

The Day Before the Next- Part III, New Life; Old Grudges

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After the battle for l'Ambertrou, Jean's life has now been lead in a new direction in part 3 of The Day Before the Next as he hopes to start a new life.

Day Before the Next - Part III, New Life; Old Grudges

My eyes opened slowly with only blurred vision accompanying the previous trance I was coming out of. I groaned.

Sounds of voices could be made out in the background, maybe they were of my mind, maybe they were actually there, I couldn't tell. In the distance were two torches from what I could make out, the light brimming from the yellow-orange flame which hurt my eyes to see after being in so much darkness for only the Lady knew how long.

Beside me was found my armour on the ground, a shine to it, but I could make out nothing as I looked up at the pale wall beside me... that's when the scratches and creases of it's builders came through and the grey tone flushed into my eyes.

I found myself tucked into bed, and the boiling heat from the room was surprising for a place that seemed to be so damp. I was light-headed, but all right. Realizing my wounds and cuts from the battle had been bandaged, I laid back down. A single drop of sweat came from my precious forehead, trickling down my skin. As it did, a maid came in mumbling to herself in a hurry, with a cold, wet cloth in her hands, patting my temple, getting rid of what sweat came.

"Ah, good, you're awake." She said in a soft tone, "We thought we had lost you!" She said with a bit of joy to see her patient alive and well.

"Where... am I?" Was my quick, yet lingering, response, a quick answer protruded afterwards: "Why, you're in castle Saint Brillien, good sir."

Saint Brillien, yes, I knew the place. My home was Castle l'Ambertrou, or as we called it Castle Marcel. Over the Hill of Amone, leading to the plains of L'Anguille, and then a little Eastward, you had Castle Gourenne and then Saint Brillien, almost side by side, which many of the nobles poked fun at for having stupid land developments like that.

My mind wandered as it recollected bits of information as to why I was where I was. "l'Ambertrou... why am I not- wait, yes, the Chaos... it is no more, what of my-" My mind trailed off into an oblivion of sudden repression of memories and gut-wrenching moments. My mother's own head ripped from her neck, my father... betrayed, my brother's body trampled by dirty feet. They were dead. Those three words echoed in my mind, furiously assaulting my sanity.

Before showing signs of weakness, I asked the maid to leave me, lying back down in my bed. Two knights walked in right after. Oh the ignorance of them to not let me have rest with my memories. Standing at attention, one wore Silver armour with gold in its creases and detailing of all sorts, a large fleur-de-lys on his chest plate. I knew him; he was my father's friend. His colours on his clothes were blue and white, the provincial L'Anguille colours. This was Sir Reginald. He was a bit of an arrogant man, but with great self-confidence comes great skill I guess, a true leader on the battlefield. The other beside him I knew not, but his colours seemed familiar.

He was lathered in trinkets of the Lady, all sorts of little grail pendants and crosses, fleur-de-lys symbols scattered across him. His armour was gleaming silver, almost a mythril-like shine. His helmet was in his hands and a long purple feather came from its top. Gold designs, which must have cost a fortune, and all sorts of details were on his armour, and a large diamond was augmented near the top of his chest plate. His clothes underneath his armour that showed were purple and white, in his hand was a blade, fine, elven craft too. Seen rarely, he must be from the West of Bretonnia, closer to the Elves, or so that was the conclusion I had drawn. Both of them seemed to wear more ceremonial armour pieces, but the occasion it was for slipped my mind.

"Jean," Was the first word muttered to me from Reginald, "it is good to see you are all right." Words obviously escaped him to try and express what he was trying to say, and that was when the other knight interrupted: "Your home is no more, your family is... no more... you are the last of your family, and as far as we can tell the lone survivor of the betrayal of Castle l'Ambertrou."

Reginald sighed, turning to face the knight beside him. "This, Jean, is Henri Borechard, a vassal of the Lord of Roiglan in the West, in Lyonnaise." Henri nodded at Reginald's announcement, and bowed low to me.

"My Lord heard terrible news of your family, Jean, and so what few retainers would follow were sent from as far as Roiglan to your castle, only to find the corrupted ones had destroyed it. My Lord was a friend of your father's; it grieves him to hear of his passing."

