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The Star of Zara  
And the Quest for Ladon

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Act 1:

It has been several weeks since the Valkyrie have merged themselves with the memories of the PAWS Soulforge and so far, Kumara has not had success gaining any usable intelligence as he had hoped for. He doesn't appear to be bothered by this either, but then again, he doesn't seem like the type, to let on- if he was bothered. I have decided to move into the house and start writing the accounts that Kumara had asked me to write, as well as to journal any of the observations regarding the house itself, which I find fascinating.

It is quite interesting how each morning there are slight changes, as if the house itself was alive and growing with each passing day. I asked Valkyries why these other Valkyrie are so different than she is, to which she commented by saying that "we are the same, except they are constantly interacting with these memories and these memories are growing in strength. It takes much effort to do this and they have to stay focused."

I noticed that some of these memories are starting to look different. One had an order shield on today, and yesterday another one had a shepherd's crook. I have not understood the importance of this, if there is any, but I plan to study these changes regardless.

A few days later something interesting transpired as Kumara decided to spend the entire morning outside of the house. Kumara was not listening to the memories as he normally does, so I decided to walk outside to see if he discovered anything. "Archmage", Kumara said, I have a message from my sister Hathors, and he handed me a book. "This is the Logic Matrix journal of my sister that she has gifted to us for our quest. I have taken the liberty to copy the book from the memories of Ladon, this morning for you." "Also, while listening to Ladon's memories and the message from my sister, the Champion next to Ladon spoke the word "compassion" to me.

"compassion", I said? I wonder what that means and what about this book? What is this supposed to be? "I have no idea, as I can only copy the book for you as I am not allowed to assist you with this part of the quest, since it is the endeavor of the people of your realm and you only", answered Kumara. "You must research the contents of this Logic Matrix, but Archmage, I am confident you will find the answer." I hesitantly looked down to the book and slowly opened the cover.

This Logic Matrix was fairly complicated at first glance, but after closely studying it for a few days, I have come to really appreciate the detail behind it. It didn't take me long to uncover the clues within and what the word, "compassion" implies. There is great amount of wisdom in this book to be unlocked, something I will be spending many hours investigating later.

I believe the Valkyrie in the house are slowly changing their appearance to be that of the virtues of our realm. A Paladin, a Shepherd, a Ranger and a Mage so far seem to be the themes of these memories. The memory upstairs that uttered the phrase "compassion" must be the bard. I figured that we need to find The Book of Virtue and hopefully there is some kind of clue inside of this book about compassion that leads us to the next phase of our quest. But how do we find the Book of Virtue, is the question.

I was going to ride to town and speak with the current Archmage Guildmaster about this topic, but before I did, I thought to ask Kumara for his wisdom. It didn't take long to get an affirmation that I was on the right trail. So instead of wasting more time, I did ride to Britain, but not to converse with scholars at the library, instead, I rode directly to Castle Blackthorn.

Another call went out from the Captain of the Guards and Mages' Guild across the land to assist with recovering this book, once I explained the story to them thus far. Since the Paladin and the Ranger were the first two recognizable memories in the PAWS Soulforge, I specifically requested we recruit the Paladins of Trinsic and the Rangers of Skara-Brae to see what they could find out about this book's location. That would only be the logical place to start, in which the court agreed with my assessment.

The Mages' guild and scholars of the Britain Library researched everything they could find about the virtues. The Paladins engaged with the business of demonic and undead forces, directly-with the sword, while the rangers searched the overland and enchanted forests for information, as only a scout could uncover. There was much promise and hope for our fellowship at first, but as time grew on, clues expired and dungeons were explored, yet there was no sign of "The Book of Virtue". What made matters worse was that winter was upon us and most of the fellowship had started to returned home. It became clear that our efforts were not going to produce anything meaningful and in disappointment, I returned back to Valkyries' house.

When I returned back to the PAWS Soulforge I found Valkyries in the same place that I had left her, but Kumara was nowhere to be found. I asked her about this and she said, "he will be back when he will be back and not before, but he will be here right when he needs to be", she added.

