through the eye. When he turned to deal with the other one, he saw the pirate captain stab it with her cutlass.

“Behind you!” Link shouted.

She turned in time to see another. It jumped her, stabbing forward. The barb sliced along her side and stomach. In spite of the wound, she swung the cutlass around with a shout, cutting into it. She hacked again and managed to take one of its tendrils from it before stabbing it repeatedly in the eye. Its limbs flailed wildly as it vanished, leaving a smear of slime and ash on the deck. Another of the beasts crawled up from the side, forcing Link and Jolene to stand backs to one another with the rest of the crew.

Three of the creatures circled around them, tendrils swinging. Link thought quickly, realizing what he’d have to do. “Everyone duck!” He channeled energy through the sword, flicking his fingers slightly along it. Fire spurted from the hilt and swept up the blade. The beasts leapt for him as the pirates ducked or rolled out of the way. Jolene leapt back just as the longsword swept in a circle, flames trailing its path. His shield shattered with a strike of a tendril. Another drove into his shoulder, blood shooting from the wound and hitting the creature’s tentacle. The blade cleaved through all three, setting each ablaze. The squeals and screams echoed around them as the pirates quickly set to stabbing them through the eye as they lay burning on the deck. Another emerged over the side as the cannons fired again. A full broadside crashed into the leviathan off the port bow, causing it to roar. Link swept the blade, still ablaze from the magic, in an upward arc, grazing the beast’s eye. The return stroke down cut through the eye and the rest of its body in half. Both sides of the beast fell to the deck, but vanished before they landed.

The pirates looked on in shock at what he’d done; how swiftly he’d dealt with them. He took a moment to catch his breath, sheathing the blade on his back. Lurch emerged from below, carrying a swivel gun in each hand that had been modified for his use like pistols. As another of the creatures crawled over the railing, he leveled one of the guns and fired. The boom was deafening as grapeshot tore into the tentacles. It fell back into the ocean then. “Everyone okay?” he asked.

“Y-yeah,” one of the pirates said, eyes fixed on Link.

“What happened to him?” another asked.

“Looks like death, smells like it too.”
“Oye! You lot!” Jolene shouted. “You’ve never heard the stories of a ploughin’ hexer before?!” She sheathed her blade and clutched the wound at her side. “Get us clear and start loading the depth charges! We need to drive it back to the surface so those coastal guns can hit it!” Before another word could be said though, the leviathan breached the surface. It grabbed the mast of the hyrulean frigate with its jaws and tentacles around its mouth.

Link looked at Jolene. “I need to get over there!” he said.

“Can’t,” she replied. “We’ve lost the weather gauge. By the time we’ve pulled around, they’ll be worm food.”

He looked around quickly, spotting Medli still high above. Linebeck’s ship had moved off and was opening fire again with the turret. A cannonball shattered a piece of its armor, but it didn’t let go of the frigate. He did see slime ooze from the cracks between its shells along its tail, forming more ropa. He had to get over there…

“MEDLI!” he shouted over the chaos. He tried again then, stopping when he heard Lurch’s second swivel gun fire. Glancing back he saw another of the monsters vanish in a puff of smoke.

“Link!” he heard. Turning quickly he saw the rito beating her wings to hover above the deck.

“Glad you heard me.”

He could see the fear on her face, even though there was an understanding in her eyes. “You drank it…”

“Was that or let ropas overrun the ship.” He scratched at his collar. “How bad do I look?”

“Like a freshly raised redead.”

“Terrific.” He looked over to the leviathan. “I need to get to Tetra’s ship before the leviathan tears it apart.”

“I see that.” She beat her wings twice more and landed on the deck. Medli walked past him for a moment to look at the deck below. The surviving pirates were already clearing their wounded away and wiping blood and slime off the deck as two more climbed into the sails. “I have an idea, but you’re not going to like it…”

“Oh?”

“Get on the catapult they used. Grab my feet and they’ll launch us over. I’ll glide down and drop you on Tetra’s ship. Or at least get you close enough so you can use your Farore’s Wind to land safely.

Link looked at her. Had there been any way to convey emotion through the way his face was at the moment, it would’ve been unadulterated annoyance. “You’re right. I don’t like that idea.” He sighed. “Well, better get this over with then…” Link walked down the steps and to the deck below. He slipped the sword back in its scabbard. “Jolene! We need to borrow your catapult!”

Chapter End Notes
Second to last chapter for the season! Can you believe it?! I sure as heck can't!

I've also posted the first roughly 600 words of Season Three on my tumblr as well! I'm taking questions as well for the setting there as well, so feel free to drop on by. :)

Devnotes:
- Twenty inch guns are actually REALLY big. For reference, the USS Missouri that fought in World War II had nine 16 inch guns mounted in its main turrets.
- Keeping men in order at sea during the Age of Sail is disturbing. Caning and flogging and hangings for all!
- Given the size of an average goron, I felt that swivel guns would make excellent pistols for them.

Special thanks this week to vaporeonxglaceon for their bookmark! And as always a huge thanks to all you readers, kudos-leavers, commenters and bookmarkers! I'll see you next week for the season finale! Keep being awesome!
“You’re aware of how risky this is?” Jolene said.

“Believe me, I know,” Link groaned before the pirate had even finished. He had Medli sitting on his shoulders, hands firmly gripping her legs. The rito looked down at him, almost as nervous as he was. “But we don’t really have a lot of options.”

“Could be worse though,” Medli said. “Don’t know how but…”

“It could be raining. Could be a hurricane. Tropical storm…”

“Link, please don’t…”

He looked up at her with a slight smirk on his lips. It’d have been humorous if not for the fact virtually every dark vein was visible and stuck out against his currently pale and toxic skin. “It helps the mood.”

“Not for me.”

“You two ready?” Lurch asked.

“Ready as we’ll ever be,” Link said. He took a deep breath. “Medli, ready?”

“Yeah,” she said, voice shaking a little. The boat rocked slightly as the cannons fired again, trying to free the other ship from the leviathan.

“Launching in three! Two! One!”

“Fire!” Jolene shouted.

There was a snap and the small catapult launched the hylian and rito high into the air. Link felt his entire body shake. He flew into the air, hearing Medli gasp as she spread her wings. They soared high above the ocean below. The sounds of cannons and shouting far below. They were still falling though and at a surprising rate. Link guessed it was how heavy his armor was.

“I’m gonna have to let go soon!” Medli cried from above him.

“Just a little further and I’ll be able to get there!” he shouted back. “Just a little closer!” He could make out now on the deck of the frigate; the privateers fighting a losing battle against at least eight of the monsters. Tetra and two other privateers were on the bridge, dealing with four others, but they were surrounded. One of the privateers with her suddenly went down as a ropa gored him. The mast began to creak and snap. He felt Medli suddenly drop several feet suddenly. Her talons dug into his armor and the cloths. “Careful! Blood’s acid right now!”

“I gotta let you go, Link!”

“Just another few seconds.” He heard her strain, beating her wings harder before the talons let go. He looked down and let go of her legs, falling. As he did, he quickly made the wind sign and thrust his hand down. A snap of magic and he was held a few feet above in the air. The force of the blast had knocked the advancing few monsters back, giving the desperate privateers the breathing room.
they needed. Right next to him, the rito landed, looking tired, but quickly readied herself in a defensive position. The ropas were upon them almost as soon as their feet had touched the deck. Medli swung a hand out fast, sending a burst of wind at it to knock it back. Another jumped for Link, but he grabbed the longsword and the second after it had left its scabbard the monster was sliced in half. As another came for him, he jumped and rolled towards the stern, avoiding it as it tried to stab him. The rito handmaiden though spun and managed to catch its eye with her talons, beating away the flat end of the scythes on the creature’s tentacles with her wings. A twist of her ankle coupled with closing her talons tightly was all that was needed to kill the creature in an instant.

Two of the privateers were emboldened by seeing the others fight and charged forward. One tackled a beast and the other stabbed it with a pike repeatedly. The tendrils waved wildly around until the pike managed to pierce the eye deep enough to kill it. The one holding it down fell on his face as it vanished in foul magic. There was the boom of a swivel gun on the deck above. Link looked to see one of Tetra’s guards having fired it at the leviathan, still gripping the main mast. Splinters and the topsail shattered as its tentacles pulled and ripped it apart.

“GET CLEAR!” Medli shouted. She rolled towards the privateers and Link as the topsail crashed into the deck. It crushed one of the two privateers and another of the monsters, while the other managed to escape. The surviving creatures rolled and writhed over the damage and lunged for the others. The rito swept her hands around in a circle and thrust her palms forward at the advancing creatures. A long billow of wind magic flew from her fingers, knocking the cloth of the fallen sail back, but more importantly, it kept the monsters back. Link lobbed a grenade then at three who were particularly close. It rattled on the deck for a moment before going off. Tentacles flew through the air, some into the sea once more, leaving three badly wounded monsters on the deck. A scream above though grabbed Link’s attention. He looked to see Tetra’s two guards ensnared and one was swiftly cut to pieces.

“Can you handle them?” he asked.

“For a little bit!” the rito shouted, wind still billowing from her hands to keep the others back. A crossbow bolt landed in one of the creatures, but failed to kill it. The crew next to her had found their courage and were quickly firing into them as Medli held them back. Two more bolts to one and it was killed.

“Remember to watch your flanks!” He gave her a pat on the shoulder and quickly turned to look at the bridge. Link lowered his sword to the back and leapt into a pirouette, vanishing in a flash of green as the blade began to rise in an upward swing.

“I know!”

Tetra blocked another swing from the creatures that had climbed atop the bridge. It was only her and one other guard now. She stabbed it with her cutlass forward and swept it in an arc out of the creature’s eye. As it writhed on the deck, she fired her flintlock, killing it. The one at the far end was sliced in half with a flash of green. Link’s blade cleaved cleanly through slimed sinews and tentacles as he reappeared behind it. Its remains blackened on the deck before bursting into smoke. The surviving guard quickly put himself between Link and Tetra, watching the monster that was now before them.

Ignoring them, he looked to see another of the beasts climbing up the side. As the tentacles reached over, he lunged for it, sweeping in a controlled arc that cut off one of the barbed tentacles. It climbed over and jumped for him, landing a blow. He ignored the pain and pulled the tentacle out
as he kicked it into the railing. The barb already was melting from his blood as Link forced it into the creature’s eye. It screeched from the pain as Link kicked it back into the sea. Behind them another climbed aboard. Tetra and the guard spun to deal with it. She parried first, then stabbed at the tentacles while the guard thrust his harpoon into it. It swept low though as they did and sliced into the guard’s leg. He fell, forcing Tetra to grab the harpoon and finish stabbing it through the creature. It vanished in a puff of smoke when Link turned back to see if they were okay.

“You two okay?” Link called over.

“Fine!” the guard said, struggling to get to his feet. Tertra pulled him up.

“We won’t be long as that thing’s holding onto the ship though!” she said. “It’s making those things!”

“Have to make it let go then,” Link said, looking to the leviathan. It lurched again, pulling at the mast. Another shell exploded against its armor from the coastal guns. Around them, the two other ships circled, firing occasionally to try and free the ship. He looked down to see the privateers and Medli dispatch the last of the beasts. She swept her arms in an arc. A gust burst forth and sent the last of them into the mast. With it stunned, two of the privateers rushed forward and drove a harpoon through its eye. They barely had time to catch their breath as two more globs of slime fell out of the beast’s carapace and formed on the deck.

“We make that thing let go though, it could crash into the deck and split the ship in two,” Tetra said, walking over to him. Link looked at her. Her face went from one of exhausted determination to shock at what stared back. She looked away from him then, wearing the same look when he’d appeared in the palace. Link wondered if, even with all her knowledge of The Chosen, she’d ever seen one after consuming their potions.

“So, knock it back first.” The mast snapped again, this time the beast moved its fins onto the deck, swiping into the cabin under the bridge and slicing into the foremast. “Can you get it to let go with the tentacles?”

“We… We might. The swivel guns could work.” She looked back. “Gonzo! Get some fresh shot and load the bridge guns!”

The guard gave her a salute and rushed down the stairs, harpoon still in hand. Link glanced back over to see the other privateers and Medli still holding back the monsters the creature produced. She flipped over one to send a gust into its back. The two other privateers then impaled it as it flew uncontrolled into their blades. He then looked at the leviathan again and sheathed the longsword and started walking for the railing.

“Link, what are you doing?” Tetra asked.

“The shell. It’s damaged enough and segmented. I might be able to get some cluster bombs under it.”

“And if it doesn’t work you’ll blow your hand off!”

He hadn’t heard that over the sound of the cannons shooting again. Some shots went wide. Others shattered pieces of the monster’s armor. Link pulled the clawshot out and one of the cluster bombs. He took aim and fired the device. Its claws sprung open and it latched onto the dorsal fins of the creature. Hitting a button on the grip, he was pulled forward. Gravity took minor effect as he was in the air and landed on the creature’s back. Holding onto it tightly he lit the first cluster bomb. He looked to the segments and jammed it under. Letting go with his hands and the clawshot, he
dropped lower before the bomb exploded. He saw small explosions of gore along its tentacles above and the beast pulled back. The entire frigate shook as its main mast began to snap in half. Link jammed another two bombs into a crack in the armor and fired the clawshot this time to go higher on its back. As they exploded, shell splintered. Exposed nacre was covered in black gore that was washed away as the beast pulled back into the water. The main mast snapped away, tentacles flailing around its mouth. It bent backwards, towards where Link was clinging to its spine. He was able to pull the facemask back up over his mouth and the headpiece down just as they fell into the chilly water.

The force of the impact nearly made him let go, but he held firm. He latched the clawshot tightly to the spine and held on with it in his right hand. The water was filled with debris and gore, but it quickly cleared as the leviathan dived. Link pulled the silver longsword from his back and stabbed between the segments of its shell. He dodged a piece of the destroyed mast that floated upward, but didn’t avoid another chunk. It hit him and he was flailing. His arm strained as he held onto the clawshot for dear life. Deeper they went, the darker it became. The last piece of the mast flew past him and he began to reel himself back towards the creature’s spine. Piece by piece, he got closer. Soon he was able to plant his feet again on the creature’s back, then his left hand while the right still held the clawshot. He held on tight as he could as he quickly detached the clawshot and fired to get higher up on the creature.

The long tentacles were swept back, the eyes watching his movements. He kept climbing though. He reached the end of the spine, near the head of the creature. The tentacles suddenly swept for him, forcing him to move back out of reach. They lashed and beat the creature’s shell as he avoided its grasp. He managed to get his crossbow free and took aim for the eye of one of the tentacles. With a squeeze of the trigger, it fired. The silver bolt landed in the eye of one of the tentacles, causing it to flail back. The others seemingly redoubled their efforts. Link pulled the sword from his back once more and began to stab at the segment just under where the clawshot held. He glanced up when he heard something explode, muffled by the water. Another powder keg sunk down, sparks of a fuse flickering far above before it exploded too. A third fell into the water then and sank. The leviathan swam deeper so that Link could see the ocean floor then. The next keg went off far closer to him than he’d have liked and he felt the shockwave of the water rattle his armor. That seemed to get its attention though, and the beast began to surface.

A minute later, it broke the surface. It breached high, forcing Link to drive the sword into the crack between the shell’s plates and held on. Glancing over, he saw Jolene’s frigate open fire with a full broadside against the creature. It was starting for the ship when there was a boom from the island. There was a flash of black blood moments later. Link saw the lower left side of the creature’s head explode from a direct hit from the shore guns and sent ripples down the rest of the creature. Several of the beast’s tentacles were destroyed from the impact and the lower jaw of the shell had been shattered. As it dropped into the water, it swiftly turned for the island. Another shot from the shore landed close, sending a plume of white water into the air. It dove again, the dive making Link’s grip on the clawshot loosen some. Moments after they dived, another keg exploded behind him, catching some of the beast’s tail as it went under the waves. It rose again moments later, nearing the Outset docks.

He could almost hear the shouting as it dove headfirst into some of the small fishing boats that were there. A couple locals who had not sought shelter behind the pair of cannons on the cliffs fled the coast as they saw the beast. Link stowed the clawshot and pulled his sword out before blinking away with his magic. It was a rough landing as he rolled onto the dirt nearby. The leviathan let out
a roar and began to pull itself on land with its foreclaws. It even used some of its surviving tentacles to help get it moving. Purple slime seeped out of the wound that had been caused. It formed into more ropas, but they lacked the same speed as the ones that had attacked the ships. Link forced himself to his feet and watched as the beast lumbered into the buildings right on the coast. Its tentacles whipped furiously, smashing buildings while the smaller monsters swarmed after the few fleeing militiamen from the battle. Link took a deep breath. He was exhausted from the swim, bleeding from his partially sealed wounds and enraged that the creature had harmed so many. The facemask had fallen from his nose. His hat and the mask attached to it was adrift at sea somewhere and his armor had almost no integrity left and he’d stuffed the clawshot back on his belt.

He forced himself to stand tall, the silver longsword in his left hand. His fingers coiled tighter around the blade’s grip and he broke into a run for the leviathan. As he got close, he channeled magic through his burning muscles and leapt at it. When he reappeared several feet in the air, he aimed his blade down and stabbed into one of the tentacles.

Before one of them could swing around to grab him, he blinked away, landing under it with a roll. His heart pounded. The screeches of the smaller beasts echoed around him. Another tentacle swept from below, grabbing him. It didn’t last though as a small explosion struck its mouth above. The tentacle let go and dropped him on his back. He kicked up, landing on his feet and forcing to stand, he saw Aryll with her crossbow up the path, among some buildings. She raised one of her repeaters and opened fire, sending silver bolts into the charging tentacled beasts as some of the villagers fled for higher ground. Three quickly fell before one got close. She dropped the repeater and pulled the short sword she had out. As it leapt in the air, she ducked down, aiming the blade upward. It crashed into the weapon’s edge and the speed was all that was needed to bifurcate it. As the leviathan advanced, she dropped the blade and reloaded her full-size crossbow with another bomb arrow. She fired moments after sighting and a fiery blast engulfed its mouth.

While it was occupied, Link swung at the nearest tentacle, both hands gripping the blade. It cleaved into it, causing black blood to gush. Another swing and it began to fall away. With the third it was severed. Another came for him, but he blinked away before it could grab him. He felt his arms burning more than before now because of the energies of casting his signs. Had it not been for the Farore’s Kiss in his blood, he’d have long burned through all his magic. Instead it was second nature to use them. Aryll ran back, loading another bomb arrow and firing a third into the thing’s mouth. This time its teeth shattered from the blast as it nearly went into its gaping maw. It swung its tentacles forward then, swinging them into the ground and throwing dirt and debris up. The shockwave of it alone though was enough to knock Aryll through the window of a building. It advanced on her, swinging its clawed fin out and slicing the wood apart. He heard his sister screams muffled by the shattering of wood.

“ARYLL!” He jumped forward, a flash of green behind him as he skidded to a stop in front of the ruined hut. The dust from the collapse didn’t give him any vision. He turned around to see the leviathan lash forward with its remaining tentacles. Link gritted his teeth and roared. A green glow enveloped him as he channeled his energies. A second later, a flash echoed from him in a spherical shockwave. Time seemed to slow for him and in an instant, he was gone. A second later, he reappeared in a flash on the beast’s back, swinging with a blazing blade into one of the tentacles. Then again for the next and the next. The eyes of the few villagers who were there could see him in nearly four places at once as he sliced through the tentacles. Against one he slashed hard low. Another he ducked and swept through the eye at the end along with a piece of it nearer the main creature. In seconds, he was standing before it again.

It bled terribly into the ground and lashed its tail, shattering what was left of the docks. He looked up as it let out a roar of pain. Without any thought other than that of rage for what it had done to
his sister, he pulled two cluster grenades and the only frost bomb he had. Holding them against his body, he lit one of the grenades with a flicker of magic and lobbed them into the leviathan’s gaping gullet. The sideways jaws closed and there was a muffled explosion that forced its jaws open once more. A white cloud billowed out, frost almost instantaneously formed over the jaws. More came out of the wounds along its top and the remains of its tentacles. Ice crusted over the top half of its body. For a second it held in the air above him. He jumped back in a roll into the ruined hut as the leviathan collapsed. The head shattered the second it hit the ground into thousands of scything shards. He shielded himself, creating the barrier around him. It shrieked as pieces broke apart against it until the magic broke apart itself. Some of the ice sliced into his arm as he covered his face.

Before the survivors stood two monsters. The first was the leviathan, sent to destroy everything in its path by Bellum. The top half of its corpse lay in thousands of pieces of frozen gore that slowly melted in the afternoon sun. On the shore, the damaged hyrulean frigate had been dragged to the island by Linebeck’s steamboat while the surviving privateers, their captain among them, rushed up the beach to the ruined village. The survivors eyes were fixed almost exclusively on the second monster though; the one that stood like a man and had slain the first. They saw his pale skin, his marbled veins, and speechlessly watched as he reached for the hylian girl in the ruined hut. Blood dripped from his wounds, sizzling on the rubble where it fell. Link sheathed the blade on his back, exhausted from the fighting and saw his sister on her backside in the rubble. She was bruised and bleeding, but alive. He offered a hand, but she recoiled. Her wide eyes were focused on how he looked and the gruesome sight that lay behind him.

“Don’t touch him!” someone shouted. “Don’t even look at him!”

He reached for her again, offering an open hand. Aryll didn’t even look at it. She scooted back, away from him. Her breath shuddered as she did.

“It’s okay,” he said, voice quiet. “It’s okay, Aryll.” Link extended his hand again, leaning towards her.

“Don’t touch me!” she shouted. The outburst made Link pull his hand away. Aryll forced herself to her feet then. She struggled to stand on her own with a particularly deep looking wound on her right leg. “…What… What the hell are you?”

“Aryll, it’s me… It’s Link.”

“…How?” She sniffed then, steadying herself against some of the rubble. “No.”

“I swear, Aryll, it’s me. I…”

“No! You can’t be him! I saw what happened to those pirates! What the hell are you?!”

“Get away from her!” one of the militiamen shouted. He held a harpoon in both hands. Another was next to him. Link looked to his right. His eyes locked with Tetra’s. No, not Tetra’s, Zelda’s. She’d known the truth, but the look of horror on her face as well suggested that she wasn’t aware of what he had been capable of in the first place.

“You,” Aryll said then. “Whatever you are…”

“Aryll, it’s me,” he said, looking back at her. “I had to…”

“You’re not my brother!” she shouted at the top of her lungs. “Whatever you are, you are not him!”
Tears were running down her face and she stumbled a little. A couple other villagers had grown bolder now, and approached him. A couple held rocks and tools, watching his every breath it seemed. “Just… Just go.”

“Aryll…” His voice was breaking. “I…” Link stopped himself. He wanted to tell her the truth. How the boys at the Tower of Hera who passed the trials were augmented, changed to be able to perform their heroics and that to fight and protect people from monsters they had to even the odds. How magi and sorceresses watched over them to help guide them for the good of The Kingdom. But he didn’t. His eyes darted to Zelda again.

“Just go,” a villager said, approaching. He held a spear in his hand, glaring. “Don’t come back. Never come back…”

He bowed his head. Already his vision was starting to blur as the elixirs in his body began to wane. Soon he would be blind and weakened.

“Hey!” another shouted. “You heard us! Get out of here, monster!” A couple of the villagers shouted in agreement. A rock flew at him. He made no attempt to dodge it as he turned away from his sister. It struck him in the back. A second flew over his shoulder. This time his training kicked in and the blue crystal barrier flashed around him as he flicked his fingers. The display of magic shocked the others. He looked back at them for a moment and took one last glimpse of his sister as she was pulled away by the villagers to be tended to and then walked to the shore, the barrier around him fading away.

“Link, I’m so sorry,” Medli said. “I saw it all from above.” She put her hand on his shoulder, in spite of the fact he was still soaking wet and bloodied. The boat rocked as it steamed away from Outset. Linebeck watched from the bridge while Lurch stood atop the tower watching the island shrink in the distance. “I don’t even know what to say. You had the best of intentions but…”

He silently ran his hand down over his face. Even with his monstrous appearance from the elixirs, he looked wounded and confused. As they sailed north once more to Dragon Roost, he sat down on the deck and went over the events that had followed the death of the creature. Link opened his mouth to speak, but no words came to him. Instead he closed his mouth and just bowed his head into his arms.

“We did everything right. I can’t imagine why they did that.”

He didn’t say anything. The cocktail of elixirs in his body, coupled with his wounds and state of mind stopped him from speaking. He just gave Medli a look of worry. She sat down next to him then and gently put her arms around him. He flinched slightly but reached back to return her hug with tears in his eyes. Not a word was exchanged until the Farore’s Kiss had run through his system. Once it had, his vision dimmed and soon all he could see was darkness and hear the sound of the water and engine of the ship.

Chapter End Notes
Surprise! A Sunday posting? What's the world coming to?

Well, like I have said. In roughly 72 hours, Season Three starts! Fair warning too; we won't be seeing Link for a few weeks with it... Now who, oh who could we possibly be following for like five or six chapters? Here's a very big hint; they were introduced in Chapter 33.

I've also updated the character tags so you can see who's gonna appear as major characters in Season 3.

Devnotes:
-Musical accompaniment this time you could argue! That entire last section between Link and Aryll was written to me listening more or less on loop to the track Farewell Old Friend.
-There'll be a lot other musical accompaniment pieces coming up too as most of Season Three was written to the fantastic Twilight Symphony and The Wild Hunt OST.
-The climax was inspired by something I kinda always wished had happened in Twilight Princess: How would Ordon have reacted if they'd seen him change into his wolf shape? What would they have done? We never do, but I doubt it'd be good and they'd freak. Couple this with the more cynical nature of The World of The Witcher, and we get the chance for some heartbreaking moments.

Very special thanks this week to Squinch for the bookmark! And as always, a huge thank you to everyone who leaves kudos, comments, bookmarks or even just takes the time to read a few words here or there! You guys rock!

Keep being awesome! I'll see you in three days!
There was smoke on the horizon. Steel clashed and echoed in her ears. The smell of blood and piss filled her nostrils as she urged her horse in its full gallop across the battlefield. She didn’t even know really how the war had started completely, nor did she care about the details at this exact moment. All she wanted was to put as much distance between her and the monster that was hot on her heels. Her focus was forward, into the melee in front of her. Kingdom soldiers were fighting and dying with Tribe warriors. The ground was slick with mud made from blood and the recent rains. She saw three fireballs arc across the sky. The first crashed into the dirt behind her, screams of the people thrown into the air and incinerated from the explosion. The second landed to her right. With a shriek, she flew from the horse and into the mud.

As she forced herself to her hands and knees, she saw the third crash several feet far in front of her. In front of her an iron knuckle stood, clutching its axe in both hands, illumimated by fires that burned behind it. She saw its bulk clank and clatter towards her. It swept its axe in an arc down towards her, digging into the ground as the blade landed. She pulled her crossbow from her back as she rolled back away from it, aiming. Her hands were shaking from adrenaline and the chaos, but she managed to shoulder the weapon. The axe was pulled out of the dirt. As it was lifted over their head, she fired. The inferno bolt pierced the already damaged chest plate and there was a flash as the magic ignited within. Smoke began to billow out of the helm’s holes. The armor began to glow from the heat. She heard the warrior within begin to scream, the shape of the helmet and armor creating a terrifying bellow as they were cooked from within the plate armor. The axe dropped into the dirt. The girl got to her feet and rushed away, not looking back as the Tribe warrior dropped to their knees.

Without a horse, she now ran, slipping in the mud a little as she rushed through bushes and over toppled trees. She didn’t stop, but looked over her shoulder to see if anyone was following her. When she looked back, she ran right into someone. They spun around and fell. The young woman instinctively pulled one of her hand crossbows from her hip and aimed it at the other person. A terrified look was on the girl’s face, probably about the same age as she was and just as terrified. Her dark robes were stained with blood and the markings along the sleeves indicated she was a tribe witch. She watched as they struggled in the dirt, scooting away and getting to her feet before rushing in the way she’d come from.

She kept running once she got to her feet, not bothering to pick up her dropped bag and the old telescope within it, heading away from the edge of the battle when she felt a pain in the back of her leg. A throwing knife had landed near the back of her knee. The girl stumbled from it, but forced herself from not falling. Again, she turned around and had her hand crossbow raised. At what she saw, she pulled the trigger repeatedly. Silver bolt after bolt flew at the pursuer she’d crossed nearly half of Hyrule to escape was almost upon her, but they were deflected by their dark blade. She quickly reloaded the weapon then, but in that time darkness took her and the weapon snapped in half as the sword sliced through it…

SEVERAL WEEKS EARLIER…
Seagulls flew in circles above Aryll of Outset as she stepped off the merchant’s ship and looked about the docks of Dragon Roost Island. There were still some repairs being done since the attack that had happened a few weeks ago. A couple local rito were hammering away on a dock with new planks as she passed, tugging her hood over her head further. She glanced back at the ship once more before heading to the main cavern. With a deep breath, she walked past the guards at the open doorway. Aryll walked up the ramp then, watching a couple couriers dart in and out far above, not even touching the ground. Ever since the events with Bellum, they were working overtime it seemed. She pulled a letter out of a bag on her hip and read through it quickly again, finding the directions to the room she was going to. With purpose, she kept going until she reached the third floor. A courier landed a few feet in front of her and entered the room to her left then, squawking about something she didn’t completely catch. It sounded like it was about trade prices entering the mainland or news about the war between the Kingdom of Hyrule and United Gerudo Tribes.

