

Journey to the Void Lands

Footsteps echo down the hallway, then stop.

“Rin... Rin... Rin, wake up! We don’t have time to let you sleep,” teased Zet from where he leaned against a gnarled tree.

“I wasn’t sleeping, especially not in this twisted mockery of a forest. I was trying to divine what is up ahead. But I guess cats can’t ever leave their masters alone, can they?” quipped Rin.

“Ouch, low blow,” the mischievous beastfolk chuckled. “Well, if you weren’t sleeping, then what’s with the drool on your face?”

“There isn’t drool –“ Rin began.

“Enough children,” a grizzled old half-elf interrupted. “None of us have any idea of what’s ahead, but if you both keep at this, we might as well announce our approach.”

“Yes, Dad,” Zet murmured under his breath.

“Rin, did you see anything new this time or just the same dark hallway?” asked Gilsaran, ignoring Zet’s comment.

“Just the same echo-y dark hallway,” shivered Rin, “footsteps approach slowly, and right before they get to me, they stop.”

“Hmph,” Gilsaran replied. “Let’s see what Silver brings back this time.”

“I’m sure it’ll just be more of the same,” the red-haired gnome, Taddis interjected. “*Real* birds would be able to tell us more and be less conspicuous than that snow crow familiar of yours, Rin.”

“Now now, Tady, not all of us can just squawk at any bird we want, like you forest gnomes do,” teased Zet.

“I prefer the wild beasts to those of magic too, Taddis but a familiar is a useful tool,” added Gilsaran.

“If Gil and Zet both agree on something, it has to be a bad omen,” Taddis mock whispered at Rin.

Forcing a laugh, the short human woman said, “I know you mean well, Tady, but please, don’t joke about ill omens. I’m really worried about this. I haven’t been able to get any other images about this place, and everyone else from Az’mar who has tried has seen even less.”

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"I know you're worried, Rin, but there is little else we can do at the moment but push forward. Here," Zet pushed a plate of foraged berries and some rabbit cooked over the fire to Rin; "I know Gil's cooking is awful, but you should eat at least something before we go."

"If you don't like it, you cook," Gilsaran replied

"You know he hates being called 'Gil,' Zet," Rin admonished.

"Just eat and let me worry about Ol' Gil," Zet replies with a wink. With exhaustion, Rin finishes off her food silently while the others looked on in concern. No one was looking forward to continuing the trek towards whatever lay before them.

Once everyone was packed and ready to begin the long trek again, the group covered their small campfire and set off. With night fast approaching, there was a sense of urgency that they make it the last few miles toward where the other groups had disappeared from. Within the Unmade Lands, a new ruin had appeared. This wasn't something too unusual but, "manmade" structures usually indicated a new race and if not a new race, a new piece of the "history."

While the city of Az'mar is all some people ever see of the world, Impios, is a vast and growing place. Impios is a relatively new world. The first and oldest race on Impios were the Elves a little over 1800 years ago. None could remember anything before the first day here, though they knew about their culture and knew those around them as friends or family. As the decades went by, new races were brought to Impios with the same story, and scholars have been trying to figure out what came before, ever since. To organize and defend themselves against the monsters that roamed the landscape, the city of Az'mar was founded. Az'mar lies in a very fertile field with a large river within walking distance. The Elves, Dwarves, Beastfolk, and Humans were the founders of the city near 1300 years ago. Since then, Az'mar has become the largest city in Impios and is the center of their world.

"Are we there yet?" whispered Zet to Rin in an attempt to raise her spirits.

"No," she sighed, "we haven't even met up with Silver, but he's very close now. A few more minutes and I'm sure we will run into him."

A gleaming white crow swooped down from a break in the trees and landed upon Rin's outstretched arm. "What did you see?" she asked to her familiar.

Silver cawed back, "No men, two pillars, dark pit, didn't enter, hungry." While Silver could "speak," he did so in the language of crows, only Rin, his summoner, and Taddis, a forest gnome, understood what was said. Taddis relayed the information to the other two, while Rin fed Silver some of the berries they have saved.

"I'd rather you actually sent him *into* the entrance rather than just around it," Gil grumbled. "The bird isn't even real, and you can summon another if something killed it."

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“You may not feel it when he gets attacked, but I assure you, it’s not pleasant. Just because he’s not a *real bird* doesn’t mean he doesn’t experience the pain of dying,” returned Rin.

