Rebirth of the Empress

by Probs_not_perfect

Summary

Post Mk X. Kotal Kahn enlists the help of Cassie and her team to track down the remaining rebels. On the run, Tanya and Rain believe Mileena has been reborn. But she isn't where they think. Tanya/Mileena and other pairings.

Notes

Have been in love with this franchise for years but have never tried my hand at writing for it. Takes place after mk x. Enjoy!
During the majority of the rebellion, Mileena had her camps hidden in the Kuatan Jungle. At the
time, Rain had referred to it as “one of the most loathsome places in Outworld”. Tanya agreed. The
plentiful bugs and reptilian creatures made for an unwanted and occasionally painful distraction from
the war effort. After the death of their leader, the pair of Edenians were grateful to leave the wretched
jungle behind. However, given their current surroundings, Tanya would have gladly trekked back
through the swamps if it meant she wouldn’t have to pass through this elder god forsaken place.

The imposing darkness and rotting corpses were just side dishes to the carnivorous trees of the
Living Forest. As much as she hated to admit it, Tanya would have likely felt more comfortable with
a squad of Tarkatans at their side. The more eyes watching the branches and roots, the better. In the
past, the trees of the Living Forest were mostly immobile, only able to open their mouths and ingest
anyone too stupid to get close enough. Over time, however, the forest had evolved. Many of the trees
were able to move their appendages in order to trap prey and pull them into their gaping maws.

By themselves, the Edenians had to constantly monitor their surroundings and keep as much distance
from the trees as possible. Some of them snarled and roared when they passed, others held still and
smiled as if they knew they’d get caught eventually. The only upside to their location was that it was
unlikely they’d be discovered by Kotal’s forces.

Reaching a relatively large clearing in the woods, the weary Edenians were finally able to rest with
relative safety. The demi-god settled himself down, but Tanya was too alert to sit. She tapped her
foot impatiently.

“We need to rest, Tanya.”

“This is no place to relax. We cannot stop if we intend on reaching our destination alive.”

“I have repeatedly asked you how much farther-“

“And I have repeatedly told you I don’t know.”

Rain sighed, looking away from his irritated companion. “It may not even still exist.”

She scoffed, not giving a response to his doubts. She knew better.

He’d decided to pester her further. “How do you know she was telling the truth?”

This elicited an eye roll. “The empress would not lie to me.”

“Yet you didn’t mind lying to her.”

The dark skinned Edenian looked down to her nails, pretending that hadn’t stung.

“I did what I had to do for our realm.”

“Indeed. But you don’t think she was skeptical of our loyalties?”

“Yours, perhaps.”

The half god crossed his arms. Tanya would have found it amusing under different circumstances.

“Why should she have thought you to be trustworthy over me?”
She ran her fingers through her hair. “Maybe you hadn’t noticed, but the empress and I were quite close.”

He stood up, stretching and brushing himself off. He crossed his arms again, this time with the intention of looking serious. “What exactly did she tell you?”

She sighed. That night was burned into her memory.

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Many of the tents of the rebel army weren’t in the best condition. They were sparse, only providing absolute necessities. The Tarkatans didn’t complain much. They were nomadic by nature; they’d sleep wherever they could. Tanya had done her best to spruce up her own tent to make it more suitable for living. She’d adorned it with pottery and ornate furniture, and even put some of her jewelry on display. All her effort became utterly pointless for most of the war. She could count on one hand the number of nights she’d spent sleeping in her own bed.

The tent she was in now was much different. A portrait of the late Shao Kahn rested against a large table used for strategizing. Armor and weapons were strewn throughout the interior, as were bones and skulls of various species. The only soft thing in the room was the lavender sheets that hung off the bed at her feet. It was silent, save for her own breathing and the breath of her beloved empress.

Mileena’s head rested in her lap, letting her stroke her hair as though she were a pet. The empress rarely allowed herself to be so vulnerable, but the Edenian was able to bring out this side of her. They’d spent the evening together, unwinding from the day’s trials and tribulations. It always ended this way. Mileena needed her comfort, and she was happy to supply it.

“Dearest Tanya…”

“Shhh. It is time to rest. We have a long day tomorrow.”

The empress let out a low growl which Tanya found oddly endearing. She stayed quiet for only a moment longer before picking herself up so that they were face to face.

“You know I trust you above all others.”

“And I, you.”

“I must share something with you that I am uncertain about.”

Mileena’s face contorted in confusion. Tanya had never seen her think so hard about something before. She perked up, knowing whatever it was would be more important than the empress’s usual mutterings of carnage and gore.

“It is no secret that I was created by Shang Tsung…”

“Yes, by Shao Kahn’s request. You were his true daughter.”

“Indeed. My father made many requests to the sorcerer. Although my memory of the time immediately after my birth is hazy, I recently recalled a conversation I overheard between the sorcerer and my father.”

Tanya searched her face, trying discern if it would be good news or bad news. Although she prided herself on being able to read people (as one must if they are to make the right choices), the empress currently appeared too conflicted to tell. Her pause went on as she became lost in thought until Tanya
rested a hand on her knee, urging her to continue.

“Shao Kahn had asked if I was indestructible, which the sorcerer denied. He didn’t seem upset, so I believe this was not something he’d expected anyway. However, Shang Tsung said that although my body could be killed, he’d engineered my essence to be able to live on.”

The Edenian turned this over in her head and tried to make sense of it. “So, you are not immortal, but in death your spirit will still exist?”

The empress nodded, although she herself did not look totally convinced.

“Where will it go? Did the sorcerer intend on absorbing your soul?” She remembered the stories of the soul hungry Shang Tsung. It sounded plausible he would attempt to claim her essence in her death.

Mileena swatted a bug, baring her teeth at it in annoyance. “No. Father wouldn’t have allowed that.”

She continued to swat and snarl at the bug. Tanya smiled, skillfully throwing a small fireball and scorching the large insect. The empress grinned and crushed its corpse with her hand, likely imagining it was a certain insect-like traitor.

“Perhaps your spirit will become part of that soul collective, Ermac.”

Mileena grimaced, the Edenian chuckling at her sudden change in expression.

“Very funny. I have a theory of my own.”

“Do tell, empress.”

“Shang Tsung created me in his flesh pits. It was home to many other “abominations” as my sister so lovingly referred to them.”

“A pity she has fallen to the depths of hell. I have no doubt she would aid us in the fight for a free Edenia.”

Mileena snorted. “She would have sided with that Osh-Tekk imbecile and allied with Earthrealm. Her heart was heavy with the love of their champion.”

Tanya shook her head. “I often wonder what she saw in him. A man whose entire life span isn’t even half her age.”

“She was a fool in many ways. She never would have even discovered the truth had it not been for the Thunder God.”

They both shared a scowl at the mention of Raiden. Earthrealm’s protector was both mocked and feared throughout Outworld.

“My apologies, I seem to have steered you off track a bit, my empress. You mentioned the flesh pits?”

“Yes. A dark place where Shang Tsung ran wild with his magic and the corpses of outworld. I spent much time there as I was trained to use my sai and magic. These things were part of my design, so I was quick to catch on. But I remember what I saw down there. The sorcerer had many projects.”

