

PATH OF THE DEATHLESS (BOOK 2 COMPLETED)

3 Festival

And so the war between the Yellowstone Republic and the Necrotechs came to a bitter end at the Battle of Blackedge. As the Republic's reinforcements arrived to stall the tide of the Necrotech Legions, a daring group of heroes led by Pathbearer-Master Roland Arrow pushed into the depths and slew Abyssal Lord Udraal Thann.

This shattered the morale of the Necrotech Legions, and as they collapsed into chaos and infighting, the Republic began a full counteroffensive, pushing the threats back into the Abyss and purging any unholy nests that lingered too close to the surface.

In the aftermath, Pathbearer-Master Roland Arrow returned to his fortress stronghold of Blackedge to proclaim his victory to the capital, and to establish his claim over the great fissure splitting the ancient kingdom of Lost Angeles as he obtained the Title of Town Lord...

-A History of the Eclipse War

Festival

“Itha. Switch with Marco. You’re supposed to peel the potatoes, not your own fingers.” The elf eyed Shiv warily for a moment before he casually slammed his knife on the chopping block. She moved very quickly after that, heeding his orders. He allowed himself a slight smile as the others worked doubly-hard under his watchful gaze.

Something he discovered about himself was that he was a good Sous Chef. Very good. Where Georges liked to yell with his lungs and scream insults, Shiv liked to “shout” by driving his blade through the board.

For once, the fear-aura induced by his Omenborn Curse came in useful. People were scared of him. Scared people listened. Scared people worked faster. Scared people didn’t waste time defying or complaining. Pair that with the fact that Shiv was more than good enough to fill in for any role they failed as relief cook, and the Swan-Eating Toad was churning out meal after meal with minimal issue.

What problems they did have within the kitchen were handled by Shiv with ruthless efficiency. The problems with guests on the outside? That was

something Shiv left Seymour in charge of. The goblin wasn't any good at cutting, or mixing, or reading recipes, but he was a charming little creature who had an uncanny talent when it came to calming people.

An automaton server rushed in, huffing gasps of electrical static despite not having actual lungs. She laid a stack of empty trays as she came in to pick up the new items that were due. A hovering stick of chalk constantly updated the conditions of orders delivered and pending along the corner wall as dictated by Georges or Shiv. Not that it was needed for the latter. He remembered. He kept track of everything. "Orders thirty-five, twenty-three, seventy-four, eighty-one delivered. Good feedback. Table thirty-five is adding another dish—"

"Another?" Marco moaned. Shiv glared at him and started hacking into the cucumbers with more ferocity. The man paled. "I mean, yes, another please! I want them to order more!"

"What do we want?" Shiv grunted.

"More orders!" the rest of the kitchen cried. Someone working the grill began to cry. But it was all part of being a chef.

Georges burst in through the back door with a balled up list of orders in hand. “Table Sixteen has been occupied by a gang of wankers. Shiv. Have everyone spit in their food.”

“Yes, Chef,” Shiv said. “Smokers: Clear your phlegm—no evidence.”

As the dishes for desk sixteen were passed around and graced with special sauce, Shiv felt Georges tap him on the shoulder and point toward the freezer. Time for another talk, apparently.

“Parsley—” Georges began.

“Parsley! Take over!” Shiv shouted reflexively. He paused. “Sorry, chef.”

Georges hummed. “No. Just... more cursing next time. They need it.”

As he led Shiv into the freezer, the Omenborn knotted his apron and threw it over the top of the door to stop it from closing fully. He didn’t need another incident where someone accidentally locked them in without noticing. Like Georges that one time. That was the day Shiv learned the head chef did indeed have the Physicality to yell for a literal day.

“So. What now?” Shiv asked.

“Now, we prepare to wind things down here and head to Starhawk’s Perch. The real fun’s about to begin.”

Shiv’s heart skipped a beat. “Already—it’s—”

“It’s almost four. The sun’s starting to go down. The festival is going to be starting soon at the Town Lord’s mansion.”

“I thought we were going to be making things here.”

Georges shook his head. “Security. Lord Arrow needs someone to supervise and analyze the contents of the food. Extra tight this year because—”

“The wedding. The guests... His son...”

“Yeah, exactly.”

The Omenborn still wasn't sure about this. "What if they see me? I don't think they'll let me in."