“I get your point, I’m sorry,” Gil replied with a sigh. “I’ve trusted you and Silver for a decade now, and that hasn’t changed. I just really don’t like going underground without knowing what’s waiting.”

“I can perform another Augury if you’d like me to, it’ll just take time,” Rin suggested.

Zet interjected, “We’ve got the time, Gil. Tady and I can check ahead and see what we can find.”

“I supposed you might as well, but stay silent,” Gil said.

“Silent, you’ve already lost me,” Zet replied, as he faded into the brush.

“Showoff,” Tady murmured, following after Zet.

Gil returned to keeping silent watch as Rin began the ritual of augury. Never the most devout, Gil worshipped the gods and goddesses in his own way by attending the temple and leaving offerings when required. He just held more belief in his sword arm, than in a deity’s divine intervention, especially since they didn’t seem to have any rhyme or reason to make such a dangerous and erratic world such as this. Over the last 2 centuries, Gil had personally escorted hundreds of caravans across the relatively safe, Made Lands, the more wild but stable, Half-Made Lands, and the dangerous and volatile Unmade Lands. To date, this was the smallest and least equipped excursion into the Unmade Lands that he had ever gone on.

To make matters worse, two of their party had been required to stay in Az’mar rather than accompany them. Those two were “too valuable” to risk. He kept the reason for their absence a secret from the others as he always did, but he was confident they were suspicious.

Across the small camp, Rin pulled out a pouch of incense and used her divine magic to light a small amount of it in front of her on the ground. Seating herself comfortably, she began the ritual of augury. After completing her prayers to the Gods and Goddesses of foresight and knowledge, she pulled a single card from the middle of the deck. She knew immediately it was the right card as she felt a small shock when she touched it, as if it was electrically charged. Thanking the deities for their wisdom and insight, she waited for the incense to finish burning out and flipped the card over to study what meaning it could have. The card she drew made her gasp in surprise.

Gil was pulled from his thoughts by an audible gasp from Rin. Expecting an attack, he drew his sword and rushed forward. “What is it?” he said, looking into every shadow.

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“Nothing immediate; put away your blade. The card I drew worries me.” Rin replied, a nearly perfect mask of calm upon her face. Nearly perfect.

Gil knew the augury was much worse than she admitted, but let her conceal its true meaning without argument. Nothing good would come from forcing her to share what she didn’t want too.

“Let’s wait for the others, so I only have to explain it once. I need time to interpret what the card means,” Rin said as she withdrew a few feet from where she was in an attempt to gain what little privacy she could without getting too far away from Gil.

After a few more minutes, Zet and Tady returned to the group. Zet was carrying an extremely plump squirrel with him, “For later,” was all he said to Gil’s puzzled expression. Tady appeared a moment after him, she was gasping for air due to the effort of pushing back all the branches and leaves that were in her face due to her short stature. “I could have carried you,” Zet teased.

“Try it, and I’ll make sure the group swallows you whole,” Tady replied, settling to the ground with an appreciative sigh.

Everyone’s gaze fell to Rin, who sat with her back straight, and her eyes unfocused, not seeing any of them.

“Well?” Tady said. “I know we were gone for a while, but you’ve had time to figure it out, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” Rin said emotionlessly. “I just don’t think anyone is going to like the card I pulled.”

“We’ve been through worse and made it out ok. Just let this supreme example of a warrior protect you,” Zet replied with forced humor. The silence that followed was long and drawn out..

“I pulled the Void card,” Rin said with slow, intentional words. “I’ve never seen a Void card before, I haven’t even heard of one being drawn before. A Void card is exactly that, a void. A giant nothingness. That is what awaits us inside. Nothingness.”

“But if it’s nothing, then why do you look like we aren’t coming back from this?” Zet questioned.

“I’m afraid of nothingness. Even a Woe card would have been better. Knowing that our fate was shadowed by ill omens would be better than nothingness. Nothingness implies neither good, bad, neutral, anything. It implies there is no future down there. There is NOTHING!” Rin exclaims. “Sorry, I’ve had spells fizzle or fail, but I’ve never had one return with a *nothing* before.”

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“We’ll take it slow and let me lead,” Gil announced, trying to regain control of the situation again. “Stick close to me. Rin, you’re on detection duty. Zet, be ready with your knives. Tady, be ready to collapse the tunnel ahead of us if we need an escape. Let’s go.” He pushed through the brush towards the unknown. Silently they all followed after the heavily armored Gil. They all trusted in Rin’s divination but at that moment, they all hoped she was wrong.