Great, more riddles, I thought and asked what she was working on, as she was clearly hard at work with crafting at the forge. "The Citizens of Britain have created a tree to celebrate the holiday season and require presents for the tree, but few are participating. I need to do what I can to help spread good will

and holiday cheer, as the bonds of mankind are precious and must be preserved, even if mankind fails to understand the importance of this.” I noticed some of the items, out of curiosity, that Valkyries was constructing and appreciated one item in particular. A brilliant white banner of very fine quality with small golden lilies decorating the entire field of white silk, with two angels on either side kneeling, while holding up the world in their hands. On top of this depiction of the world was a pure white dragon, which had its’ wings stretched out over the world and a brilliant azure and golden ray of sun-light behind it, as if proclaiming some kind of magnificence. Above that scene was also some kind of un-recognizable word or phrase. I nodded in agreement and appreciated the sentiments from my dear friend, then went upstairs to retire for the evening so I could plot the next course to follow to find “The Book of Virtue”.

The next day Kumara returned to the house but riding a large white and black dire wolf and with him were new recruits, I assumed. “Well met travelers and Kumara”, I said. To which Kumara responded by saying: “Archmage, this young lady here is Zara”, as he got off the back of the giant wolf, helping the girl down too. Looking to the young girl, and slightly bowed with proper introduction etiquette, “malady and well met” I replied. Then I looked to the other figure who did not look to be human and was mostly dressed in red, with gargoyle wings. “Hello Sir”, as Zara pretended to hold out an imaginary dress skirt to her sides and curtsied in response to my greeting.

Looking back down to Zara, I smiled then looked back up to the figure dressed in red garb, shield and spell book. And added, “well met sir?” Kumara ignoring my question while attending to the dire wolf instead as the man dressed in red spoke up. “Well met Archmage, my name is Valentine and I have come to lend my aid to Kumara and with your quest as well”. Kumara looked over to me and added: “This is a judge Archmage-but you know him as Saint Valentine, perhaps, as it is one of his many names. He is an agent of Venus and has rescued this girl from the clutches of this wonderful beast here.” The dog quickly snapped to attention, recognizing he was being talked about, then let loose a loud single bark in confirmation, as if saying hello to me, while wagging his tail furiously.

Startled by the display and taken back by all of this, I greeted Saint Valentine and the dire wolf too as one would not want to be on bad terms with a dire wolf, especially one who could understand words, such as this one could. We all then-walked inside to discuss the events that led the group back here.

What I learned was that Zara was following her father, a scout of the Skara-Brae Ranger’s Guild near the forests by Destard when she got lost and found a small cave in the mountains to rest. There, she was confronted by this large Wolf, who was alone, and Zara quickly found herself in a dangerous situation. Saint Valentine said that is he was led to Zara by Venus, Kumara’s Ancient Dragon sibling, and was instructed to teach her the ways of archery specifically. I asked why, and he didn’t seem to know, but did add that the mission presented to him was to confront an old friend of his and this girl was just a side task that Venus approached him about.

The girl was in danger and the judge rushed to her location and to her aid-just in time to cast a spell of love over the Dire Wolf immediately and when this happened the beast laid down on the ground and started to whimper. Zara realized she was just rescued from some great peril, but in her shock and terror, she also noticed the animal was injured. The dire wolf had a missing ear and had a broken front leg. Zara carefully approached the beast and put her arms around the great animal and said, "love cures all things".

It was at this time that Kumara had also arrived and was able to heal the wounds of the animal and repair the missing ear with the staff he normally carries with him. That part fascinated me, because after Kumara infused himself with the young mage, when he first arrived, he had this staff with him. I just assumed this staff was a part of the ensemble of the young mage, but apparently it holds the power of Kumara's dragon's breath, a type of signet, if you will. I dangerously thought to myself, what the Healers Guild would do to get their hands on this relic-then focused on the rest of the story.