“I seem to recall you telling me it took him a long time to perfect your design?”
Mileena nodded. “There were many failed attempts. Lifeless monsters that shared my visage. He had trouble balancing my sister’s essence with tarkatan blood. He even showed me his journal which listed the many methods and spells he’d needed to create me. Cloning is not easy. Creating a clone and adding extra traits is even harder.”

“You truly are a miracle, Mileena Kahnum.”

The empress couldn’t help but smile at the use of her title. Somehow, it sounded even better when it came from Tanya. The Edenian woman smiled back at her, clearly very aware of what she’d done.

Mileena resisted the urge to close the distance between them and focused heavily on her current train of thought. “Even after I was allowed to leave the flesh pits, Shang Tsung continued to work when not engaged in the tournament. Shao Kahn was aware of this, so I assumed it was something he ordered him to do. But when he’d finished, and stopped descending to the pits every night, there was nothing to show for it. There had been talk amongst his underlings of what would emerge next. Baraka had hoped for another Tarkatan hybrid, perhaps one fused with the blood of a Shokan or a Centaur. Reptile, who had been there to witness some of my creation and often aided the sorcerer with his work, had no insight to offer. He had been too occupied with the tournament and hadn’t returned to the flesh pits since my birth. That wretched traitor Reiko insisted Kahn had ordered Shang Tsung to make him a son, a position he so desperately wished he could have filled himself.”

Tanya smirked. They often talked about friends and foes from the past. Mileena spoke fondly of Baraka, one of her only allies to not jump ship when Kotal executed his coup. He may have claimed to serve Mileena as a way of honoring Shao Kahn’s will, but the empress had led her to believe he’d had other motivations as well. Reiko, however, was a dark stain on the bottom of her shoe. He’d been so devoted to her father that he was mocked by Shao Kahn’s other followers for being an “arrogant boot kisser”.

Despite this, he was never devoted to Mileena at all. His affection was all a ruse to suit his own ends. Tanya knew someone on the outside looking in may have seen her in a similar light, but they would be sorely mistaken and savagely beaten for saying so. She took her mind away from such thoughts, returning her full attention to the story.

“When nothing ever emerged, everyone waited for Shao Kahn to punish the sorcerer for his failure. He never did. The whole ordeal was eventually forgotten as Quan Chi began to replace Shang Tsung at the emperor’s side and the invasion of Earthrealm began. But as I’ve recently recalled the exchange between them in regards to my essence, I now wonder if Shang Tsung had created another body for me.”

Tanya let that thought sink in. It made sense. Why allow her soul to still exist after death if it would have nowhere to go? “You truly believe it is possible?”

“I do. He still had all the necessary information. It would have been even easier since he would not have to give the body life.” The hybrid took Tanya’s hand in her own. “Should I ever perish, dearest Tanya, seek out the flesh pits. The entrance is in the heart of the Living Forest.” She moved in close, dropping her voice to a husky whisper. “If I am reborn there, I will wait for your arrival.”

Mileena’s eyes were on the edenian’s soft lips as she spoke. “And what if I should perish before I can find you?”

They came closer still, her lips practically brushing the other’s as she replied. “Then there is hardly a world for me to return to.”

As they kissed, Tanya committed this to memory. For all the manipulation and treachery, there was
love here. She wouldn’t let it slip away, even in death.

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Tanya could recall every word as if it had just occurred moments ago. It was one of the many moments in which she’d surprised herself with genuine feelings towards the empress. She’d spent so much of her life perfecting the art of deception, and Mileena had been an easy target for manipulation. She and Rain had only one thing on their minds when they freed her from Kotal’s imprisonment. A free Edenia. Her artificial loyalty had become something very real over time. Genuine trust was something new for her, which was why moments like this were so profound.

Rain stared, waiting for an answer. She turned her attention to her nails again.

“I’ve already told you all you need to know. If you spent less time being skeptical we’d likely be there already.”

He was about to retort when they both heard the sound of rustling leaves and footsteps in the distance. They froze in place. Neither one had expected to find anyone else this deep in the forest. Turning towards the source of the sound, they were soon greeted by the sight of Osh-Tekk warriors led by the soul collective himself.

“We have found you. Surrender now, or be destroyed.”

Their reply was an eruption of water and flame.
As she approached her parents, Cassie was already putting together scenarios in her head on what mission they would have for her. Things had been relatively peaceful since the whole fiasco with Shinnok, and they’d mostly been dealing with issues in their own realm. Judging by the stern looks on their faces when they noticed her arrival, it was going to be something serious.

She popped her gum in greeting. “What’s up?”

Sonya gave her the usual expression for whenever she spoke informally at the base, but didn’t address it out loud. “We have a mission for you and your team. Kotal Kahn has requested your help in Outworld.”

“Ookay. Definitely not what I was expecting to hear.”

Johnny chuckled. “We weren’t either. The emperor must be really desperate if he turns to Earthrealm for help.”

Cassie scoffed. “Yeah, really desperate to lure us to our deaths. Why would we help him?”

Her mother continued to fix her with a steel expression. “Because it will be good for both our realms. Peace has never been something we’ve been able to achieve with Outworld. His request may be unexpected, but we believe it is genuine. We’ve already accepted.”

“What?!” She was hardly surprised, but still upset. “Mom, you could be sending us to our deaths! What if they hold us hostage and use us for extortion? How can you know if he’s being genuine?”

Her father intervened before the argument progressed. “Honor is very important to someone like Kotal Kahn. Asking us for help probably hurt his pride. It seems like a last resort.” He cast a smile towards Sonya. “And your mother’s right. Strengthening the bond between our realms is beneficial for everyone.”

She returned the smile for a split second before returning to her usual serious demeanor. “We’ve already notified the others and they’re on their way here. It’ll be your job to brief them once they arrive, so pay attention.”

Cassie popped her gum again, irritated but defeated. She knew she’d never win an argument against both of them. She followed her parents to the briefing room where Sonya pulled up an image of two
familiar faces.

“You remember these two?”

“How could I forget. Homegirl on the left snuck up behind me in the jungle.”

“This is Tanya and Rain. Two edenians who were part of Mileena’s resistance. They’ve been wanted in Outworld ever since the civil war ended. Kotal says he’s kept them on the run for months but he hasn’t been able to catch them. We’re guessing he wants them alive so he can make an example of them in front of an audience.”

The young Cage looked confused. “So why does he need us to catch them? He’s really having that much trouble doing it with his whole army and his squad of cronies?”

Her father laughed. “Must be. We’re guessing he just wants to finally put an end to it and he knows SF has superior skills and technology in tracking and stealth.”

Sonya hadn’t taken her eyes off the screen. “Or he’s trying to stop them from accomplishing something. Maybe he’s worried they’re organizing another resistance group or trying to escape the realm entirely.”

Cassie snorted. “He’s paranoid.”

Closing the images, Sonya started towards the doorway. “I’ve got other work to do. Your team should be here shortly. Brief them and then head for the old refugee area south of the base. Kotal said he’d open you a portal there.” She didn’t wait for a response.