Aryll found the room she was looking for and pushed the door open. Inside was Medli, pacing behind a stone desk. Her feathers looked ruffled as she held her folded arms to her body and muttering to herself. Aryll knocked gently on the door, causing Medli to look quickly to it.

“Oh! Aryll!” she said in a surprised tone. “I… I honestly wasn’t sure you were going to come.”

She pulled her hood back, knocking the braids on the sides of her face away for a moment. “I wasn’t sure I’d be coming here either when I got your letter,” she said. “Can we talk?”

“Oh, of course!” She quickly pulled a chair near the desk over. “I know we left Outset pretty quickly but that’s…”

“…About Link?”

The rito stopped dead in her tracks and inhaled deeply through her nostrils. “Just like him… Right to the point.” She looked back at Aryll, folding her arms. Thanks to her wings, it looked like she had tucked her hands into massive white feathered sleeves.

“Sorry, I’m just…” Aryll shook her head.

“Did you think about this at all before coming here?” She raised her hands, but didn’t uncross her arms as she spoke.

“I did. And I decided that I need to know.”

“Know what?”

She glanced to the floor for a moment. “That… That can’t have been Link. He butchered that monster. Even before he threw the frost bomb into its mouth. We talked about doing that against it, but… A frost bomb?! That…” Her jaw was open and Aryll shook her head, recalling the image in her mind she’d never forget. “And then… He looked like a corpse! And the eyes! And… What happened? Did he get tainted or twisted by Bellum like…”

“Aryll, take a seat please.” Her arms fell to her side. “This… Is going to take a bit to explain. But yes, that was Link.”
“How though?” She glanced back and pulled a chair over.

“Have you heard of the Grizlemaws in Holodrum? The legendary warriors, not the bears?”

She shook her head, took her seat.

“And what about the hexers during The Inquisition three hundred years ago?”

That got Aryll’s attention. Her head shot up and eyes went wide. “But The Crown eradicated The Interlopers with the help of The Chosen.”

“Chosen are like hexers in a few regards. Trained from childhood and conditioned to superhuman levels.”

“That’d mean though…” The look on her face said everything.

“I’m sorry, Aryll. But…” Medli knelt down then and looked her friend’s sister in the eye. “You’re smart. You’ve been taught by some of the best scholars and tutors in the world. You know that magic is just a force. An energy. And it is the intention behind it that makes it good or evil.”

“So… When he agreed to-” Aryll shook her head. “Did he even know? Know what they were going to do to him?” She knew the answer, but couldn’t help asking.

“I wouldn’t know. That’s something you’d have to ask him. I know though he did it for you.”

“I know. I remember Aboda during the war with Labrynna. Was three? Four maybe? And Uncle Alfonzo and the sheikah Impa.” She smiled sadly, unaware of the tears in her eyes. “He said he’d go with them. Long as they made sure I was safe from any harm and had food.” Aryll looked back at Medli. “But the old stories say the hexers were monsters themselves. Any trace of humanity or emotion in them extinguished! Just like the interlopers.”

“I can safely say that is a lie. He was so hurt by what you said he hardly said a word to anyone until we reached Windfall.”

Aryll winced at Medli’s words. Her fingers clenched into fists as she felt guilt churn in her stomach. “So I really did that. I told him to just get out of there and…” She took a deep breath. “Gods, I… Why didn’t he tell me any of this then?!?”

“Would you have believed him?”

“Of course! He’s my brother!”

Medli smiled a little then. “No question there. You came here with more of a concept of a plan than an actual plan. But, the fault rests with him too. I think he still sees you as his little sister. And he wants to protect you from the evils of the world.”

“I know…” She looked down at her feet with a long sigh in silence. “I was actually pretty sure he wouldn’t want to take me with you. I just wanted to help. Since it sounded like so much had gone wrong. I mean, not working for The Crown anymore? Becoming the most wanted man in all of Hyrule? What did he do to become that? Why even? More I think about it, more it seems like he just…”

“Went off half-cocked?”

“Y-Yeah! Like he didn’t think any of this through at all! That he wanted to do something other
Medli silently waited, watching her friend’s little sister try to piece it together or come up with a reason on her own. “Link made the choice because of what he was taught. And that… Well, he does sometimes not completely think some of these things through. He told me when we first met that The Chosen were meant to be the ones carrying the spirit of The Hero. And that his job was to set Hyrule right if it was wrong.”

It was making sense. With what she remembered him telling her in the letters and their brief time together about the chaos in the north, it seemed like Hyrule needed someone like that more than ever now. “So what’s The Hero supposed to do when he feels The Crown is in the wrong?”

“In all my studies, there’s not one story about that. About what they’re supposed to do when the home they love is besieged from without and damaged from within. I think though that there’s been a lot building to this. That if some things hadn’t happened the way they did back when he was an agent of The Crown, he might still be working for them.”

“He might?”

She nodded. “How much did he tell you about his job with me?”

“Just what was in the letters. That he was sent into the islands. Met you and Linebeck. Recovered some old relics of The Goddesses. And… And that was about it.”

Medli let out a sigh and gave Aryll a comforting smile, “Let me get us some tea and scones. This will take a while. But I think you need to hear the whole story. Not the version that was likely censored by The Kingdom.”

“Okay.” Aryll took another deep breath and huddled in the chair as Medli got up and left the room out the back. She glanced around for a moment, seeing some of the surroundings. She saw several small idols and statues on a counter to her left of different birds. There were pictographs as well on the walls of different people. Some looked like different kinds of rito, including a pair of ones that resembled owls, wearing outfits that clearly made them not from the islands. There was one with Medli sitting on the shoulders of a hunched goron wearing a strange and long stripped hat, both of them smiling broadly next to a mustached man who looked dressed for a harsh winter. Two rare color pictures were there too. One of a young zora man with one of their traditional coral spears next to chieftain Komali. Both of them were smiling warmly and stood in front of the crest of the Island Postal Service that was painted on the wall downstairs.

The other though, Aryll’s eye was drawn to. It was Linebeck and her brother, with Medli standing between them. Link stood with his arms folded over his chest and was wearing one of the same blue tunic with white accents that other Chosen had worn. Chainmail was on underneath it; leather vambraces over his arms and plate guards over his knees. Around his neck too, seemingly worn with pride, was a pendant bearing the mark of Farore. There was only one sword on his back with his shield as well. All three of them were smiling. She got to her feet and walked over to get a better look at it.

“That was before he headed back to Hyrule. And Linebeck went back to Mercay,” Medli said. “Our last day on Windfall at the end of our first job together.” Aryll turned around to see her there with a tray in her hands. Simple clay mugs sat upon it with a jug that had steam coming out the top of it. A plate had several pastries on it that shone with a simple sugar glaze.
“You all look pretty happy.”

“Was a long month and a half.” She put the tray down and set to pour Aryll a drink. “Spent a couple weeks together just relaxing, finishing some loose ends and then went our separate ways. Linebeck would come by regularly though, often with not completely legal goods. And Link, well whenever he was in the South Lanayru would ask if I’d like to meet and occasionally I’d fly all the way up to Castle Town to see him.” With one mug finished, she poured her own drink. “So… Are you ready to hear this?”

She turned around and took the drink offered to her. The mug was warm in her hands as she sat back down, glancing back at the picture. “I am.”

“Okay.” Medli picked up her own mug and sat down in a chair next to her. “It all started for me a few years ago. When we started to notice a delay in our mailing schedules. After all, we’re the best couriers in the islands. And have some cousins in the mainland, but they were fine. It was all the islands. So… under High Priest Zepps and Chieftain Komali’s orders, we were dispatched to investigate. We were picked personally by them. You know Quill, yes?”

“Yeah.”

“He went south, towards Mercay and through the ring of islands we came from recently. Anoot and Trebli went West, towards the Zuna ports and Termina’s southern coast. I… I went north to Windfall. The gateway to the South Seas if you’re coming from Aboda or the Zora Delta in Hyrule proper.” She took a sip of her tea then. “Of course… It wasn’t smooth flying. And your brother learned it firsthand.” Medli laughed a little. “I was so scared too after crashing into him.”

Aryll raised an eyebrow and looked at Medli with surprise, though a small piece of her found the image in her head humorous. “You literally crashed into my brother?”

She nodded as she finished sipping her tea and put the mug down again. “Yeah. It was… embarrassing.” Medli then took the pastries plate and offered it to Aryll. She took one before taking one herself and putting it back down. “I mean, last time I was that clumsy at landing I had just started to learn to fly!”

“What’d he do?”

“He got up, asked if I was okay. He acted as though he was at fault for not having heard my cries in time. Though it was very windy that day. I wouldn’t have been surprised if he didn’t hear me.”

“Oh.” Aryll took a bite of the sweet in her hands. “So,” she began, still chewing a little. She stopped though to swallow before continuing. “Sorry. So you two were on Windfall together and started to get to work finding what was going on with the winds?”

“Yeah. After he helped me up, we went to the café on the top of the hill and talked a little. I knew he was a Chosen from the colors he wore and someone like him wouldn’t be in the South Seas without a good reason.”

“What was his reason?” Aryll grabbed her mug of tea and dropped a couple cubes of sugar into it before taking another bite of her pastry.

“Well, he was looking for a freighter that’d gone missing and carrying some artifacts that he was to recover. But…” She stopped as she saw one of the guards standing in the doorway. “But it had been blown off course.” Medli put her drink down and stood up. “Excuse me one moment.” Aryll
watched as she went to the doorway and spoke quietly with the guard. She caught a little of it, sounding like Medli had another visitor. She watched as Medli nodded a little to what the guard had said. After a moment she turned back and the guard headed off once more. “Well,” she said, starting once more. “Looks like you’ll be able to get a little more soon about that.”

“Oh?”

“Linebeck is here about a job I’ve offered him. He’s on his way up.” She sat back down across from Aryll. “We met him on Windfall too actually. Since we needed a boat. Because of the winds, we couldn’t take a ship with sails and Linebeck had the only steamboat. So, we had to find the captain.” She paused again as the two heard Linebeck’s voice outside of the room.

“I swear,” the sailor said. “If not for the fact you were a goron, she’d have had you keelhauled, I’m sure of it!”

“Like to see her try,” a gravely voice replied. Aryll recognized it instantly as the goron pirate who had accompanied them on their trip to Outset from The Tower of the Gods. Linebeck stepped in, followed by a zora with orange scales and carrying a staff. He wore simple dark blue robes and sandals. Behind him was Lurch, his swivel guns modified into hand cannons on his back. He looked into the room as they stepped in and the grim look on Lurch’s features vanished to a small grin when he saw the hylian girl. “What’re you doing here, Aryll?”

“Medli sent me a letter. Said I could come talk and help out. That it...”

“Ah...” Linebeck started. “So, not here for a job.”

“No?”

“Good. More money for me and my crew then.”

Medli put her tea back down, not having gotten another drink of it as the smuggler stepped into the center of the room. “Linebeck,” she started, “I told you in the letter you get paid the rest when you get them here safely. I’ve already sent and received letters from the elders on the frontier.”

He gave Aryll a smirk as greasy as his ships’ engines. “Your brother would’ve given me more incentive.”

“Her brother also used to have the Royal Treasury to pay you with. And you didn’t end up taking even one thin green rupee from that entire mess with Bellum. Don’t make it an issue, Linebeck.”

All Linebeck did was grin widely at Medli. She let out a sigh and bowed her head, shaking it as she looked at her feet. “For the love of Zephos, you soft-hearted devil. You can drop the act.”

“Agreed,” Lurch rumbled.

“You’re taking her side, Lurch?” he asked, pulling his flask from his coat and looking to the goron. “Going against your new captain so soon?”

He grunted and moved to sit on the floor next to Aryll. “We are among friends. Unless you are doing that to ruffle her feathers.”

He only grinned wider as he flicked the flask open with his thumb. “What can I say? Sometimes it’s difficult being a man of the sea!”
“Let me go get the papers from Komali,” Medli said, standing once more. “Can I get you three anything to eat?” She saw Lurch shake his head before turning to Linebeck.

“If you have any of that Windfall Whiskey, I could use some of that.”

“I’m good,” the zora said. “But thank you, Medli.”

She nodded and looked about the group. “I’ll be right back then and give you a chance to talk a little.” The rito stepped out of the room then.

It was quiet for a moment as Aryll took in the others. The zora sat down in a chair next to Medli as Linebeck took a sip from his flask and closed it again. “Well then!” he began. “Introductions! You know myself and Lurch, but the young man here is Bekko.”

He looked at her with a smile when Aryll turned to face him. “Hello,” he said, offering a hand.

“Hi, I’m Aryll,” she introduced, shaking his hand. “Aryll of Outset.”

“One of the captain’s mates recently then?” She nodded as Bekko slipped his staff behind the chair. “He told me about the geozards and The Leviathan.”

“Yeah. Was a...” Her eyes darted away from him and to the tea and pastries on the table for a moment. “A harrowing experience.”

“Reasonable why you’re here then,” Lurch said, shifting his hands to rest on his knees as he sat cross-legged. “The Handmaidens of Valoo are wonderful counselors. And I am sure they’d be willing to help Outset after everything.”

“He’s right,” Bekko said. “I’ve also wanted to study some of their medicines and healing techniques.”

“You’re a doctor?” Aryll asked.

Bekko shook his head. “No, just a disgraced healer from the Cheval Monastery.”

“Don’t be so modest, kiddo,” Lurch said.

“It’s the truth though. And being honest is important for first impressions.”

“Nonsense!” Linebeck cried. “Nobody is themselves when you first meet them!” He moved his hand to wave to Aryll. “Why, even her brother wasn’t quite the same as he was just a couple weeks ago when I first met him!”

“What was he like?” Aryll asked.

“Mnn?”

“Feel like everyone knows him better than I do and he’s my only family left.”

Linebeck looked at the flask in his other hand for a moment, the only sounds being the fireplace next to the sailor. He slipped the flask back into his coat slowly and leaned against a mantle over the fireplace. “He was headstrong. Bright-eyed.” He chuckled a little for a moment. “Saw a bit of myself actually in him. Proud to be a champion of Hyrule. Eager to show his princess and commander what he was capable of.” The smile faded and Aryll saw a very tired man now before her. She could’ve sworn she’d seen some glimmer of tears in his now unfocused eyes as they stared out the window. “Like so many boys who joined the navy right when the war started.” He sniffed
deeply and rubbed his nose then. "...You can still see pieces of it in him today but, it’s tarnished. It’s been ground away by years of seeing some people on the worst days of their lives and being lied to by others."

“Surprisingly poetic,” Medli said, stepping back into the room with a few papers in her feathery hand. “And honest coming from you, Linebeck.”

“Well, been around long enough to see that. Seen it before during the war. Join the Navy! See the world! Fight for your Emperor and secure a new glorious land for your country! Even someone like me knows you fill a kid’s head with enough fairy tales they’ll start thinking they’re greater than The Hero himself.” He bowed his head, looking at the floor and shook it before looking back at Aryll. “And the truth can destroy all that idealism to leave a broken husk of a man...”

Chapter End Notes

HELLO SEASON THREE! WHOO!

And the cat is out of the bag! Aryll is who we'll be following for the next... Oh... Like 18k words or so? Then we'll rejoin Link for the remainder.

Devnotes:
-The idea for Aryll's stories actually was a sort of 'compromise' between writing out Link's earlier adventures and not writing them at all. So most of her adventures will be digging into her brother's past two major assignments. The South Seas and The Conjunction.
-Aryll's adventure will be seeing some of her own companions as OCs. Though it won't be all OCs traveling with her, but for this one we'll see Lurch and Bekko along with Linebeck and Aryll.
-Though we won't see them until prolly Season 4, a cookie to anyone who can correctly guess who attacked her in the beginning.

That'll be it for this week. As always, a huge thanks to everyone who leaves a kudo, reads, bookmarks and comments! Thanks for reading! Keep being awesome everyone!
Linebeck’s gaze shifted to Medli then and the papers in her hands. “Well! What’ve you got there? The contract?”

“Yes,” Medli said, handing one to him and the others to Bekko and Lurch. “Just standard agreements that we already talked about.”

“Looks simple enough,” Lurch said. “What’s this though on a bonus for helping in the caverns?”

“Mmm?” Linebeck muttered. He skimmed the contract quickly. “Oh. Well, more money is always welcome. We’ll do it!”

“Hang on,” Bekko said. “What exactly is it?”

Medli walked back to her desk and pulled some papers off of it. She skimmed them quickly before putting them down and checking another one. “Well,” she began. “Last time you were here, Linebeck, you know we had the leviathan attack. The one that hurt Valoo.”

“Yeah?” he asked.

“The Dragon Roost caverns are his home. And they’re also home to a variety of other creatures. Most notably, magtails. With Valoo wounded however, these things are starting to show up in greater numbers. So all that needs to be done is go in and clear them out before they cause too much trouble.”

“Doesn’t sound too bad,” Aryll said. “Can I help?”

“You sure, kiddo?” Lurch asked, looking at her as Medli handed the goron a pen.

“Yes. Can’t be more difficult than the monsters that we found in the tower, right?”

Lurch began to laugh. It became a very deep belly laugh as he bent over from his sitting position on the floor.

She shook her head and looked to him. “What?”

“You don’t have stone skin like me. Gonna need the dodongo hide or the fireproof armor for you, kiddo. Dragon Roost Cavern has lava you can walk right up to. You’ll catch fire without something to shield you from the heat if you’re lucky. Regular armor too you’d probably end up just roasting inside it.”

“Oh...”

“We have some,” Medli said. “Don’t worry. We’ll take a day and get one fitted for you.”

“Guess that means I’m hanging back,” Bekko said, taking a pen from Medli. He scribbled on the bottom of the contract and put a checkmark next to it.
“At least out of the heart of the cavern,” Medli said. She took the contract from the zora when he was finished. “Something does go wrong we’ll need you nearby to stabilize any serious wounds.”

“Alright. I can do that.”

“I can help with Bekko too,” Linebeck said, handing Medli his contract.

“Not wanting to see the caverns, boss?” Lurch asked.

“I have gunpowder all over my coat still!” he said. “And carrying it in its pouch for my flintlock.”

“Good reason,” Aryll said.

“Which could easily be solved if you just left it on your boat,” Medli countered.

His eyes went wide and he leaned over slightly to look Medli in the eye. Aryll had to admit the look on Linebeck’s face was “And just go in there with my saber? Are you mad?”

“Well, you did usually just stay with the ship back when we were working with Link, so I guess I should be a little grateful you’re not wanting to stay there and let Lurch and Bekko do all the work.”

He puffed his chest out and tugged at the edges of his coat. Its collar seemed to flap briefly as he did. “I need to at least do something to earn my pay after all.”

“We know anything about what’s going on in there?”

“According to Elder Zepps, the magtails are close to taking over. Like I said too, usually Valoo can keep it clear. But because he was wounded in the fighting earlier against Bellum’s agents, he cannot. And we need to clear it before a gohma shows up.”

“Technically it’s not a gohma,” Bekko said, raising a hand. “It’s more like a lobster.”

“Oh?” Aryll asked. She moved in her seat to see him. The young zora nodded a bit as he relaxed in his chair.

“A gohma is more of an arachnid type of monster,” he said. “The one that can swim in lava isn’t related at all, but because of the large claws and the large eye above its mouth people thought it was a different type of gohma.” The room was silent as everyone looked at Bekko. He glanced around awkwardly. “What? There were some old books on monsters at the monastery they were going to get rid of. I took a couple before they tossed them on the fire.”

“Book say if it goes well with rock salt and butter?” Lurch asked.

“Uh, no.”

“Damn.” He shook his head. “Least some of those magtails will be good and crunchy.”

“You eat those things...?” Aryll asked in surprise.

He looked at her with a grin. “A goron cannot live by stones alone. Besides, Snowhead back home is way too cold for some of these things.”

“Okay,” Medli said then, checking over the contracts briefly. “With all this signed, I’ll go handle it with Komali and then we’ll be more or less ready. Meet me down at Zauz’s forge and we’ll get everyone equipped with what they need in an hour or so.”
Aryll remembered the forge from her first visit. Aveil had taken her down here to get a set of armor while Linebeck had procured silver bolts for her crossbows. She fidgeted a little as the group sat waiting in the main room. They could hear Zauz at work in his forge, hammering away on steel. Lurch emerged then from the room carrying a pair of heavy gauntlets over his fists. They had flat plates over the knuckles and were welded together. He adjusted one for a moment before pulling them off with a grumble. He sat down then as Medli emerged, wearing a heavier-looking set of leathers. There was a little chainmail as well in the armor. It left the arms relatively free, but there were simple clips of sapphires within them. In place of her simple beaded headband was a circlet with a large blue sapphire placed perfectly on her forehead. She beat her wings for a couple moments, hovering above the ground before landing with a nod. Aryll looked over the old telescope in her hands. The wooden body had on it a pair of seagulls carved into it. She remembered doing it when she was three and the shrieks of her mother when she saw it. It had once belonged to the father she never knew. She remembered her grandmother painting the carving and showing her how to clean it up before giving it to her. It had been one of the few things that had escaped Outset with her and Link when the war between Hyrule and Labrynna reached their shores. She even remembered wanting to give it to her brother to borrow for his birthday.

She refocused on why she was here and cleared her throat, closing up the telescope and slipping it in a bag at her feet. “So,” Aryll began, looking to Linebeck. “How did you meet my brother? Medli said it was on Windfall.”

“Mmm?” he asked, looking at her. “Oh, yes. And was looking for a boat that wasn’t at the whims of the winds. And I had the only steamboat in the harbor! So of course, him and Medli came to me! And I was needing the money so I agreed to give them passage.”

“After you asked us to handle you tab and Link distracted Jolene’s people,” Medli added. “And then he gave you savage rights to the freighter.” She folded her arms and leaned against the wall a little.

“Yes, but-”

“And two thousand from The Royal Treasury.”

Linebeck shook his head, slipping a hand in his pocket and pointing an accusatory finger at Medli. “You realize how much work it takes to maintain a steamboat of that caliber?” He cocked his head slightly to the right before spinning on his heel and clapping his hands together. Bekko jumped slightly in his seat from the sound and fumbled the book he was reading. “They’re wonderful! Fast, strong. And mine can outrun the fastest interceptors in the Labrynna and Hyrulean navies! But keeping it capable of that takes lots and lots of rupees. It’s why they haven’t caught on really yet. It’d bankrupt Labrynna to refit her navy right now if Ambi were to do so!” He glanced to Bekko. “Especially with the Leviathan that caused such damage! Cheval’s Harbor is in tatters and the zoras are still finding men and women who died in the waters.”

“Sounding like we got very lucky on Outset,” Aryll said.

“I was there to see the aftermath,” Bekko said, closing his book and looking to the rest of the group. “And the creature’s corpse. It was huge. With eight massive eyes on its tentacles! And a
shell that looked like it’d taken every gun in the navy to its side. If Linebeck had said it was from
the Abyssal Plains and I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn’t have believed him. Its body
was still turning to ash and smoke when I left.”

“Be happy you didn’t encounter the ropas,” Lurch said. “Saw one jam a tentacle with a scythe of a
claw down a man’s throat at Outset, kiddo.”

“Can we get back to my brother?” Aryll interrupted. She could swear, she could see those monsters
now crawling up the beach and impaling defenders while another jumped one who was fleeing and
impaled them in the back with all of their tentacles. She shook her head and forced the gory images
from her mind.

“Yes, please,” Bekko agreed, looking rather agitated. “I don’t need to hear about abyssal horrors.
The Goddesses know the depths are terrifying even to the ones who live there.”

Linebeck cleared his throat then and leaned back against the wall, sliding a hand into his coat
pocket. “Well, once everything was paid, I took them to sea. We traveled to where he had found the
freighter’s last known location and he dove in. Found It right away thanks to Medli!”

“Oh?”

“Yeah,” she said. “We’d been keeping an eye on the winds and were able to from the shamans here
on Dragon Roost. And our couriers to map the changes in the winds. From that, we were able to
determine the area the ship had been blown off course to.” Aryll smiled a little at the cleverness.

“Someone had beaten us to it though!” Linebeck continued. “Pirates! Actual pirates! Not privateers
like Tetra’s crew either. Like the gerudo pirates out of Termina’s great bay.”

“They’re not quite as nasty as they sound,” the goron rumbled.

“Easy for you to say. You worked with them for years, Lurch.”

“So, what happened with the pirates?” Aryll asked.

“I told him we should avoid them,” Linebeck said. “He refused to listen and before we knew it, we
had their sabers in our faces. Their boss wanted to see what it was like to fight a Chosen. He
quickly regretted it.”

She gasped in surprise. “He killed him?!”

“No. Though he’s missing an ear and an arm now.”

Aryll felt her jaw fall open. Her eyes were wide in a bit of shock. Of course, it fit with what she’d
seen on Outset. And how the leviathan had been slaughtered by him. If a single hexer like him
could do that to a true monster, they could turn a human into a smear on the cobblestones in a
regular fight if they had any desire to do so.

“We got lucky the mercenaries attacked then with the darknuts,” Linebeck said.

There was a name she knew. Though she couldn’t reason how they’d gotten involved in this
situation. “Darknut mercenaries? They’re knights in the desert. They don’t take contracts.”

“They do Aryll,” Medli said, removing the circlet around her head to inspect the gemstone for a
moment. “But they’re reputable. They only take jobs that they feel are just. The things we
encountered weren’t true darknuts. They were-”
“Monsters,” Linebeck finished grimly. His face reflected it. He wasn’t smiling and his eyes were unfocused again, looking out into the forge room with Zauz inspecting a metal jacket. The room fell silent for a minute as the group processed the information.

“Mutants, actually,” Medli said. She put the circlet back on her head and walked to Aryll, bending over to look her in the eye. Aryll looked back as Medli placed her hands on her shoulders. “And Aryll, I need to know right now because we’re getting into an area where I need to know if you’re sure you want to hear this. I can’t take it back once you hear it. And this gets into state secrets of The Kingdom of Hyrule. The sort that gets people sent after them. Are you sure you want to know?”

Aryll was silent as she thought about it. This was exactly what she’d wanted. She could hardly believe that Medli knew enough about all this and still was walking around. The look on her face too told Aryll that whatever she was about to hear was something massive. She wondered just what it was.

“I’d like to know,” Lurch grunted. He grinned at Medli and slammed his fist into his palm. “Those brutes are an actual challenge to fight!”

“It’s not your choice, Lurch.” The goron nodded, smile fading to neutrality.

Aryll looked at the others for a moment, then down at her hands. “...how much more is there?” she asked.

“Mmm... what’d you say, Medli?” Linebeck asked.

She glanced back at him for a moment before looking back to Aryll. “I’d say about halfway through our first job together. Aryll lowered her head and looked to the left. She took a deep breath and thought it over. “He wouldn’t want you to know any of this I think. He’d want you safe and happy. And couldn’t say anything to you about it because-”

“State secrets, you just said,” she interrupted. Aryll slowly looked back at Medli then, looking right back to her. “Okay. yes.”

“Are you-”

“Yes I’m sure. He’s my brother. I need to know. I need to know what happened to him. What they did to him. He did all this for me in the first place.”

“No question you’re his sister...” Linebeck said, shaking his head a little.

“Okay.” Medli let go of Aryll’s shoulders and stood back up. She folded her arms and glanced in the direction of Zauz, who was now standing in the entryway with the metal jacket he’d been working on. “I’ll need to get my notes and I think they’re ready for you to get the armor fitted, but those mutant darknuts were created using the same methods that are used to create a hexer.”

Lurch muttered something, but Aryll didn’t catch it. She glanced in his direction for a moment before getting to her feet. “Thank you,” she said. She walked into the forge then. Zauz smiled a bit to her as he showed her the jacket.

“So, back for another set,” he said. “Medli told me the details.”

“Yeah,” she said. “Something to help protect me from the heat of Dragon Roost Cavern.”
“Well, this’ll do it. Enchanted sapphires worked into the coat, while the jacket here will help protect you from normal attacks from magtails.”

“What do they do?” Aryll asked.

“They bite.” He handed her the jacket, which she slipped over her shoulders. Immediately it felt heavier than the leathers she’d been wearing regularly. He then handed her the cloths and gauntlets along with a pair of chain leggings. “Try all of these and let me know if it fits right.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy Hump Day everybody! Another chapter!

