

FIRESTORM PART ONE

A WORLD OF MAGIC STORY

The storm rose silently. No one in town had noticed, no one but the old fisherman on the docks. He gazed at the sky, feeling scarce a breath of wind when there should have been a gentle breeze. He decided to turn in early. Back when he was younger—and more reckless—he would've sailed right towards the gathering black clouds. But age brings wisdom, and wisdom told

him that today was not the day to tempt fate.

Elsewhere, a small caravan of merchants, noticing the worsening weather, had also decided to stop for the night. They drove off the road, and circled their wagons in a defensive ring, before lighting a fire and cooking a quick meal.

In the mighty castle of Summer Hold, the King was enjoying his own meal when the first drops of rain fell. He glanced out the ancient window for a moment, before returning to his food. Rain does not disturb a Castlian King easily, and King David Silver was hardly disturbed by anything anyways.

In the Salore Tavern, a merry band of musicians drowned out the sounds of rain and wind. No one noticed the water sluicing down the windows until a group of bedraggled Council scouts trudged in, water pouring off of their cloaks. But all the people did was close the doors, offer the scouts some towels, and invite them to join the festivities. The bartender mopped the floor and all returned to normal.

But under the ancient trees of the Whispering Forest, the rain was more like a heavy fog than anything. The trees sheltered the ground from the downpour, their mighty branches catching the water before it hit the ground. Every now and then a large

drop plopped to the ground, splashing where it landed. Three bandits huddled around a dying fire, trying not to fall asleep.

“Say, George, when do you think he’ll arrive?” asked the first, a scrawny youth with a head of yellow hair. George, a slightly older man with greying hair, didn’t respond. He had fallen asleep.

“Hush, we must keep quiet. Lighting the fire was risky enough,” replied the third bandit. She pushed damp black hair out of her eyes.

The youth frowned, but didn’t reply. The forest was silent but for the muted crackling of the fire.

“Sleeping on the job, are we?” a voice asked, amused.

The two younger bandits jumped. George sat up groggily. “Took you long enough,” he replied.

“I had to deal with some other business,” the owner of the voice said. He appeared like any other ambitious wizard, his gray robes damp from the rain.

George sighed, drawing his knife and checking its edge. “What’s the target this time?”

The gray wizard smiled. “There’s a caravan a kilometer from here. North by northwest. I want you to strike it. They’ve got quite some

goods inside, as I hear. I'll take a ten percent cut of whatever you find."

George nodded. It was evident that he was the leader of the group. "Is there anything you'll be wanting for yourself?"

"There's a red crystal in the third wagon from the front." The wizard's teeth glinted white in the darkness. "About palm-sized. It's mine if you get it."

"Good then." George got up. "Kiki, Revan, pack up." The two younger bandits got up as well, checking weapons, stocking arrows, and putting miscellaneous articles into their packs.

The wizard watched silently.
When they were finished, he turned to
leave. “Remember, meet me at
Seawatch when it’s done. I’ll be
waiting.”



“Can you believe it? The sheer audacity! Attacking a caravan so close to our city!” fumed the minister of coin.

The head of the mercenary guild sighed. “They get bolder every day. Once it was possible to walk from here to Umber Keep carrying a block of gold on your head without being harassed once. Good for business... but our business isn’t pleasant.”

The King frowned. “Are you sure they were just bandits?”

The captain of the guard nodded. “They said they saw the caravan passing them in the day and planned to steal from it at night.”

“Did they not realize that such a caravan would be heavily protected?” asked the minister of coin.

“Heavily protected?” The head laughed. “They had two barely trained rookies and a newly minted mage. No... this caravan was relying on traveling close to towns and cities for protection.”

“The mage. What was his name again... Kyle Auburn? We’ll have to reward him,” the King said, pushing a sheet of paper to the side. “The caravan would probably have been a complete loss had it not been for him.”

“Kyle is quite talented,” a new voice spoke.

“Mr. Booth. Pleasant of you to finally join us,” the minister said.

The wizard smiled. “I was held up by other things.”

“Visiting your cousins again?” the minister asked mockingly.

“Unfortunately, I have no cousins... that is, none that I know of.” The Vistarian-born wizard was used to being subtly—and not so subtly—reminded that he was not welcome in Summer Hold. “Perhaps it’s different here, but in Ironport we don’t require our wizards to account of their actions to the coin-kissers... but perhaps that’s why you call them accountants.”

The minister turned red with fury. “Be careful of calling people

names, Mr. Booth... you'll find that most don't like it."

"Whether they like it or not, everyone has a name."

"You know very well what I mean you—"

Whatever he had been about to say was cut off when the King rapped sharply on the table. Silence filled the hall. "Lamorak, the Lady Alexandra Marshall wishes to see you later today. Something about her son and his marks. Richard, I need you to contact the Alalean embassy. We've caught another group of smugglers."

"Alaleans. For such a haughty group, they sure have no class," the head scoffed.

The King fixed him with a sharp glare. “Fredrick, I’ll have no harsh words in this hall. Whatever they have done is in the past.”

Fredrick didn’t respond.

“Fume all you want but I won’t be changing my stance on this. And if you will, go fetch Kyle Auburn.” The King looked around. “Well what are you waiting for?”

The minister, head, and the wizard nodded and headed towards the door. It slid shut behind the wizard’s soft gray robes.

The King sighed and wondered why he bothered with so many advisors when all they did was squabble.