Kumara didn't stay long and left instead to find and retrieve the girl's father, taking with him the dire wolf, while Valkyries strangely kept to herself by the forge. Zara and Saint Valentine finished recounting the story of her rescue and how it was that they both came to be sitting here telling me of their story.

"Well then", I said, looking to Saint Valentine that is quite the tale. Who is this old friend of yours, that you speak of, since he is now-clearly our focus? Saint Valentine replied, "another judge by the name of Nicolas". Saint Nicolas? I asked. "Yes", replied Saint Valentine. "We are going to kill Santa Clause?" This has to be some kind of folly, I demanded. As soon as I said this Zara became wide-eyed in terror and yelled out loud, "no!". "Don't kill Santa Clause!"

Saint Valentine continued by saying: "he has changed over the years and has somehow become corrupted and consumed with hate". This does not bode well, I thought to myself-and being perplexed by this revelation I asked, how will we find him then? "I don't know, but since we are in his season, I am sure it won't be too difficult a task" Valentine answered back.

Kumara was gone for a few days and during that time Zara was learning how to use the bow and the arrow from Saint Valentine. She was too weak to pull the bow string and the arrows only flung pathetically a few feet in front of her. I felt bad for the girl, perhaps she needs a smaller, less powerful draw and I suggested this to the judge. Valkyries decided to make Zara a bow more appropriate for the girl when one memory, the memory of the Ranger uttered the phrase "Twenty-Twelve". That was immediately followed by the memory of the Bard saying, "Zara".

Valkyries looked up to me and Saint Valentine and I were trying to process what was just said, then I looked over to the judge. Saint Valentine was in shock and even more puzzled than I was-as he clearly

knew something we didn't know. I inquired to his condition to learn what he was not saying out loud. "Archmage, do you have that copy of the Logic Matrix handy", he asked. "Yes", I replied, "but why?" To which he returned: "look up the number twenty in that journal and tell me what it says". I did as he requested and the number twenty seems to represent "The Book of Angels", which we don't have, but there were a few notes assigned to this specific tome written by the Old Ones in the copied journal of Hathors. The Archangel is represented by the number 2, the angel is represented by the number 4, the paladin is represented by the number 6 and the Valkyrie is represented by the number 8. I looked over to Valkyries and asked her what this means, in which she responded by saying, "I'm sorry Archmage, I have no idea-really, but I would be interested in knowing this information as you are."

Saint Valentine was informed of what was discovered and then he looked to Zara and smiled and said, "young lady, we are going to need-to get you comfortable with a composite bow instead." Confused, Zara look at him and asked the question that we all were thinking-as she said, "why?"

"Valkyries, can you construct a compound bow and also a brace for Zara to wear on her arm, something that she could use to assist with the compound mechanism of that bow, to allow her to train with this more powerful weapon", he asked. "I think I can figure something out", Valkyries responded, but in a confused, delayed tone. "Wait, what is going on", Zara interjected.

"I'm sorry little girl, I do not want to divulge the meaning discovered by these memories in case I am wrong, but If I am right, I don't want to do anything to prevent whatever is supposed to happen from happening. Let's begin your studies tomorrow once Valkyries has finished her work for you, shall we?"

Zara agreed and Saint Valentine left the PAWS Soulforge, saying that he would be back the following morning. Zara wanted to explore the house and asked Valkyries for permission. Valkyries nodded in her direction and the girl was gone up the stairs to look around. I looked over to Valkyries and wondered if it was safe for her to wander around the house by herself. Valkyries shrugged and said, "death and corruption have no power here-in this place, so she is quite safe". Then I said, "what do you think Saint Valentine was holding back?" Valkyries started to think about the question and seemed to get lost in her thoughts, then she looked up to her banner that I had admired earlier and began to cry.

"Dear friend, what is the matter?", I asked. Valkyries looked to me and smiled, then said, "a memory came to me Archmage, not of the girl Zara but of my past". I don't know what this all means to be honest, but it seems very important, both the memory I witnessed and what the judge is keeping to himself." I did not press Valkyries further on this, as she was clearly upset, then I looked over to her banner to study the pattern on the flag again more closely.