Devnotes:
-I remember seeing somewhere (can't remember where) a joke from Ocarina of Time where Link asks why the gorons can't eat other rocks with Dodongo's Cavern being sealed up. In response, one of the gorons makes a remark at him about Link being a little shit. Though it is a good point. We don't just eat one kind of food, so why should gorons be relegated to just one kind of stone? Maybe they had other sources, but the ones in the cavern were the best and was like them losing their farmlands. And given some of the nastier creatures int he setting, maybe they did some hunting too?
-Coming up with what creatures in the setting could be when fitting with descriptions and all from The Witcher has been a fun activity. Some things could be necrophages (such as a dead hand), cursed creatures (readeads, bubbles) draconids (dinoflos, dragons) and so on. Also, wraiths in Wild Hunt look like poes. Seriously, with their lantern and tattered robes!
-If I had the time, I'd write a couple adventures of Linebeck and crew. Which might have even had interjections by other crew members as Linebeck's embellishments get out of hand.

As always, a huge thanks to everyone who's read, left comments, kudos and bookmarked! That'll do it for this week. Next week, more with Aryll! Thanks everybody! Keep being awesome!
They waited until morning before heading for the caverns on the island’s peak. Aryll was up with the sun. Not by choice, but rather due to her upbringing on the ranches and farms owned or with agreements with The Crown. She carefully fitted the new armor over herself after pulling on her slacks and a longsleeve shirt. Though she wondered how effective it’d be in the heat of the cavern, she was sure she was going to be sweating something awful in it. The sun was still peering over the ocean as they reached the entrance. Lurch did not have the swivel guns on his back, but instead a massive blunt axe in addition to the gauntlets he’d gotten yesterday. Linebeck was loading his pistol, carefully tapping the ball in place with the ramrod while Bekko stood leaning against his staff and appeared half awake. Medli was performing a defensive drill but stopped when she saw Aryll approaching.

“Good morning, Aryll,” she said.

“Morning,” she replied. A yawn escaped her as she rolled her shoulders a little.

“How’s the armor, kiddo?” Lurch asked.

“Heavy. Way heavier than my leathers.” She shook her head as she pulled her crossbows from her hips to inspect them. “How do knights tolerate this stuff?”

“A full darknut set would probably weigh closer to fifty pounds. That stuff’s pretty light actually compared to that.” Lurch looked at Medli then as she picked up her bag. “Ever go up against a magtail before, Aryll?”

She shook her head. “I’ve... I’ve never even seen a picture of one.”

“It looks like a centipede. They’ve got big pinchers in front and a big eye behind it. Wanna try and put a bolt in there. Even if it doesn’t go through the brain, it should keep those pinchers open for a follow-up shot to finish it off.”

“I can do that.” Aryll began to load the bolts into her crossbows while Linebeck gently tapped Bekko on the shoulder. The zora started at the touch and shook his head.

“Just steel will be fine for them,” Medli said. “Don’t waste the silver. They’re not preternatural like the geozards were. If we were dealing with something like poes though, it’d be good to keep them.”

“Oh.” She looked down at the weapon in her hand and started to unload the bolts before replacing them.

“If we were dealing with poes too, I’m sure you’d have gotten us the specter oil too,” Linebeck added.

“I’m really glad we’re not,” Medli said. “And if we were, I’d almost say we’d better find Link or Aveil since they’ve both handled them before.” She waited until Aryll had finished loading her weapons before handing her the bag. “Here.”
She took it from the rito and “What’s in the bag?” Rather than wait for Medli to tell her, she pulled its flap back. Inside was a thick steel claw attached to a rope. There were also a couple salves labeled for burn treatment, a knife and some other bottles with water.

“A grappling hook so you can get to some high points to give the rest of us some cover if we need it. Can use it too on the magtails if you hook one by the claw you can get them to curl up in a ball and then Lurch can kill them.”

Aryll looked back at Medli then, flipping the bag closed and slipping it on her back. “I can barely move in this armor as it is,” she protested. “I don’t think I can climb up a rope wearing it.”

“Well, I could throw you up to any vantage points then!” Lurch offered as he cracked his knuckles.

Her eyes went wide in a bit of shock. She had no doubt Lurch could throw her into the air, even wearing the heavy armor. The thought was far from a comforting one. “...uh...”

The goron laughed heartily, throwing his head back. “Hah! She thought I was serious.”

“I thought you were too,” Bekko admitted. He sniffed a little before Medli stepped into the middle of the group.

“Is everyone ready then?” She scanned the group; following nods and hearing everyone say they were. “Good. I’ll guide us through. Shouldn’t be too bad, but if there is a problem we need to stick together. Magtails can be pretty nasty, but they don’t do things like spit acid or are on fire like torch slugs. Just watch out for the pincers and their barbed feet and you should be fine.”

Lurch smacked a fist into an open palm. The metal gauntlets clinked a little as they did. “Good,” he grunted.

“If you’re bitten, let Bekko know and we’ll treat it fast as we can. We shouldn’t be facing anything too big either in there. Lurch, you’ll take the lead. I’ll be behind you. Aryll, Linebeck behind me. Bekko?” She turned slightly to face the young zora. He gripped his staff a little tighter. “You’ll be in the back. And if it gets too hot in there for you, let us know. I know Zauz gave you some sapphire gems for your robe, but that’s just cloth you’re wearing.”

“I will,” he said.

“Good. Any last second questions?” She looked about the group once more. Lurch shook his head, as did Linebeck.

“How many magtails do you think there’ll be in there?” Aryll asked, raising a hand.

“Given the size of the caverns, we could be encountering over well over a dozen. I hope not though.”

“How many we can prevent them from showing up again?”

“Unless you wanna go swimmin’ in the lava, kiddo, you’re not gonna be able to get to the places they nest typically,” Lurch said. “Us gorons can tolerate lava for a bit, but even stone’ll melt if you get it hot enough.”

“I’ve already been looking at ways to try and keep it from happening, but I don’t see it being something feasible we could pull off,” Medli added. “The effort and time too to pull off some of the possibilities would be counterproductive and too costly for us at this time. So we gotta do this the hard way until Valoo has recovered from his injuries.” She clapped her feathery hands together.
then. “Okay. Let’s get in there and clear them out. We’ll meet a pair of guards up at the entrance. They’ll get us maps of the cavern. There’s a few places that are used for guards and we’ve used it as a shelter in the past. I remember being up there as a girl during the war between Hyrule and Labrynna when the navies were bombarding each other offshore. The heart of it though? That’s gonna be the magma chamber. There’s ways around it both in and out of the caverns though, so we can avoid that until we have to go in there, but there’s other parts of the caverns where you will be exposed to the lava. Unless you’re literally made of stone, have the proper protective spells or a hexer’s mutations, make sure you have a facemask pulled up. There’s a lot of nasty stuff in there.”

“We can still access all areas without needing to enter any of the exposed rooms, right?” Bekko asked.

Medli nodded. “Yeah,” she said. “It’s kinda the long way around for some of them, but we can do that easy.”

“Good.”

“Anything else?” She was greeted with silence. “Okay. Good. Let’s get this done.” The rito started up the trail with the rest of the party behind her.

Lurch lead the way down the cave entrance after they’d been given maps by the two rito guards outside. He had a torch in one hand and lit the ones on the walls as they passed. It wasn’t long before they came upon an opening. The ceiling had been cleared of some stalactites, with a few still hanging from above. In the stone around them was carved rito figures and offerings around each one. At the end and up a set of steps was a door that would take them deeper into the cavern. Lurch set about lighting the torches as Aryll pulled her crossbows from her hips once more.

“Alright,” Medli said. “Keep your eyes peeled.”

“There,” Lurch said, pointing to a tall and thick brazier by the door. Aryll saw something curled tightly near it. The goron walked towards it, pulling the axe from his back. In an almost comical fashion, he approached it and nudged it with the weapon’s head. Nothing happened, so he nudged it harder.

“Well?” Linebeck asked, clutching his saber in one hand and his pistol in the other.

“It’s a shell,” Lurch replied. He picked it up and it uncurled, revealing a black and hardened shell. There were no pincers or eyes. “Do magtails molt like some crabs?”

“They do,” Medli said, approaching him. “That looks pretty big for one too.”

“It is?” Aryll asked. She approached, watching as Lurch twisted it a little until the shell broke in half.

“Yeah. Usually they’re not that big when we need to clear them out.”

“Is that bad?” Bekko asked.

“Never seen them get this big before. It could be just long enough that the infestation has gotten to a point that it can sustain the bigger ones or…” She furrowed her brow. “Or, and this is a longshot, Bellum’s power somehow influenced them to get bigger.”
“He can do that?” Linebeck asked. He slipped the pistol back into his coat and sheathed his saber.

“Well, he was an ancient god. But none here would be affiliated with him. Ambassador Tolec carried out an investigation after we knew what we were dealing with for the zoras and none of them were followers of his cult. And none of the rito were either according to both Zepps and Komali.” She went to the door then and pushed into it. It lurched slightly and rose upward.

“C’mon. Let’s get going.”

The group headed into the cavern’s halls. Aryll stayed behind Lurch as they walked. Medli stayed close as well, keeping her eyes peeled for trouble. They remained quiet and listened for any signs of life. Occasionally they’d find a rat or keese hanging from the ceiling, but the creatures were content to ignore them entirely. It wasn’t until they’d traveled halfway through the entire cavern before they encountered their first living magtail. It was virtually exactly like how Lurch had described it to her. Its underside glowed red with heat as its pincers clicked slightly. A single massive eye was in place over a set of mandibles that twitched along with a thin pair of antenna. It seemed completely content to ignore the group until Lurch took three steps towards it. The creature reared up then, its legs twitching and moving as its pincers went wide. Before it could lunge for him though, the axe came down and split its head in half. The glow of its underside faded in moments as Lurch effortlessly pulled the axe out. Steam hissed out of the shell as he turned back to the group.

“That’s it?” Aryll asked. Her jaw had fallen open at just how quickly the creature had been dispatched. Had Lurch not gone for it, she was sure she could’ve probably hit it in the eye with a bolt.

“That’s it,” Lurch grunted.

“Well, I’m all for getting paid well for an easy job!” Linebeck said. “Let’s head on back and enjoy a few good drinks!”

“We’re not done yet,” Medli said. “Though I’m starting to get worried since this has been the only one we’ve encountered.”

“What are you thinking?” Bekko asked.

“That we’re going to find a lot of them in the magma chamber, or we’re going to run into a lot of them in the next couple rooms.”

The zora gripped his staff a little tighter. “Do they like going outside?”

Aryll was already looking into the next room as Medli shook her head in response to Bekko’s question. It was a large one that looked like it had been at one time a barracks if the ruined bunks were any indication. A couple torches were on the walls but had clearly not been lit in a long time. She stopped though when she heard another clicking. Aryll glanced over her shoulder to see the rito handmaiden approaching her.

“See anything?” she asked.

“No, but I heard a clicking,” Aryll replied. A moment later she heard it again. When she looked at Medli, she clenched her fists. “That was one of them?”

“Yeah. Okay. Next room has at least one hiding in it some-” she cut herself off when she heard another. “That’s not good.”
“What?” Linebeck asked.

“Lurch give me the torch.” The goron handed it to her and she lifted it upward. On the ceiling was over a dozen of them. Each one was curled slightly. It was high enough up that the faint glow of their undersides didn’t reach them. One turned slightly and began to lower itself from above.

Aryll swiftly raised one of her crossbows, aiming for the massive eye. Her instincts told her to kill it before it reached the floor. Her finger squeezed the trigger and a steel bolt went clean through the eye within seconds. The bolt exited the back of its small head and clattered on the ceiling. Her kill fell from its perch onto the floor before the group saw the eyes of the others swiftly open. The sounds of their feet on the ceiling filled the room as some began to lower themselves.

“Wasn’t me this time, Medli!” Linebeck said, swiftly pulling his saber and pistol. One magtail dropped down right in front of him and he fired. Lurch swung his axe in an arc, slicing three in half as they fell. A fourth made it to the floor, but was quickly knocked into the wall by a burst of wind from Medli’s magic. She jumped as another lunged for her. Her foot landed on its head and she dug her talons into it. There was a crunch and the creature’s lower half flailed and twitched for a moment after she’d let go. Aryll fired another bolt as soon as she had a clear shot at one of the magtails. This time it wasn’t lucky enough to go cleanly through, but the monster reared back, shrieking strangely as it did. A second shot killed it. Two more dropped, one landing near Bekko.

The zora shrieked in surprise and jumped back as it reared up. He jabbed his staff forward, poking it in the eye and causing it to curl backward into a ball. A second later, Linebeck stabbed it through the back of its head and through the eye with his saber. “Use a little of your magic to help out!” he ordered.

The next one he complied with, aiming his staff at before a bolt of ice shot from the end of his staff. The strike pierced the eye and killed it. He fired another bolt of ice at another, but missed. Before it got close though, two steel bolts went through it from Aryll while a third put it down. “Aryll! Behind you!”

She spun around just in time for another from above drop from above and clamped its pincers around her calf. There was an intense heat as it clenched tighter, tearing at the leather and plate on her boot. A small screech came from the pincer scraping the metal. Aryll dropped her crossbows and grabbed the pincers. She pulled with all her strength, but it just bit down tighter. Blood began to leak out of the damaged boot. “Get it off!” she cried as her skin began to burn. “Get it off me!”

“Lurch! Help her!” Medli ordered as she hovered several feet above the ground. One magtail coiled up and lunged for her, but a quick move kept her from being grabbed and she grabbed it with her talons. A swing of her arms as she landed sent two more tumbling into the wall, coiled as balls. The goron slammed his axe into one of them as he passed and reached Aryll. The girl was on the ground pulling at the pincers with futility. He grabbed it by its tail and twisted it while his other massive hand grabbed the back of its head. A little more twisting and the pincers suddenly let go. The back of Aryll’s head hit the cold stone floor as Lurch pulled the monster away. Another twist and he’d torn it in half. Both sides flailed wildly as the underside glow faded. The last magtail was quickly dispatched by Medli’s talons as Lurch tossed the remains aside.

The room was quiet then. Linebeck exhaled sharply through his lips and sheathed his saber. “That was a bit rough, wasn’t it?” he asked, pulling his flask from his coat.
Aryll was still lying on the floor, panting hard. Though it hadn’t been as bad as the panic she’d felt seeing the leviathan, she’d never actually been directly attacked or hurt by anything. When she’d been on the island with the geozards attacking it, Aveil had been right next to her and helped keep the primal zoras from getting too close. While traveling with her brother and unraveling Bellum’s mystery she’d been kept out of the direct fighting until Outset. Even then, the bulk of the fighting took place offshore and she was mostly working to try and help the island’s inhabitants avoid being killed. She slowly started to sit up, knowing they still had work to do, but was shaking a little. A moment later, she got to her feet, but slipped suddenly. Lurch caught her with one hand.

“Easy, kiddo,” he said. “Medli, we might have a problem.”

She turned around and grabbed a stool next to one of the ruined beds. “Aryll, sit down,” she said. “We need to take a look at how bad it is. The girl complied a second later as Bekko approached.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Wednesday again everyone!

Miraculously, no devnotes this time around. Got a couple next time though. As always, a huge thank you to everyone who’s read, left kudos, bookmarks and comments! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome everybody!
“How bad is it?” he asked.

Medli carefully lifted her leg and inspected the wound on the boot. The leather was ruined more or less from the bite, but it had done a good job at protecting her. Blood was still coming out of the sides while she looked at the upper half of the magtail Lurch had ripped in half. “Not that bad actually,” Medli finally said. “The magtail was still young so its pincers weren’t fully developed.”

“This really really hurts guys,” Aryll managed.

Bekko moved to kneel next to Medli to take a look himself. “Take the boot off. Carefully,” he said. “Medli, water please. Will need it to clean the wound.”

“I’ll get it out of the bags,” she said. A moment later, she was already digging away in her bag as Bekko carefully removed her boot and the bloody sock. The skin was broken badly and there was evidence of blistered skin around her calf from the natural heat the magtail produced. In all though, it wasn’t as bad as it could’ve been. Bekko looked up at her with a smile.

“How does it feel?” he asked.

“Burns,” Aryll admitted. “Like when I dropped a brand on my foot.”

“Ouch.” Bekko carefully looked it over, turning her foot to get a better look at the damage to the outer side of her calf. “So, like for cattle?”

“Yeah.”

“You worked on a farm before all this then?”

She winced a little as his thumb ran over a forming blister. “I-I grew up moving around a little. But was working the ranches and farms around Hyrule.”

Medli handed him the water and a cloth then. He gave a nod of his head in thanks and wetted the cloth. “What we’re your favorite animals to work with?” Bekko began to clean the wound carefully.

The cool water was incredibly soothing, especially on the blisters around the cuts. “Uh... the cuccuos and... and horses.”

He chuckled a little as Medli got up to speak with Lurch. Aryll watched after a moment the goron went into the next room. Even from her place on the floor, she could feel the heat from it and see the orange and red glow through the door as Lurch went through. “Cuccuos? The feathered terrors as Linebeck calls them?” Bekko asked.

“Yeah? They reminded me of the gulls from Outset.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. I. I was born there.” She smiled a little at the peaceful moments before the war had reached their doorsteps. “I liked them.”
Bekko nodded in agreement before magic started to build between his hands. He ran his fingers up her leg carefully. Soothing energy from his magic entered her body and the wounds felt cooler in moments. “How’re you feeling now, Aryll?”

She took a breath, reaching up to push one of her braided pigtail back. “Better.”

“The bite really isn’t as bad as it could be. And Lurch pulled it off before it began slobbering.”

“Gross.”

“Very,” Medli added. “Magtails begin eating their prey by-”

“I don’t need to know, Medli,” Aryll said as she winced at the thoughts of just what they could do popped into her mind.

“Well, I thought it was interesting...” Linebeck muttered.

Bekko glanced back to the others as his magic worked on her wounds. She could see worry in his eyes as he looked up at her. “Tell me about the cuccuos, Aryll,” Bekko asked. We zoras don’t have them.”

“What do you have for livestock then?” she asked.

“Tuna. We raise tuna.”

“Tuna?”

He nodded with a small smile. “Chicken of the sea.” The door to the next room opened and Lurch walked back in, shaking his head. He looked up to see Bekko working on Medli’s wounds and chuckled slightly.

“So, I have to know,” Medli aside, smiling a little as she walked over and folded her arms. “If a school of tuna is aggravated or feels threatened, they attack everything they feel is a threat?”

“Yes.”

“You speakin’ from experience there, kiddo?” Lurch asked

Bekko shook his head. “No, thankfully. But I remember my teachers frustrated with some of the other students at the monastery and the wounds they’d suffered. The headmistress immediately recognized the wound type. Tunas are predators too. So, most things that’d eat them are like sharks and whales. Some octoroks too have been known to as well.”

“Huh,” Aryll muttered. She looked down to watch him work a little more with his magic. The wound didn’t burn anymore at least.

“Are cuccuos predators?”

She shook her head. “No. They’re omnivores and scavengers mostly. We’d give them stale bread sometimes and sour milk to fatten the ones for slaughter. But most of them would roam the farm and get grasses and bugs. I saw a swarm of them turn a rat into a skeleton one time though...” She shuddered at the memory.

“Huh. We use chum. But have to be careful with it. A shark can smell it for miles.”
“Why every zora fisherman has those coral fin knives then?” Medli asked.

“Yes. The sharks don’t like it as the venom in the coral we use naturally produces. They’re big enough a small cut and dose that small won’t kill them, but drive them off.”

Aryll smiled a little. “Clever. We had dogs to help keep the farms safe. But we also had some other things too.”

“Like your crossbows?” Bekko remained focused on the wound, watching carefully as he worked.

“That kinda started as a hobby actually,” she admitted with a couple nods. “I liked the target shooting at a traveling carnival.”

“No longbow or recurve?”

“First time I used a recurve bow I broke my nose.”


Aryll chuckled a little, grimacing as she remembered. “Yeah. But I just couldn’t hold it anymore! And then... SMACK!” She clapped her hands together. “I literally blinked and then was tearing up.”

“Ouch!” Medli cried with a small laugh. “That happened to me too when I tried one of the Tabantha Ranger longbows. Lucky for me beaks don’t break like noses do. But it left a horrible black eye.”

“I can’t see how Malon can even string her bow,” the hylian said as she shook her head.

“Different muscles and training I’d guess kiddo,” Lurch offered. He glanced to his left to see Linebeck carefully loading his pistol once more. “Using a traditional bow takes years of training and practice. Different role too.”

“Yeah. She’d be on horseback and helping watch the cows while they grazed.”

“Impressive,” Bekko added. He removed his hands and the glow of magic faded from them. “How’s it feel?”

“Huh?”

“The bite.”

Aryll looked down. She saw that where there had been broken skin was just a red mark. It still hurt, but it wasn’t nearly as bad as it had been when she was trying to pull the magtail off.

“Magic?”

“Yeah.”

She inspected it a little more, smiling a bit. Aryll had never seen magic used to treat injuries, even though she knew it existed and had read about it. “Thought I’d need stitches.”

“If I didn’t know the spellwork, you would have needed them.” He got to his feet then, after picking his staff up. “Try standing up. Maybe walking a little.”

Aryll took his suggestion and started to. Medli stood close by just in case and had her arms out a little to catch her if she stumbled. The cave floor was cold on her bare foot and there was a little
pains with each step, but it wasn’t as bad as she thought it’d would’ve been. “Still hurts, but I can walk on it.”

“Well, I don’t have the proper tools with me right now. But it also might feel better after moving around a little.”

“Okay.” With each step, Aryll’s stride grew more stable. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Let me know if it hurts more or gets infected or anything.”

“I will. Now just hope it doesn’t scar. Heh.” She took a seat again and pulled the boot back on. It was a little weird without the sock, but she didn’t want to put it back on when it was still wet and bloody.

“You gonna be good to fight, kiddo?” Lurch asked as she got back to her feet. He handed her the small repeating crossbows.

She nodded as she took them and slipped them on her hips one at a time. “Yeah,” Aryll said. “I should be.”

“Good. Because we’re gonna need it.”

“What’d you find, Lurch?” Medli asked, folding her arms.

He growled slightly and furrowed his brow. One massive hand reached up to scratch at his beard. “A red, one-eyed lobster swimming in magma in the next chamber. Casually snacking on magtail larva that are crawling up the walls to try and escape the lava.”

“Oh no...”

“Oh yes.”

Aryll shook a little at the words and inhaled sharply. She looked at the group. “So,” she started. “How do...” She found herself trailing off.

The goron shook his head and looked at Bekko. “Your book say anything on how to deal with it?” he asked.

Bekko reached up and rubbed his forehead. A worried frown was on his face. “I think it said we need to break its shell first. Since the outer shell is its primary defense.”

“And then?” Linebeck asked.

“I... uh...”

Aryll thought about the creature as it’d been described earlier. It sounded like it was something terrifying, but there was also what Lurch had said earlier about the magtails. “What about its eye?” she asked.

Linebeck spun on his heel to face Aryll. He pulled the ramrod out of the pistol’s barrel and slipped it back in its holder and reached for a percussion cap from his coat. “Mmm?” he said.

“It’s just like a big magtail, right? Or close enough? We get it to hold still long enough I could put a dozen bolts into its eye.”
“Need something big to hold it down,” Lurch grunted. He was nodding though. “The lava looks too deep. I can’t wade through it.”

“Wait,” Medli said, raising a finger. “I have an idea. Lurch, you saw the columns yes?”

“Yeah?”

“Could you bring one down on top of it?”

The goron’s mouth spread wide, revealing his dirty teeth. His eyes narrowed a bit and Aryll felt the need to remind herself that Lurch had been a pirate. “Easily.”

Medli was nodding. “Okay, perfect.” She pointed at Lurch. “You break down the two big ones so they fall on top of it when it surfaces. Those two should break it’s shell.” She looked at Aryll, lowering her hand. “Aryll, you and I will handle any magtails in the room. Once the shell is shattered, I want you to throw the grappling hook to the top stalactite or dislodge it somehow so it will impale the monster. Should hold it in place long enough for us to finish it off.”

“Okay,” Aryll said with a deep breath. “I can do that. Just lasso the rock and pull.”

“Yeah.” Medli then looked at Bekko and Linebeck. “Both of you stay here. If you hear trouble, I want you to go back and get the guards. The only good thing here is that the gohma can’t actually get out of the magma chamber. So it’s stuck there.”

“We can pick off any of the magtails that you two are too lazy to get,” Linebeck replied with a self-serving grin. Bekko sighed and shook his head as he leaned against his staff.

The heavy stone door landed with a thud behind them as Medli, Lurch and Aryll stood in the entrance to the magma chamber. Lurch’s axehead spun as he twirled the grip around in his hands once. Aryll and Medli were behind him as he stepped forward. The air was hot and dry as Aryll pulled a facemask up over her nose and mouth. Ash floated in the air and the bright red glow of the lava filled the hallway’s exit. A single magtail skittered along the path but was quickly smashed by the axe. A moment or so later, they were in the main room.

Aryll’s jaw fell open as she peered up to see six great columns rising out of the lava and up to the ceiling. A stairway would lead down to the heart of the chamber, where there was a large stone island and a natural bridge leading to the other end of the chamber. Another door was there which she assumed would lead back into the regions of the caverns that were not exposed to the lava. A couple magtails were upon the walls, skittering as high as they could get from the lava below. It bubbled and crested like a wave and for a fleeting moment, a massive creature was seen within it. A moment later though it jumped out and grabbed one of the magtails on the wall with its mandibles. The creature shrieked briefly before it vanished in a splash of lava as it landed back in the pool below.

“That thing’s huge!” Aryll cried.

“Yeah,” Lurch replied. He quickly scanned the pillars around them as they neared the large central island. Magtails crawled quickly away and up the columns as they approached. “So, which column do you want me to knock down, Medli?”

The rito scanned the room quickly. She pointed then to the pillar near the central island. “That one,” she said. “We’re only going to get one shot at this too I think. We drop another pillar and we risk bringing the entire roof down on top of us.”
Aryll looked up at the ceiling at her words. She saw the stalactites above, including a very big one which she assumed was the one Medli mentioned to bring down on top of the monster. With a deep breath she pulled the grappling hook from her pack and readied it. “So… How do we lure it over to that pillar before I drop the spike on it?”

Medli pulled one of the water bottles from her bag. She worked it in her hand a bit before tossing it once in the air. “We do something that your brother would do.” She looked around carefully and spotted another magtail. “Aryll, can you grab that magtail with the grappling hook or otherwise get it off there?”

She nodded a little when she spotted it along the column in question. She swung the hook around in a circle a few times before throwing it out. The claws scratched along the column and hooked its underside. With a tug, Aryll pulled it onto the island. Medli jumped into the air and flew up into the chamber. As the magtail landed on the ground, the lava began to crest once more. Aryll started to back away before running as the gohma jumped out of the lava. Its massive claws crashed into the island, digging deep as it snatched the magtail in its jaws. The single giant eye flickered as it spotted the hylian girl. It swung one claw forward to try and grab her, but before it could land the water bottle Medli had shattered against its eye. White steam flashed and the air hissed before the beast screamed.

Lurch slammed his axe into the dirt so it was ready to grab and curled into a ball. He began to spin against the column, sending dirt and rock chips flying around him. “We need to keep it busy!” Medli shouted. She threw another water bottle at its eye. Aryll quickly looked around, noticing as it reared up to cover its eye with its claws. She spun the grappling hook and saw an opportunity. Even though she was sure she might not be able to pull it off, she had to try. She swung the hook, aiming for its eye. The hook missed, but grabbed its left claw and was latched onto its carapace. Aryll tugged with all her strength as the beast began to pull back. She shrieked as she was pulled off the ground. Before it could pull back into the lava though, another water bottle crashed into its eye and shattered. The gohma shrieked and reeled from the blow as the grappling hook’s claws dug deeper and snapped a fragment of carapace away. Aryll fell back onto the island roughly. Looking up, the monster swung a claw at Medli. It was up like a snake ready to strike, in spite of its lobster-like nature. Dozens of pairs of legs clicked against its glowing underside before it turned its attention on Aryll once more. She quickly pulled her crossbows from her hips and fired. She knew she should aim, but in her desperation she just fired every bolt she could into the creature. The shots ricocheted off its carapace, with one or two finding weak joints and lodging within it. When it brought its claw down, it crushed one of the bolts that had gotten under its shell and the bolt dug in deep. Blood shot from the wound and Aryll quickly reloaded one of the crossbows. She only got three bolts ready before the claw started to fall for her again. This time, she fired for the wound. Each bolt landed and tore the hole the first one had made wider until the gohma reeled back.