"They already have," Georges said. He handed Shiv a golden badge bearing the emblem of a hawk drawing a greatbow with its talons. There was also a strange pattern of spells on the back. It looked pretty enough. "This is a special pass marking you as a guest of honor and not some assassin trying to do something sneaky." Georges pulled out a badge of his own, and Shiv narrowed his eyes.

"Why is yours mithril?"

"Because I'm not a guest. I'm head-felling-chef, son. That gives the privilege to invite one guest of honor."

Shiv blinked. "You used that on *me*?"

Georges looked at him like he was stupid. "Who else do I got to spend it on? How else will I get you in?"

“I...” Shiv still didn’t have anything to say. Georges was playing a dangerous game. If Lord Arrow found out about this—*when* he found out about this, Shiv wasn’t sure if Georges was going to get out of this unpunished. “We... We better make some good godsdamned food, I guess.”

“Yeah. We better.” Georges sneered. That was the same audacious sneer that he gave when he went out and got in a fight with one of the customers.

The streets were filled with revelry and noise by the time they got out. Pyromancers sent twisting serpents through the air, dancing to the delight of children and drunks alike. Illusionists practiced their trade on every corner, showing dramatic scenes from the last great war between Yellowstone’s heroes and the horrible monsters from the abyss.

Vendors hawked their wares and called out to anyone who would listen, while the streets were draped in a carpet of rose petals.

Which wasn’t great for Georges. “Pollen. Bloody felling pollen—every bloody felling year.” The man sneezed as he stomped his way through the streets. People who saw him followed by Shiv offered them a wide berth. The Omenborn’s presence was like a coming plague. The path he took saw the

aforementioned vendors, artisans, and performers screaming for people not to flee as parents pulled their children away while most spat and made gestures while invoking the divine.

“We could have taken a carriage,” Shiv said.

“Yeah, but I wanted to walk,” Georges replied, uncaring about the looks they were getting.

“You don’t seem bothered.”

“By what? The rubes?” Someone spat behind them. Georges spat back and intercepted the spit with his own globule of phlegm.

Shiv arched an eyebrow. “Is that a skill?”

“Reflex. Things feel slower when I focus. It’ll be that way for you too, once you get past 20.”

“If.”

“When. Stop bloody worrying. This’ll work.”

Shiv really hoped so. But aside from a few people acting decently around him, most of his life could be defined by things not working.

Blackedge was, by most standards, quite the bland and unremarkable town. It wasn’t particularly large, housing only around fifty thousand people. Most of its buildings resembled bunkers due to its past as a sky fortress, and to this day, most people here were either Slayers or Soldiers or some Path that logistically supported Slayers or Soldiers. In the end, that made the whole place rather compact as well.

The town could be sectioned off along two tiers: the lower level where most of the commerce, businesses, and housing were located, and a higher level occupied by Starhawk’s Perch—the town lord’s residence and castle. Well, it was more looming tower than castle, considering how high up it went.

Shiv looked at the golden, gleaming pillar rising above all the other dome-shaped buildings around him, and he swallowed slightly. Rumor had it that Lord Roland Arrow saw everything, heard everything, and knew everything that happened in Blackedge from atop his tower. Rumor also had it that his

Awareness skill was so advanced that he could hit someone from over the horizon.

Shiv didn't know where the legends began and the truth ended, but even an Initiate Pathbearer was like a blur to him, capable of pulling apart a lesser vampire with ease. Shiv, meanwhile, barely won his fights through preparation, cunning, and a lot of fire.

So. It was best to assume that Lord Arrow knew where he was, that the man was always watching. In that case, if an arrow didn't blow a hole through his chest, Shiv took it as a sign that Lord Arrow was fine with his coming.

It took them the better part of an hour to reach Starhawk's Perch—with them getting stuck in a security checkpoint to get past the parapets protecting the castle. The security eyed Shiv several times while Georges glared at them. Almost everyone in the town knew who Shiv was thanks to the ritual of his birth, but the Town Lord's guest badge was the Town Lord's guest badge, it seemed.

As they approached Starhawk's Perch, Shiv saw it from ground level for the first time, instead of just gazing at the tower from the lower level. It was quite like a bird's nest in terms of design. Curving bands of glistening metal and flowing magic protected its exterior, while its balconies were staffed by scores of archers—most of them automata rather than human, elf, or goblin.

Shiv was used to people staring at him. He was not used to walking toward a group of very unfriendly-looking archers.

“Stop being so bloody tense,” Georges said out of the side of his mouth. “And stop staring at them.”