My brow rose slightly from what he had said, starting to acknowledge the point he was getting to: "I wish to have you stay with me in the outer lands of Roiglan, under my supervision. Lord De Ponthieu would be graced to have a survivor from such a tragedy upon our lands."

I considered this momentarily... so fast was this offer, but I had nowhere to go, nowhere to live... I had no choice but to abandon L'Anguille for now and find shelter elsewhere. Nodding my head in agreement, they dismissed themselves to the Grand Hall, where Reginald began shouting out to the knights assembled outside.

They left me alone for a moment's peace. Ha! Peace... I wished such would come to me. I sat on the bed, deep in thought. Each memory scarred my mind as it came to me, the fury, the noise, the rumbling and bloodshed, the voices. My hands instantly rose to my head, pulsing in feverish and fickle flares, until I stood up, the swarms of words, memories, and the voices in my head, protruding from my mind only to come back like a snake and stab its venomous fangs into my rotting brain again and again and again and...

"SHUT... UP!" I screamed, shattering the previously omnipotent silence. As my voice rang, the air, like a spider and its web, tangled itself back together into its deep silence. Not a word was heard, not a sound was uttered, and not a single move was made. Even the brimming, fiery torches upon the wall softly calmed to a brittle flame.

A sigh escaped me. Concentrating for a moment, I took a few minutes to put my armour on bit by bit, and then stood up, looking in a nearby mirror, nodded, and marched out into the Grand Hall.

The great, spiraling pillars of stone rose up in columns of four to hold up the palace of a castle, on either side of the room of course, there were only two columns. Turning the corner, a picturesque sight came to me. The long, red, silk carpet, with gold lines down the sides of it, was rolled out in a royal and ceremonial matter. Along the sides of it, knights were knelt along the side, their swords pointed to the ground and their heads bowing down. The sun was shining through the glass high above in the castle, down upon the carpet. At the far end was a long, short podium with a long item wrapped in cloth. Behind this were giant stained glass designs of the Lady and of the Grail.

The maid who had tended to my bandaged wounds stood beside the podium, as Sir Reginald appeared from a back room walking slowly up to the podium, nodding to me, signaling me to come to him. The walk seemed so long as I came down, and up the 3 steps to the podium, where the maid handed Reginald the item and he knelt before me, holding it up with both hands.

"Keep it, it was your father's, and you too should use it. We found it by you when we found you." He said. The knights' heads turned up to look at me as I unraveled the cloth... and the shine hit me in the eyes.

It was Alexander's Great Sword. I clasped the hilt in my hands, the shine of the metal bright as it was held close to me, and its weight was heavy. I began to walk down to the great wooden doors on the other end, and as I did, the knights stood up as I passed and nodded to me, acknowledging the mourning and grief they believed I was going through.

The blade rested over my shoulder, holding it with one hand, the aura around it a light white and blue, as it began to surround me. My hair went to a dazzling white for a moment; my eyes shone a light blue, as it then dispersed. The

magical power in this blade was unlike any other. The great doors before me opened and a yeoman walked in, the reigns of a horse in his hands, and the beautiful steed behind him.

"A gift from Henri Borechard." he said in a thick Breton-Lyonnesse accent. Such generosity was unexpected from someone I had just met, but I accepted his offerings. As I saddled upon the horse and rode outside where the main gates, portcullis, and drawbridge were opened up, a small army was arrayed on the field before me, with Henri Borechard at the helm.

"As little as I can console you, Jean, these men before you marched across the entire province of Lyonesse and then some just to eradicate the dreaded Chaos filth which had led itself upon your home, time for mourning is accepted, but it would be wise to move on. You have years upon years ahead of you, and I have heard you have potential. Come with me to the West, you will find ease to your pain away from home, I swear it." were his words.

Somehow this man reached me as blunt, yet he had a way of making it sound so much better than what it was actually saying. His condolences helped, that's all I could really ask from someone like him.

The ride Westward was long, strenuous on mind, body, and soul. Was this the Lady's test for me to overcome? Did she not know that she planted within me the dreaded seed of hatred? Hatred for those who cracked the whip and burned life to ashes in blazing fires, rampaging savagely across the lands, killing and pillaging, destruction the only remnants in their devastating paths. Yes, my hatred to Chaos. No words could truly describe the loathe I had for the race of corrupted and foul ones.