With a sigh, Cassie turned to her father. “Do you really think this is a good idea?”

He threw an arm around her and pulled her to his chest. “Have I ever steered you wrong, punkin?”

“I don’t think you want me to answer that.”

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“No way. This is an obvious trap.” Kung Jin echoed her earlier sentiment as soon as she’d finished explaining the mission.

“That’s what I said. My parents are both convinced this will help strengthen the ties between our realms, but I think it’s more likely we’ll end up with ties around our necks.”

Takeda laughed. “Don’t be so pessimistic you two. I think it makes perfect sense. We’ve worked with him before, he knows what we can do.”

The shaolin scoffed. “And what happened after that? Oh yeah, he locked us up.”

Jacqui quickly came to Takeda’s aid. “That was different. The amulet was in play, and he was betrayed by D’Vorah. He probably regrets that decision knowing what he knows now. And besides, after all that’s happened, don’t you think it’s possible that he wants a stronger bond with Earthrealm too?”

“No.” Cassie and Jin answered in unison. It was rare that they agreed on something, especially mission related. However, they shared the trait of stubbornness.

Despite her aversion to the plan, Cassie still lead her team to where the portal was supposed to appear. As if sensing their arrival, it materialized as soon as they were in sight of it. Taking a
collective deep breath and silently prepping themselves, they stepped through the portal one after another. Bright outworld sunlight assaulted their vision and left them disoriented for a moment. When they were able to see again, they found themselves in Kotal’s war room. *Balcony* was a more fitting word. They looked over the edge to the hustle and bustle of the marketplace and courtyard below.

Turning around, they found the emperor seated at a long table. He was accompanied by Ermac, Erron Black, and Reptile. Cassie could feel the glare Jacqui was shooting the mummy-esque figure who was responsible for the loss of her father’s arms. She was a bit on edge that the emperor wasn’t alone, but none of the table’s occupants seemed hostile at the moment. Kotal extended an arm, motioning for them to have a seat. She was hesitant, but complied, the others sitting beside her.

Kotal Kahn wasted no time. “Suspicion radiates off you in waves, Cassandra Cage. You have my word that I bare no ill will against you or your friends.”

Recalling how Kung Jin had impressed the emperor with his choice of words, Cassie did her best to speak as formally as she could manage. “In all honesty, emperor, we are confused as to why you have come to us for help.”

The emperor sighed. “It was not my first choice; merely the only one I have left. I’ve exhausted all other options. It pains me to admit it so frankly, but I grow desperate.”

Takeda looked to Cassie for permission to speak. She nodded. “Are the edenians really that big of a threat on their own? I’m sure being hunted constantly hasn’t made it easy for them to draw in new supporters.”

“I’m afraid it’s not new recruits that I fear. Something much worse could be on the horizon if they are not captured.”

He became silent after this ominous statement, and Cassie noticed he seemed visibly shaken. She wasn’t sure what to say next, but Kung Jin apparently did.

“You going to enlighten us? I think we’d be closer to actually trusting you if we had all the information.”

Across from him, the marksman shook his head. “Tch. I see you still haven’t learned to keep your mouth shut.”

The young shaolin rolled his eyes. “It’s a fair question considering the last several encounters we’ve had were *unpleasant* to say the least.” He studied the gunslinger for a moment. “For all we know, you’ve already been paid to take us out as soon as our back is turned.”

Jacqui socked the shaolin in the arm and Cassie shot her a smile since she’d been about to do the same thing. To her surprise, the emperor sighed and nodded in his direction. “The shaolin is right. If I am to expect your trust, I must be forthcoming with all the details.”

Jin shot her an arrogant smirk and she resisted the urge to stick her tongue out at him. She chose to pop her gum at him instead. Ermac and Reptile watched the exchange, thoroughly confused about Earthrealmers and their nonverbal communications.

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The emperor wrung his hands as he spoke, noticeably uncomfortable. “The last location we’d tracked the Edenians to was the Living Forest. I was initially uncertain what could possibly bring them to such a dreary and abandoned place until Reptile brought something unsettling to my attention.” He’d tilted his head in the scaly figure’s direction, prompting him to reiterate this
information for the newcomers.

“The Living Forest was used often during the reign of Shao Kahn. Those who defied him and were unworthy of execution in the coliseum would be used to satisfy the forest’s hunger.” His slimy tongue extended and hissed as he spoke. Cassie couldn’t tell is it was unintentional or if he’d been doing it for dramatic effect, but it disgusted her either way. “The sorcerer Shang Tsung could often be found there, stealing corpses to drag down to his flesh pits. There is an entrance to the wretched place in the heart of the forest. This is surely where the edenians are going.”

This was all new intel for the Earthrealmers, but it still didn’t really explain anything about their mission. They all looked expectantly back at the emperor, who seemed as though he was struggling to continue. Cassie was slowly starting to see the desperation present in his attitude. This is for real.

“The flesh pits are where that abomination, Mileena, was born. I had thought to be finally rid of her, but I am fearful she may somehow return.” He paused to collect himself, as though speaking the words out loud might have made it true somehow. He regained his regal composure and gave the team his full attention. “I am no expert on the sorcerer Shang Tsung, but what Reptile has told me does not bode well. I can think of no reason for the edenians to journey to the flesh pits that does not involve Mileena. This is why I must stop them. This is why I called for your help.”

The emperor stood up from the table, moving to look over the balcony. He opened his arms towards his kingdom below. “As long as Mileena may still exist, she is a threat to my throne and my people. I wish nothing more than to be rid of her forever. I have been living with false hope that she was truly gone. I have been a fool to allow the edenians to live for so long.”

He returned his attention to the table, now lacking any uncertainty or fear. “I had planned on executing them in front of my people, to show that we stand together against those who wish to tear us apart. Now I only wish for their long lives to end one way or another. By the time we launch our attack, they will have likely arrived at the flesh pits. This is my last chance. They have been able to thwart my previous efforts and escape with their lives, but they would never expect me to call upon Earthrealm for aid.”

Takeda chuckled. “We’ll have the element of surprise. They won’t know what hit them.”

The Osh-Tek emperor seemed pleased at his enthusiasm. “Precisely. I see no way we can fail.”

Kung Jin was still apprehensive, and Cassie was slightly glad he’d asked the question so she wouldn’t have to.

“And what happens afterwards? No double cross this time?”

With a sigh, the emperors momentary burst of passion drained from his expression. “I had hoped it had been made clear that we mean you no harm. What else can I do to earn your trust?”

“You wouldn’t have to earn it back if you hadn’t betrayed us in the first place, chief.”

“What happened to your ability to forge words of silver, young shaolin?”

Jin scoffed. “I reserve that for people who haven’t tried to kill me on multiple occasions.”

Once again, the mercenary across the table chimed in at his expense. “Quit your whining. Don’t you have any sense? The rest of your team understands the current situation. Maybe you should follow their lead.”

The shaolin turned around to face the offender. “I don’t remember ever asking for your opinion, old
“Can it, Jin. Cassie’s the one in charge here. She decides what we do.” The girl in question felt all eyes on her. She hated to admit it, but Jin did make some good points. Even so, she wasn’t in a position to decline. If they returned to Earthrealm, her parents would likely force them to come right back. They’d already made the decision for her.