Taking the chance, Aryll got to her feet, grabbing the rope to the grappling hook and ran as the beast fell into the island. She tripped over a rock a little, but kept from falling as Medli circled above. There was a crack then and Aryll looked back. She pulled the facemask up over her nose again after it had slipped. Lurch uncurled and grabbed the axe. He slammed the edge of it into the massive crack in the column and the entire thing shuddered. A second swing was all it took as it fell. Aryll covered her face with her arms as the column collapsed on top of the gohma. It shrieked as its shell shattered under the immense weight from above. Its head crashed into island and it cried and clawed. Lava shot from its mouth, searing the earth.

“Aryll! Move!” Medli shouted from above. The girl didn’t need to be told twice as the gohma spat again. Even though the armor was keeping her from bursting into flames, she was still sweltering in it and the weight made her sweat even more as she ran. Lurch jumped for the nearest claw then, slamming the axe into the exposed meat from the shattered carapace. Two swings and there was a
sickening crack. The gohma reeled back as best it could with the weight of the column atop it and cried for its lost limb.

Aryll skidded to a stop and climbed upon the stump of the column. The gohma was still struggling to get the weight off itself and retreat back into the lava. She threw the grappling hook up towards the stalactite they needed to drop, but missed. She gasped as it fell, knowing if it landed in the lava there would be no way to recover it. Instead, she jerked it back while it fell in hopes of getting it at least back towards the earth. At that moment, Medli dove for it and caught the rope with her talons and started to rise once more. She saw what the rito was doing and let out as much rope as she could before Medli wrapped the hook around the stalactite.

“Give it a pull, kiddo!” Lurch shouted.

She did so. To her surprise, the spike in the ceiling gave almost instantly and fell straight down. It pierced through the gohma’s hide within moments, splashing lava violently as the beast shrieked and vomited from the blow. Its many legs twitched as its head buckled back and mandibles clicked. In moments, the twitching ceased and it slowly began to sink back into the lava. For good measure, Lurch slammed his axe into its eye, causing a spurt of goop to shoot from it. Aryll panted as she watched the remaining claw remain hooked to the island, but stay still from the killing blow of the stalactite.

“Did you think that’d actually kill it?” Medli asked as she landed next to the goron.

He shook his head. “I was expecting Aryll would have to have put her entire quiver into it,” he admitted.

“Not looking a gift horse in the mouth.” She smiled and looked back to Aryll. “It’s done. We can…” Concern washed over her face as Aryll’s knees gave out.

She was roasting in the armor. In spite of all the enchantments and work done to shield her from the heat of the cavern, the exhaustion from running around in the heavier armor had caught up with her and she lay on the floor of the magma chamber, gasping for air. Medli’s voice echoed in the chamber along with Lurch’s as her sight blurred. With a tired hand she reached up to see one of them standing over her before she closed her eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Halloween everybody!

Some spooky news. I may be missing a couple weeks of posting here or there due to NaNo.

Devnotes:
- Figuring a different name for the ghoma that appears in Wind Waker for the 'boss' here was a simple thought, mostly because of other actual ghomas appearing in the story.
- Having Bekko talk to Aryll to keep her mind off the pain felt like a perfect idea to use for some character development.
That'll be it for this week! I'll hopefully see everyone next week with the next chapter! Thanks as always to every reader, bookmarker, kudo-leaver and commenter! Keep being awesome!
Aryll’s head was throbbing. She winced a little as she started to hear voices once more. There was the crackling of a fire as well and her limbs felt heavy. With a groan, she slowly sat up, opening her eyes. In the low light, she saw she was in a cave room, but far more furnished than the cavern’s chambers. The moon glowed in the window and she could smell the sea breeze blowing in. As her vision adjusted enough to clearly see around her, she saw the room had a bookshelf that was overflowing and pictures upon the walls. The glow of the fireplace came through the open door. She almost didn’t want to get out of the bed, soft with feathery down and thick comforters was enjoyable to her sore muscles. Her curiosity of where she was and what was going on though got the better of her and she stepped out of bed. Aryll hissed as her bare feet stepped upon the cold and walked for the doorway.

She saw Medli’s office. The rito stood leaning against her desk with her arms folded and back in her simple grey robes. She was looking to her right at the chair that was spun to the small terrace leading outside. “So, you did it?” she asked them, not noticing Aryll.

“Yes,” another woman said. The voice sounded incredibly familiar, but in her current state and the pulsing pain in the front of her head made it so she couldn’t immediately place it. “ Managed to kill the thing. But got lucky it only left me a scar on my thigh. Judging by that claw the big guy dragged back, what I had to deal with was a lot smaller than that one.”

Medli bowed her head, looking down at her feet. They were wrapped in bandages, one of which looked a little bloody. “ We got lucky against the gohma. If Lurch hadn’t have managed to drop those pillars just right to stun it, Aryll wouldn’t have been able to drop the stalactite on it.” When she looked back up, she spotted Aryll and smiled. She pushed off the desk and walked over to her. “ Speaking of whom, look who’s back among the living!” Aryll stumbled slightly but was caught by the rito’s feathery hands. “ How’re you feeling Aryll?”

“Like a drunken Labrynnan whaler who’s been press-ganged...” she muttered.

“That bad, huh?” The chair turned, revealing Aveil was the other voice she’d heard. The gerudo hexer was reclined back in the chair with her legs crossed. She was in a simple cotton shirt, while wearing the leathers over her legs she usually had. Around her neck was the hissing viper with ruby eyes on a silver chain. “ Well, remember feeling the same way my first time against a magworm in the phantom wastes.”

Aryll blinked. “ Aveil? What’re you doing here?”

She glanced at the rito. “Hiring Medli.”

“You do that?” Aryll asked, looking at her.

“It’s a...” Medli began. She cocked her head to the right as she guided Aryll to a chair. “A special circumstances sort of thing.”

“Need someone who knows Hyrule,” Aveil said, getting to her feet. The chair creaked slightly by the force she used to get out of it. “ And since your brother has seemingly vanished off the map, Medli is my best option.”
That came as a surprise. Even though she told herself she was doing this to learn about her brother, she felt guilt welling in her stomach. The thought of him on Outset flashed in her mind as she realized he was likely alone off somewhere on the mainland. “He… He’s missing?”

“Yep. And I saw him a couple weeks ago at Lakeview after a job together.”

“What kind of job?”

She walked to the other side of the desk and leaned back against it, resting her hands on its edge. Medli stepped away and went to the fire to inspect the pot that hung over it. She carefully took it from the fire and poured it into a clay pot and placed a tea infuser in it and then capped it. “I’ll give you all the details if you want, but long and short of it? Slavers hit Ordon,” Aveil said. “I’d been tracking them since I first met you guys. He and a local there helped me find them. We managed to rescue every last one of them. And the world has less scum in it now.”

“You killed them,” she said plainly.

“They didn’t exactly give us much choice and weren’t expecting them to give up their captives just by asking nicely.” She shook her head then. “Especially since one of them was a tribal leader’s daughter.”

“Oh…”

Aveil waved a hand outward before letting it fall to her side and walking away from the desk. “I’m tracking the disappearances among people in the desert now. And the trail has led me to No Man’s Land. Given its mostly in Hyrule though, I need Medli.”

“So. You saw my brother?”

She smirked as she went to inspect the tea Medli was making. “Yeah. Hand a few drinks, swapped a few stories of The Conjunction and scars… We had fun. Even though the proprietress kicked us out of the bar.”

“Oh?”

“He’s not told you?”

Aryll shook her head.

“His letters to her were censored by the crown,” Medli informed her.

“So, she doesn’t know about the griffin then.”

She shook her head again. “I don’t,” Aryll said. “Though, I did get two letters during the conjunction.”

“You did?”

“One saying he had died in it. And the other apologizing as he was found alive and well a couple days after the letter was sent.”

Aveil began to laugh. She reached up to cover her mouth, though her eyes gave away her amusement. Medli merely sighed as she shook her head. “That… That does sound like him,” the rito admitted.

“Haven’t know him that long and I’m inclined to agree!” Aveil chuckled. “Though, was surprising
to find him at a brothel in Aboda.”

“...his sister’s right there, Aveil,” Medli muttered.

The gerudo turned to face her as she poured tea for everyone with a shrug. “So? In spite of the adorable braided pigtails, she’s a grown woman.”

Medli placed the teapot on the table again with maybe a little too much force causing it to clink against the stone. “Yes, but there’s etiquette!”

Aryll sighed as she heard the tale. A frown came across her lips and she looked up at Aveil from her seat. “I’m going to regret this, but what was my brother doing in a brothel in Aboda?”

“His exact words were making poor life choices,” Aveil said bluntly.

“Yes,” Medli admitted, “that’s usually what happens at a brothel, but this is Link we’re talking about. He still bushes and gets bashful around overtly flirtatious girls.”

“Really?”

“You should’ve seen him when I introduced him to Marin.”

There was a name Aryll hadn’t heard in a very long time. Her jaw fell open as she took the tea from Medli and clasped the clay mug in her hands. She remembered seeing her years ago. When she had gone to a coastal town for trade with the ranch she’d worked for at that time. She remembered a vibrant, red-haired singer with an enchanting voice and smile as she strummed her small harp. “...the singer?” she asked, looking up with wide, surprised eyes. The wood in the fire crackled a little as the women exchanged glances.

“I don’t know the name, Medli but I think you broke her somehow,” Aveil finally said before taking a sip of her tea.

“You’re seriously telling me he was at one time involved with her?”

Medli looked at the tea in her hands for a moment. She sighed as she put it on her desk and stepped over to a picture on it. “It wasn’t a long affair,” she said, picking up the picture and slowly handing it to Aryll. “Maybe six months.”

She took the picture and looked at it. It was full-color pictograph of her brother and the songstress. He had an arm around her waist and they were both smiling broadly. He was in a simple white cotton shirt and his uniform’s pants while she was in a knee-length blue dress with a pink sash around her waist. Aryll smiled sadly at seeing it. He looked happier than she could remember there.

“He had his duty and she her dreams,” Medli continued. “And then small pox hit the islands...”

Aryll looked back up at Medli then, lowering the picture in her hands. “Oh... so she-”

Medli swallowed hard. “Yeah. Only two members of the troupe who survived were Kass and Guro, their goron drummer. You could probably ask Kass if you really wanted. He sometimes performs her last ballad. She sent Link the original copy.”

“How’d he take the news?” she asked after a moment of silence staring at the picture.
“Not... Not well,” Medli admitted. “He first looked like an animal in pain. You’ve hunted yes? And seen probably how they try to not show it?”

“Might’ve been the mutations,” Aveil suggested. “I’ve experienced something similar in the past too with the enhanced instincts and senses. Whatever they did to us when we were children really warped our behaviors.”

“I don’t know,” Medli said. “But the dam broke after a few minutes and he wept terribly. Until his face was red and sleeves of his shirt were soaked through. It hadn’t been long but they were incredibly close. Barely said anything for the remainder of my visit. And... well, I haven’t seen him get close to anyone like that since.”

Aryll winced then. Her insides felt heavy and she put the picture down on the table next to her. She went back to the events of Outset. The confusion and fear at seeing Link looking more like a monster than “Wow,” she started. “Uh... by Din... you said on the trip back he hardly spoke too...”

The rito nodded. “Yes.”

Aryll bowed her head, placing it in her hands. She kept seeing his face and remembered the recent events. She knew why he’d done it. It had been the same reason why he’d agreed to go with Alfonzo and Impa so many years ago as they were starving and orphaned in Aboda’s streets. “…Medli?” she asked. “If you see him again. Tell him I’m. I’m sorry for what I said.”

“Would probably mean more if you said it yourself to him, but I will.”

She sighed, slowly removing her head from her hands and looking back up at them. Aveil was sipping her tea as Medli took the picture back and put it on her desk. She turned around again to face Aryll. At that moment though, she realized a course of action. The guilt chewed at her too much, and the desire to do what she felt was right was too great to ignore. “…Yeah. You’re right.” She sat back up and took her tea before standing up.

Medli’s eyes followed her. “Aryll?”

“I’m gonna find him.”

Medli was on her feet. “Aryll, think this through.”

“I have.” She winced as she stepped oddly on her foot that had been grabbed by the magtail. Some of her tea splashed over the edge of the mug, but she recovered. It was too dark to see what was in the room though and she turned back around to get a lantern from the room. “I get to Aboda and pick up the trail there.”

“I can tell you right now,” Aveil started, putting her mug down, “it took us into the heart of No Man’s Land.” She walked away from the desk as Aryll found a lantern on the wall and took it to head back to the room. “And the fighting has only gotten worse. To say nothing of the necrophages and other monsters there now. Just getting to the coast from Lake Hylia, I’ve gone through more silver arrows than I have in my entire career as a hunter in the desert.”

Aryll found her belongings in the room and quickly started going through them. She checked her crossbows, finding they’d been beaten up and would require some maintenance, so she put them aside. Her regular leather armor that she’d gotten because of the Bellum incident was sitting on a chair at the foot of the bed. Her boots and pants were folded under it along with the grappling hook, neatly wrapped up and hanging off the back of the chair. “Then I find a Chosen and they can help me find him.”
Medli’s eyes went wide as she strode into the room. Aveil followed, but stopped in the doorway and leaned against it. “Aryll! That’s not a good idea!” Medli cried.

“Why not?” she asked, spinning around. “They’re still hunting him, right? And I’m his only living family so it’d make sense I’m looking for him.” She pushed a strand of hair out of her face. “And I could possibly even help. And they know him, so I can hear more about him.”

“It’s bold, Aryll. I’ll give you that,” Aveil admitted. She shook her head a little.

“If something happened to you, I don’t know what Link would do,” Medli said. She threw a hand up before dropping it to her side as she continued. “Heck, I don’t even think he knows.”

Aryll clenched her teeth with a groan. “But I have to-”

“I know,” she said, holding up her hands as Aryll glared at her in frustration. “And I know I can’t really stop you.” Medli lowered her hands then. “But,” she pleaded, giving Aryll a worried stare “Don’t do that. I have an idea that would keep you out of that trouble.”

She relaxed a little. “What?”

“Look for his allies. He worked with a merchant and a sorceress during The Conjunction.”

“He traveled with the two sorceresses during the conjunction?” That was a surprise. She remembered him mentioning several times in his letters that The Twin Sorceresses Lana and Cia were almost never allowed out of The Tower.

Medli shook her head. “No. They stayed at The Tower. The sorceress in question wasn’t even from Hyrule. I hardly know anything about them as your brother hasn’t talked a lot about his time during The Conjunction with me. I’d guess because of state secrets and all. But I do know their professions and their names.”

“He mentioned them when we were talking, but no names,” Aveil admitted. “I got the feeling he was leaving a lot out.”

Aryll took a deep breath and folded her arms. “So, who are they?” she asked Medli.

“Ravio of Caelondia and Midna,” she answered. The room was quiet then. The sound of the fire in the office crackled and snapped a little more along with some of the breeze coming in through the window.

“Of?”

“Of what?”

“Where’s Midna from?”

Medli shook her head. “He’s never said. If I had to guess, she’s either from Labrynna or the desert. She might’ve been the sorceress he contacted while we were at The Tower of The Gods earlier too. As he did say it wasn’t Lana or Cia.”

Her plan was looking safer now. There would still be danger, but she was not some child anymore. She did not need to hide behind her big brother as he fought off bullies. And she had to admit her mistakes rather than let them fester. They were the only family either of them had. And she wished she could take back what she’d said at Outset. “So I find these people and they could lead me to Link.”
“Yeah. Or at the very least you learn more about him.”

She nodded a little, arms falling slowly to her sides. “Okay. Then I need to get back to Hyrule.”

“We’ll be leaving in the morning for Windfall,” Aveil said. “Linebeck will take me and Medli then to the coast. You could probably hop the ferry to Aboda and then pick up the trail there.”

“That’s what I was thinking. I’d need a horse and some money too probably, but that might grab too much attention in No Man’s land.”

“Aryll,” Medli asked. “Please try to avoid No Man’s Land. It’s called that for good reason. I flew over it while trying to find Link before this entire mess with Bellum and it’s well-named now. And like Aveil said. It’s not just the soldiers and highwaymen you need to look out for. Ghouls and rottfiends swarm the sites of battle. Sometimes they show up while the fighting’s still going on. The only reason why Ganondorf hasn’t been able to establish a foothold in South Lanayru is because his forces are bottlenecked in The Seer Valley. Small parties can get through the caves and passages there, but can’t move a full army. So raiding parties and small companies are there trying to clear a way to the sea so they can bring in forces from the Zuna Ports.”

She shook her head as she moved out of the way as Aryll went back into the main room for her tea. “And with the bulk of Hyrule’s armies along her Western Border, they’re stuck with small companies trying to stop them where they show up. And according to my information, every Chosen is on the front right now, with three or four being cycled through No Man’s Land.”

“Don’t forget the poes and stalkin,” Aveil added. “Found some incredibly big poes by trees that had been used for hanging deserters and traitors. Your brother apparently has found some before we met too that would burst into smaller poes if their forms were damaged enough. And given how many bones the necrophages pick clean, we could be seeing something like a gomess show up.”

“I’ve never heard of a gomess,” Medli said.

“Do you know the tale of The Gravelord of Ikana? Of The First Dead? A particularly dominant spirit pulls others to it, essentially a ghost eating other ghosts and takes the bones of the dead to fashion a body. But the body is typically just as many skeletons as it could pull to its core and assemble into something that looks like it could’ve been human, or blin… Or anything else that it could get bones from.”

“That… That sounds terrifying,” Aryll admitted.

“Some wear cloaks of keese. And unlike most poes that carry a lantern, they have stowed it within the center of their bodies. Meaning it can be difficult to stop them if you’re not prepared.”

This was helping, even if it was making her nervous. “So. I need to avoid No Man’s Land as best I can. I can do that. Maybe go north up through Ordon and along those roads. There might be fighting, but I’ll be far from the fronts and the heart of the region. I can go to Lon Lon Ranch and I’m sure Malon will let me borrow a horse.”

“That sounds like a good plan,” Medli admitted. “You can then head up to Castle Town and continue your investigation there.” She stepped back to the desk. “I might actually have someone else you can contact up there.”

“You do?”

“Yes. He knows Link too. His name is Shad. And he’s a scholar.” She smiled a little as she dug about a drawer behind her desk. “I’ve had the chance to meet and speak with him. He’s a very
proper man. And he’s known your brother years. They met through Zelda actually I think.”

“I see.” Aryll looked down at the table where she’d left her tea. “So, has he met the other two?”

“I don’t think so.” She put a book on the desk and closed the drawer. “His passion is researching the Sky Tribes, or Oocca. He’s brilliant. But may need to focus him on the task at hand. He loves discussing his work.”

“Okay… So. Ravio, Midna and Shad.”

“Shad might be the one you could find most easily as well. The others, I’m not sure.”

“I do think Link mentioned Shad,” Aveil admitted. “Of course, most of that night is a blur anyways…”

“You mentioned.” Medli looked to Aryll then. “Though since we’ll be leaving tomorrow early, it might be good if we all got some sleep. I know I for one am not going to get a single wink of sleep on Linebeck’s boat with how Bekko said one of the gears is squealing now.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey everybody! Sorry about missing last week, but it IS NaNo and I got distracted by writing. There's a chance this'll happen again and again through the next couple weeks given it's November.

Devnotes:
-A kinda breather chapter and a lot of backstory/history as well.
-Yes, a sad tale when it comes to Marin. The idea kinda was to emulate to a degree Link's Awakening with their time together. Brief and fleeting but sweet and wonderful like a dream.
-The title for the chapter comes from how Link and Aryll are more alike than either are willing to admit.
-Obviously, Ravio is lying about where he really came from. This will become something of a running gag and a little bit of fun for me as the author. A cookie to the first to get the reference of Ravio's false-home. Here's a hint: It involves a kid who shows a great deal of courage himself and his 'lifelong friend'.

That'll do it for this week! As always, huge thanks to everyone who reads, leaves kudos, comments and bookmarks! Special thanks this week to Ericobard for the bookmark!

See you guys next week hopefully! We'll be rejoining Link and finding out just what his 'poor life choices' were! Thanks for reading and keep being awesome everybody!
The best milk liqueur that Link had ever tasted was half a continent away. The clay mug in front of him right now held a poor version, but the price was right and it was doing what he desired. The terrified face of Aryll at seeing what he was dulled, but it always became clear. He still heard her voice and the shock in it. Link took another drink from it to finish the contents and waved the bartender over.

“Another?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Link said, sliding a purple rupee across the counter. He glanced over his shoulder when he heard a woman giggle, wondering for a second if it had been his shadow, but he remembered a moment later she wasn’t there anymore. His vision swam a little as he saw the locals and a few other sailors enjoying the only brothel in town that was open this early in the morning. It wasn’t like when he’d be sent to the Plush Unicorn to keep an eye on recruits or even make sure a fellow Chosen didn’t cause too many problems. The milk liqueur was better too there and occasionally he’d have an interesting conversation with one of the girls.

When the clay mug was in front of him again he grabbed it and took a long drink. He was happy to be leaving the seas behind and that he was on land once more, but knew he couldn’t waste too much time at the bottom of a bottle. Link let out another yawn and brought it to his lips once more. Before he could take another sip, he was knocked forward, spilling it.

“Hey! I’m talkin’ to you, traitor,” a man said.

Link slowly looked over his shoulder. He hadn’t even heard a word they’d said before, but saw them with five others. To Link’s right was a particularly large and round brute. He grinned at Link, showing he was missing several teeth as he cracked his knuckles. “Just let me drink in peace,” he said.

“You ever… Ever…” He shook his head then and downed the rest of what was left in the mug. “Wonder why… It’s twenty thoua…” Link burped then, looking surprised himself that it had come out of his mouth. Again, he felt like he was going to fall over a little, but took a deep breath to scan the bar. Even in his altered state, he could clearly make out where they were and planning a way out. If he drew his blade or killed any of them he was not going to get away. Of course though, there was no way other than through the thugs. He spied some mugs he could use and a loaf of bread. There was also one of the benches that he could kick over if he could just get around them. The clay mug still in his hand too would be useful and the alcohol could burn their eyes.

“Don’t think he’s listenin’,” the large man said. He immediately grabbed Link by the arm.

Something clicked. He registered it the second he felt them squeeze his arm. The hand holding the clay mug threw it into the large man’s face with enough force it shattered. As one of the others came from him from behind, he swept his arm around and beat their face with the back of his
bracer. In that time, the brute had let go of him, staggering back from the mix of milk and vodka in his eyes. Link kicked low against the leader in their shin. Two of the others though grabbed his arms and tried to force him against the bar. Link reacted, forcing his right elbow into the ribcage and up. The wind was knocked clean out of them and one more blow was all that was needed to lay them on their back. The one still holding his arm twisted it, making him groan. Link grabbed a nearby plate and swung horizontally, beating it into their throat. They instantly let go of him and clutched their neck, giving him the chance to then smash it over their head.

Link was knocked to the side into the large man then and grabbed. His arms were held to his side. He felt the fat thug’s breath and smelled the liquor from his drink sinking into their hair. The leader of the band smacked his jaw. Due to his inebriation, the impact was dulled, but still hurt. Link struggled, managing to avoid another swing and get his hands on the bar. Link moved his elbow as if he was going to smash it into their stomach, but never connected for he never intended to. While they were busy watching his hands and arms, he slammed his heel into their knee. It landed with enough force there was a snap of bone, followed by the man screaming as he let go. Link took the opportunity to push back and freed himself. He parried quickly then, but not quick enough to get another blow. As the leader charged, Link flicked his hand out. There was a snap and flash of green along with a shriek of one of the staff. The leader of the group was thrown through a window by the burst of magic into the street.

He looked around the bar then. Many people had backed away to the walls, fright in their eyes at what had just transpired. Link knew he had to leave and right then, even though he was starting to feel even if he felt his eyelids drooping. Link turned around and started through the bar. He pulled his wallet from his belt and shoved it at the bartender who had a look of shock on his face as he watched the hylian stumble through the kitchen.

He was in an alleyway now. It had only been a few moments, but he didn’t know that. Things were getting harder to see and a yawn slipped from his mouth. Link closed his eyes and shook his head as he heard an echoing bell along with more shouting. He thought maybe finding a place to hide and sleep off how much he’d drunk would be for the best, even though he didn’t think he had drunk all that much. Link rubbed his head and stumbled forward again. He had to get further from the brothel. Maybe if his feet didn’t give out from exhaustion and drunkenness, he could get out of Aboda and into the fields. There had to be a bridge or somewhere he could hide under. Each step though made him more and more exhausted. Sounds echoed around him as he stumbled into a parked cart a ways away from where he’d started, even though to him it felt only like a few minutes. Then he felt a hand on his shoulder. With a wild and slow swing, which looked far faster to him than it actually was moving, his wrist was grabbed.

“Whoa! Careful there!” a woman said. “You really did a number on the brothel.”

“…Huh?” Link blinked a couple times, seeing someone with long red hair. “M-Malon…? No… Midna?”

“Wow, you’re completely out of it, pretty boy. Stay with me here. You have any Oasis Spring?”

When he managed to get a look at the woman’s face, he recognized its sharp features and the longer nose. The striking gold eyes as well and dark tanned skin along with the terminan zora armor instantly told him who it was. “…Aveil?”

“Yeah, it’s me.” She put a hand on his forehead for a second and sniffed the air. “You’ve been
poisoned."

“Huh… Don’t feel poisoned…”

She groaned. “Because you’ve drunk an entire bottle of vanilla and honey milk liqueur. That stuff
tastes like pure sugar and regret. No wonder you didn’t notice it.” Aveil glanced back over her
shoulder, hearing something that Link didn’t register in his current state. “Do you have something
that can cleanse it from you?”

“Huh?”

She let out a sigh and pulled a bottle from a bag under her cloak. “If you didn’t just hand your
entire wallet to the bartender to pay for the damages you caused, I’d be asking for two hundred
rupees for this thing…” The gerudo uncorked a bottle and handed it to him. He nearly spilled it,
but she kept it in his hand. “Drink it.”

“What is…”

“Oasis Spring. Use it to cleanse the body of our potions or some of the venoms the nastier worms
use.”

“…Oh… Nayru’s Tears.” He sniffed it. “…Smells like it. Like… Wet chalk and dust…”

“And tastes like it too.”

“Not unless you…”

“Just drink it before you pass out. You can pay me back with…”

He was holding up a corked bottle of one of his potions. It was not the Nayru’s Tears though, but
one of the red healing potions. Quite possibly one of the two that Aveil had given him back on
Outset. “…Wait… No…” Link nearly dropped it then. Only because of the quick reaction of Aveil
did it not fall to the cobblestones.

“Damnit, just drink that thing already.”

Link closed his eyes and downed the entire bottle in a couple gulps. His eyes watered as it really
was like drinking liquefied chalk. His mouth felt incredibly dry afterwards as he instantly began to
feel like he’d regretted putting the bottle to his lips even though he knew exactly what was going to
happen. He felt his throat constrict and coughed a couple times, expecting a cloud of dust to fly
from his lips. A second later though he had caught his breath. “…I’m okay.”

Aveil blinked slowly and watched, as if expecting something to happen. She looked skeptical with
her arms folded under her chest and right eyebrow raised slightly.

“Really I’m…” He felt something surge up his throat and keeled over; vomiting up almost every
drop of the alcohol he’d drunk that night. Link coughed a couple more times before heaving for
breath. He barely got any air in his lungs as he kept vomiting.

“That’s it… Get it all out…” He felt Aveil pat him on the back which only caused him to let out a
more forceful hurl. “Know it’s painful and can’t be something you just piss away like if it’s
directly in your bloodstream… Though we should probably find an outhouse or something soon
anyways.”

“Water,” he heaved.
“Huh?” Aveil looked down at him as he was now on his hands and knees, spitting into the street. She pulled her canteen and offered it to him.

Link grabbed it and drank greedily for a second before pulling it away and spitting more into the street. Another minute though and a couple more gulps of water and the vomit had thinned considerably. His throat ached and was soaked with sweat, but alive. Things were becoming clearer as well. He coughed a bit more as his stomach was finished being emptied into the alleyway. "So..." he sniffed, rubbing tears from his eyes from vomiting so hard. "What're you doing... Doing at a brothel at three in the morning?"

"Only place I could find for a good game of cards that was still open." She quirked a brow and leaned back against the cart. "What're you doing at a brothel at three in the morning?"

Link wiped more spittle from his mouth and tried to get back up, but remained on all fours to cough and dry heave. "Making poor life decisions it looks like..." He groaned and heaved before forcing himself to his feet. “Thank you...”

“You owe me.”

“I know...” He dug about his potions again, finding the Nayru’s Tears. “Here... To replace what you...”

“Actually, I had something else you’re going to help me with.”

“...Oh?” He fumbled the bottle a little and got it back in its pouch. Link felt his stomach churn then as the elixir continued to wipe every trace of toxin from his body. Again he nearly buckled over from it. If it weren’t for the mutations, he’d probably have passed out from the pain and exhaustion by now.

“Got a contract. And I need the help of another in my line of work.”

“Oh... Sure...” Link blinked a little then, managing to stand on his own. “…Wait... How’d you know I was poisoned?”