My memory flowed, trying to drain it of sorrow and sadness, harnessing the emotions to further anger and revenge on the dreaded wastes. Such could be used in battle to a powerful extent. Many warned me during the years not to let it overcome me, but sometimes it was just too hard. Even in a unit of knights, disciplined, well-trained, and strong, I still galloped faster to the front than the rest, I still ravaged through the savages' bodies with my lance and blade alike, cleansing the world of those most hated by our realms.

Off of that, Roiglan became a home for me. Its vast amount of land was good for me to just get away from life and death alike. It seemed like only the day before that I had came to the main humble town, yet it was over the course of a year that it had become. Under Borechard's vision, I completed my Errantry quickly. My brave tests against the dangerous scum who opposed me were quickly overcome with the strength of my anger and the skill of my lance.

After I achieved my true Knighthood, I was only 16. It isn't exactly that old and it isn't the youngest ever seen either, but it was still young at that. 2 and a half Years passed from that date, that's when things finally changed from my routine life. Routine... I love that word; I call 3 and a half years a routine! Every day of those years it was the same knightly life, though, as everyone else.

Tend to the lands, tend to the peasants, make sure taxes are paid, defend the land, and go on patrol, the usual daily chores.

It was funny because... I wasn't use to that at the time. It seemed so different to lead a normal life, even for a little while. Ever since those few days that changed everything, it was like there was a certain significance that was lacking in my life, something that wasn't giving me the satisfaction of my knighthood, of my courage being boldly seen, my confidence challenged by my foes. It really didn't make sense to me that I felt this way, but then again, at the same time, it felt good to take time away from life with such a casual and lax one.

As I said, though, things finally changed in only a matter of 3 and a half years, 2 and a half since I reached my true Knighthood. Let my thoughts recall my life's sudden epiphany of my significance.

"What?!" Borechard yelled to the Yeoman before him. His face turned a brilliant red for a moment as he turned to me, calming down. "The vile men and beasts of Chaos sacked Gresdale." he said. Gresdale was a castle on the edge of the Mousillon-Lyonnesse border just south of here. I had met the Lord of the castle only twice: Once, when our armies converged to rout an army of Greenskins, and a second time to defend the coast of Lyonnesse. His name is not important to this tale, but if you wish to know it, it was Lord Forésen.

"Sacked Gresdale? Do you jest?" I said in a haughty matter. Such a thing wasn't usually seen as possible. The tactical advantages purely outweighed anything that some disorganized mob of men could come up with, yet somehow they had accomplished it.

By the Western sea, the castle burned with a dark delight. My head shook in disbelief as we approached it. Countless savages were screaming incoherently at the raging fire as our knights approached them. I spit on the ground at their sight. "Chaos." I muttered in hate.

Their leader could be seen from here. He stood out like a sore thumb, the one warrior wearing black armour, a helmet with horns large enough to impale a man, amongst a group of fur and pelt-covered Norsemen. Large axes were held in their hands, sharp enough to crack armour and drink blood, and with them came a slew of beastmen. Countless ranks of them were seen dancing and chanting around the raging fire.

The hundred of us assembled in line for a charge, our lances at the ready, and they saw this as they began a pre-

emptive retreat. Fleeing like cowards... the Chaos way of living, sacking, burning, maiming, killing, then just fleeing back where they came from. A way of life one can never respect. Without a moment's notice, I kicked my horse's sides ahead of time and speedily charged ahead of the rest. A great cry was heard from the knights as they joined in, the thundering of hooves accompanying it.

We spread out in formation to fall upon the Chaos in a storm of lances as they fled faster from us. I knew my target, the man in black. His blade was slowly being retrieved from his sheath as he saw me riding towards him. My lance tipped down, and I ducked low to my steed, readying for impact, yet something threw me off. His blade came and as he charged at me, a shoulder piece corrupted my concentration. A broken shield was being used as a shoulder piece, a trophy on his black armour... it was white with an inner shield painted Purple and Green; my heraldry; Beregond?