Kotal Kahn must have perceived some sort of inner turmoil. “I would be greatly indebted to you and Earthrealm as a whole. I am very open to negotiating terms of peace in the future, once my empire and realm are fully secured. Something a bit more binding than a non-aggression pact.”

Cassie stifled a sigh. There it was; her parent’s goal all along. She cracked her knuckles.

“We’re in."

Chapter End Notes

Comments and Kudos are always appreciated. Next chapter is planned for later this week. Thank you for reading :}
The Source

Chapter Summary

Tanya and Rain find what they're looking for. Kinda.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Both Edenians were considerably shaken by their encounter with the soul collective. The living forest was unpleasant by itself, but they had hoped it would provide them a break from being constantly hunted. Apparently not. They’d barely escaped with their lives and remained on edge for the rest of their journey. By the time they arrived at the entrance to the flesh pits, neither one of them had any energy left. Tanya set fire to a nearby log and they both settled down to rest, sleeping in shifts. It wasn’t the most comfortable or safe place to relax, but they had to make do. They’d been making do ever since the end of the rebellion.

Tanya had been a little disappointed that Mileena hadn’t been waiting to greet them at the entrance, but still held out hope that they would find her inside. She wasn’t familiar with the flesh pits, but the empress had done her best to describe its horrors to her during the war. She peered down the staircase, getting anxious to see it for herself. Rain slumbered softly across from her, leaned against a large boulder. She had half a mind to leave him behind. He didn’t deserve to see the birthplace of their beloved empress. Sure, they’d both had their secret agendas, but Rain’s ambitions had included allowing Mileena to kill herself over time with the amulet. Tanya had been plotting numerous ways they could dispose of the half god after Mileena had reclaimed her throne, but it never came to pass. Eventually, she decided she still needed Rain in case the empress was weakened from her rebirth and needed her assistance. She toyed with her dark energy in the palm of her hand as she waited for the purple prince to awaken. The living forest was much quieter and sparser here, as if even the menacing and bloodthirsty trees had been afraid of the sorcerer’s dark deeds. She wondered what it must have been like for the empress, emerging for the first time into such a dark and dreary place. Although it was thousands of years ago, Tanya could recall her childhood in Edenia. It had been a bright and beautiful realm, with lush grass and sparkling streams. Shao Kahn had taken it all away, and the Osh-Tek fool had refused to restore it. Perhaps one day, she could show Mileena the real Edenia.

Finally, Rain awoke from his slumber. Tanya wasted no time, jumping to her feet and starting down the steps to the flesh pits. The demi god scoffed at her impatience but followed, checking behind them one last time. They reached the bottom and took in the scene as their eyes adjusted to the dim lighting. Cobwebs riddled the walls and corners and dried blood was crusted onto nearly every surface. Tanya spotted the large containers Mileena had described and was disappointed once again to find them all empty. Rain nearly tripped over a large pile of limbs and bones, making a noise of disgust. This was clearly no place for a royal like himself.

Creating a small flame in her hand to illuminate her surroundings, Tanya spotted a large bookcase on the far wall. She hurried over to it and scanned the spine of each book, looking for one that resembled the journal the empress had described. After accidentally stepping on a severed head and splattering it beneath his shoe, Rain huffed and turned to his companion.
“There’s nothing here. This was a waste of time.”

“Silence, Rain. If you aren’t going help me look then find some way to amuse yourself. Or better yet, make yourself useful for once and keep watch.”

The demi god clenched his fists. “Do not take your frustrations out on me! You were foolish to lead us here. No doubt Kotal Kahn is aware of our presence. You’ve led us to our deaths.”

Tanya ignored his reply and continued tracing each row of books. She’d nearly reached the final row when she stopped in surprise. She quickly grabbed a book bound with rough skin with a sharp spike serving as its spine. Opening to the first page revealed the title of the sorcerer’s project. The flame in Tanya’s hand illuminated the page and her sly smile.

*The Emperor’s True Daughter*

“You would do well to hold your foolish tongue, Rain. This book holds all the answers.”

“And what exactly will those answers do to save us from an attack?”

“Are you unable to teleport us to safety?”

“Not here. Shang Tsung must have wards that prevent such magic.” Rain could feel the strain on his energy as if the ghost of the sorcerer was slowly stealing his soul.

“Then the emperor and his lackeys will not be able to teleport here either. Just allow me a moment to read. Perhaps there is still something we have to do here to bring our empress back.”

With a sigh of defeat, the demi god let go of his protests and leaned against the wall. It was cool against his bare skin and no doubt covered in dust, but he was too weary to care. As strong and powerful as he was, being on the run had just about sapped all of his willpower. Things might have been easier if his companion was more cooperative. Despite their common goals and heritage, Tanya and Rain seemed to bicker at every turn. The edenian woman had been obsessed with finding their empress from the moment they realized she was dead. He’d certainly been aware that the two women had been close, but he was beginning to think there was more between them.

It had always puzzled him during the rebellion why neither one of them seemed to take a liking to him. He’d seen firsthand Reiko manipulate Mileena and had been planning on following suit. Rain had always thought of himself as an attractive man, and if his looks didn’t do the trick, his status likely could. But neither Mileena nor Tanya had been smitten with him like he’d hoped. Although he was successful in fooling Mileena with the amulet, he never had as much sway over her as he would have liked.

He glanced over at the ebony skinned woman who was hastily flipping through the worn-out pages. Although his efforts to woo Mileena had been in the name of manipulation, he saw Tanya in a different light. She shared his ideals of a free Edenia and would make a perfect candidate to rule by his side as queen. For some time he believed they were working together. They freed the empress from imprisonment and allowed her to rally her tarkatans while they plotted in the shadows. However, it became increasingly clear when Tanya no longer shared his bed and would disappear into the empress’s tent at night that things weren’t going the way he’d planned. Their time on the run had brought them back together as consorts, but Rain was almost certain she was just using him to fill the void left by Mileena.

“I’ve found something. Come look at this.”

Rain was snapped out of his pathetic thoughts by Tanya, who didn’t sound as excited as he’d
expected. *Bad news,* he assumed. He was careful not to step on anything else as he crossed the room to her side.

“I believe this is referencing her rebirth, but I don’t understand.” She pointed out the passage in question. Tanya handed the book off to him and he read aloud.

“In the event that a new vessel is needed to house the creation, one will be formed from the source and awaken on its own once the soul has harnessed enough energy.”

Tanya returned her attention to the empty containers, expecting one of them to begin bubbling with power as though reading the passage would trigger the reaction. No such thing occurred, and her hopes sank.

Rain followed her eyes and drew his own conclusion. “Perhaps her soul isn’t strong enough to reform yet.”

Looking down dejectedly, Tanya allowed the flame in her hand to fade. “How long are we meant to wait? The sorcerer provided no explanation.”

With a scoff, Rain began flipping through the pages on his own. “He probably wasn’t writing his notes with the intention of someone else reading them.”