Aveil pushed some of her hair back. “Because I’ve done something similar with worms in the past. And one or two people you could call monsters... Enough tranquilizers masked by something sweet and savory, something that dulls the senses and that creature isn’t going to be waking up when they lie down for a nap. Even with our mutations...”

“Resistance isn’t immunity.” Link nodded a couple times, coughing and feeling dizzy from it. He reached out and steadied himself on the cart. “One of the first lessons I...” He bent over a little then and coughed, but nothing else came up. “I need...”

“More water?”

“Details.” To his surprise he let out a burp which left a sickening taste in his mouth. His eyes were wide in a bit of surprise as well from it.

“...Not here. We should get out of town first. The local militia is going to want your head after the mess you caused. And I’ve already overstayed my welcome given how few people like gerudos here. Especially when she takes all their money in a game of cards.”

“Okay.” He sniffed a bit and managed to straighten himself. “We’ll need... Need horses.”

She nodded. “I got mine at a stable near here. You have one?”
Link shook his head. “Going to have to borrow one… Show me the stables.”

“Not been here before?”

“I have.” He checked his back, finding both swords and his shield were still there. “Just not after feeling sick and disoriented.” Again he felt his stomach twist. “…Maybe an outhouse first.”

Even after finding an outhouse and cleaning himself up a little bit, Link still felt sick to his stomach as he drank the entirety of his canteen of water. The next couple days were going to be rough as the concoction finished its work. Though it removed all the toxins from his body, it also removed a great deal of water. They’d need more and soon. Link glanced back at Aveil, who had pulled her cloak on. It was worn so the golden symbol of the Gerudo Tribes was not visible. She pulled a scarf over her face as well, leaving only her eyes and some of her hair visible.

“Ever steal a horse before?”

“Not stealing, borrowing,” he said. Link glanced back to the stables. A couple guards were out front of the large wooden doors talking. “I’m going to find one with a specific brand on them and use them until I can get Epona.”

“Your horse.”

He nodded. “She’s safe and if I take the horse with the brand there it really will be borrowing.”

“But you technically still are stealing a horse.”

“I have every intention to return it.” He pulled his clawshot out and looked to the roof. “Can you distract the guards while I get inside?”

“Yeah. Soon as we’re out of town though, we’re talking about this job.”

“What is it exactly?”

She glanced around quickly. “Know those disappearances I was looking into? Tracked the perpetrators here from the Zuna Ports.”

“Meaning you crossed No Man’s Land.”

“Actually, I chartered a smuggler to take me and Teron here.”

“Who’s Teron?”

She looked at him for a second. Though most of her face was now hidden, the way her brow shifted slightly told him enough.

“…Oh. Your horse.”

“Yep. Can’t miss him. Only black Tantari Dunerunner there.”

“Never seen one of those before.”
“You’ll see him soon enough.” She walked for the guards then, waving to them. Link waited for her to have them distracted before slipping across the road and to the other side of the stables. Spotting a rafter that stuck out, he fired the clawshot and pulled himself up. Once hanging there, he swung a little to the open window and released the device. He caught himself and pulled up to get into the hayloft. He could hear Aveil’s voice outside as he carefully and quietly lowered himself down. He clenched his eyes shut for a moment and opened them again, vision adjusting to the darkness. Once done, he grabbed a saddle and bridles off the wall before looking among the horses there, settling on a white mare with a clear brand for Lon Lon Ranch on its backside. It only took a minute for him to get the horse ready, but he heard the doors open and saw a lantern.

“So, you’re the one with the big black stallion?” the guard asked.

“Yeah,” Aveil said. “And I must leave tonight.”

“Sure seems like you’re in an awful hurry to get going.”

“I have a contract I must fulfill. I explained that already.”

“Still, odd you’re leaving before the sun’s even come up.”

“My quarry appears in the dawn.”

He heard a gasp and peeked around the edge of the stall to see the guard with Aveil there. The guard’s facemask was down so he couldn’t see their face, but his tone told him all he needed; the man was afraid. “You’re chasin’ the spirits.”

“Spirits?”

“The ones that appear at dusk and dawn? It’s the only time our worlds meet! People say packs of them appear and carry off people to other worlds! Been showin’ up ever since the war started! Heard some taken from No Man’s Land! People just disappear! Entire villages and hamlets gone in a puff of smoke but no bodies! Like they were never there to begin with!”

“Huh…” He saw Aveil guide a large black stallion with eyes that looked more like rubies than actual eyes before throwing a saddle and light blanket on their back. “Have heard rumors, but thought that was attributed to just regular highwaymen.”

“Not slavers from the West?”

She shook her head. “I don’t follow a lot of politics, but I’ve heard that you could make a good profit by bringing the heads of slave drivers to tribal leaders. There anything like that around here?”

The guard shook his head. “Usually it’s something The Kingdom’s forces deal with. Slave rings like that are big enough to not be something regular folk are able to deal with.” He helped her with the bridle. “You don’t think it’s just some slave ring, do you? I mean, spirits and no traces of hoofprints or things from those places. Just completely gone.”

“Don’t know. Gonna find out though.” She finished getting her horse ready and started stuffing some things in the saddlebags. Link saw the head of a manhandla’s stalk hooked to the left of the back. It was withered and it was missing part of its lower jaw, but he knew what the massive killer plant looked like. It gave him brief pause.
“’course. Know not all gerudo out there are the thieves an’ murderers like folk say. Y’wanna get outta here fast though. They’re lookin’ for someone to blame at Martha’s Pearl for the mess earlier this night and your neck is as good as any.”

“Thanks.” She looked about a little. “I’ll take it from here and go out the back.”

“Okay. Be careful out there. Lot of bandits and things like ghouls and readeads. And the poes around the trees army’s been hangin’ deserters. Saw a real big one out there earlier. Like twice the size of an ox! Killed a few people coming from Ordon!”

“I’m not equipped to handle specters. I’d need the proper oils and a bottle to trap it until I could burn the body.” She looked at him then as she stroked the horse’s snout a little. “Gather some people up and cut the bodies down. Go out when they’re not haunting the area and burn them. Be sure to do whatever funeral rites are needed as well. That’ll weaken the poes and they should eventually fade away.”

“Mayor doesn’t want the bodies gone from the tree though. Says it’s warnin’ to anyone thinkin’ ‘bout betraying The Crown.”

Aveil shook her head a little. “Then the poes will remain. That’s all I can tell you.” She glanced over to the white mare for a second then back at the guard. “I’ll be heading out the back so not to cause any more of a disturbance for the guards then I already have.”

“Sorry again ‘bout the captain…” He turned and walked out of the stable.

“Mmm. Lucky for him he had bigger fish to fry…” She waited until he’d gone before glancing back to the mare. “Y’can come out now.”

Link emerged, guiding the mare out. He muffled a cough against his arm and pulled the face mask to his zora armor back up. Though the armor was back on Dragon Roost undergoing extensive repairs after the events at sea, he kept the mask in case he ever had to breathe underwater. He looked to the back doors of the stable. “Out the back?”

“Yeah,” she said. “C’mon.”

He tugged on the reins slightly and the mare followed him. “Heard what you said. You left out though if the poes manifest and you have to fight them you want to capture their souls in blue-glass bottles. Long as they’re trapped in them, they won’t dissolve through the glass and reform later.”

“We’d typically use jars coated with a ceramic glaze. That way there was no risk of it getting out.” She guided her own steed to the rear gate. As she had, Link removed the barricade and pushed the door open. “Hunted spirits before?”

“A few.” Link mounted the white mare, giving her a pat. “Mostly poes, but I did deal with a couple ghinis. There was also a shadow hag…”

“Never dealt with a shadow hag before.” Aveil swiftly mounted her steed in a single fluid move. “Though had to deal with more konakis than I’m comfortable admitting…”

“A what?”

She looked at him. In the dim light, he could make out sad eyes peering back from under her hood. “I think hylians call them botchlings.”
If there was any color left in his face from throwing up virtually everything that had been in his stomach earlier, it would’ve been gone with mention of those tragic, cursed creatures. “…Oh…” Link took a deep breath as the information sank in. He gently nudged the mare in the sides and was silent. He had never dealt with such a creature and prayed he never would.

They rode well into the dawn before stopping as the trees of Ordon began to appear for a small meal and to water the horses. Link finished filling his canteen and taking a long drink himself before walking back to the white mare. Aveil offered him some jerky and biscuits as he did.

“Thanks,” he said, taking them and pulling the biscuit apart.

“So, the job,” she said, inspecting the straps to the manhandla trophy on the back of her horse. “The contract I have comes from The Tribes. They asked me to track down a missing person. I followed the trail along the coast through smugglers in the Zuna Ports. From what I got in Aboda, sounds like I’ve stumbled upon a slave ring.”

“Any luck finding this person yet?” He placed the jerky on one of the opened pieces of biscuit and then made a sandwich out of it. He wrapped it carefully before mounting his horse again.

She shook her head as she climbed back on Teron. The large black stallion snorted as she did. “Just their trail. Following names of people who were connected with it so I can get their routes. From there, find the common points and then infiltrate those.” She flicked the reins and said something in her native tongue. The stallion started to canter. Link was right by her side then.

“So what’ve you learned so far about them?”

“The slave ring?” She looked back to the road. “They’re operating near the swamps of the Northern Front. Near a pass into the desert.”

“So why not head right there first?”

“I did. But while we were at sea, it looked like the Hyrulean Army came through and completely destroyed their encampment. I didn’t find the person I was contracted to find as well. After finding a couple people connected with it that fled into the Tantari Dunes, I picked up the trail and headed back south. Gave me names. People to find. Before I left the Zuna Ports though, I got a lead. They escaped and had started fleeing East. Had hoped to cut them off in Aboda but… The local garrison captain was less than helpful. And I was running into other problems as well.”

“I see.” He took another bite of his sandwich.

“Shouldn’t be surprised I guess though. Hylians in The Zuna Ports were being treated pretty much the same way I was in Aboda. Suspicion, fear. Hate… Occasionally find someone willing to trust though and help.”

“So were you able to get a lead?”

“Just following the last leads on the trails. They might’ve been passing through the village north of here or they might have some information.”

Link nodded. “Ordon. I was through there recently.”
“What’s it like?”

“Small village. Mostly goats and farming. Close to the Lost Woods. Haven’t had the problems with refugees too since it is on the southeastern part of the country. Technically they’re not even part of Hyrule proper.” He stuffed the last of the sandwich in his mouth and checked a map from his back. Once he swallowed, he glanced at her. “Will probably be a couple hours only if we keep this pace. Everyone was pretty friendly too last time I was there.”

“Sounds like a small oasis in the chaos of the war.” Aveil pulled back on the reins a few moments later. “Wait…”

“What?”

“Smoke…” She pointed to the trees. Black clouds were rising from behind them a fair ways off. Link checked his map quickly again. It was clear where it was coming from but there was too much to suggest it was just the people of the village working normally.

“…That’s not good.” He nudged the mare in the sides with his heels and soon they were riding at a gallop. The trees started to grow thicker and the trail harder to clearly see. As they started to go down a hill, Link spotted someone near the path in a dark robe. They were picking mushrooms and herbs, stuffing them in a bag. He pulled back on the reins.

“Whoa!” the woman in the robe shouted. “Careful there!”

Link instantly recognized the voice. “Irene!” he called. “Irene, is that you?”

“Link?” She quickly looked to the gerudo on the stallion that was right next to him. Her eyes quickly went to the charms around their necks. “By Din the fortune teller was right again! Said that a wolf and viper would come from the south!”

Aveil looked at Link then back at the witch in front of them. “You know her?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Link said. “She’s a witch that lives near Ordon.” He looked back at Irene then. “What’s going on there? We saw smoke and picked up the pace.”

“Funeral,” she said. “They were attacked a night or two ago. Didn’t hear everything, but Mayor Bo sent some people to Aboda.”

Aveil glanced to the hylian man on the mare. “The guard mentioned a few Ordonians were killed by a poe…”

“A poe?” Irene sighed. “Great, sounding like even more of that fortune teller’s story is coming true.”

“Oh?” Link asked.

“She said that spirits of hate would show themselves as innocence left Ordon. But that aid would come as a wolf and a viper rode from the south.” She pointed at the wolf charm around his neck. “You’re wearing a wolf, she’s got a snarling viper. Just like they said that taking care of green would help to avoid a terrible fate.”

“They might still need help finding the perpetrators of the attack.” He didn’t say it, but hoped it wasn’t what Aveil had discussed with the guard back in Aboda.
She nodded. “Mayor Bo would be grateful, but…”

“But what, girl?” Aveil asked.

“But I’m not sure he’d be happy to see Link again. A couple Chosen came through a week ago.”

“Chosen? Here?”

The witch nodded. “Handed out posters and then headed to Aboda. Anyone who brings you in gets…”

“Twenty-thousand rupees, I know,” he said. Link thought quickly, reasoning they’d come through probably to go retrieve Zelda from Outset. He’d just missed them, but was quite thankful that he hadn’t run into them.

“Actually it was thirty.”

“By the Phantom Guide, Link,” Aveil half-groaned. She ran her hand over her head and through her hair. “Thirty thousand rupees? It’s a miracle you didn’t have every man woman and child in Aboda chasing you out of town.”

“You’re still going there though, aren’t you?” The witch folded her arms, slipping her hands in the large sleeves of the robe. “You want to help them.”

Link looked to Aveil then. “It’s your contract,” he said. “They did give me a job and feel like decent people. I’d like to help them if we could, but I owe you still. And with the price on my head the risk might be too great.”

The gerudo nodded slightly. “We could also take the chance to get some extra supplies since we left Aboda in a hurry.” She looked back to Irene. “We’ll see what we can do if they can give us information on a lead I’m following,” she said. “Keep following the path I’m guessing?”

“Yeah,” Irene said. “Hey, if you’re heading back, I could use a ride.”

“No broom today?” Link asked.

She shook her head. “Too dangerous to fly at low altitude in the forest. And if I was going into the field, it’d stick out. And that’d make someone want to shoot me down probably.”

“Ah. Makes sense.” He glanced at the back of his mare. Though not as strong as Epona, he was sure she’d be able to carry two of them the remainder of the way to Ordon. “Hop on.”

Chapter End Notes

Extra big chapter since I missed last week! Might be the same way next week as a heads-up. It’s that time of year after all.

Devnotes:
- Though I thought about not having Link getting wasted, I ended up keeping it in. Part of it was funnily enough, inspired slightly by Captain America. Where Steve tries to get drunk, but discovers he can’t because of his enhanced physiology.
- Though the most obvious of the ideas behind the Nayru's Tears (or Desert Oasis if
you're from the desert like Aveil) potions came from the White Honey potion from The Witcher series, there was some science behind it. It's more basic than acidic. And the two cancel each other out.
-I was gonna name Aveil's horse something else, but couldn't find a good sort of mythological entity or being that would fit to be named after. After all, Epona is named after a Celtic goddess and I ended up naming Midna's big wolf Fenris after the same big wolf of Norse myth.

That'll be it for now! See you next week or the week after next! As always, thanks to everyone for reading, kudos, bookmarks and comments! Keep being awesome everybody!
They continued along the path shortly after, Irene riding with Link. The three reached the village from the south, coming into the small valley that held Ordon. A funeral raft was ablaze in the middle of the small spring nearby. The locals stood by and watched as it burned. Looking around though, Link clearly saw a great deal of damage to the simple buildings. Many were horribly burned and had animal skins hanging from them to fill holes. The roof of one of the buildings had been completely burned away. Link dismounted from the mare and hitched her to a post near the small shop, which appeared to have survived the attack. Irene hopped off. “Thanks for the ride,” she said.

“Of course,” Link said. “Heading back up to your grandmother’s now?”

“I wanted to talk to some of the villagers actually. Let them know we’d be willing to help them given what happened. Have to ask Mayor Bo anyways to let you.”

“Looks like they were attacked alright,” Aveil said, dismounting Teron. The stallion whinnied and seemed to not want to be hooked to the post next to the mare, but obeyed all the same. “What exactly happened?”

“From what I heard?” Irene sighed. “They came a night or two ago. Screaming and riding. Like they were spirits from beyond. Killed some of the militia, carried off some people. Got Ilia when she tried to help Rusl. Was middle of the night too. When I got down here by dawn, it was over.”

“Midnight raid. Local militia probably not equipped to deal with a dedicated attack, especially in such an isolated area. Especially at night. Fire and smoke would’ve added to the confusion.”

“Sound like you’ve seen this before,” Link said. He folded his arms as he watched her tie the reins of her horse to the post.

“Ganondorf lead a group of boar riders and blins during the unification several years back against a tribal leader who opposed his call for unity.” Aveil pushed a single strand of red hair back behind an ear and fixed her cloak to ensure it stayed on her shoulders. “Not a single survivor. Me and Teron passed through the aftermath a day or so later while stalking a lanmola.”

“There were survivors here at least though, indicating they were trying to take people,” Link said. “And the fact they only took the young indicates they had desired targets.” He glanced down the path of the shop to the rest of the village. “We’ll need to talk to Bo and see if they want our help even, but we could start by investigating the area.”

“Agreed,” Aveil said. “I’ll start on the left, you on the right?”

“Sounds good.” Link rolled his head a couple times on his shoulders to stretch and scanned the village again carefully. “Irene, do you have anything that could be used for dowsing?” He already saw several places where horses could have come through, but would need a closer look to determine some of the specifics.

“I do!” she said. “Proper work though would take a day to prepare for.”

“Might lose the trail by then. Can you do something that could just give us a rough direction to
“I could. Would still take an hour or so. Me and gram are witches, not sages of the temples.”

“All we need is a direction. I’ll be able to track them once we’re sure.”

She nodded readily. “Count on it. I’ll go get to it soon as I’m done talking with the villagers. Might be able to get a volunteer too.”

“Volunteer?”

“Blood will find blood,” Aveil said. “Ritual similar to what some of the gerudo witches practice when trying to navigate desert storms.”

“Exactly,” Irene said.

“Do it,” Link said. “More leads we have the better.” He walked down the trail then to inspect the half of the village he had been asked to take. Link glanced back to see Aveil start to her side while Irene went up the path to the spring. He saw a patch of pumpkins near the small stream that ran through the village and didn’t need to kneel down to see they’d been trampled, but he did kneel down to examine the horseshoe prints in the dirt. The direction suggested they’d come up from the south, much like they had. The small area south of him lead to a larger river rather than a stream, but he could clearly see a dozen different ways through the trees and rocks that a small pack of riders could come from. The wolf around his neck rattled, causing him to grip it. A small pulse of magic sent through it gave him a direction by the river then and its mill.

Inspecting the mill’s side, he saw blood staining the wall and dirt. Kneeling down as well, he noticed no evidence of riders either. Link stood back up then and inspected the blood on the wall. It was a time like this he’d wished he’d listened in one of his classes back at The Tower rather than sneaking off to see the twins. He could reason at least though that someone had been standing there when they’d been hit, badly, in an artery to cause the blood to spray. He continued around the building then to the other side. The wheel still turned as the water never had ceased flowing. There had been some damage to it though and he saw a used torch stuck in the spokes. Carefully, he reached in and pulled it out. Soon as he had, the wheel started to turn faster. He glanced back to Aveil at the other end of the village. She had knelt down and was inspecting the damage to one of the buildings, holding the animal skins to cover the hole in the wall up. He wondered what the night would’ve been like when the raid had started. He reached back and pulled out the vials for his elixirs. Checking through them, he found the lupine sense one and uncorked it. He downed the potion and felt it go to work with a cough.

When he opened his eyes again, things were sharper. He could hear the hushed voices of people at the funeral if he listened closely enough and the scents around him grew stronger. Through the eyes of a wolf, he could see spirits. A young man stood, facing the blood on the wall of the mill. They were completely unaware of his presence as Link inspected them carefully. The spirit bore a particularly bad gash across their throat. Link thought it a miracle they hadn’t lost their head from the attack. He saw a couple other spirits as well in the center of the town wandering, each with various states of damage. One was missing an arm, another looked severely burned. One in particular though looked considerably different. They wore battered armor, mixed of hyrulean plate and gerudo leathers. There were some odd markings and they wore a gruesome mask as well. As Link walked around them to inspect the spirit as it shambled, he saw markings painted along the leather guards on their arms and shins. They were rough swirls, but looked faded and patchy in a couple places. It was clear though that these had not been some beings from beyond the light.
world. Link pulled his sketchbook and quickly drew out the design. As he did, Aveil came over.

“What’re you doing?” she asked.

“One of the raiders was killed,” he said, showing her the work in progress drawing.

“…You can see spirits?”

“Lupine sense potion. Wolves can sense the recently deceased. Thought it’d be useful to tracking and picking up things we can’t normally see.” He drew a few more details from the spirit. “Do you have anything like that?”

“Have one that increases the touch sensation. Useful for detecting the vibrations of worms under the sand, but worms are easy to track when you follow the destruction.”

“Clever.” He finished the drawing and put it away. “Looks like someone came up along the stream. And then…” Link stopped and glanced up the path to the spring. With his enhanced hearing, he could hear Irene’s voice and Mayor Bo arguing. It was growing closer. He picked up a couple other voices he assumed were villagers. “They’re coming back… Don’t sound happy.”

“Should we hide?”

“Might just make them mad.” He watched as a couple of the villagers came down the path. Before they got too close, they went to the shop, inspecting the two horses at the post for a minute. Link spotted Rusl though quickly coming down the path right for them. Irene was talking with Bo near the top of the hill. A couple other villagers were with them, but they didn’t appear to be moving any closer. Link assumed they were listening to the conversation the witch was having with the mayor. His attention was turned to Rusl though as the retired soldier called to him.

“Link!” he said. “Little surprised to see you again. Especially since I’m sure you saw the poster outside of Sera’s Sundries.”

“Poster?” he asked. He already was sure what it’d say, but hadn’t spotted it when they’d arrived.

“That The Crown wants your head for some reason?”

“Ah… That…” He reached up to pinch the bridge of his nose with his thumb and index finger for a second. “That’s a bit of a long story.”

“Does it have to do with why you’re traveling with a gerudo?”

Aveil’s eyes narrowed a little at the mention. Link saw she still had her hood and scarf on, hiding most of her features, but it was still worrisome how quickly she’d been identified. “And what makes me one of the desert folk?” she asked.

“One, the eye shape and skin tone, even with your hood up. Two, the black stallion you have is one only from the Tantari Dunes, which was tribal territory long before the war. Last time Link was here he had an Eldin Drafter, not a Labrynnan Charger. And finally, your scimitars are a pair of blades commonly used by light cavalry from the Tantari Dunes.”

“You know your horses well,” she said, arms folded.

“I do.” He looked back at Link then. “So… Thirty thousand rupees on your head and traveling with a gerudo. This is not looking good for you.”
Link took a deep breath. “Like I said, it’s a long story.”

“What did you do to get them that mad at you? Did you collaborate? Disobey an order that would’ve gotten your squad killed? Were you a Royal Guard? Where were you stationed before the war?”

He slowly looked at the older man. “I was stationed originally where I was trained. The Tower of Hera.”

Rusl’s jaw fell open. He tried to speak for a second, but closed his mouth and looked back at Aveil for a moment. He then looked back at the young hylian. “A Chosen,” he said. “One carrying the Hero’s Spirit.”

“Yes. I am not working for The Crown, but I’m also not working for The Tribes.” Link glanced at Aveil for a second. “Even though…”

“What’s your story then?” he asked Aveil.

“I am a mercenary,” she said. “If the witch didn’t mention me, then I’m tracking the same people it looks like who took your children. I met Link in the South Seas while on another job. And he owes me a favor.”

“I see…” He looked back at Link then. “You trust her?”

She took a step forward. The expression in her eyes changed from neutrality. She took a step forward. “Excuse me?” Her arms dropped to her sides and Link caught her fists clench.

“I trust that she can do her job well,” he said. “That she won’t put me or anyone else around me at risk without a good reason. And that in a fight she won’t be one to abandon me.”

Her expression softened under the hood and she slowly folded her arms again. Rusl seemed to notice the reaction as well. “I apologize,” he said. “I was a soldier and we had to keep a very careful eye out for spies.”

“What did you do?” Link asked.

“I was with the Castoren Troop. We were nicknamed mulldozers.”

“Mulldozers?” Aveil asked. “Like the bug?”

Rusl nodded, Link looked to her. “We were an irregular unit. Guerillas, rangers, scouts…”

“Similar to the garo of Ikana before its fall if some sources are to be believed then.” Aveil glanced up the path. The portly mayor was coming down from his discussion with Irene. The witch however was nowhere to be seen. Link assumed she had left to return to her grandmother. He hoped that she’d been successful in finding someone to help them. When he turned, Rusl did as well.

“Excuse me a moment,” Rusl said, going to intercept Bo before he arrived at the two hexers. Link watched him go.

“That went better than I thought,” he said.

Aveil nodded a little in agreement. “You were expecting trouble?”
“Given the price on my head, many people are more likely to be thinking with their wallets than
their heads. Which is what I’m thinking happened back at that brothel in Aboda.” He looked to see
Bo and Rusl talking then, but still far enough away that they’d not be heard, if not for the elixir
Link had consumed earlier. His hearing was enhanced to that of a wolf and could pick it up clearly.
“He’s telling the mayor about us. Sounding like Irene told him too that we want to help.”

“That’s good. Means we might be able to avoid any sort of confrontation.”

“Still, I think we need to leave before dusk regardless of if they want us to help or not.”

“Because of that price and that other Chosen are looking for you.”

“Exactly.” He looked back at the mayor and old soldier, watching their actions as much as
listening to their words. Link focused carefully then.

“A Chosen who abandoned The Crown,” Bo said.

“He helped us before,” Rusl said. “Cost us a lot, but the problem turned out to be even worse than
we thought it was.”

“I know. But Ordon relies on The Crown and Hyrule to help us. If we’re found to be hiring a
criminal, one that may very well not only being hunted by the Chosen but also the Sheikah, it
could destroy the trust between us we’ve built. We’d no longer have military support if the wild
men came looking to raid us once more. Or if another gohma showed up.”

“Bo, they have your daughter. My son. And half a dozen others. With the war on, it will take at
least a week for Hyrule to send a response. Especially since Fado came back after that poe attacked
the group on their way to Aboda. Link is here now. And we know he can do the work. I’m not sure
about the gerudo woman, but I know we can at least trust him to do everything in his power to
help.”

“But what is his price going to be this time?” He put his hands on Rusl’s shoulders. “Believe me, I
have begun thinking about it the moment that Irene told us he wanted to help find the children.
Chosen can conscript people for their assignments if they’re vassals of The Crown. With the war,
we may as well be a vassal state. Agreeing to his help could make us harboring an enemy of the
Royal Family. Meaning they’d be within rights to exact a cost from us to continue to work
together.”

“You’re thinking that if he gets our children back The Crown may pull them into the army.”

“I don’t want to get Ilia back only to see her taken away a month or a week later because Hyrule
needs people to help with their field hospitals and hear she’s died from some disease or on the end
of a raider’s spear. I know some of them are too young to serve, but your son is almost the same
age that you were conscripted as a page against Labrynna.”

“And I was very lucky the war ended before Robin ordered a counterinvasion…” Rusl closed his
eyes and bowed his head a little before looking back at Bo. “What about Darunia? Could they be
taken there?”

“It’s been years… And the gorons are no longer working with the Royal Family. But we might be
able to work it politically. I’ll send Jaggle and a couple of the militia to Death Mountain and see if
we can work something out. I do not want to talk to Irene’s grandmother about moving them to
Labrynna for the war, that’s too risky politically and the cost would bankrupt us and possibly lead
to a dispute with The Empire. And goddesses forbid that The Sisters hear of this. We’ve been incredibly lucky they didn’t show up when this mess with that gohma started.”

“Agreed.” They turned then, Bo removing his hands from Rusl’s shoulders and they began walking over.

The undead gohma’s head was hung over the fireplace in the mayor’s residence, still as scorched and damaged as Link remembered it when he fought it with the kokiri Saria and the fairy Navi. The fire was burning and a pot with the stew he’d had his first visit was being prepared by Rusl’s wife while Link and Aveil sat at the nearby table, watching their surroundings. Rusl and Bo sat across from them.

“Soon as Uli is finished with the stew, we’ll eat,” Bo said.

“Thank you,” Link replied. He looked the mayor in the eye. “I wish to apologize as well for not informing you of what I did before, but given the circumstances, I didn’t know who I could trust. Or still can.”

“You know Darunia well enough to have earned one of those sets of armor, that’s enough reason to trust you then. But this…” He raised a hand and let it fall back on the table. “This is a very delicate situation. Because of your position and the price on your head, we cannot take risks with our relationship with Hyrule.”

“You don’t want our help?”

“We do. We do. Just that it is something we’re going to have to handle very carefully.”

“I pride myself on my professionalism when it comes to contracts,” Aveil said. “If it is fair and we agree to the terms, I will carry it out.”