With Gil in the lead, the others didn’t have to worry about getting whipped by the brush as the knight was quick to cut the path clear for them. They all suspected this was to work off frustration as much as anything else but they followed without a word. As they neared Gil looked up through the canopy, barely visible through the thick trees, were two massive pillars.

“Wow,” Zet murmured, coming to stand beside Gil, “Even I’d have trouble climbing to the top of one of those.”

Gil replied, “I’ve seen you scale walls and climb into attic windows that are almost that high, what’s so different about these?”

“You see those carvings, my guess is a mage made those. That pillar will be smooth as a chest plate, and the edges of the carvings will be sharp enough to cut through gloves,” Zet mused.

“If it’s a mage’s work, I’d rather not get too close to them,” Gil admitted. “Ah, no offense of course Taddis.”

“None taken,” she glared.

Paused at the edge of the brush in front of the tower sized pillars, no one could see or hear anything around them. Erring on the side of caution, Silver was sent just inside the entrance of the tunnel, but nothing unexpected occurred. The night was soon approaching, and while most of the party didn’t have much of an issue with this, Rin, being a human, was unable to see without an external light source. The group decided to use a little of their vital magic to cast a spell of Darkvision upon her so that she would be able to see without the aid of a torch or crystal which would give away their position.

“Is everyone ready?” Gil questioned the group. “Everyone’s vials are full?”

The group all silently patted at special padded pouches containing four small vials of blood, one vial from each of them. “Remember, if it doesn’t seem like we will make it, take the vials and run. The priests will make sure we are brought back as long as they have our blood. But be swift about it. Tady, you are the only one who can be guaranteed to get there in one piece with your portals. Don’t be a hero.”

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Tady rolled her eyes with annoyance. "We've done this a hundred times before, let's get moving already."

With a nod and a serious expression, Gil stepped from the brush and toward the entrance saying "Until we all meet again."

Each in turn echoed this phrase, as much for reassurance as for good luck and tradition.

The slope into the darkness was easy and quick. At the bottom, a framed tunnel lay before them. The tunnel was without lights and even those with excellent dark vision could barely see the crudely cut timbers that formed an ill fitting frame around them. They all could tell that it wouldn't take much to collapse a portion of the tunnel. While silently creeping forward, Gil was the first to spot a thin, nearly invisible piece of rope stretched across the bottom of the floor. Pointing it out of the group, they quickly stepped over it, and with Zet's careful eye, they found the spiked ball that would have dropped from the ceiling and swung at them. Carefully unlatching it, they let it hang suspended where it wouldn't get in their way should they have to make a quick exit.

Communicating with touches and hand signs, Rin pointed out a pouch with an enchantment on it. To her eyes, the pouch glowed brightly in the dark due to her magical detection spell. Her vision blurred as the drain of casting had begun to affect her mental focus, but the spell was worth it if it kept them alive and out of traps.

Stooping down to inspect the pouch, Tady's vast magical knowledge led her to discover that it was a pouch of preservation used to keep spell components fresh for extended periods. What surprised her the most, though, was the insignia of House Darklight upon it. Confirming it with the rest of the group, they all began to worry. House Darklight is one of the ruling noble houses in Az'mar, and finding something as essential as a spell component bag here was a bad sign indeed. Pocketing the bag to return later, the group continued down the tunnel.

After several minutes of running into dead ends, the group finally arrived at a much sturdier part of the tunnel. Gil stooped to touch the smooth stones beneath him, and Rin confirmed that they were not magical, but manmade paving stones.

"Who do you think did this?" Zet whispered, "The tunnel we came through was way too twisted for it to be the main entrance. Do you think we stumbled into the escape passage?"

"It's beginning to look that way," rumbled Gil. "If this is the escape passage, we may have escaped notice so far, but there's no guarantee it will continue to be that way. Be careful. Zet, I'm not the one who should be in the lead if this is inhabited. Scout ahead, but stay within earshot." With a nod, Zet silently crept forward on the soft pads of his bare paws. Slowly and as silently as they could, the rest of the group followed.

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The room that Zet glimpsed as he exited the passageway was enormous. The meeting hall was one of the largest he had been in outside of Az'mar's guilds. He could see it was styled much like an amphitheatre with a dark stone throne positioned directly in front of him, where a stage floor normally would be on the lowest level, beyond that were four rising levels each with sturdy stone benches on them. He emerged silently as he padded towards the back to the throne, being cautious of what may be waiting for him in every shadow. While he usually wasn't this cautious, Rin's admission about the unknown Void card had him spooked. Coming around to the front of the throne, he pulled his daggers from his belt and let out a warning yowl.