Irritated with their predicament and Rain’s snarky comments, Tanya trudged across the chamber and placed a hand on the nearest container. She expected it to radiate magical energy, or at least be warm to the touch. Instead it was cool, the liquid inside completely still. She knew they couldn’t wait here forever. It was impossible to say how long the rebirthing process would take. Without their empress, they were back where they started. Wanted criminals. A price on their heads. Having Mileena wouldn’t change those things, but the tarkatans would follow her to hell and back. There weren’t many of them left now, but there were other denizens of Outworld who believed in honoring Shao Kahn’s will and would support Mileena. Without her, they were just two Edenians of questionable loyalty. They could never ignite another rebellion without her.

Just as she was about to begin weighing her options on what to do next, Rain made an observation of his own.

“Aside from her special attributes, Mileena was a clone of Kitana, correct?”

“Yes. They were intended to be identical. The empress once told me she believed she was originally meant to replace the princess and assume her identity.”

“Well it seems to me that you could say *Kitana* is the source of her creation.”

Tanya nearly jumped when the realization hit her. “You don’t think…”

Rain didn’t have time to respond, as both edenians abruptly turned towards the entrance at the sound of footsteps.

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A low growl escaped Mileena’s throat as she drifted to an uneasy consciousness. Her entire body ached as though it had been incased in stone for a million years. She struggled to open her eyes and then snapped them shut again when they were assaulted with a bright light. The empress gave up on trying to move and allowed her body to recover from…whatever had left her in this condition. She couldn’t recall what had happened, but the ground beneath her felt hard and rocky. She would have thought herself to be in the Kuatan Jungle had it not been for the silence. Every area of that jungle
was alive with the sound of birds and insects.

_Insects._ The word brought a bad taste to her already dry mouth.

When she finally felt she could move again, Mileena pushed herself up onto her hands and knees. Every movement sent a sharp pain surging through her and her arms were barely able to support her. _What happened to me?_ It was as though her body was learning how to move for the first time. Allowing herself a moment to rest before trying to stand, she slowly let her eyes drift open. The ground beneath her was dull and cracked and appeared devoid of any plant life at all. _Definitely not the jungle._ Looking up, she recoiled in surprise, finding that she was right next to a lake of lava.

Her mind was still foggy, but even so she could deduce that she was likely in the Netherealm. How had she gotten here? The empress recalled Kano’s failed assassination of the Osh-Tek traitor and her own attempt on his life. The amulet was immensely painful for her to use and it had rendered her unconscious. _What next?_ She’d awoke back at camp and Rain informed her that their location had been discovered and that an attack was imminent. She’d rallied the tarkatans for battle and then…

Nothing. She was sure something else had happened, but her thoughts were all muddled. It practically gave her a headache trying to concentrate so hard. It was difficult for her to imagine any scenario that would have landed her in the Netherealm. Perhaps Quan Chi had come to retrieve the amulet and had defeated her. It seemed unlikely. Why would the sorcerer leave her alive and alone in his realm?

Suddenly, the sound of breathing that wasn’t her own alerted Mileena that she was _not_ alone. Still unable to stand, the empress turned as far as she could muster to find the source. Only about ten feet away was another unconscious woman, similarly sprawled on the ground. The woman’s attire gave her a menacing appearance, dark jagged edges and a crown of some sort. Mileena had never known the Netherealm to have any queens. The woman seemed familiar to her somehow, and it became crystal clear when the empress spotted a pair of fans.

Her dry throat croaked as she spoke. “Sister?”

Chapter End Notes

_Sorry about the long absence blah blah you’ve probably heard it all before. Hope you like the way this is going. Also, who’s pumped for MK 11? Next chapter hopefully soon :)_
Chapter Summary

Cassie's team begins their mission while Mileena continues to struggle.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After they’d finished discussing their plan of attack, Kotal Kahn had rushed them out of his war room. Their mission was time sensitive after all. Cassie and her team followed Ermac as instructed and silently observed the outworld palace. Osh-tek warriors stared at them as they passed. Cassie winked at a few of them just to see their reactions. They either didn’t notice or didn’t know what winking even was and thought she just had an eye twitch or something. Boring.

The ghostly construct led them all into a small room with what looked like a well in the center. Taking a peek, Cassie found that it was filled with a substance that glowed green and drifted slowly like smoke. Pretty certain that she was looking into a well full of souls, she scooted away from it and stood at attention. The soul collective hadn’t said a word to them on their walk over, but now came to float directly in front of her. It was more than a little unnerving.

“Uh…yes?” Cassie marveled at how none of the souls he housed knew about personal space.

“Cassandra Cage, you are the leader, correct?”

“Yep.”

“Would you like us to repeat your objectives?”

She scoffed. “No, I think I’ve got it. You’ll teleport us to the flesh pits, we find the prince and his chick, and we subdue them.”

Ermac nodded. “Or kill them, if necessary.”

“Right.” That part made her a little uneasy. SF obviously taught them how to kill, but her mother always stressed to keep unnecessary casualties to a minimum. She would feel a million times better capturing the edenians and letting the emperor do the dirty work.

The team watched as the mummified warrior drifted over to his soul well and began absorbing energy. He made several grunting noises while doing so, and Cassie looked to Jacqui to share in her disgust. However, her friend’s expression was stony and unreadable, and she realized it must have been hell to have to work with someone who nearly killed your father.

Seemingly satisfied, Ermac hovered close again. Cassie could feel the raw energy radiating off of him now. “We cannot teleport you directly into the flesh pits. The sorcerer Shang Tsung left wards that prevent this. We will teleport you as close as we can; it will be up to you to find your way. Likewise, the half-god will be unable to teleport. If you are unable to stop them, do your best to weaken him so that upon fleeing he will have little energy left. If he is able to teleport to safety, then you have failed.”
“Ugh. Magic.”

“If they make an attempt to flee, pursue them as close as you can. We will be stationed at the nearest exit of the forest and together we can surely apprehend them. If you successfully capture them, you will bring them there as well.”

“Got it.”

“Very well.” With that, Ermac held out his hands and green energy surrounded them. It felt like they were in a wind tunnel, and Cassie swore she heard screams as the gusts passed by. She clinched her eyes shut, having no desire to see if there were pained faces visible on the soul energy. The noise faded, but when she opened her eyes there was a face looking back at her. On a tree. Guess that’s why they call it the living forest.

“Yuck.” Takeda covered his nose, regretting not wearing his mask. “Is the Outworld Morgue?”

He was right. Corpses and skeletons surrounded nearly every tree. Cassie spotted a relatively fresh corpse who was holding something that resembled an axe. While attempting to cut down a tree with a gaping maw was probably the stupidest idea she’d ever heard, she admired the bravery and saluted the man’s spirit in her mind.

Noticing Jacqui still looking uncomfortable beside her, she gave her a light tap with her fist. “Hey, you alright?”

Jacqui sighed solemnly. “I guess. It just doesn’t feel right. I mean, my dad said he’d been considering getting full cybernetic enhancements on his arms for years, and that I shouldn’t let it bother me. But that doesn’t make it any better. Does he think I never heard him screaming in the middle of the night while I was growing up?” Feeling herself get upset, she took a deep breath. “I just feel like I’m betraying him somehow, working with that thing.”