“As will I,” Link said. “But we need to discuss the question of price.”

“…I assumed as much.” He looked at Rusl. “We are running low on funds since your last trip here.”

“Aveil? Ideas?”

She shook her head, looking at Rusl’s wife once more as she worked over the stew. “You know more here than I do,” she said. “Besides, my code does not allow me to take more than one special contract like what I have right now.”

Link raised an eyebrow slightly at her words, but also the subtle change in her voice. There was how her eyes had given a glance to the wife. “Very well.” He looked back to the two men. “What I need most right now, and I’m sure Aveil could use it too, is a safe haven in the south. Both sides are hunting me for the same reason. I was a Chosen. Aboda is not an option given its size and recent events there that I was involved in. But you know me. Know I have done work in the past as well that saved your trappers.” He looked up at the gristy trophy over the fireplace. For a moment, he almost told them about Death Mountain and the Lakeside Hamlet, but decided against it. Others could come through and ask about them. He did not want to risk possible places to avoid trouble at now that he knew two Chosen were looking for him. “When I need it, would you be willing to
provide me and anyone traveling with me shelter and food in exchange for getting the children out of the hands of those who took them."

“Your’re talking about the children?” the woman asked, glancing over her shoulder at the table. “Do you have any news?”

“Yes,” Rusl said as she approached. “Link, Aveil, this is my wife, Uli.”

“A pleasure,” Link said, offering a smile. She smiled back lightly.

“Never met a Chosen before. Rusl worked with one when he was in the army.”

“They ever give his name?”

“Eagus,” Rusl said. Link chuckled a little hearing the name. “What?”

“He taught me swordwork on the pots at The Tower. He also showed me a few tricks of how to use my shield as a weapon as well.”

“He loved my pumpkin stew too,” Uli said. “But it sounds like you’ve drifted from the price you want us to pay.” She looked at her husband who gave a nod. “I cannot speak for the rest of the village, but I know we would be willing to pay any price to make sure Colin comes home safe.”

Aveil’s brow furrowed, the pupils shifted from something human to more like a serpent’s. Her gaze shifted down slightly. Link took it as a sign to speak up. “All I need is a place I know I’m safe,” he said. “If you can do that, I’ll be more than happy to make sure your children are returned safely.”

“I think we can work that,” Bo said. “But I must put the safety of the village at the forefront. I have little faith in fortune tellers that say I need to ‘take care of green’ like Irene’s grandmother.”

“Tell you about the wolf and the viper then?” Aveil asked.

“She did.”

Link nodded a little, seeing the stew being put into wooden bowls by the fire before he looked back to the group. “So, we have an agreement then?” Link said.

“On one condition,” Rusl said. Bo and his wife looked at him. “I think it would be good if someone came with you two. Someone from the village. That way when we find the children, they know they’re safe.”

“Are you volunteering then?” Aveil asked.

“I am.”

“What?!” Uli asked. “Rusl, we just lost Colin. I want him back, but you know full well how dangerous a Chosen’s path is.”

“And we need someone who is there who when we find them will not panic. How do you think they’ll react if they see them after fighting the people who took them? They might not remember Link’s last visit either.”

She nodded a little, seeing his logic and slipped a hand onto his shoulder. “I know, but… I’m just remembering asking myself if I’d ever see you again when you were on a tour.”
“Nothing will happen to him if he comes with us,” Aveil said. “We will ensure it.”

Uli looked at the gerudo woman carefully. There was clear distrust in her eyes with the fear of losing her family. Link had seen it before whenever a guard captain and his retinue went out for conscription. He looked the woman in the eyes.

“Aveil honors her contracts to the letter, ma’am,” Link said. “If she says that, she will make sure of it. And I will too.”

That seemed to comfort her enough that she let go of Rusl’s shoulder. “Please. Make sure my son and husband come back then.” She turned, seeing the pot on the fire boiling. “Let me get you your meal now.” With that, she turned and walked back to the fire.

There was a moment of quiet at the table. “We’re leaving by dusk,” Link said. “We don’t want the trail to go cold. Especially since they had horses.”

“From the tracks, it looked like they headed West, out of the main goat ranch,” Aveil said. “Saw some tracks, pieces of fabric. Looks like some were dragged out of the village.”

“That’d be correct,” Bo said. “Some of the militiamen were hooked with chains. We didn’t have any warning either.”

Link nodded. “Someone came ahead of them it looks like,” he said. The bowl of stew was placed before him. Link glanced up at Uli and smiled. “Thanks.” He looked back to the group at the table. “The sentry by the mill had his throat torn out. Must’ve hit an artery or else there wouldn’t have been that stain on the wall.”

“That matches another I found on the Eastern end of the area,” Aveil said. “This one fought back before he was killed. Probably the one who raised the alarm.” She pulled out a glove and put it on the table. There was blood around the wrist and frayed leather. “Found this in a rock by the stream.”

Rusl picked it up and inspected it. “This is one of ours,” he said.

“There was a hand still inside it.” She flicked her fingers and a ring fell out of them onto the table. “They had that.”

Bo took the ring and inspected it. He bowed his head and closed his eyes. “I’ll have some of the militia go down the stream to see if we can find him…”

“Doubt he’s alive still. These people were clearly professionals. And the body should’ve been caught up in the mill’s wheel.”

“I found a torch in it,” Link said, watching as the last of their meals were prepared. “But no signs of a body.” He leaned over, elbows on the table. “Did the militia manage to take any of them alive?”

Rusl shook his head. “We did end up killing two of them, but they were carried off before we could get the bodies.”

Link pulled the sketchbook out and slid it over to them. He flipped it open to the drawing he’d done of the spirit. “Was this what they looked like?”

When the two Ordonians saw the picture, they both stood up. Rusl nearly knocked over the bowl
with his stew onto the pages. He looked at Link and Aveil then. “You still have a lot of your equipment from when you were a Chosen?”

“I do.” He looked to the sketchbook and took a bite of his meal. It was just as good as the last time he was there. Once he’d swallowed a piece of pumpkin, he started again. “They removed the sentries first. But with an alarm triggered, they had to ride in. Came out of the trees and through the pumpkin patches. Or else they’d be clearly identified as men rather than spirits like they were trying to if these markings are any indication and how the armor is more designed to be intimidating than practical.” He looked at the drawing again and the markings that were on the armor.

“Well, stories of recent kidnappings out of some of the villages in South Lanayru say that there have been strange spirit are behind it,” Rusl said. “But spirits don’t bleed. The armor too is a mix of Hyrulean and Gerudo as well.” He looked at Bo. “That doesn’t match completely with some of the stories we’ve heard.”

“If we had more time, I’d say we should talk to Irene’s grandmother and see if we could interrogate the spirit. But we don’t.” He took another bite of his stew. “We’ll leave soon as you’re ready and pick up the trail that Irene gives us.”

“Let me make some preparations then,” Rusl said.

“Okay.”

“Until then,” Bo said, “enjoy your meals. I shall tell the village what is happening. Not everyone will approve of this choice but it is our best option.” He stood up then while Rusl went to talk with his wife.

Link saw him gently put a hand on her arm and she smiled back at him. He heard the door to the mayor’s house open and Irene’s voice briefly accompanied by her footsteps. He reached up to rub his forehead. The lupine sense was still in his system and he could hear Rusl’s conversation with his wife like he was involved in it. He looked at Aveil. “Do you have any milk?”

She shook her head, some orange broth dripping out of her mouth into the spoon by her lips. She swallowed. “This is really good,” she said.

“We’ll take some with us.” He winced a little as he heard glass clinking against one another. “It keeps pretty well, but I do wish I had some spices from the islands for it.” The young witch came to the table and placed a bag on the table. More glass clattered against itself inside as she put a map of the provinces on the table.

“Dowsing done already? That was quick.”

“Something better, actually,” Irene said. “Someone saw them. Someone you know, Link.”

“From here?” He saw the witch nod. “Who could…” His ears then picked up a distinct chiming of energy and magic. “…You’re kidding.”

“Nope.” The bag moved and he heard the glass clink in it again. “She insisted on telling you herself…”

“You didn’t put her in a bottle, did you?”

She held her hands up. “Hey, I first thought she was just a regular one I could get a little dust from for some of the dowsing since gran was out. I didn’t realize she was a guardian!” Irene pulled a
bottle from the bag and uncorked it. Sure enough, a pale blue fairy floated inside. The second the cork was gone, she fluttered out. Aveil swore in her native tongue, which grabbed everyone’s attention in the room.

“Phew!” Navi said, landing on the table. “If you hadn’t have let me out, I’d have had to break the bottle!”

“…You can do that?” Link asked.

“Of course!” She landed on the witch’s bag, wings fluttering lightly. “Why do you think some travelers take fountain fairies with them? They’d not be much use helping a dying lone wanderer if they couldn’t get out of the bottle they’d been put in. Guardians like myself though are more interested in preventing injuries than mending them.” She curled up a little then. “But you wanna hear about the slavers?”

“Yes, it’s important.”

“I was checking the damage done by the mist. Looks like things are recovering! But I noticed the commotion and fire coming from the village. So I went to investigate. Ordon’s militia was able to drive them off and they’d made a hasty retreat with the kidnapped children.”

“Why didn’t you come to the village and tell them?” Aveil asked.

“Do you think they’d believe a fairy? Especially given how some of the kids have tried to swat me and my friends like houseflies before?”

“Good point.” He took another bite of his stew. “Continue.”

“Well, they were licking their wounds. And making preparations to head West. Sounded like they were going to skirt the edge of South Lanayru. No Man’s Land. So they’d avoid the fighting.” She fluttered up and pointed it out on the map. “Also, Bo’s daughter had a clever idea. She is dropping pieces of her belongings along the way. Little scraps of fabric with buttons, a bracelet…”

“Things with a scent.” He looked at Irene then.

“I said the same thing,” Irene replied. “Some of the wolfhounds the trappers use could find her. But that is why I got you some more lupine sense.” She pulled several of the vials out of the bag. “I got you six since I was sure you’d need them.”

Link picked one of the vials up. “Good. I’ll just need something to start with the trail.” He slid one to Aveil then.

“You shouldn’t though.” The witch pointed at Aveil.

“Why not? She’s had the same enhancements I was put through.”

Aveil nodded. “The Desert Vipers hunt worms and other creatures there,” she said. “I believe the term used is ‘hexer’ around here.”

“Ah.” She smiled a little then. “You wouldn’t happen to need any elixirs then?”

“I need to check my bags.”

Link looked back to Navi. “Anything else you can tell me?”
The fairy bobbed up over the map and a small trail of light slipped from her fingers to the map. It drew a path. “I followed the girl’s trail to the edge of the forest. I’d have gone further, but I had to go check on the fog again. There are some places it still hasn’t faded, but it’s mostly in the areas below the rivers. There’s a big part further in the valley too that is completely covered still. So don’t go East if you can’t help it.”

Link looked at the map. “At least that means Labrynna can’t move any troops through the forest along the border if that’s the case,” he said. “The party’s composition maybe?”

“There’s about two dozen of them. Four who look like scouts and carrying a lot of knives and bows. The others are dressed in armors with those strange markings on them. It looks like they’re trying to remind people of The Interlopers from over three hundred years ago. Those markings are completely wrong though. Then again I’d be surprised if anyone outside The Sheikah knew what they looked like anymore.” She fluttered her wings slightly as she looked at the map. “If they’re going to be going around No Man’s Land as well, that’ll mean they’ll be getting dangerously close to the ranchlands too. They might get slowed down and try and take prisoners from there too.”

“So, we’ll have to deal with around twenty four men, some of who have bows. The armor at least sounds like it’s been scavenged so it’s likely in poor condition.” He was wondering if the cursed man he’d met last time at Lon Lon Ranch had made good his promise and there were mercenaries now protecting them. “I’ll need to stop at the ranch briefly as well to get Epona and return the mare.”

“Oh?”

“The branding is that of Lon Lon Ranch,” Irene said. Aveil chuckled a little at seeing what he’d done.

“Yes,” Link said. He pocketed the potions then and scratched an unshaven cheek. “I’m gonna need some milk too.”

“No more Nayru’s Tears? I can make a couple up in an hour or so.”

“I don’t want to drink another of those so soon again.” He closed his eyes tight, the events of the previous night still very fresh in his mind. “Regular milk will be fine.”

“Did you touch anything with the girl’s trail?” Aveil asked.

“I didn’t,” Navi answered. “Just left it all there where it was. I can lead you to the first place, or you could get the scent from here I’m sure.”

“Sounds good. Just an article of clothing would be perfect then.” She uncorked one of the bottles of the lupine sense. “We ready then?”

“Soon as Rusl is,” Link said. He looked back at Navi and Irene. “Thank you for the help. Both of you.”

“Well, gran did say to keep taking care of green. So we’ll keep helping how we can.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi again everybody! Another big chapter for missing last week. I get a feeling this
might be a thing for a bit given the time of year and all.

Devnotes:
-Rusl's old military unit is, to draw a parallel to the Witcher games, essentially Hyrule's version of the Blue Stripes.
-This chapter sets up a couple planned elements that will pop up later.

That'll be it for now! Thanks as always, for every reader, commenter, kudo-leaver and bookmarker! See you in two weeks prolly. Keep being awesome!
He’d wished they could’ve spared at least a day, but knew it wasn’t an option. He also was wishing slightly he’d have had a chance to clean up since he hadn’t since leaving Outset behind over a week ago. They needed to pick up the trail though and the less time he spent in a place the better he felt with knowledge that his fellow Chosen were now hot on his heels. Right now though, he was on the edge of the forest, leading into the fields of Faron Province. Not far behind him were Rusl and Aveil, watching as he knelt down to inspect a small and broken button pouch on a belt. He’d taken a second lupine sense a few minutes ago and could pick up the scent of the forest on it, along with pumpkins and deku flowers; similar to the scent of the room he’d checked quickly before their departure. He brought it to his nose and took a deep sniff. Thanks to the elixir, he could nearly see the path now they would have to take.

Inspecting the ground, there were several horseshoe prints and they lead into the fields. There were also some wagon wheels that lead off further. From them, he reasoned at least three carts. He could hear the birds in the trees along with clearly the conversation that Rusl was having with Aveil.

“I knew the Chosen had special potions, but I never thought our little witches would be able to put them together,” he said.

“From what I saw, they’re remarkably similar to the ones my group uses,” Aveil answered.

“Ordinary human beings should not consume the ones made for us though.”

“Why not? The red mender potion is the same one I gave to my son when he had a fever a couple years ago.”

“But you didn’t give him the entire bottle,” Link said, standing up. “The dosage a Chosen consumes is not safe for a regular person. Our bodies have been altered by magic so they can put it to use quickly. An ordinary person drinks a full vial of a red potion; it’ll literally liquefy their insides.” He walked back to them, taking the white mare’s reigns from Rusl. “Said to be the magic of the Triforce that The Hero carries that lets him withstand it. The ritual for Chosen awakens that power.”

“Very different from what I went through then,” Aveil said.

“What did you go through?” Rusl asked.

She glanced at the two men for a second as Link approached them, holding the pouch. “They are secrets to everyone. At least, everyone outside of the temple. Suffice to say though they are not waking a hero’s reincarnated spirit.”

“How do you know for sure?” Link asked. He folded his arms. “You could have specific rituals and practices that you don’t completely understand. I know there were parts that even the old mages back at The Tower couldn’t figure what they were for. “For all we know the ritual is identical in purpose, but just the meaning is gone.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Out of the eight girls who went through the ritual when we were deemed ready for it, only me and another survived The Change. Unless those chosen for their potential have a very high fatality rate, I suspect our rituals are very different.”
“I see…” He glanced down at the pouch again and offered it to Rusl. “Found this. I think it’s the girl’s.”

“It is,” he said, taking it. “Ilia almost always had this with her.” Rusl carefully inspected it. “If we had time, I’d say we should ride back and get it to Bo. But we do not.”

“They’ve got a couple days head start on us still. Our benefit though looks like they’ve got a few carts. And with the people they have, it’ll be slow going probably.”

“And slavers want to make sure their product is in good condition for sale,” Aveil added. “We can reason they’d not take any unnecessary risks.” She looked to Teron, giving the stallion a gentle stroke on his neck. “We keep up a good pace, we’ll be able to track them down in a few days, I’m sure.”

“I just hope they don’t go into No Man’s Land,” Rusl said. “I’ve seen too many ghouls and stalkin when I was in the Castor Wilds.”

“There’s rotbloats eating the corpses too. So you know the difference then between a ghoul and a redead?” Link asked, mounting the mare.

“Ghouls are natural. At least as natural as any of the other undead attracted by a massive number of deaths. They act more like beasts. Redeads are deliberately reanimated by magic, hence the screeches they use to paralyze their prey. Ghouls are also far faster, typically crawling on all fours.” He nudged his brown steed forward. The horse snorted, but started trotting out of the forest’s edge.

“Gibdos screech too, but those aren’t deliberate typically,” Aveil said. She said something in her native tongue, nudging the stallion in the sides before they started walking. Link’s mare followed suit.

“Remember that I could get some gibdos to get laid to rest by bringing them something in Ikana,” Link said.

“More evidence that Ikana is a cursed land then…” She looked about the field as they entered it. “So, which way pretty boy?”

“…Pretty boy?” both Link and Rusl asked her at the same time. The older man sounded amused at the term while Link just raised a brow and frowned slightly. He just shook his head, deciding it wasn’t worth the time and effort to fight at the moment. The hylian looked back to the trees, visualizing the path of the scent. He pointed to the clump of trees in the field. “This way. I’ve got the scent. The trail also goes off in this direction, but it’ll get harder to follow I’m sure.”

“You sound like you’re expecting it to.”

“I’m sure the Goddesses like messing with my expectations.” His mare started to pick up speed a little. “Either things are strangely convenient or incredibly difficult.”

“Example?” Rusl asked.

“First trip to Ordon.” He looked to the man for a moment before looking back to the field. “As I’m getting ready to investigate the mist and leave the village for the woods, I found that fairy, Navi, in my saddlebags. She said she had something that could help me survive the mists.”

“What was it?”
He motioned to the green tunic and armor he was wearing. “It did exactly that. Some enchanted piece of armor. Probably fairy magic too.”

“One instance doesn’t mean the goddesses are messing with you, Link,” Aveil said.

“Not long after, me and a friend found some information on a curse that just so happened to afflict her. And it seemed to come almost as soon as we started doing some digging into the information. It gave us our next lead. Or… Or case and point actually, when I was in Ikana and just so happened to find every last thing the gibdos requested apart from a single bottle of blue potion and five beans in the same crypt that they were wandering around?”

“Typically they request things that were an important part of life. The younger the body, the more detailed and newer the request.”

“I never would’ve guessed that.” He checked his map then. If the path continued this way they’d run into the land owned by Talon and Lon Lon Ranch. He still hoped as well that Largo had made good his promise. If so they might’ve seen the slavers pass through or even engaged them. Several minutes later they reached the clump of trees and the scent took them north.

It was a full day before they encountered a group of riders. They wore red and white tabards, riding unarmored steeds. Many carried spears and round shields, but the armors they also wore were mixed. Some were in light leathers while others wore scaled cuirasses over their bodies and steel greaves over their boots. Link knew the former Labrynnan nobleman had kept his promise then. Almost immediately, one of the riders went off in the opposite direction while the rest quickly approached. He saw Aveil pull her hood and scarf up to hide as much of herself as possible. Link pulled back on the reins of his mare, causing her to buck slightly.

“Those don’t look like regular soldiers,” Rusl said.

“They’re not,” Link answered. “They’re from Labrynna.”

“You can tell?”

“They should be at least…” The riders neared the three of them and had their spears lowered. One though was in full plate, carrying a large rectangular shield and a sword on his hip. He looked more like a knight than the rest of the lighter armored soldiers around him. He was wearing a simple skull cap helmet that had a plate over his face. Link slowly raised his hands to show he wasn’t a threat, as did the other two. The knight looked them over carefully for a moment.

“You three don’t look like stragglers,” they said. “Nor do you look like you’re part of Hyrule’s army.” His accent immediately gave him away as a foreigner.

“We’re not,” Rusl said. “What’re you doing on Talon’s land?”

“The ranch owner is under our protection. Under orders from the Habsburg Family.”

“Largo hired you then,” Link said.

“You know these people, Link?” Aveil asked.

He shook his head. “No, but I know who’s paying them. And why they’re here.” Link looked at the knight. “You’re here to help protect the livestock from monsters and bandits.”
“We are,” the knight said. He pulled his helmet off then, revealing his dark red hair and softer features. “You know a surprising amount, hylian. Why is that?”

“Because I’m the one who convinced Largo Habsburg to hire your company. I take it you’re the commanding officer?”

“One of them.” He smiled a bit. “Patrol Captain Samuel Barro; Crimson Ghinis of Yoll Province.”

“All the way from Labrynna,” Rusl said. “The valleys in the south are impassable though. How’d you get here?”

“Sailed to Aboda then north through South Lanayru to Faron Province. Costly, but the duke was insistent and willing to pay the expenses.” He looked over the group more carefully. “Surprisingly well-armed for such a small group. But you don’t look like bandits or that group that came through a day or two ago.”

Link immediately pulled his sketchbook back out and flipped to the drawing. “Did they wear armor like this?”

Samuel took the sketchbook when offered and looked the drawing over. One of the other riders moved alongside him and peered at the drawing as well. “It is!” He looked at them again. “They were spotted and refused to let us investigate their caravan when they came through. There was a fight.”

“Any reason why you wanted to inspect it?” Aveil asked.

“One of the boys heard a woman shouting in the carts. We got suspicious. That’s when they let loose the arrows and fought back. The carts went off, but we made the bastards pay for it. Got about seven of them.”

“Any alive we could talk to?” Link asked.

Samuel shook his head. “Had one, but he… Expired.” He handed the sketchbook back to Link then. “Come back with us. I’ll have the patrol that ran into them talk to you since you’re clearly going after them.”

“Just need some numbers,” Aveil said. “How many are still alive we might have to deal with.”

“Don’t need a direction?”

Link sniffed the air slightly then, hoping it wasn’t too obvious. Though it was fainter than earlier, he could still detect the trail heading south into No Man’s Land. “No,” he said. “But did you find anything along their path?”

“A small horseshoe-shaped whistle. The ranch owner’s daughter has it.”

He looked at the other two for a moment. Aveil made no reaction, but Rusl did. “Can we see her and Talon?” he asked.

The ride to Lon Lon Ranch’s walls was shorter than Link had anticipated. He dismounted as they neared the gate and guided the white mare up to the buildings. He saw several more of the
mercenaries around then. Some sat around a table playing cards near the stables. They looked up as him, Rusl and Aveil passed, guided by the red-haired captain. As they passed, his ears picked up pieces of their conversations. It was clear they knew exactly who he was. One even asked another mercenary if The Crown would pay them for dragging him to Castle Town. He had no one to blame but himself though for having consumed another lupine sense potion to follow the scent. At least he hadn’t seen any of the recently deceased spirits. As they turned a corner, he saw his face on a poster nailed to the wall. Not far off the round, mustached and balding owner of the ranch, Talon, stood talking to two other mercenaries. One was dressed in plate like Samuel, only carried a large axe instead of a sword. He had a cloak with a stylized ghost on the back of it in red with vile-looking eyes and an incredibly long and snaking tongue. He also had a white ruff around his neck. It seemed to stick out with the pale blue plate armor he was wearing. The second looked like one of the regular soldiers in a red and blue tabard and chainmail. He carried a large shield and a spear in his hands and stood guard.

“Colonel,” Samuel said. The man in the ruff turned. He looked “Found these three. They’re looking for the kidnappers we drove off.”

“Rusl!” Talon cried. “What are you doing here?!” His eyes shifted to Aveil and Link then. “And with incredibly dangerous company I see!” He walked over, followed by the mercenaries. “A man that The Kingdom calls public enemy number one and a gerudo assassin.”

“It’s a bit of a long story, but the men your mercenaries chased off have Colin,” Rusl said. “They also took Ilia, Beth, Talo… They took the children from Ordon.” He looked to the two hexers. “They offered their help.”

The ranch owner folded his arms and looked them both over carefully. “Bo know about this?”

“We reached an agreement,” Aveil said. “I honor my contracts.”

“We heard that Malon has something that belonged to one of the people taken,” Link said, moving between her and Talon a little. “We need to see it. And I need Epona back.”

“Long as you’re not here long I think we’ll be okay,” Talon said. “A tower mage came through the other day heading into No Man’s Land with her escort. They said more would likely be coming through soon.”

“Wait, what?” He took a step forward. “She give a name?”

“She did not,” the colonel said. “Four soldiers, two other sorcerers and herself. She had ashen hair and a scepter. Didn’t know hyrulean mages though wore white and purple.”

Link’s face lost some color to it and became awash with worry. He took a deep breath to clear his head.

“You know her?” Aveil asked.

He simply nodded. “They give any sort of timetable to when the others would come through?” he asked.

Talon just shook his head.

“Meaning we need to be gone within the day probably then.” He quickly looked at Rusl and Aveil. “You guys okay with that?”

“Fine by me,” she said.
“Prefer to get a little more information but sooner we go too the closer we get, “Rusl said.

“Good.” He turned back to Talon then and tugged on the reins of his white mare. “I needed to borrow a horse to get out of Aboda. So I made sure I found one with your brand.”

Talon looked at the mare for a moment and then began to laugh. “Oh, Ingo is going to be so steamed.”

“…I took his horse, didn’t I?”

“You did.”

“In fairness,” Aveil said, “our departure from Aboda was somewhat rushed after an incident at Martha’s Pearl. We didn’t have much option.”

“Might be safer for him too there right now,” Link said. “There’s a large poe that’s causing problems in the area too. Attacking travelers. We didn’t have a chance to deal with it, so it’s still there.” He folded his arms.

“Right,” Talon answered. “So, anything else you need other than your mare and to see my daughter?”

“I’d like to look at the area the item was recovered and possibly the site of the engagement.” He looked at the colonel. “Take it you’re the commanding officer then?”

“I am,” he said. “Colonel Alester, at your service. Duke Habsburg spoke of you. The hylian in green with a sword on his back.”

Link nodded. “That’d be me. He around?”

“At our field camp not far from the ranch.” He looked Link right in the eye then. “He is not having visitors right now.”

“Didn’t ask if he was wanting to talk. Just need to know he’s still breathing.” He looked back at Talon then. “So where’s Malon?”

“Stay here,” Talons aid. He turned then and left the group.

“Captain, a word please,” the colonel said. The red-haired man approached his commander and the two walked off.

Link reached up to rub his eyes after pulling a glove off. Once he was happy with it, he pulled his canteen out for a drink.

“You okay?” Rusl asked.

“Fine,” Link said. “Just still recovering a bit from Aboda.”

“Well, Martha’s Pearl has a bit of a reputation for a wild house.” He chuckled a little then. “Sure that you enjoyed yourself though.”

“If by that you mean getting poisoned and in a bar fight then yes.” He winced a little at the memory.
“I found his sorry butt in an alleyway after he’d put one of his attackers through a window,” Aveil said. “Nayru’s Tears is not something you enjoy drinking.”

“You didn’t call it that,” Link said, sipping from his canteen again. “You said it was what? Oasis Water?”

“Oasis Spring. But the alchemical properties Irene said were identical. Just Nayru’s Tears by a different name.” She glanced over though as Talon returned. “That was fast…” He sneezed just before he got to the group once more.

“She wants to talk to you, Link,” Talon said. He pulled a grimy handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his nose. “Without anyone else around.”

“…Why?” he asked. Link’s emotion of unease was written on his face.

“Said it was about Epona. She’s in the stable.” He pointed over his shoulder with a thumb before blowing his nose.

Link looked at the others for a second. “I’ll be back then I guess.” He started for the stables then. A couple of the mercs stopped to glance at him as he pushed the door open. Inside was Malon humming a tune as she carefully put a blanket over Epona’s back. Hearing the door close, she glanced over her shoulder to see him there. The second she’d finished putting the blanket on the mare, she spun on her heel and planted her hands on her hips. “Hey, I…”

“Have you seen the price on your head?” she cut him off. Though her tone was angry, her eyes were worried. He’d always known she could be forceful when she wanted. He’d seen her give her father an earful each time he’d been lax around the ranch.

“It’s complicated,” he said, mind going to the entire adventure at sea. “I can’t really go into all of it.”

“You can’t go into why. Because of all the secrets in your head.”

“That’s part of it.” He shook his head and closed his eyes, bowing it a little as he did. “Malon, I’m sorry I didn’t give you all the details last time, but you know how some of these secrets work. I came with Epona because I knew if something did happen at least she’d have a safe home. Your dad has the contracts with The Crown, but also Windfall and Labrynna.”

“So you knew she’d be safe.”

He nodded. “You’re neutral still. And I really didn’t want to risk your involvement.” Link looked back to her then, rubbing the back of his head. The simple leather band he’d used to hold his hair back in a ponytail had been lost somewhere and he noticed he’d need a trim soon there as well.