Hearing Zet, the rest of the group charged ahead at full speed to get to help him. They were only 60 feet behind him, and he was very skilled at dodging to buy time until everyone could get there. Gil who is the largest and most heavily armored, quickly fell behind as Tady's fly spell propelled her over his head and down the tunnel like a diving bird looking for prey. Rin stayed just in front of Gil as her eyes lost focus again as she prepared to empower the group with her divine magic.

The sounds of two metal daggers clattering to the floor were deafeningly loud in the echoing hall. A grey color hand connected to an arm as thick as a tree branch was holding Zet by the throat and crushing his windpipe. Zet's feet were dangling above the floor, and the corpse-faced horror was impossibly strong. He knew better than to enter a room without someone there to back him up. Rin's prediction had him spooked, and he screwed up. All he could do now was buy time for everyone to get to him. Grasping the forearm of the hulking undead in front of him, he dug his sharp feline claws into the cold, dead tendons of its arm to seemingly no effect. His vision went from red to a black tunnel that closed in on him. A jolt of lightning shot through him from the contact with the creature. Tady, fingers splayed wide, had just unleashed a bolt of searing electricity into the faceless being.

Taddis flew into the throne room just in time to see the muscles of Zet's arms begin to go slack as he was choked to near unconsciousness. She raised her hands and incanted the words she needed to call forth lightning. With luck, the wild magics within her would stay controlled long enough to keep her friends safe from their random and destructive effects. The grey-skinned humanoid in front of her released Zet in a spasmodic fit as its muscles fired from the electrical energy passing through it. Without slowing down, she flew off to one side, in an attempt to distract the undead from Zet, and landed two rows up, making her near eye level with the 7-foot fall being.

Rin's magic felt like it was ready to explode from her, and she did everything she could to hold back the divine light until she was within eyesight of everyone. Entering the throne room and picking out each of them in turn, she released the light she had been holding, and the strength of her faith empowered all those she chose. Not a split second after that, she saw the creature they were fighting which caused the light of her magics to dim visibly.

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Gil felt the warmth and radiance of Rin's spell strengthen his resolve as he charged into the throne room. He saw the look of horror and defeat on her face, and wanted to wrap them all in Tady's portal magic and escape back to Az'mar. The only thing that kept him from commanding just that was the resounding oath he took when he joined House Thane. "You will stand between the weak and those who would do them harm. You will fight till your last breath to ensure the survival of those behind you. You will never flee from your enemy knowing you leave bodies behind." Until this thing was slain, many more parties would be sent down here, and they would be killed as well. Giving Rin one last concerned look, he summoned a blade of radiant light, given to him by his Celestial patron and he charged the enemy before him.

Zet hurt. He could barely breathe, and he knew instinctively, the potion he was going to force down his throat would hurt even worse. Pulling the glass vial from his bag, he tossed it back, forcing down a scream as if needles had just exploded in his throat. He stood and picked up his daggers to rejoin the fight. While he knew he couldn't do much until the pain in his throat subsided, he mentally locked onto his target, venomously swearing, "Next time you'll be the one on the floor unable to breathe." Emboldened by his sworn oath and the warmth of the potion working at repairing his damaged throat, Zet used the distraction provided by Tady to get behind his foe undetected.

Tady had her back to the wall and nowhere to run, what a poor, poor fool this undead monstrosity was. Everyone knows you should never corner a wild thing. She whipped up her hands and spat out a single word of power, and a bolt of swirling color erupted forth. When the bolt struck the creature, a green, foul-smelling sludge struck it and began to sizzle its flesh. With a cackle, Tady spat a word again, and this time frost erupted on the chest and upper arms of the creature. With all the spells being flung around in quick succession, Tady's breaths were coming in large gasps, but the smile on her face never left.

Rin was roused from her thoughts by the roaring charge of Gil. His fearlessness helped return her to the present. This hulking undead brute wouldn't stop her from saving her friends. Seeing that Zet had just drunk a potion and was back on his feet, Rin spoke a prayer to heal him further, and by her word, Zet's wounds continued to heal. Assuring herself, he was fine; she called out, "It's an undead warlord. Treat it like you would a lich, but they don't use magic. They just drain the life from anything they touch."