“I’m afraid they’ll shoot me.”

“Well, if they do, it won’t be your problem. Those bows will turn a Pathless like you to paste.”

“Thank you, chef. I feel worse already.”

They went around the side of the castle instead of just marching in through the front door. A good thing, as Shiv didn’t much want to come face to face with either of the Arrows during this little “invasion” of his. Instead, he and Georges went in through a servants’ entrance, and once again, Shiv noticed a distinct preference for automata workers rather than humans.

“They’re harder to taint,” Georges said.

“Hm?” Shiv asked.

“The automata. They might not advance nearly as fast as a human, but they’re harder to taint by far. There’ve been attempts before on the Town Lord and his son.”

Shiv grimaced. Everywhere he went, there were reminders—scars left from the *ritual*.

They made their way through the servants’ entrance—and by now Shiv was absolutely certain they made a mistake. The automata might not be easy to taint, but they were still fearful as humans were, and they knew who he was. It wouldn’t take long for the Arrows to find out. Shiv imagined getting thrown out from the Perch. Or just killed outright if either was in a poor mood. But what about Georges? What would they do to Georges after—

“Eyes forward. Shoulders back. Put this in your mouth.” Georges handed Shiv a cigarette.

“I don’t smoke.”

“It’s not for smoking. It’s just to hold. Show that you’re not scared. Part of being a respected chef is being able to tell someone to go sit on a knife with a glance.”

“I think that’s just you, chef.”

“Yeah. And that’s why I’m the most respected chef in this place—”

“No! Absolutely not!” The whirring of metal limbs sounded, and an automaton with spider-like legs dressed in a noble’s doublet came rushing forward.

“Georges! Have you gone mad? What is this?”

Georges gestured at his smoke. “Sorry, love. I have to get in the mood before I—”

The automaton zipped past him and loomed over Shiv. The Omenborn faced the mechanical life form with a slight grimace but betrayed no other hints of fear. This one was a Pathbearer too. They had to be. Some kind of butler, maybe. Their face looked like a facsimile of a human. Most automata did some way—something about them being created by humans in the time

before the System. Whatever the case, this one was human enough that its bronze face could crease with outrage. “Why did you bring this... this...”

“This is my guest of honor,” Georges explained.

The automaton wheeled on him, sending other servants scattering. “What?”

Unauthorized content usage: if you discover this narrative on Amazon, report the violation.

“I got a guest of honor badge and I gave it to him,” Georges shrugged. “That’s what they’re for, right?”

The automaton butler seemed on the verge of exploding. Steam was hissing out from his beady, glass eyes. “You—you—Lord Arrow will hear about this.”

“I hope so. Tell him we look forward to making him several dishes. That he won’t find a better set of chefs in the republic, and that he can feel free to chuck us into the abyss if he’s disappointed.” Shiv turned to stare at Georges, pleading for the man to stop talking. “Now, unless you want to countermand the Town Lord’s authority...” He gestured at the badges on his and Shiv’s

chest. “You should consider pointing us to your kitchen for the grand feast, and standing aside.”

“I—you—he should have never purchased your indenturement from the capital! You deserve to rot in that penal colony! He’ll hear about this!”

As the butler let out a vicious scoff, he shouldered past Shiv and Georges without pointing them toward the kitchen.

“Come on,” the head chef said. “Let’s get this done before we get in trouble.”

“I thought you said—”

“You gotta be audacious to get someone to change their mind sometimes.”

“And what’s this about a penal colony?”

George’s grin faded slightly. “A City Lord had an allergic reaction. Felling nobles always overblow things.” The look on his face told Shiv not to dig further.

After some questioning, Georges managed to find the kitchen, and he entered with Shiv at his side, greeting the present staff. Lord Arrow's personal chef—an older man with a finely trimmed mustache, turned to greet them. "Head Chef Georges, I must say that your presence here is an incredible honor—" The rest of his well-wishes died at the sight of Shiv.

Georges walked right past him and immediately began ordering the staff to their stations. "Alright. We'll start with the Honey-Glazed Hawks. I hope you felling shits read the recipes I've sent you and memorized them well because we're going to make this good and perfect, or else..." Georges pointed to Shiv. "Well, we never know when the Omenborn's Curse might go off."

Shiv sighed. And there was the other reason Georges probably brought him: It was easier to bully people with Shiv.