“Look… I…” His hand fell from his head. “You’ve seen the hangings, I’m sure. And heard about what’s going on just south of here.”

She nodded slowly.

“It has to end. And I’m going to try to do that.” He let out a long sigh and looked at his feet for a moment. “I always thought The Hero was supposed to help the people of Hyrule. Not just be a tool of the Royal Family.”
“The Crown looks out for people though, right?”

“Sometimes.” He glanced at Epona then. “It’s complicated. And I can’t tell you a lot without putting you at risk. Especially since I heard Cia came through.”

Malon nodded a little. “I thought I recognized her from when we were children. She and her sister would be playing with you sometimes when we brought supplies up.”

“Yeah.” He was quiet for a moment, not sure where to go from here but knew that “She didn’t give you any trouble, did she?”

“She didn’t. But I’m kind of surprised.” She went to get the saddle and bridle next for Epona. “She’d have recognized Epona, I’m sure of it. She didn’t.”

Link quickly went over to help her with the saddle, taking it from her and heading back to Epona. That was something of a relief, but he couldn’t help but recall when he was sneaking out of Castle Town with Shad more than a month ago now. She’d detected him in the camp while they had been sneaking through it, but still didn’t alert the army commander she had been talking to that he was there. He was wondering if it was on purpose. “No questions?”

“None. Just handed out the posters and then headed south with her guard.”

“Huh.” He gave Epona a pat and the mare pranced slightly. She nudged him with her snout before he moved to put her saddle on. “Miss me that much?”

“Well, it’s been busy, but it’s nice to see that at least you might have your reasons for what you’re doing. Not sure I agree with them though.”

“That was to Epona.” He chuckled a little though and looked back at her. She rolled her eyes in mock offense and handed him the bridle to put on next. “I want to end this war, Malon. The Chosen were supposed to prevent conflicts like this.”

“You’ve said.” She glanced to the doors for a moment. “That why you’re working with a gerudo?”

“She’s independent. A mercenary. Actually a lot like the Chosen in some ways.” He started to place the bridle on Epona. “We help Ordon, it gives me a safe place for some of the fighting. I’m going to need people to be willing to listen to me. Maybe get enough voices and that’ll convince the two sides to stop fighting and go back to talking.”

“That’s pretty optimistic…”

He finished and turned to face her. “Yeah. Yeah, it is. But what other choices do we have? Everyone I know of in power is too stubborn to stop it.”

“And you’re too stubborn to try to work in the system.”

He chuckled a little at the remark. “Yeah, suppose I am. But it’s worked well for me.” Link took a deep breath. “Well. Anything else I can help with?”

“Not really. Though I’m still kind of amazed how you were able to pull off the stuff with Largo. He really cursed like I’ve heard the soldiers say?”

“Sort of… I was able to break it a little bit, but not fully I think.” He shrugged. “Better off asking someone who knows more about magic.” Link folded his arms and leaned against the wall of the stable. “They haven’t been giving you any trouble have they?”
She shook her head. “A lot of them are rougher around the edges than some of the hyrulean soldiers if you can believe it, but no. None of the Crimson Ghinis have actually caused any problems for us.” She smiled a little bit. “Surprised that they’re getting along with Mr. Ingo too. He never seemed to care much for anyone from the Southern Empire. They’re just people; like us. Trying to find their way in this world.”

“Yeah.” It was quiet again for a long moment. They could hear a man shouting orders for a drill outside and a reply from the mercenaries. “Not to ruin a peaceful moment between friends, but do you have Ilia’s whistle? I need to see it for tracking.”

“So you’re off again then?” She nodded a little as he did to confirm her. “Back into the fighting.”

“I can’t stay long. Not with so many people looking for me.” He almost told her how he was looking for the location of where she’d dropped the instrument. But knew that if he did, someone could come asking. “I… I know I’m putting you all in danger too just by being here. If they’ve got tower mages looking for me, I’m sure they’ll be coming back through soon and asking more questions. Sooner I’m gone the safer it is for everyone.”

“I know. Just…” Malon sighed and shook her head as she glanced away from him. “Just worried about my friend.”

“I know,” he said with a sad smile.

“Be careful out there, okay?”

“I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey everybody! Happy Wednesday! Small announcement too! I'm going to start posting another Zelda fusion fic I've been working on longer than this one on January First. At Midnight if I can swing it. Full warning right here though. It will not update nearly as often as this one, and there's a very good chance that it might not ever get tagged complete due to a number of factors. The biggest being that of time.

Here is your only hint to what it is fused with... Incidentally, the title of the first chapter too.

Devnotes:
-The mercenary company was fun to develop. Even if they were just minor characters
-The conversation with Malon was reworked heavily as this was originally when she was very upset with him. That got edited and mixed around though and reworked. Clearly.
-If I had the time, I'd do an entire series of Aveil's adventures.

Very special thanks this week to Knight_of_Hylia and Scarred_One for their bookmarks! And as always a huge thanks to people who bookmark, comment, read
and leave kudos! That'll be it for this week. See you next week or the one after it! Keep being awesome!
Catching Up

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The sun was late in the sky as they stood near the edge of the ranch’s lands. A ruined fence marked the end of it as Link knelt in the dirt, inspecting the tracks. In one hand was the horseshoe-shaped flute that belonged to the girl from Ordon. In the other another vial of lupine sense. He pulled the cork out with his teeth and spat it on the ground before drinking it. It was the fourth one he’d consumed in as many days and getting to the point that the taste didn’t tickle his throat to cough. His hearing increased to where he could hear birds a long distance from them. He could hear the voices of Aveil and Rusl not far behind along with that of captain Samuel and a couple of the other mercs who’d come with them. The scent from the instrument carried a far stronger and fresher scent as well, which he could virtually see with the elixir and his training. He noticed something different though with it when he inspected it closer. It felt like something was blocking one of the holes of the flute. Carefully, he inspected it and pushed his finger in. Dried mud cracked and he soon heard something rattle inside it. He hoped he hadn’t broken it, but carefully shook until the mud and an earring fell out. After he rubbed the last of the mud off it, he saw it was a brilliant gold topaz stone set in gold. It had been cut like a diamond and had a tiny chain as well attached to it so it would hang low when worn.

“...When we got here, they were gone, but saw them heading south,” Samuel said. “Right into No Man’s Land.”

“The hyruleans pass through here too?” Aveil asked.

“They didn’t. They went more west when they were at the ranch, heading for the front north of Lake Hylia. They came through before the slavers did too. So they wouldn’t have run into them anyways.”

“Probably good for us then,” Link said, even though it was quiet enough that no one heard him. The trail he could smell out was very clear now. He stood up, pocketing the vial and walking back to the group, having finished inspecting the area. Aveil glanced to him as he approached, handing the flute back to Rusl. “They stopped here it looks like for the tracks. But didn’t stay long.” He looked to the mercenaries. “Was it raining a couple days ago?”

“A little bit,” one of them said. “But not when we ran into them. The fields were soaked. So much mud we got one of our carts stuck back at the ranch!”

“We have a good trail to follow then in general.” He held up the earring then. “Found this in the flute.”

“Ilia doesn’t have pierced ears,” Rusl said, pulling on the reins for Epona and his horse.

“The one I was contracted to find does though,” Aveil said. She offered an open hand. “Let me see it.” Link handed it to her and she raised it to an eye. He saw her pupils shift to become more like a snake’s as she inspected it. Carefully she turned it between her fingers and then pocketed it. “This is hers.” Her eyes shifted back to normal. “Means she was captured again. But gives us something else to track.”

“And these tracks are still pretty fresh. So we’re close,” Link said. He looked back then to the trail. “Day. Maybe two. We’re catching up.”
“Well, they’re traveling heavy,” Samuel said. “Makes sense they’d be slower.”

“You guys have a plan when you run into them? I doubt they’ll just hand over their goods without a fight,” one of the mercenaries asked.

“I’m going to ask nicely,” Link said, subtly and sarcastically. He petted Epona’s snout a little before moving around the side. “Maybe I can convince them to let everyone go and turn themselves in to The Kingdom.”

He heard Aveil chuckling as he climbed on Epona. “And while you’re doing that, I’ll be sneaking them all out of there.”

“Actually that sounds like a pretty good idea,” Rusl said. “That’d give us a chance to get the children out and away from any bloodletting. I’m expecting we’ll have to fight them anyways.”

Link moved in the saddle a little to get comfortable. He gave Epona a pat on the neck and looked to the others. “Sounds like a plan then.” He looked back at the red-haired captain. “Thanks for your help.”

“No problem. What we’re paid for.” He gave Link a smile as he looked up at him. “You ever drop by Yoll Province in Labrynna be sure to drop by. I’ll show you around. There’s a wonderful pub on the coast.”

“I’ll remember that.” He gave them a respectful nod. “Hope things remain quiet for the ranch.”

“You and me both.”

Link looked back to the path ahead as Aveil rode up next to him. She was smirking, but he couldn’t reason why at the time. Rusl was bringing up the rear as they headed south and into no Man’s Land. An hour after leaving the mercenaries behind, they already saw signs of recent skirmishes in the fields of South Lanayru. An entire hamlet had been abandoned it looked like with the only evidence it had ever been there were the scorched frames of wooden huts and houses. They found no bodies as they rode silently through, following the scent Link had picked up from the flute; each aware of how close it was to the ranch and how easily the conflict could head north towards Castle Town. At least in the south though, it would be a long march and through some of the forts that had been set up during the war.

He remembered how vital it had been they hold the Seer Valley and the swamps of the Castor Wilds as well when he was fighting there. The conflict in the swamps had been brutal, but Link knew, probably as well as the commanders for The Kingdom and The Tribes that if the line in the Northern Front collapsed, it’d be a nearly straight march of a couple days right to Castle Town. At least in the south it was mostly open ground with occasional patches of forest and rocks. When the sun was setting, they stopped for the night in a small cluster of trees that would be defendable. He curled under the tree after waking Aveil for her watch and drifted to sleep, using one of Epona’s saddlebags as a makeshift pillow…

He bolted awake, seeing the sun peeking over the horizon in the east then. The memories of The Trial of Grasses swirling in his mind from a dream. He thought he could still feel the leather
digging into his wrists and ankles as mutagens were pumped into his veins and magic seared into his bones. Link took several deep breaths, ending with a yawn. Within moments he was fully alert to his surroundings. Epona was grazing nearby with Teron. Aveil knelt by the fire, hands on her thighs and appeared to be in thought as she watched the sparks in the blackened wood. She made no comment though as to his sudden awakening.

“We had visitors last night,” she said. “A trio of poes wandering the field.”

“Three of them?” he asked, rubbing his chin. The stubble and fuzz was getting to him and he dug into Epona’s bag for his toiletries. “Why didn’t you wake us?”

“They were easily dealt with. Far from their bodies so they were far weaker. Couldn’t even become incorporeal. It’s a sign though.”

“Yeah. That things are getting worse.” He found his shaving kit and prepared it. Wouldn’t be as good as a visit to a barber, but at least it would stop bothering him for a time. “They’re able to manifest farther from their bodies it means there’s a lot more death in the world.”

“Yeah. Meaning there’s going to be more stalkin probably and other dead things… More necrophages too.”

He winced a little at the thought and looked at the fire. He inspected his razor and carefully took it to his throat to scrape the nearly two weeks of fuzz off. “So… You have breakfast yet?”

She shook her head. “Do you still have the scent, pretty boy?”

“I do.” He flicked the razor shut and stuffed it back in the leather case with the rest of his personal supplies. “Are you going to keep calling me that?”

“Well, you are kind of pretty.”

He let out a sigh. “…Right.” Link reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose before letting out another yawn. “Let’s get breakfast going. I want to be moving again before the sun is completely up.”

“So do I. I’ll water the horses while you heat up the stew. Better get some coffee on too.”

“Works for me.” He got to his feet then to grab the other saddle bag, but picked up his swords and slipped them on his back once more before doing so. Link took a deep breath and reached for the wolf around his neck. He stopped though, remembering that there was no way to talk to anyone through it. Even if he could, he realized he wouldn’t have anything to say to the twins back at the tower. It just reminded him of another small thing he’d had to give up when he’d left The Crown’s service. With a sigh, he began to prepare their breakfast.

The sun was beginning to set after a long day of following the trail. They’d picked an abandoned and ruined windmill as a place to rest for the night. Rusl was busy taking the saddles and blankets from the horses as Link prepared their dinner. He hummed a little as he watched the meat and mushrooms on sticks made into skewers darkened, turning them to ensure even cooking. The smells started to fill the ruins and thanks to the strengthened senses from the lupine sense made him drool. He sucked some of his saliva back in and wiped his mouth, thinking it would only be a
couple more minutes before they’d eat and have the last of the pumpkin stew. He stopped though, noticing another scent on the wind.

“Link! Rus!” Aveil shouted. “Get up here!”

He looked up to some of the ruins of the windmill and saw her waving down to him, before going back to the southern end. Link pulled his clawshot and aimed for the secure supports above. In an instant it latched and pulled him to the floor above. Swinging carefully, he got his feet safe before letting go and walked over. He saw Rusl rushing up the stairs then. “What’s going on?” he asked.

“She just called for us,” Rusl said. They walked quickly over as she knelt behind a hole in the ruins. “What is it?”

“Movement,” she said. “Something in the tall grasses down there.” Aveil pointed down then into the fields. “Can’t tell what it is though. It’s coming this way. Either of you have a telescope or something?”

Rusl reached around and dug into one of the bags on his back. A moment later he pulled an old hawkeye mask out. The paint had long since faded from its metal surface but they could hear the clockworks inside working as he put it over his eyes and activated it. “There are people down there.”

“Bandits?” Link asked.

“Hang on…” The device on his face whirred a little and clicked. His jaw fell open slowly. “…It’s Ilia. And… And Talo. I see someone else, I don’t recognize them though.”

Link watched carefully out the hole, kneeling next to Aveil. Sure enough, he saw small movements of the grasses below. “Anyone behind them or following?” He looked at Rusl as he carefully adjusted the hawkeye. When he shook his head, he removed it from his face in an instant.

“Stay here!” he shouted as he started down the stairs. “They might not react well to seeing you two!”

Within minutes Rusl had returned with the three people they’d seen. The teen boy Talo was ripping the meat off of the skewers like he hadn’t eaten in days. For all the group knew, he might not have. Ilia sat huddled by the fire, holding her knees to her body with a blanket over her back. The third was not a native of Ordon, but rather a boy named Jack from Kakariko. He kept looking at Link every time he moved. His eyes darted away and looked away. Sometimes he’d even shake.

“Talo, you’re going to make yourself sick,” Rusl said. “Slow down at least.”

“Going to have to hunt tomorrow,” Aveil said. “We weren’t expecting to find any of you just yet.”

“We…” Ilia started. She closed her eyes and hid her face in her knees. “We had help getting out. One of the other prisoners.” The young woman looked at Aveil slowly. “She was like you. From the desert. She said. Said her name was Riju.” Rusl handed her one of the skewers of meat and mushrooms and waited for her to take it. The mention of the name immediately grabbed Link’s attention. He kept his mouth shut though, mind working on the possibilities. “Said that help was on the way.”

“How long have you been free?” Link asked.
“Was… Late afternoon when we tried it. The girl managed to pick our locks.” She finally took the skewer from Rusl. “One of the guards saw it though and there was a fight. She told us to run. The three of us got away, but the others…”

“Means they’re close,” Aveil said. “We can catch them tomorrow.”

“They’re going for the Zora River. There’s a boat that’ll take them to the sea.” She looked over the food for a moment before taking a bite. It was clear they didn’t have time. If they had, Link would’ve suggested heading to Lake Hylia. From there he was sure he could at least get some zoras to help them out or even capture the entire group and stop them for good. “Meaning we need to make our move tonight.” he said. He reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Makes sense they’re taking this route though. The river delta is well guarded by the zoras, but people are always able to slip through.”

Aveil nodded a little as she pulled her map out. “Aboda’s patrols make it risky with their cargo,” she said. “Make a straight line for the river here.” She pointed on it. “South of Lake Hylia and leads to a delta and the South Seas. We’ll never catch them if they make it to the river.” She looked carefully over the map, muttering in her native tongue to herself. A moment later she drew her finger along it to the ranch.

Link looked at Ilia and the two children then. “Are they directly south of here?”

She nodded as she chewed on the meat.

“Good.” He looked to Aveil and Rusl then. “We need a plan. We’ll move in tonight.”

“Yeah,” Rusl said. “Ilia, Talo, Jack. I know this is hard, but I’m going to need you to tell us everything you remember about the slavers. Their numbers, weapons, anything we could use to our advantage.”

“He doesn’t talk,” Talo said, shoving a piece of flatbread in his mouth before pointing at Jack. “Doesn’t say anything.”

“Alright.” Rusl rubbed his forehead and took his own meal then. After a deep breath, Ilia started. “They weren’t happy,” she said. “The soldiers around Lon Lon were new they said. And far tougher than the regular guards.”

“They should be,” Link said. “They’re a mercenary company out of Labrynna.”

“There was a fight,” Talo said. “They got chased out of there. Didn’t see some of them.”

“That’s right,” Ilia said. “A few were killed I think.”

“How many?” Aveil asked.

She looked at her skewer again and took another bite. “There… There were a few… I didn’t count.”

“There were about two dozen I think said when we were in Ordon,” Link said. “So we’re looking at anywhere between twenty and fifteen men still probably.”

“Too many to take head-on,” Rusl said. “And they’ll likely have sentries for the night.”

“We strike late when we can move past them. Fewer people will be awake. Get them talking…”
“So we really are going to do what we talked about back on the ranchlands,” Aveil said.

“If we do that,” Rusl started, “Might I be the one to get the children out? The ones from Ordon know me well. We’ll have a better chance. We also don’t know about the others.”

“I’d prefer to go too, but given the person I’m looking for helped you out of there, I can allow it,” Aveil said. “When they’re out of there, get back here.”

“So what’re you going to be doing then?” Link asked her.

“I’ll go with you. Seen you fight, but that’s still a lot, even for someone of our skills.”

Link nodded and got up. “You three going to be okay hiding here?”

“We… We should be…” Ilia said. “We’ll stay quiet. And if you don’t come back we’ll head to Lon Lon Ranch. It’s just north of here, right?”

“Yeah. Be careful though. There are poes and necrophages wandering the fields.”

The girl’s face lost color at the mention of the monsters. Link assumed she’d already seen some of them. He remembered the first time he’d seen a ghoul devouring a corpse. It had been on the bank of a river while skullfish braved the shallows to manage to rip a foot off back to the water. He had been thirteen years old then. “How many prisoners are there?”

“About a dozen…”

“In total?” Aveil asked.

“Yeah.”

“Okay,” Link said. “So, Rusl will find them while me and Aveil distract the bulk of them. Once they’re clear, we can fight them if we need to.”

“You are seriously thinking they’re just going to walk away from this?”

He shook his head and dug out a Kaepora’s Vigil as well as a purple fluid. The label read Thunderbird. Already he was sure what was going to happen with the confrontation. He just hoped him and Aveil would cause enough of a distraction for the others to get out safely. Link silently looked up at the gerudo hexer. His eyes narrowed and the corners of his mouth dropped.

She merely nodded in response and got to her feet. Once she was gone he looked at the others. “You three going to be okay on your own here?”

“We will,” Ilia said. “We can hide in here if we have to.” She smiled a little bit. “Colin always said someone would come help us. Just wasn’t expecting you’d help Ordon twice.”

“Me neither, but glad we got here in time.”

Chapter End Notes

Been a bit since I posted, huh? Life, work and computer issues kinda prevented it. Thankfully, backups were in place and I finally had a chance to post the next one.
Another thing that's held up the posting is another project of original fiction that, if I'm lucky, will see the light of day sometime this year. I'm really hopeful because it's been literally 15 years in the making! Additional minor details might end up in these notes for anyone interested.

**This does not mean I'm ending The Wolf of Farore.** I have the fourth season in the process of writing right now and have finished outlining the entire series! I'm planning on a total of 5 seasons and with a little luck, it'll be finished writing sometime next year. When that happens, and the editing is close to finished, I'll prolly post twice a week to finish updating and get this incarnation of Link's story out into the wild.

No devnotes for this one. Also, it's kinda late here anyways. So kinda just trying to get the chapter out there and back in the swing of regular posting.

Okay, maybe a couple.

Devnotes:
- Musical choice for this piece isn't something like Hyrule Field's theme. I pictured something like *The Hunter's Path* from The Witcher. Mostly because the mood of the piece isn't something like charging out in an adventure, but stalking through a land that has seen a great deal of pain.
- There was a dream sequence in here where Link recalled the process that turned him into a mutant, but I cut it because I felt it could work better as a standalone piece. Which will be showing up in the companion series to this one. Not posted at the date of this update, but hopefully will be added soon enough. Next chapter will have another musical choice too. And yes, the song title is a hint.

As always, thanks to everyone who reads, leaves kudos, comments and bookmarks! See you guys (hopefully) next week! Keep being awesome!
The tall grasses and cover of darkness were ideal for the two hexers to sneak through. The enhanced senses and night vision of the mixture he’d drunk was enough to let Link clearly see and hear everything around him as they neared the campsite of the slaver party. Aveil had pulled her bow out and knocked a frost arrow in it. She looked at him with eyes that reflected the low light like a cat’s, scarf wrapped over the bottom of her face. Link wondered if he should cover his any, not due to the fact they might recognize him by the posters they’d seen wanting his head. Trace amounts of Lupine Sense had mixed with the Kaepora’s Vigil and Thunderbird elixirs to pale his skin and make his veins stick out. Very dark circles were around his eyes as well giving them a sunken appearance and making the cobalt blue of them stick out clearly. Any more though and they’d have turned pure black with not a single bit of white showing. His focus was on the sounds around them mostly as they moved quietly. Rusl had slipped around the camp by now and likely waiting to hear the few slavers who were awake due to the enhanced hearing the Lupine Sense had given him and Aveil.

“The last of them is finally asleep,” one said. “Goddess damn that little devil.”

“You didn’t smack her again,” another asked.

“You did and I’m going to chop your hand off,” a third answered.

“’Course not,” the first man said. “Know the price a brat like that can fetch to the right buyer?”

“Why the hell you think I said I was gonna take your hand if you laid a hand on her again?”

“Hey, I learned my lesson the first time. Just locked her in the cart with the other two causing problems.” Link could make them out clearly as they got closer. He looked at Aveil and pointed his fingers at his eyes and then in their direction. He held up four fingers as well. The gerudo nodded silently.

“So, we sellin’ the desert rat too?”

“No, boss has special plans for her,” a fourth voice said. “Said we’re to keep her in as good as shape as possible. So if shit happens, get her at least to the river. We can abandon the others if we have to.”

“Don’t know about you Laero, but I wanna gut her. She’s been nothin’ but trouble since we grabbed her. First she got loose and lead us on a chase through this goddess-damned war zone. Then, she lets those brats out. Lucky we got all but those three back. And let me remind you that after all that, she got your knife and ripped Meros’ throat out with it! And the only reason she’s still breathing is ‘cause boss says we’re supposed to keep her unspoiled! Don’t know what he’s got planned, but sure as hell better be worth the trouble she’s given us!”

“Boss is gonna be pissed the blonde got away.”

He’d heard enough and decided to make his presence known. Link moved forward then, standing out of the grass. He quickly scanned the campsite, seeing a pair of tents set up. Four men were
sitting around the campfire, while eight others were asleep in the tents. Aveil followed suit, keeping her bow close and the arrow still knocked. It took one of the slavers a second to realize he had appeared and quickly got to his feet, grabbing a hammer on a long wooden staff off the ground by his side. The others quickly followed suit, looking to the two new arrivals.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” Link said.

“Back off you,” one of the slavers replied, clutching his axe.

“Oye, don’t be rude,” another said to his friend. “He’s prolly just some poor lost sod.”

“Lost sod my ass,” another said. “Only a few things wander these fields now. And none of ‘em good. He looks like a corpse.”

Link scanned the group. Four at the campfire, six in a tent nearby asleep. Four more in a tent next to it, near a pair of large covered wooden carts. He didn’t see any horses. No one was in armor, but everyone had a weapon in hand or close enough to grab. Swords were few, while there were a few spears and axes. “Which of you is in charge here?” he asked.

“Who’s asking?” a bearded man among the four by the fire asked. He had an axe in his hands, holding it defensively.

“Pair of wanderers.”

At the response, the group seemed to grow tenser. They eyed Aveil carefully, even though she’d made no threatening movements other than keeping her bow in hand and the frost arrow knocked. “Where’d you come from? What’d you want?” the leader asked.

Link’s eyes went to the carts. He could make out Rusl in the darkness thanks to the potions quickly ushering some of them out. No one had noticed yet. The slavers seemed to be completely focused on him and Aveil. “You’ve got some very precious cargo. Cargo that doesn’t belong to you.”

“Who told ya?!” one of the other slavers asked. Link saw one of them move to one of the tents and quietly wake some of the others. “The…”

He was silenced by a kick to the foot by the leader. He looked back at Link then, fingers coiling tighter around the axe. “Answer my questions!”

“Originally? Outset.” Link looked at Aveil then. When he looked back to the slavers, his eyes glanced to the carts. Rusl was moving back to get the first group out of danger. They needed to distract them a little longer.

“The Phantom Wastes,” she said. The others who had been woken were now watching them. Link counted ten of them now armed and watching them.

“They’re poes, gotta be…” one of the slavers said. “Nothing livin’ out here, not after Ganondorf’s army ploughed through.”

“Poes carry lanterns,” Link said calmly. “Does it look like we have lanterns?” He watched as another slaver’s grip on their sword tightened. “We’ve told you what we want. Let them go now. In exchange, we will conveniently forget you were ever here.”

“You… What?” the leader nearly shouted.

He watched carefully, seeing another slaver had gone to check on the carts. Their time was up.
“You let them go. You all get to keep breathing. Do we have a deal?”

The leader barred his teeth. “You… You think you’re some sort of hero?”

“Never said that,” Aveil said.

“We’re waiting,” Link said. “You going to let them go or is this going to get ugly?”

The slaver’s grip on his weapon tightened even more. His eyes looked carefully at the others. It seemed like everyone knew what was going to happen now. The only question was who would make the first move.

The leader looked back at him then. The fear of the strange two armed figures in the dead of night gave way to instinct. “Now I know a threat when I hear one…” He lifted his axe. “Should’ve just hacked you into pieces the second you showed up!” The weapon was quickly raised back like a club. The others raised their weapons then. Link saw briefly as a couple other slavers woke from the shouting.

Almost too fast for the other slavers to follow though the arming sword cleared its scabbard; the hylian swept into a pirouette, gripping the blade with both hands. It met their neck and cleaved cleanly into flesh and bone. The bearded man’s head flew from his shoulders, a long red ribbon of blood breaking in the air as his body fell into the dirt. The axe had never moved from the back position. Link’s heart pounded as the Thunderbird started to react with his adrenaline.

The other slavers shouted and charged. Aveil’s frost arrow was loosed, piercing through the chest of one before the magic triggered and created a cloud of ice and snow. Her mark had been frozen solid, while a second slaver screamed, caught by the magic as an arm and leg were frozen solid. The second they tried to move, they fell and the limbs shattered. The one with the long hammer thrust it forward at Link. He spun on his heel to avoid the strike and swung the longsword backhanded into their side. Another rushed him with a spear, he moved to the side, avoiding the stab. Link returned the malice with a sweep of his sword low, aiming for the back of the knee and sending them into the ground. He turned his attention to another attacker, coming at him with a claymore. He parried the swing before giving way and rolling out of the way as the sword went into the ground.

Aveil drew her scimitars as a fourth slaver ran at her with a sword. She parried the swipe expertly with one blade and opened their belly with the other. Before they had fallen though, she stabbed forward, aiming through the wound and upward, avoiding the ribcage and piercing their heart. Behind her, another swung, but the sword never met flesh. She’d jumped outside their swing, to the side and stabbed both blades into their unguarded side. Before they’d fallen, the scimitars swung around and made two long and deep gashes; one along their throat, the other along their chest.

Two slavers shouted as Link shoved his shoulder into one of them, before turning around and driving the longsword straight through the chest of another. He had moved so quickly and with such efficiency that they never had a chance to move out of the way. Link placed his hand on their chest and pushed the body back, making them fall. His ears picked up the move of another from behind. He was grazed in the side by a spear, but it had failed to cause any serious damage. Link took the chance to bring his sword back up in a vertical sweep and shattered the weapon’s shaft. The elixir acting with his adrenaline made him swing further upward until he’d taken their arm off at the shoulder. The slaver screamed as he collapsed from the dismemberment. One coming up from behind Link gagged in time for him to turn. A hookshot’s harpoon had gone right through their chest and they were pulled back towards Aveil before their head was nearly taken off their
neck. She kicked them back and they collapsed in the dirt.