Sometime later Zara returned and beckoned Valkyries to pay her attention and so Valkyries did. "What is it", Valkyries asked. "Well mam I was thinking since the holiday season is upon us, that we could decorate the attic and put a tree up there, since there isn't anything up there anyways". Valkyries finished working on the arm mechanism and turned to Zara and asked her to try it on. As Zara was trying to figure out how to put her arm through the device Valkyries smiled and said, "I don't see why we can't do that and I think that is a great idea. Let me see what I can come up with, in the meantime I made you a place down here to sleep, so get some rest Zara." This seemed like a good time to retire for the evening myself. I wished the girls a good-night and headed upstairs to fall asleep reading as I normally do in my reading chair.

During the night I was awoken by a commotion playing out in front of me on the balcony. I quickly spoke the words to lighten the room and cleared my eyes. Valkyries had a mysterious figure in a black death robe pinned against the railing with a sword to this figure's throat, while the mysterious figure had an all-black dagger drawn to Valkyries' stomach. "What is the meaning of this" I demanded, as I raised up out of the chair I was in? The mysterious figure, said in a playful women's voice: "This is the Night's Kiss", referring to the dagger she was holding, "my lovely Valkyrie, are you sure you don't want to taste its' warm embrace"? Valkyries quickly rotated the sword she was holding and with a flick of her wrist slapped the women's hand with the flat part of the sword, then rotated the sword back up to the women's throat all within a single motion. As the dagger was knocked to the ground below the mysterious figure, Valkyries replied, "I'm quite sure".

The mysterious figure opened the palms of her hands and in her right hand the scythe she was holding fell to the ground and she said, "ok, ok, mercy-please. I didn't come to fight, but instead I came to deliver a gift to the girl and that is all." Valkyries began to let loose of her grip on the mysterious figure but left her sword at the ready as she stepped backwards. "I am sure the girl does not want any gift you could offer", Valkyries responded. "It isn't from me", as she produced, from under her death robes a pure white lute. "Venus instructed me to retrieve and deliver this thing here and so I did." Valkyries took the lute from the mysterious figure while the women in black collected her weapons and suddenly noticed the memory of Ladon (ImaNewbie) on the balcony and she then stopped herself, as if she was frozen in-time. "What is the meaning of this here", the mysterious figure demanded, clearly being upset by what she saw. Just then the memory with the Shepard's crook, next to Ladon spoke the words, "Pride", startling the women.

The mysterious figure now free from Valkyries' grasp and her weapons collected, proceeded to jump over the balcony and vanished into the night. As Valkyries ran up to the railing and leaned over, we could hear this strange woman in the distance, yelling through the blackened woods in the dead of night: "Adieu-adieu, parting is such sweet-sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be the morrow-or whenever my little Valkyrie". And like that, the mysterious figure was gone, as the silence filled the air once again.

Never a dull moment, I noted to Valkyries as I walked over to examine the lute in her hands. “There is an inscription on this Archmage”, Valkyries pointed out to me, as I Leaned in to take a look. I read the word “Lolo” and as soon as I did the memory near us said, “compassion”. I looked up to Valkyries and said Lolo is the Champion of the Virtue of Compassion, this must be his lute. “I hope that this wretched thing didn’t steal it from him then”, Valkyries commented. It is very much possible that she did, but she did say it was from Venus after all. Valkyries took a closer look at the lute and said, “I don’t sense anything evil about it, but quite the opposite, it should be safe to give to the girl”.

I returned to my chair and turned out the lights as Valkyries left the room, thinking about the chaotic events that had just transpired. I re-summoned the words of light again, found my dagger and held that close to my chest. I looked around the room and listened in the silence, waiting to hear any indication of sound at all. After convinced I would hear nothing more, I turned off the lights to finish my slumber, clutching my dagger tightly.

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End of Act: 1

- Archmage Guildmaster