Hearing Rin's warning Gil understood the danger of getting within arm's reach of the brute, but there was little else he could do. The magic he had at his disposal was a gift from the being that gave him his sword, and they all focused around it. Calling out the name of the sword, it ignited with a blindingly bright light, and he slashed the creature across the back twice. The radiant flames burned the creatures badly, and it began to roar deafeningly. More deafening roars answered back.

Zet had one goal, bring down this hulking undead before it could get to anyone else. As Gil's sword cut it, he found an opening and struck. As the small blades severed the creature's spine

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and its roar died out, Zet heard the answering calls. “Run!” he shouted back at them all, but it came too late. Tady stood there, paralyzed with fear. The magics she had been concentrating on fizzled and she curled into a screaming ball. Looking for help, Zet saw Rin’s tear streaked face. He knew everything he needed to at that point.

Tady couldn’t move. A terror unlike any she had ever known gripped her insides and twisted. All she wanted to do is make the roars stop echoing in her head, but all she could think to do was cover her ears and scream to drown out the noise. Zet was near her, but there was nothing he could do. She just needed to think for a second; she needed to rationalize what was happening. As she thought that, a radiant light enclosed her, and she was no longer afraid. Rin had freed her mind from the nightmare that had taken her. She turned to Rin to thank her, but the look of resignation upon her tear streaked face nearly caused her to curl back into that ball and scream again.

Rin called to Zet and Tady, “You both need to go. I can hold them back for a while, since they are undead, to give you time, but Gil will never leave until he is certain you’re both safe. Go now, or we will all die. Wait where we camped last night until dawn. I don’t think they will follow you much past the entrance if at all. They are tied to this place, now run!”

“But Rin,” Tady pleaded.

“Go!” Rin shouted, “You are the one who has the highest chance of getting back with our blood. They can always bring us back that way. Now Go!” Rin knew they would be indebted to the Guilds for several years but it was better than being dead.

Tady and Zet turned to run down the tunnel they had come through. Gil came to stand next to Rin in front of the tunnel. “I’m getting too old for this kind of the last stand, you know.”

“You realize you’re saying that to one of us short-lived humans, right?” Rin said with a smile. “You were already old when my grandparents were born.”

“That’s exactly what I mean. I’m entirely too old for this.” Gil replied.

The doors on all three sides on the chamber burst open, and undead poured through.

“Until we meet again,” Gil saluted.

“Until we meet again,” Rin replied.

The chamber was long and winding. Where Zet thought there were exits, there were dead ends. Where they thought they had disarmed traps, the traps were armed. Whatever was going on down here, something wasn’t right. Tady and Zet pushed hard to make it to the exit. They knew the dangerous and ever-shifting landscape of the Unmade Lands was still a better option than staying down here. Tady could teleport them back to Az’Mar, but she needed space and time, something that wouldn’t be an option while underground. Coming to what they felt was the last

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passageway before the exit, they found the tunnel had recently collapsed. Screaming in frustration, Tady cast a beam of pure force into the rubble, and it turned to nothing but dust.

“Nice,” Zet called out as he ran through the dust and up the slope toward the outside. “I haven’t seen you cut loose in what, minutes?” He crested the slope and stopped dead in his tracks, all hint of humor dying on his lips. “No.” was the last thing Tady heard from him before his desiccated corpse was thrown back down the slope towards her. Back in the Merchant’s Guild of Az’mar, a candle that had burned brightly for 23 years went out.

Gil let out his loudest battle cry drawing all the attention he could away from Rin, who was now visibly glowing as she prepared her magics. He wasn’t going to let a single one past him, and as the front line barely held together, skeletons grabbed at him. He unleashed a burst of radiant light from his sword, causing all those immediately around him to fall to the ground, now piles of inanimate bone.

Rin’s faith was unshakable. She believed in the divine goodness of her Gods and Goddesses. They had never forsaken her, and they would protect her and her friends now. “The divine light burns away all that profanes the miracle that is life.” A pulse of radiance emanated from the holy symbol she clutched, and the undead who were weak turned to dust while many of the stronger ones simply turned their backs and fled. One, however, pushed through the fleeing mass and leveled a shriveled finger at her. No voice assaulted her ears, but the threat was clear. This was what lay beneath the ruins.