Cassie really wished she could think of something profound to say to ease her friends mind. She’d probably be feeling the same way if it had been her dad. Luckily, Takeda came through with something pretty good.

“Your dad only cares that you come home safe. And I’m sure he knows how important peace with Outworld is. You’re doing the right thing.” Cassie and Jin watched as the couple exchanged meaningful looks and shared a tiny little kiss. Cassie refrained from rolling her eyes and just let them have their little moment.

The shaolin did not. “This week on Love on the Battlefield: A moonlit romp in the living forest.” He followed this up with a mock puking sound and the young Cage stifled a chuckle.

“Very funny.” Jacqui crossed her arms. “I’m pretty sure I saw some sparks flying between you and that gunslinger”

Laughing openly now, Cassie chimed in. “Yeah, Jin. You never told me you were into older men.”

“Oh, drop dead!”

Jacqui wasn’t finished. “Betchya they were playing footsie under the table.”

Kung Jin shot them a dark glare and waved his hand dismissively at them, stomping off down the path. The girls giggled at the childish display. They all had entirely too much fun trying to get under each other’s skin.
“Knock it off you two.” Takeda playfully nudged both of them. “We’ve got a mission to accomplish.”

Cassie shoved back harder than necessary. “Oh whatever. You always come to his defense.”

“Because you guys always double team him.”

Jacqui snorted. “He always starts it. Don’t dish it out if you can’t take it.”

Ahead of them, the shaolin groaned and shouted over his shoulder. “I can hear you!”

Cassie cupped her hands around her mouth. “Good! Pro tip: don’t be an asshole!”

The telepath pinched the bridge of his nose. “We’re supposed to catch them by surprise.”

Speaking in only whispers from then on, the group moved as silently as they could towards their destination. Ignoring the stench of rotting flesh had been hard enough, but blocking out the moans of living trees had been nearly impossible. Jacqui nearly screamed when a set of roots latched onto her leg. They were quickly disposed of with one strike of Takeda’s whip, but they all walked a bit closer after that.

Just as Cassie began suspecting that they had taken a wrong turn and gotten lost, she heard voices in the distance. Checking behind her, the others met her eyes; they’d heard it too. While it was comforting to know the voices were real and not insanity setting in, it also meant it was game time. Drawing her weapon, Cassie continued forward and spotted an equally spooky looking staircase descending beneath the surface. They approached the entrance with caution, taking positions on either side to avoid being seen. She heard the voice of a man and a woman. Targets located.

However, the voices abruptly went silent. Cassie held her breath. She’d planned to ambush them mid conversation in the hopes of catching them off guard.

“Show yourself!” The man’s voice—Rain as she recalled—bellowed, echoing up the passage.

Shit. So much for the sneak attack.

Cassie started down the steps at a brisk pace, her team right behind her. “It’s over. We’ve got you outnumbered. Surrender and—” Her sentence was cut short by a powerful blast of water.

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Making her third attempt to stand up, Mileena only managed to wobble forward a few paces before she flopped miserably back to the ground. She growled angrily and pounded her fist against the ground. She couldn’t recall another time she’d felt so weak. The fact that she didn’t know how she got like this didn’t help the situation, but she was starting to get concerned. Aside from her still slumbering sister, she hadn’t seen anyone else. She hoped that meant Quan Chi was unaware of her presence, and she intended to keep it that way. Which is why she had to get away before her sister woke up. The fancy new getup Kitana sported clearly still represented her revenant status. Mileena was certain Kitana would bring her before the sorcerer or just kill her outright.

Mileena hadn’t seen her “sister” since the beginning of the rebellion. Outworld and the Netherrealm had been on the brink of their own war, and her allies advised her that aligning with Quan Chi would ensure victory over the false emperor Kotal Kahn. She’d been opposed to the idea at first, but Tanya had convinced her to at least make contact with the sorcerer. Perhaps he’d be open to taking down Kotal together and settling their differences afterwards. Begrudgingly, Mileena gave in and traveled to the Netherrealm with a small squad of tarkatans. Rain had elected to stay behind, not wanting to
taint his godlike soul with the evils of that foul place. Tanya, her most loyal adversary to date, had accompanied her. She was much better at diplomacy, and dabbled in some dark magics herself.

Realizing her struggling was getting her nowhere, she allowed her body a little more time to recuperate and indulged herself in the memory.

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As they stepped through the portal, Mileena let her eyes wander. The hellish landscape of the Netherrealm almost bored her. She much preferred the desserts and jungles of Outworld.

“So?” Tanya extended an arm towards the landscape. “What do you think?”

“Barren. Ugly.”

The edenian chuckled softly. “Agreed. Thankfully our realm is nothing like this.”

“Tell me about Edenia again, dearest Tanya.”

She smiled. “Another time, my empress.” Tanya tilted her head to the side. “The sorcerer approaches.”

Riding on horned beasts, Mileena spotted the wicked man. At his side, likely for protection, were two of his revenant soldiers. At his right, the Earthrealm warrior with the large bladed hat. Mileena remembered her father personally executing him in the coliseum. The thought made her grin, but Quan Chi’s other companion made her grimace. To his left, her dear sister, looking much unlike herself. It was strange to see her so changed. They were essentially both flawed copies of the once great princess. However, Mileena was the only one who had been an empress, so she believed that made her superior.

The tarkatan soldiers, who’d been observing the landscape and picking fights with each other, stood closer to their empress when the sorcerer arrived and dismounted his beast. His two revenant attendants followed suit and stood silently at his side.

“The fallen empress. To what do I owe this pleasure?”

With a nod in Tanya’s direction, the edenian woman spoke on her behalf. “We seek an alliance with you and your realm, mighty sorcerer. We ask nothing about your future ambitions regarding Outworld, only your aid in defeating Kotal Kahn who is clearly unfit to hold the throne.”

“And you believe the throne is rightfully yours?”

Mileena ignored his tone and answered as calmly as she could. “The throne is mine by Shao Kahn’s decree. I was usurped by a group of traitorous dogs and want nothing else than to be rid of them forever.”

The sorcerer laughed a deep, hearty laugh, enraging Mileena. Her fists clenched and trembled at her sides, and only the subtle stare from her edenian accomplice kept her at bay. They didn’t want to make an enemy out of the sorcerer.

“What is the earthrealm expression?” The sorcerer turned to Kung Lao as if the revenant still possessed a sense of humor. “Ah, yes. You’re grasping at straws Mileena. Even if you manage to destroy all those who oppose you, your claim to the throne is not enough. More will rise against you. Your efforts are futile.” The bald man scratched his chin, contemplating another sinister plot. “However, I will make you a different offer.”
Mileena and Tanya exchanged uneasy glances. Neither one of them had been prepared for this.

“Abandon your pathetic cause and join mine. I’m sure I could make good use of you. Just look what I’ve done for your sister. She’s never been happier.”