The five remaining slavers began to scream and run. Link saw Rusl chase after one of them briefly as they dragged someone away from the carts. His blade was drawn and he was bleeding. He knew he should’ve gone to look after Rusl and the others. He knew he should have waited a brief moment to make sure the others had been released without injury or the slavers causing problems for them. Instead, he snarled and broke into a run at the ones leaving the camp.

“Link! Wait!” Aveil shouted, but he was already in a sprint. His heart pounded. The Thunderbird put him into an intense focus on the fight. Through the dark, he rushed after them. One stopped to turn, thrusting a spear at him. He saw it though and moved to the side with a slight twist of his toes. The longsword swept into the back of their legs, taking one of them off at the knee. The slaver’s mouth fell open as the blade cleaved through their neck and spine. Before the corpse had hit the dirt, Link was already sprinting after the few remaining slavers.

“What the fuck was that thing?!” a slaver shouted. His voice echoed among the ruined keep they’d fled to. His ears heard them and he could smell the sweat and urine from their panic in fleeing their camp site.

“Some expert swordsman and a gerudo assassin!” another slaver said. “And keep your fucking voice down!”

“Swordsmen don’t move that fast! Did you see what he did to Arden? Two swings! His leg then his head! And Arden knew-”

“One swing!” the third of the slavers said. “One swing and just took Jarph’s head clean off! Not a drop of blood on him! And the sword was in its sheath the whole time!”

“Told you someone would come looking for me,” the girl said.

“Shutup! We keep quiet! For all we know that thing wanted your head too!”

“What do you think it was?”

Link crept closer having followed their scent. His heart was pounding and rage was in his eyes as he climbed over one of the rocks. Four left and one hostage. He saw them in the moonlight and thanks to his enhanced vision from the potion. They stood together, holding their prisoner close. The slavers had swords. One had a bow on his back and a spear in his other hand. He slipped into the ruins, sticking to the shadows and listened to the conversation.

“Some monster. Some kind of beast in a human’s skin,” one of the slavers said.

“Like a skinwalker?”

“Don’t be an idiot. Skinwalkers don’t exist!”

“How the hell do you know?!”

“Quiet! Both of you!” a third said. Link moved along the outside of the ruined section. He was nearly behind them all now.
“He had a wolf around his neck though. Skinwalkers wear charms that say what they are. Just look ordinary.”

“That’s boarshit! Skinwalkers don’t exist! And if he was, maybe just maybe he’d have changed to attack us?” He suddenly spun around, hearing Link’s boots in the ruins. “…What was that?”

“Shit, we walked right into a monster’s den. Some of ‘em like old ruins… And you bastards have been so loud…”

“Oye, I’ve been in here before! No monsters! Sometimes drowners from the river, but just toss them some meat and they’ll leave you alone.”

“Now that’s boarshit,” their prisoner sneered. “Drowners like live prey. It’s them. The assassin and that man with the wolf around his neck.”

“I told you to shut up!” one of the other slavers said. He pulled his sword back and aimed the pommel for her head. It began to fall. Link saw it though and pulled his crossbow. A single pull and the bolt went through the slaver’s neck before he could make contact. The three remaining slavers spun around to see where the bolt had come from. Taking the opportunity, the girl fled, but he did get a good look at her from his position in the shadows. She was gerudo, with vibrant orange hair. The slaver gargled and coughed, struggling to breathe on the ground.

“How the fuck did they find us in the dark?!” one of the survivors asked.

“Hell if I know…” the one with the bow and spear said. He dropped the spear and knocked an arrow, looking around carefully. They stood with their backs to one another. “Laero, keep your eyes open.”

He could get above and jump down, driving his sword into them. It would take a moment to scale the ruins and position himself though, they’d move too quickly. They were jumpy, so if he surprised them further it could result in injury to him. He could throw a bomb right into their midst as well, that’d kill all three of them in an instant, but the noise could alert other creatures or even an army patrol. Instead, he crept around, pulling his clawshot from his back.

“See either of them?”

“No… And someone shut Boga up! He’s already dead!” The slaver glanced down at his comrade in the dirt, choking on his blood and the crossbow bolt through his neck.

“No way, you fucking shut him up!” Before he could say another word though, there was a snap. A claw on a chain grabbed his back and pulled him into the shadows. He let out a surprised shout and there was a brief clatter of steel before the two remaining slavers screamed. An arrow flew into the dark then, but missed the hexer entirely.

“I don’t wanna die…” the slaver with the bow began repeating. “I don’t wanna die…”

Link barred his teeth as he moved around the dark again. “Should’ve thought about that before you started kidnapping and selling people,” he said with a growl. “I can hear your hearts pounding. And smell you. If you had just let them go, we wouldn’t be here.”

“Fuck…” the other surviving slaver said. “He’s no skinwalker… His shield!”

“What do you mean, Laero?”
“That shield bears the mark of Farore’s favor!”

“…You don’t seriously think…” He turned his attention quickly back though, hearing rocks clatter from footsteps. The hylian clenched his sword in his left hand, glaring as he emerged. The slaver with the bow loosed an arrow which was swiftly deflected. The one with the sword shouted in rage and lunged for Link while the bowman dropped his weapon and ran screaming. It was over in a few heartbeats. Link parried the strike, beating the sword aside and driving his own blade through their heart. He kicked the slaver’s body off, hearing the blade sliding against flesh and bone.

He barred his teeth and started after the last slaver, but stopped when he heard hoofbeats coming from behind him. He spun around, seeing Aveil on the back of a horse, followed by Rusl. Link felt his muscles twitch, the rage from the battle fading from him even if his training and the potions wanted him to seek out more of it.

“Link!” Aveil shouted, dismounting. “Where are the others? Where’s the girl?”

He pointed in the direction the other slaver had gone. “They won’t be a problem anymore,” he said. “As for the girl…” He looked around carefully. “She can’t be far. You have the earring, don’t you?”

“…I do.”

“Been a long time since I saw a Chosen in action,” Rusl said, inspecting the carnage.

“Did you get everyone out?” Link asked.

He gave him a nod, putting his hand on his arm. There was blood and he barely holding onto his sword. “We did… Except the gerudo girl.”

Aveil shouted in her native tongue something. Link picked up a couple pieces of it, including a title he’d learned from reading reports back at the Royal Palace. His eyes widened for a minute and then looked squarely at Aveil. He knew then who had likely given her the contract in the first place and was going to have a long talk with her as soon as everyone else was safe. The girl’s name had been no coincidence. She was quiet for a minute before shouting again. A cry came back this time and Link’s enhanced hearing from the potion picked up the words in gerudo. Link turned his attention back to Rusl though then. “You got in a fight I see.”

“Yeah… But at least none of the children saw it.” He winced and pushed his sword into the dirt.

“Anyone else wounded?”

“No, thankfully.” He looked to see the two gerudo talking in their language. Link got a good look then at the girl Aveil had been sent to retrieve. She was dressed in simple rags, but stood tall and defiant. In the low light with the elixirs in him, he could make out scars and a couple scabs, but nothing serious in the way of injuries. She only wore one earring, the other assuming she’d slipped into Ilia’s flute. Her eyes were a deep green that was familiar from his days before The Conjunction. He let out a long sigh. “So… Back to Ordon for you and the others.”

“Not coming?”

“I’ll go with you to Talon’s lands in Faron, but I can’t take the chances around there with a tower mage having come through.”
“I understand.” He looked at Link carefully then. “You know, Irene’s grandmother kept saying that because we took care of ‘green’ it helped keep the village safe from the fog. A lot of people thought she was crazy. But you really have.”

“You needed help. I know I charged you for it, but I was happy to do the work to help your home.”

“And now many won’t care that you’re a deserter there.” He smiled a little and picked up his sword.

“Better get that arm bandaged.”

“I’ll talk to Iliia. She’s good at that sort of thing.” He turned back then and started walking. “We need to get back to the others anyways.”

“We’ll be along shortly, I’m sure.” Link then looked to Aveil and the gerudo girl. To his surprise though, she was already mounted and had her rescuer as well and ready to go. Link approached, sheathing his blade. The girl watched him carefully, while Aveil took Teron’s reins. “We’re heading back.”

“Correction,” Aveil said, pulling her scarf down. “You’re heading back. I need to get her home.”

“Across No Man’s Land? Would do better if you had more than one person.”

“We’re only a day or two from Lake Hylia. From there it’ll be a swift ride through the valleys.” She glanced back at her charge. “And time is a factor.”

Link took another long look at the young woman they’d saved, studying her features before looking back to Aveil. He almost spoke up but decided against it, knowing what could happen thanks to his former position. Link nodded slowly.

“I’ll see you again though pretty boy!” She smiled down at him from the great black stallion. “Count on it.” Before he could say another word, she snapped the reins and shouted. Teron reared slightly and took off into a full gallop. He heard the girl shriek in surprise and watched as they rode off.

Chapter End Notes

Well, been a while again, huh? Just quick ’cause it's late here.

Anyways, devnotes:

-Like mentioned last time, song selection! The chapter name even shares the name with the song I hear while reading the fight.
-This scene was the big reason I put an M rating on this. The increased realism for fights and all is one thing when it's clearly monsters and the like. When it comes to other human beings? Yeah. Couple this with the fact that Link's mutations make him able to take on things that turn regular human beings into red smears of paste and put that against something like a regular human and it won't be pretty. I will admit though, it was kinda fun choreographing the fight a bit and making it akin to the swordplay we see Geralt using in Wild Hunt.
-When it comes to Link in the games, I can't help but sometimes think of what the bad
guys think of him and how they might see him. Do they see him as a vile enemy? Or something that puts terror in them the way someone like Ganon does for other people? Part of this was an attempt at that when utter scum like these slavers, comes across someone who could wipe the floor with them. That their only chance of survival really is to just not be noticed. Or maybe they start thinking that he's just some kid and easy prey. But eventually start telling stories about the monster that single-handedly stalked through their camps and forts, effortlessly beating their best warriors and beasts. As if The Goddesses created a worse monster to go after them...

-Not completely sure on having the thugs talking and all between themselves, but too late now.

-Originally the girl that Aveil was sent to rescue was not Riju, but decided to work it in after BotW in the editing process to use another character and help set up more connections for the story down the road.

I apologize for this being a late chapter and regret to say there may be another big delay in the next coming chapter. Doing a big project and trying to post it regularly goes right down the drain when you have a busy season at work for three and a half months out of the year.

As always though, special thanks to everyone who's read, left comments, kudos and all. Extra special thanks to the several people who have bookmarked it in the time between postings! Those being, procrastinatorAT, SomberWinter, WellHeyHereWeGo, This One and TheOverlord!

That'll be it for now. Thanks for reading and keep being awesome everyone!
Link looked into the now empty clay mug of milk he’d been drinking and waved a pair of fingers at the bartender at Telma’s. “Another,” he said, pulling a red rupee from his wallet. He closed his eyes and thought back on the recent events in No Man’s Land. It had been four days since he’d seen her ride off and three since seeing Rusl and the ordonians safely meeting with the mercenaries at Lon Lon Ranch.

His senses had returned to heightened, but still human, levels and now he was trying to figure his next moves. Something else ate at him though about the events out there. Just as the corpses of the men he’d killed were probably being eaten by ghouls and their bones were pulled into the earth by stalkin.

“I can still mix up a milk liqueur for you if you want hun,” Telma said.

Link glanced up. The young man who had been serving him had slipped back into the kitchen. At this late hour, there were only a few people around. Thankfully none seemed to be bothering him. “Just some more goat milk would be fine, thanks.”

She picked up the red rupee. “Suit yourself, wolf.”

“What’d you call me?”

She took his mug and pulled a large bottle out from the back of the bar. “You look a little like a feral wolf with that scruff on your face and how you were baring your teeth with your first couple drinks.” Telma poured the bottle into the mug. “And recently, heard rumor there’s a wolf that walks as a man out in No Man’s Land. A wolf bearing the blessing of Farore.”

“Didn’t think you were one to put so much stock in rumors, Telma. What’d your clients say if they heard that sort of gossip?”

She chuckled a little and handed him another mug. “I’d just have to set them straight.” Her eyes studied Link carefully as he looked down at his milk for a moment then back to her. “But rumors are like old legends; each one has a grain of truth to it.” She slipped him a fresh napkin. Link took it, finding that there was also a letter wrapped inside it. “Want a room tonight too?”

“We’ll see if I have enough left after I’ve had my fill.” Link took a long drink from the mug, wiping some dribble from his lips as Telma turned to put the bottle back. He inspected the letter then. It had a blue wax seal on it bearing the crest of the royal zora family. It was identical to the gemstone he had stowed in one of Epona’s saddlebags. Link raised a brow slightly and slipped his thumb inside it. He was about to break the seal when he heard a voice next to him.

“Innkeep!” Aveil’s voice said. “Something good and strong since no one wants to play cards tonight!”

Link looked to his left. There was no mistaking the gerudo hexer. Two scimitars on her back with a quiver and her short recurve. Her hookshot was on her hip and she leaned on the bar as she waited for Telma’s attention.
“And maybe something to snack on. Any recommendations?”

“At this hour?” Telma asked, turning around. “Your best bet is some biscuits we cooked up for the evening meal a few hours ago.” She put a tankard on the bar. “Vodka, beer or ale?”

“I’ll do an ale.” She pulled a purple rupee from her wallet as she looked at Link. “And one for the pretty boy too.”

She began to laugh a little. “Well, let me go get it for you then.” Telma turned and headed into the kitchen, leaving only Link and Aveil at the bar. He took another sip from his mug and looked at her for a moment before going back to his drink.

“Y’know that won’t get you tipsy.”

He had picked it up and was about to take another drink when she’d spoken, but stopped. The clay clattered dully on the wooden counter. “Well, last time I wanted to get a bit sloshed it tasted like sugar and regret. And that was even before you gave me the Nayru’s Tears to get it out of me.”

Aveil chuckled at what he’d said and he took another drink. “Sorry.”

“For?”

“I’m sure you know.”

“Leaving all of a sudden or the fact you didn’t tell me that you had been sent to find and bring back Ganondorf’s youngest daughter?” When he looked back, she bowed her head, eyes closed. A second later she began to nod.

“You suspected I’m sure though. Just as I suspected that Captain Tetra was actually Princess Zelda. The reasons why are the same as to why you didn’t say anything.”

He did and just nodded, finishing his mug. Link reached up and stroked his chin firmly, rubbing the scruff a little bit.

“One of those bits of professional reality we have to deal with. The contract was… Absolute. No one could know. I took a major risk as well trusting you for this. But it paid off. And will for you too.”

“Really?” he questioned.

“Her mother wants the war to end just as she does. And if rumor’s true, you’re trying to end this war too.”

“I am, but I don’t want either side in a state of weakness. I want a lasting peace. Not one that’s going to leave everyone in a bad place.” He shook his head then.

“Ah.”

“Yeah.”

“That’s going to be tricky…” Telma returned with a pair of mugs then in one hand and a cask of ale in the other. She put the cask down and opened it. “Nature of politics and all.”

“I know. ” He watched Telma for a minute before looking back at Aveil. An idea started to form
though he’d need to talk to some people who were more aware of how to handle it. He had always intended to try and find a way, but his talents and training were towards warfare and espionage, not statecraft. If he wanted to have the war end in a way that might help both The Kingdom and The Tribes, he’d need to get the voices of people in power on his side, not just neutralize their ability to make war.

“They want to meet you.” She slid a letter across the bar to him. Like the one from the zoras, it had a wax seal on it. This one bronze in color and bearing a mark that was not of the united tribes.

“This bears the mark of the sage of spirits.”

“Her tribe is custodians of the Goddess of the Sands. If you want to have a voice of reason within The Tribes, it’ll come from them. And I’m sure you can find them in Hyrule proper as well.”

“Will be difficult now but…” He saw one of the mugs get placed in front of him. “Knew that going into this.”

“Well, you’ve got my help now if you’re ever in the desert. Though… Might be a bit.”

“Another contract?”

“Yeah.” She took her mug of ale from Telma as she handed it to her. “Taking me back into No Man’s Land. Finding the last traces of that slave ring.”

“Well, you might’ve come to the right place first then.”

“Oh?”

Link looked at Telma. “Telma knows things. For a price.”

“Excellent. I’ve been looking for a broker I can trust in South Lanayru.” She took a drink from her mug then. “So…” Aveil said. “The Wolf of Farore…”

“I didn’t come up with it,” he said. He looked at the mug of ale in front of him. “Maybe he was focused on the charm.”

“Well, it is a nice-looking charm.” Aveil pulled a tip of two red rupees from her wallet and left them to be collected. “Malon was saying the same thing when I was talking to her about the trail. Before we left.”

“She was?” He picked up the mug and brought it to his lips.

“Yeah.” The gerudo smiled a little. “So, you never…”

The refreshing drink would have to wait. He lowered the mug and glanced at Aveil. “No.”

“You don’t even know what I was going to say next.”

“I could figure it out.” Link took a quick drink. “You were going to try and set me up with her. Just like a couple people back at The Tower tried…” he muttered.

“She was eyeing you a bit. And you two did have a history she mentioned. How you sometimes saw her at The Tower?” Aveil smiled a little as she took another sip from her own drink. “We’d have visitors at the temple too some days. How I got Teron was from Kilterdorf’s family. They
breed some of the finest horses in the entire Gerudo Desert. He was cute too.” She looked at the ale for a moment in her mug. “Kind of had hair like yours, pretty boy. Really deep red, but same style.”

“You’re not gonna keep calling me that, are you?”

Aveil laughed a little. “It’s true though.” She took a sip. “Well, if not Malon, then what about that girl? The one who gave us the trail?”

“Ilia?” He took a long drink then from his mug. “I barely know her!”

“So?”

“So, I’m not exactly interested in something like that.”

“Okay…” She waved the bartender over and finished her drink. “Another, please.” He took the mug and left them. “What about that guard? The mercenary knight?”

“Wh-which one?” He raised an eyebrow and turned in his seat a little to face her better. “Wait, the…”

“Red hair, big smile. Human… I think his name was Samuel.”

He looked at her flatly. “…This is because of the tunic isn’t it?” Link let out a sigh and leaned back to take a drink.

“You don’t go that way.” The bartender returned with another drink for Aveil.

“I don’t go that way,” he said, the mug blocking some of his face. He put it down and then picked up the envelope. A quick inspection and he stuffed it into his pocket. “Some people have an issue with people like that but not me.” He leaned against the bar. “My mentor always said you need to know yourself before you can know someone else that way…”

Aveil chuckled a little. “I kind of figured you more for the romantic type.” She took a drink from her new mug. “…But you’re not the sort to save a princess and then spoil her, are you?”

He did have to laugh a little at that as well. “Only if I’ve already bought her dinner a couple times.” The smile faded a little. “Honestly though, I’d prefer someone to be at my side that I know I can trust than someone far off and worrying. Know they can handle themselves. Save themselves even.” Link took another drink from the mug on the counter. “Not easy to find a woman like that, even though I’ve met a fair few in my time.” His eyes drifted towards the rest of the bar. A pair of locals got up and started for the door. Given how they moved quickly and shunned his gaze, Link assumed they were trying to avoid any trouble. A second later, the door was swinging shut behind them, leaving Link and Aveil the only two in the bar apart from three others at a table near the back playing cards. “And someone who won’t freak out when they see me toxic.”

“You mean like those slavers we tracked down.”

Link nodded. “Hell, even though it wasn’t as bad as what I had to drink for the leviathan or Bellum’s avatar, I could tell Ilia and Rusl were a bit frightened when they actually saw me in the light and it was all still in my system.” He shook his head and took another drink. “But… I can’t help but ask what The Hero would’ve done there.”

“Don’t know much about the stories in Hyrule, but I’d guess he’d have stopped the slavers too?”
“But would he have killed them all like that? Would he have…” Link raised a hand when he saw Aveil starting to speak. “Don’t answer that. I know. Know the real world isn’t like the stories.”

“Then why even ask it?”

He finished his drink then in three gulps and slid it away. “Telma! Another please…” Link then looked at Aveil. “We were always told that we carried The Hero’s Spirit in us. That that was what let us pass the trials. That the ritual to enhance us was to wake up that potential. Make us remember our past lives. We were heroes to the people of The Kingdom. The face of the potential that anyone could become if they wanted it.” He saw Telma return with a fresh tankard of ale and put it in front of him. He grabbed it and took a drink. “We’re supposed to be these chivalrous, all-loving, knights in royal blue tunics and chainmail who embody the pieces of The Triforce to different degrees.” Link looked at Aveil again. Her face was neutral as she sipped her drink and relaxed against the counter. “Mine was courage.”

“Hence the mark of Farore on your shield.”

“Yeah. Was on my old charm too. A pendant of courage.” Link took another drink and put it down again as Telma returned with biscuits for them. “We could count on the wisdom of The Royal Family to guide us… That if something seemed not right but we had to go with it anyway we could just say that it was their wisdom.” He took another drink and looked into it. “Could trust their wisdom when they called us heroes. But can’t anymore. So what does that make me?”

Aveil was quiet for almost a full minute, studying the former Chosen agent of The Crown. Her lips parted into a smile. “A professional.”

Link looked back to his ale then in silence. He couldn’t fault her for her honesty, but he hadn’t expected her to essentially compare him to a mercenary.

“You have a code of ethics. Honor the agreements you made. There are things you will not do. So what you don’t have the title of ‘hero’ anymore. It leaves you free to hold yourself to a different standard than what The Kingdom wanted of you. Possibly even a higher one.”

He found himself starting to nod. Link knew all of this, but hearing it talked out and thinking on it had helped him come to terms with it as opposed to just letting it sit and stew in his mind. He took another drink from the mug in front of him and stifled a burp. “Farore knows I’ve tried to do that even when I was with The Crown. Find the entire story before I made a choice in how to proceed.”

“Guess I’m just trying to make the world like the old stories.”

“Well, nothing wrong with that. They do give us something to aim for. An ideal.”

“Yeah.” He smiled a little and took another drink. “Still… There were some perks there… Had essentially all the money I needed. Always could talk to people at The Tower through my charm. If things got really bad I could even invoke the Right of Levy.”

“What’s that do?”

Link took another sip. “It’s essentially deputizing the populace. Like, if things were bad enough in Ordon and they were part of The Crown, and I was still with them, I could invoke it and every man and woman who was capable would have to pick up arms to join the war effort.” He looked back to his mug again then. “I’d never do that though unless… Unless things were really desperate.”

“Same.”

“You can do that? I thought you were independent?”
Aveil took a very long drink, some of the ale dribbling out of the corner of her mouth. “We are… But there’s some things…” She waved to Telma with the now empty mug.

“Like?”

“…The first thing that comes to greet you.”

Link had heard those words before in other stories. Stories of an age darker and more violent than the one he lived in now, even if the war around them made him question if it had ever come to a close in the first place. A fresh drink was put before her and Telma went out to one of the tables in the dining room with one of the other workers. He glanced over his shoulder to see them trying to rouse a man who had fallen asleep on the table and spilled his own drink.

“Or… That which you have but don’t expect yet. That was the price of the contract my mother took out.” Aveil took a long drink, gulping the ale. “I don't know if she understood what it meant… Maybe she meant my father... Or another member of the tribe. But I was old enough to understand that it meant I’d probably never see my family again.” She took another sip. “And I didn’t.”

“That why you didn’t ask for anything from Ordon? Just let me handle it?”

“Every Desert Viper must provide new blood for the temple. Enhancement procedure we use won’t work on males. And like yours, I’d assume it doesn’t work on anyone who has entered puberty. So we need children.” She shook her head as she lowered it. “I still remember my mother shrieking when Seliv claimed me. And if you weren’t there, I’d have had to ask Rusl for that.” Aveil was slow to get another sip. As she brought the tankard to her lips she looked at him for a moment. “His wife was just starting to show. And the Law of Surprise is absolute.”

“And you didn’t want to.”

“Yeah. But… I am a professional. And sometimes the job isn’t always one you want to do.”

Link nodded in agreement as he brought his mug to his lips. After a drink, he thought for a minute and then laughed a little.

“What?”

“That rule. The Law of Surprise. Where you ask for something someone doesn’t have yet or that they find at home. That only apply in the deserts?”

“What are you getting at?”

“We’re in Hyrule. You were in no danger of having to ask anything.” He smiled and laughed a little at it. “A friend of mine always said there were loopholes that could be used to find ways out of situations like that.” He felt a little teary-eyed at it, the mix of feeling a need for someone he truly trusted by his side and the alcohol now in his bloodstream.

At first, Aveil looked offended. She barred her teeth and glared at him. But she clearly thought of it and her lips curled as she too began to laugh. “Must be one real clever friend then!”

“You have no idea…” He grabbed one of the biscuits then and sank his teeth into it. “Met him during The Conjunction. Hiding under an overturned cart with some aberrations that had fallen through.” He paused to take another bite and swallow. “In a purple robe with a rabbit’s hood.”
“A rabbit’s hood…”

Link nodded, stifling a chuckle. “And a scarf that was black and blue that went to his ankles.”

“If we’re gonna start talking jobs, I’m gonna need something a lot stronger. Especially if I start talking about my trip to Termina…”

“Telma’s got it. Trust me.” He finished his ale and grabbed another biscuit. “Have you ever had Rolling Ridge Lava Juice?”

“No?”

He chuckled then. “Made by gorons in Labrynna in their caverns. Linebeck was smuggling almost a full ship of the stuff when I first met him. Makes for very good incendiaries too if you need it.”

Link waved to Telma at the table. “Hey! When you get the chance, we’ll split a bottle or two of Lava Juice!”

The crow of a cucco caused his eyes to shoot open. He instantly regretted it as it felt sunbeams from the dawn were aiming directly for his eyes. A garbled curse escaped his mouth as he slowly sat up, clutching his head. It felt like it was being split in half down the middle. Link ignored as best he could the fatigue that was running through his muscles. Rather than letting himself completely sit up, he fell back into the hay. He blinked slowly and looked around. He was in a barn. Not ten feet away, Epona stood in a stall staring at him. She blinked, seemingly slowly and an ear flicked. Link let out a long sigh and started to wonder how he’d ended up in the hamlet’s stables.

In the hamlet’s stables apparently in nothing but his underwear. Link looked back at Epona then. “I know…” he muttered. “I… Don’t…” He was interrupted by a soft moan and words he didn’t understand. Looking down he noticed a tanned and toned leg of a woman wrapped around his waist. Following it, he saw scars on the thigh and her side. Like him, she had lost her clothes and her hair was a mess. Her arm was around his torso and he felt her push her face into his shoulder. He wasn’t completely sure of how they’d ended up like this, but was wondering if it had to do with the drinks when they’d decided to start talking jobs last night.

“Phantom guide…” Aveil groaned. “What…” She slowly started to sit up. “Oh Goddess… Link?”

She moved her arm, but made no move of her leg. “How’d we end up…”

“I don’t know…” He groaned and clenched his eyes shut. “How much did we have?”

“Were we comparing scars?”

“I guess? Why else would…”

“Why else what?” In spite of the hangover, she was smirking.

“Nothing.” He coughed nervously and looked away. Even though he was an adult, the entire situation made his cheeks hot. Epona was still staring at him. Link could almost hear the mare’s voice even though it’d been probably two months since he’d said anything to her.

“I should probably get going here…” Aveil laughed then. “Though you’re probably one of the
nicest things I’ve woken up to in a long time.”

“Oh Goddess…” He had to laugh a little too, even if now he was blushing like a teenager.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everybody. Another chapter finally. A bit lighter on one too for tone.

Devnotes:
-This one was aimed at a bit of character development and all between these two and to have a bit of fun. Even with the heavier bits here or there like how Link has gotten the nickname of The Wolf of Farore.
-Yes, that is a reference to Egoraptor's ridiculously silly video and Starbomb rap. I'm sure you know the one.
-One thing I've enjoyed when reading other pieces with Link is the numerous interpretations of the character. I'm pretty sure I've said it before, but I'll say it again. The fact Link is such a blank slate but enough defined that he can be a joy to work with as a writer and someone to read about because he can mean different things to different readers and writers and they're all equally valid.
-Developing the near blank slate of Aveil has been a fun activity as well. She's also let me weave in more witcher-related elements.
-Link and Aveil sharing drinks is a reference to a scene in Wild Hunt. Sadly, there is a third person not there and I ended it before some other things, but... If all goes as planned, this won't be the first time a group of mutants gets drunk, blacks out and then wakes up next to naked.
-This piece also takes place directly before another piece I did wherein Link goes up against a shadow hag. Admittedly though, the piece there isn't quite as 'canon' as it used to be. But still good enough that you can use it as the piece that comes in next chronologically.

Extra special thanks this time to freyahhh for the bookmark! And as always a huge thanks to everyone who reads, leaves comments, kudos and bookmarks. Also, WHOO! 200 kudos! Huge thanks to every last one of you for them!

That'll be it for now. Again, it might be a bit before another chapter shows up, but thanks for reading and keep being awesome!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!