Tady screamed in rage and hatred for whoever had done this to Zet. Unleashing all the wild magics she had stored within her. She cast a flying spell upon herself and launched a bolt of the flame at the first undead being she saw. When the bolt of flame slammed into the undead horror, magic swelled within her, and the skin of her fingertips split and bled a vibrant blue glow of magic. Dodging several arrows loosed from the bows of skeletal archers, Tady called down a bolt of lightning whose impact was so significant, it left a visible crater in the ground around it.

The magic in her fingers receded, but the wild magics within her flared again, this time causing her to teleport back into the air. Luckily her flying spell was still active. More arrows flew at her, this time one caught her right calf. It hurt, but she was beyond pain at this point. She then spotted a shriveled and desiccated corpse in flowing black robes. This creature had to be the one that killed Zet. Gasping in gulps of air as her stamina began to fail from the spell casting, she launched a ball of flames into the undead horde, but at the last second, the spell fizzled into nothing but mundane flames that the wind quickly dispersed. Staring in disbelief, the last thing she did was the skeletal hand of the lich point at her, and she fell to the ground, dead, before landing. One of the hundreds of candles within the Naturalist’s Guild was extinguished.

Rin’s magic was holding back as many as could be expected, but Gil could already tell that this one wasn’t going to relent. It’s silence terrified him, but summoning all the courage and power he could, he charged at it. In contrast to the regular zombies and raised dead, this creature was overly muscled and strong. While dead, it’s bare chest seemed to possess a vitality unlike all

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undead he had ever encountered. The undead goliath moved with precise and slow movements. The greatsword it pulled from its back could split a rider and horse in half with one slash. If he got hit with that, it would be the end. Slamming his sword into his shield with a roar of challenge, Gil dove low and brought the shining blade up into the stomach of the undead and pierced it through. Yet, the creature made no noise of pain or rage. Withdrawing the black blood-covered blade, Gil jumped back, ready to block or dodge any attack that came his way.

The hulking undead pulled the two-handed greatsword from his back and slammed it into the ground, narrowly missing Gil. Rocks flew as the stones beneath the blade shattered. Recovering from the missed swing, the creature swung again, catching Gil's shield and tearing it free from his now broken arm.

Rin watched as Gil's arm shattered. The impact of the great sword against his shield was more than any mortal could hope to block, but he has no choice. If he had tried to dodge, he would have lost his footing on the newly broken stones. She went running to him to heal him, but one glance at the hulking creature told her it was suicide. She instead called to her gods to give Gil the strength to stand against such a foe, and they answered. A divine light ignited within his eyes, and the pain of his broken arm troubled him not. He stood once again, radiant blade shining to face the creature.

With the power Rin had given him, he feared nothing could ignore the pain that had nearly cost him the fight. Channeling the power of his sword and the being who gifted it to him, Gil slashed out and the blinding flames that had erupted from the sword burned the flesh of the undead, turning its black blood to dust. Jumping back, so the creature was facing him and not Rin, he taunted it to attack him.

The giant undead, burned from the blade, focused all his energy and rage on the old knight. While he remained completely silent in his fury, the great sword showed no mercy. Undead muscles bulging, the great sword whipped through the air, making it whistle. A stone slipped beneath the knight's foot. Gil failed to dodge, and the sword cleaved him in half, armor and all. One of the longest burning candles in House Thane went out.

Rin ran. Gil was dead. She saw him die, and her power to turn the undead had not effected this undead brute. Her only chance was to escape and catch up to Tady and Zet so they could return to Az'mar. Between the four of them, they could split the debt of having him resurrected, and they would all live to loot another dungeon. They would have it paid off in even less time if the other two who didn't join them on this mission pitched in. She could make it. Her breathing was ragged and her mind was foggy from all the spell casting, but the way was clear. Zet and Tady had made sure of that. Up ahead, she even saw the blasted clear rubble from what must have been a cave-in. Thank the Gods they had made it out. She tripped and fell on something lying on the ground in front of the ramp. "What was that?" she asked to no one. Looking closely at it, she recognized the sharp teeth, the tan muzzle, and the pointed ears of Zet. She covered

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her scream, muffling it. Now listening to what was at the top of the ramp, she heard the clinking of armor and the rattle of bones. "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no." She repeated to herself. "Tady had to have made it out. She had to have." But even she wasn't so optimistic as to believe that. A black hooded figure appeared at the top of the slope and saw her. With a gasp, she retreated back down the tunnel and took a turn she hoped would throw them off so she could double back and flee. She sat as silently as she could, listening.

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