Quan Chi motioned for her to speak, and Kitana nodded in agreement. “It is true. I have thrived under the guide of Quan Chi.” Unexpectedly, she turned to address the empress directly. “Aren’t you sick of being a victim, Mileena? We have both been wronged by the same people. Shao Kahn lied to me my entire life about my true identity. Her murdered my father and claimed my realm. He may have left you his kingdom, but his former lackeys have turned against you. He created you for a purpose you are now unable to fulfill. I turned against him when the thunder god revealed to me the truth, but look where it has led me. He is responsible for the future we reside in, and he has aligned earthrealm to the side of your enemies.” Kitana stepped forward, and Mileena braced herself for an attack. Instead, Kitana offered her hand to the empress. “Join us. There is no place for you in Outworld. We can truly be a family as disciples of Shinnok.”

Mileena’s anger melted away as her mind struggled to process her sister’s words. She’d never viewed her life from that perspective before. Was it true? Was her struggle for the throne all in vain? She stared at her sisters outstretched hand, glowing with orange veins. Corrupted. Possessed. Her words made sense, but were they really her own? A glance towards Quan Chi revealed a dark, sly smile. Grinding her teeth, she batted away her sister’s hand.

“You’re merely a puppet, dear sister. I bow to no one’s will besides my father’s, and he wished for me to take his place.”

Kitana’s hand returned to her side and Quan Chi clasped his hands together loudly. “I think our meeting is over.” He mounted his horned steed again, the revenants doing the same. “My offer stands; feel free to accept at any time as your rebellion is crushed. Until then, I do not want to see you in my realm again.” With the wave of his hand, he summoned a portal behind them. “Begone.”

Once through the portal, Mileena dismissed the tarkatans and made a beeline for her tent. She swatted the flap open and stormed inside. Seeing the portrait of her late father, she roughly smacked it off its stand and sent it clattering to the floor. The empress threw herself onto her bed, trying to quell her anger and avoid going on a destructive rampage across their camp. She heard someone enter and prepared to skewer them with a sai, but recognized the scent of Tanya and just snarled into her pillows as the woman came to sit on her bed.

“Empress?”

Another deep growl.

“It’s no use getting upset over this. We knew it was a long shot.”

With a sharp grunt, Mileena sat up and glared at her companion.

“Is there a problem?”

The empress spoke through clenched teeth. “My sister’s words are distressing me.”

“You mean Quan Chi’s words. You said it yourself, she’s just his puppet. He was only trying to manipulate you. As if you’d ever consider abandoning Edenia for the Netherrealm. He truly is mad.”

Mileena didn’t look convinced, but Tanya already knew how to smooth things over. She allowed their legs to softly brush against each other, speaking in a sing-song voice. “I think I know something that will make you feel better.”
Tired and confused, Mileena leaned her head on the dark-skinned woman’s shoulder, eliciting a giggle. Tanya always knew the right thing to say.

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A groan snapped Mileena out of her trance; lost in the memory of her most beloved ally. She’d taken too much time! Her sister was waking up and she still found herself unable to move. Even crawling was too taxing on her sore limbs, leaving her collapsed on the ground pathetically. She did her best to right herself and not appear as weak as she really was. It was impossible to tell how her sister would respond to her presence this time. All she could do was hope for the best.

Chapter End Notes

Bookmarks, Kudos, and comments are always appreciated. More coming soon :)
Defeat

Chapter Summary

Kitana wakes up and discovers Mileena.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As she watched Kitana struggling to move, Mileena began to wonder if they’d already attacked each other. It seemed unlikely. Even though her body still ached and throbbed, she had no visible wounds. Aside from her stiff movements, Kitana looked similarly unharmed. She began to grow frustrated with her own brain for not being able to remember what had led her here. It would have to wait anyways. Her most pressing issue was figuring out how to talk her sister out of killing her. Since her body refused to work like it was supposed to, she’d have to rely on her words. Admittedly, Mileena was not the best talker. She’d never had to explain anything to anyone under Shao Kahn’s rule. As empress, her words were always obeyed (unless of course, you were a traitorous wretch). And as leader of the rebellion, she had Rain and Tanya to handle the diplomatic work for her. The only talking she’d had to do was to the tarkatan horde, and their language was much simpler. Fight. Destroy. Eat.

On the other hand, talking might not do her any good either. The revenants occasionally seemed to resemble their former selves, but more often than not, simply lived to carry out Quan Chi’s orders. Mileena recalled hearing that the earthrealmers had freed a group of them in the past, so their original souls must still exist within them. How much free will they have while under the sorcerer’s control was a mystery. Could Quan Chi control Kitana’s mind from afar? Could he read it? Once Kitana saw her, would the sorcerer instantly be aware of her presence too? It made matters worse that they were in his realm, where he is most powerful.

A grunt snapped Mileena from her worries. She returned her attention to her sister, who attempted to hoist herself up, falling back down roughly. It seemed they were both in a similar condition. Having no other plans in mind, Mileena decided she better start talking while her sister was still weak.

“Tried that already. You’re better off just sitting still.”

Jolting at the sound of her voice, Kitana turned to face her in surprise.

“You…How did you…you’re dead.”

The empress allowed herself a chuckle. “So are you, dear sister.”

With a scoff, Kitana turned away and made another attempt to get to her feet. Mileena felt no sense of fear, certain she had plenty of time before Kitana recovered. Hell, she still couldn’t stand, and she’d woken up first. With any luck, she may fully recover and escape before Kitana can even muster up the strength to crawl.

After falling flat for the fifth time, the revenant finally paused to catch her breath. Her frustration was magnified by the fact that Mileena of all people was witnessing her appear so helpless. That abomination was going to pay for this.
“What have you done to me?”

Mileena snorted. “That’s what I was going to ask you.”

“You will offer me no explanation?”

“I don’t have one.”

Turning to face her one again, Kitana noticed Mileena’s position. She sat with her legs stretched out in front of her, her hands supporting her. Her breaths were slow and relaxed, more relaxed than she’d ever seen her before. Normally, Mileena appeared like a wild animal, always ready to pounce on her prey. The sight only confused her further.

“You are unable to move as well?”

Mileena nodded, still concerned that Quan Chi may appear at any moment.

“Were the reports of your death false? Did you survive your encounter with D’Vorah?”

D’Vorah.

It all came flooding back. The traitorous Kytinn had infiltrated her camp to retrieve the amulet, along with a young earthrealm warrior. They’d defeated her, and she was brought before that pathetic excuse for an emperor to be executed. She could feel it. The bugs filling her mouth and forcing themselves down her throat, eating away at her from the inside. The pain had been unbearable, and she’d screamed as she felt her skin dissolve and her innards devoured. Darkness had closed in quickly, but not before she’d felt her body fall lifelessly to the ground.

The memory faded and she realized her fists were clenched uncomfortably tight. That was a memory she could have gone without feeling again.

“No.” She spat. “I was killed.”

“And yet, here you are. Unharmed.”

Mileena gave no response. Her mind was racing. Why was she brought back to life, and why here? Did this mean she was a revenant? She could notice nothing different about her own appearance, but was it an illusion? Perhaps Quan Chi did not want her to know she was a revenant. Perhaps none of the revenants could perceive their true form. Looking back to her sister, the thought seemed unlikely. Kitana appeared to have embraced being a revenant.

If it hadn’t been Quan Chi, then who? Mileena couldn’t recall the last time she’d heard anything about the sorcerer Shang Tsung. She’d been there in person when her father had absorbed his soul and used it to enhance Sindel’s power. Despite his death, she’d always wondered if he’d created another body for her within the flesh pits. Her current situation seemed to indicate otherwise.

Kitana had continued to observe her silently. Whatever had brought her here and left them both unable to move, it seemed Mileena was just as baffled as she was. There may have been a silver lining to the situation, however. Now Kitana could kill her wretched clone and be rid of her once and for all. It would be like one final stroke of revenge against the man who killed her real father and ruined her life. Killing the true daughter he made to replace her. Poetic. Now if only she could recover quickly enough.

The tarkatan hybrid was still trying to collect herself when the sound of hoofbeats rapidly approaching made her jump in panic. In one last ditch attempt to flee, she pushed off the ground and
took and frantic leap forward. To her surprise, her legs did not give out. Every step was wobbly and sent a small spike of pain upwards from her feet, but she kept running. She continuously teetered back and forth with each stride, but she refused to give up.

In the end, it made no difference. She was struck from behind by a fireball and toppled over with a yelp. The pain on her back was nothing compared to the immense feeling of failure. She’d been given a free pass from death and had been unable to put it to use. Now she would likely die a painful and pathetic death, again. Her father would truly be disappointed in her.

As she began to lose consciousness again, likely due to her overexertion in this weakened state, the fire burning around her reminded her of Tanya. The beautiful edenian had at times been the only thing keeping her going during the rebellion. She wondered what had become of her now. She wondered if she ever journeyed to the flesh pits, only to find them empty. She wondered if Tanya had given up on her. Perhaps she had been captured and killed by Kotal Kahn. The thought saddened her, but provided her a sense of peace. If there was no Tanya, then perhaps a second death was all she had to look forward to anyway.

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Walking through a forest with living carnivorous trees had been unpleasant enough. Cassie really could have done without being forced to run through it. It didn’t help that she was still soaked thanks to Rain’s initial attack that had drenched her whole team. Luckily, they didn’t drown, and the fight had quickly turned in their favor. Though they were both skilled fighters and magically inclined, the edenians simply could not stand against all four of them. They’d focused their efforts on Rain as instructed, and he was currently restrained and being escorted to the rendezvous point by Jacqui and Takeda. Tanya, on the other hand, had managed to escape. Cassie and Kung Jin were frantically pursuing the woman as she darted through the forest, not daring to veer off the path towards the bloodthirsty trees. Even though this path would lead them to the rendezvous point, Cassie knew she couldn’t let the woman out of her sight. If they couldn’t catch her, they’d just have to keep pursuing her until she ran herself into Kotal’s clutches.

Kung Jin alternated between his arrows and his chakram in an attempt to bring Tanya down. His aim was sharp, but she was unbelievably agile, and her magic seemed help protect her. Cassie had tried to gun her down, but chose to save what was left of her bullets and focus on the chase. If Jin fell behind, it would be up to her. Even though Tanya was visibly weakened from the fight, Cassie believed she would have turned and taken the two of them on herself if it weren’t for the book. Whatever it was, the edenian held on to it tightly as she ran. If it was that important to her, it could only mean bad news for the rest of them.

Just when she thought her lungs were going to collapse, she spotted two figures in the distance, and one of them was definitely floating. Would have been better to have the whole army there, but ok.

The sight must have caused the edenian to panic, as she abruptly skidded to a stop. She pivoted and lobbed a ball of flame back at the two earthrealmers, forcing them to dive out of the way. Cassie quickly rolled to the side and up onto one knee, aiming her gun on her target. She had to abandon this almost immediately and dodge the tonfa flying straight at her. It barely missed, nicking the side of her face.

Tanya didn’t get far. Now exhausted from fighting and escaping, Tanya’s attacks were easily avoided by Ermac. The soul collective lifted her with his telekinetic power and slammed her down hard. She groaned in pain, and with Erron Black’s gun aimed at her forehead, made no attempt to get up.

“End of the road, sweetheart.”
She gave no response, awaiting the finishing blow.

“We are to bring them before the emperor first, Erron Black.”

“I know. Just wanted see if she’d beg.”

Cassie would have liked to collapse on the ground and catch her breath, but there would be time to rest later. She and Jin approached the pair, trying not to look as run down as they felt.

Ermac had been examining Tanya’s book, but let it close upon seeing them. “We trust you have defeated the half god.”

Cassie nodded. “Affirmative. Takeda and Jacqui should be here with him any minute.”

“Good. The emperor wishes to interrogate them before their public execution.”

Kung Jin crossed his arms. “What happened to just wanting them dead?”

“The emperor must make an example of them. And he must ensure Mileena does not return.”

Cassie and Jin exchanged glances and silently agreed not to argue with the emperors reasoning and just be happy their mission was successful. After Jacqui and Takeda showed up with Rain, the group entered a portal and found themselves back in the palace. Both Rain and Tanya were bound in both magic and chains and escorted to the dungeons. Rather than greeting the earthrealmers with a smile and some form of gratitude, the emperor was instead flipping through the creepy looking book with a troubled expression. Although she was a little curious herself, Cassie just wanted to go home, shower, and sleep for a week. The four of them awkwardly stood off to the side as Kotal and his lackeys whispered among themselves around the open book.

Jacqui elbowed her in the side, motioning for her to say something. Sighing and readying herself to navigate another conversation with outworld royalty, she approached the table and cleared her throat.

“Emperor, I trust you are happy with our performance?”

Snarling and leaning aggressively towards her, Reptile snapped back, “Do not interrupt! The emperor is trying to concentrate!”

“Settle yourself, Reptile.” Kotal Kahn gently closed the book and faced Cassie. “Yes, I am very pleased. I had no doubts that you would be able to apprehend them.” He rose from his chair proudly, his confidence reignited. “Ermac, prepare them a portal to Earthrealm.”

The soul collective nodded and drifted to the far end of the room, his hands moving slowly as he conjured the portal. Kotal walked alongside the group as they eagerly awaited their return.

“Tell your mother I will be in contact with her soon to discuss realm relations.”

Cassie grinned. “Will do.”

The rest of her group perked up as well. They may have been exhausted, but it felt good to be at least partially responsible for something as important as peace between realms. Feeling the whole mood of the room lighten, Cassie dares to make conversation with her new soon-to-be ally.

“So, what’s in the book?”

Kotal Kahn seemed to consider answering for a moment before allowing himself to be honest. “I’m not entirely certain. The dialect is very old and mostly unfamiliar to me. But from what I’ve been
“able to gather, it has something to do with Mileena.”

“No surprise there.”

“Indeed, Miss Cage. Those deceitful edenians must be able to read it, or they wouldn’t have bothered stealing it. I’ll get them to reveal its contents to me, one way or another.” He chuckled, and Cassie laughed along politely. She’d never seen him this upbeat. It would have been funny if he wasn’t talking about brutally torturing people.

Suddenly, the doors to the war room burst open, revealing a small squadron of Osh-tekk warriors.

“Emperor, you’ve received a message from the Netherrealm. It’s urgent.”