"What is the point of you being born? What did your mother push you out for? You know what I think? I think she should shove you back up the way you came and see if she can get a return coupon to try again! Because everything you do is so! Felling! Disappointing!"

Cooking > 19

Shiv smirked slightly as he finished applying the sauces to the Honey-Glazed Hawk. The bird's skin was nice and crispy, looking almost golden in the light, and the flavors it released into the air were heavy and sublime. Pair that with the new advancement he got in cooking, and some of Shiv's earlier nervousness faded, replaced by focus and a mission: To cook the best feast Town Lord Roland Arrow ever tasted.

Over the course of five hours, over five hundred dishes were prepared. Enough to feed an entire battalion of warriors. And every single one had gone perfectly. The Town Lord's personal staff was remarkable and well-disciplined, and they took Georges's abuse relatively well. The same couldn't be said for their usual head chef.

"Y-yes, chef," the older man sobbed, his head bowed as Georges breathed smoke into his face. "You're right, chef." This wasn't a development Shiv was expecting. He knew all chefs had their pride. Georges especially had his. Yet, right now, the other chef was expressing a sense of remorse and subservience to Georges.

In fact, he seemed to think very highly of Georges.

“I—I—” the other chef tried to breathe.

“You—you what?” Georges sneered.

“He can’t talk very well, chef, he’s crying,” Shiv said offhandedly as he rushed over to the vegetable station and threw out some poorly prepared vegetables. “Those have black spots on them.” He glared at the team of elves and automata manning the station. “That was incompetent.”

“I didn’t make him cry,” Georges muttered off by the side as he kept glaring at the man he was trying to ruin. “He made himself cry.”

They didn’t cry like the head chef did with Georges, but all of them went pale with terror. Shiv ignored them as he continued with preparations, making up for their mistake by redoing the salad. As he sank into the task, he felt someone pat his shoulder.

“Shiv. Keep an eye on these clowns, yeah? I’m going to use the loo.”

“Loo?”

“Pisser.”

That was more understandable. Shiv never could guess where in the republic Georges was from. Across the big river was all the man would say.

The Omenborn committed himself to checking all of the dishes in great detail. Most of the people here were better chefs than he by skill alone. But he was, as Georges said, a pillar. He didn't stop. He never stopped until the job was done. And until it was *perfect*.

His mind felt tired from how long he'd been concentrating, but he squeezed a little more out of himself. Enough to make sure there were no mistakes anywhere.

He was so engrossed in his task that he failed to hear the rest of the staff gasping and halting where they stood. He then failed to notice them all rushing out of the room, one after another.

The last thing he failed to notice—until it was too late—was the only other person in the room ripping a piece free from the Honey-Glazed Hawk and putting it in their mouth.

At the sound of the crunch, Shiv did a double-take. “Hey. What are—“ he growled as he wheeled on the offending fool with a knife in hand. “That’s for... for...”

Shiv’s words trailed off. Before him was a man. A Pathbearer. He was a bit shorter than Shiv—a bit shorter than Adam Arrow, even. Despite this, his features were immaculate. Almost angelic. A glow radiated from his body, making his hair seem like streams of gold. He wore a sky-blue jacket that did little to hide his Master-Tier Physicality.

The man was strength. He was power. He was authority.

He was Town Lord and the by far most powerful Pathbearer in Blackedge, and here he was in his own kitchen, stealing a nibble before the feast even fully began.

“For me?” Roland Arrow asked, his tone even, face expressionless.

The knife fell out of Shiv's hand and clattered to the tiled floor. "I—yes, Town Lord."

The Town Lord chewed the meat, savoring it thoughtfully.

"It's not poisoned," Shiv said, his brain numb.

Roland nodded. "I know. And it likely wouldn't matter. It would need to be particularly potent to harm me."

Shiv opened and closed his mouth. What was he supposed to do? What was he supposed to say? He wasn't dead yet. That was good, right?

"Come. Walk with me. I think it's time we spoke honestly about things."

Roland led Shiv into the palace without another word. The latter followed in a trance, his insides feeling like a block of ice. The hallways were eerily empty and silent. Like the Town Lord had them cleared. Shiv felt like he was marching to his execution, but despite this, a part of him was excited.

Maybe the Town Lord could change his mind. Maybe Roland Arrow was going to finally absolve Shiv of the things his parents did.

The walk lasted only minutes, but it felt like an eternity. They reached a white platform with a spell painting its surface, and Roland stepped on. Seconds after, they were ascending at staggering speeds. Shiv felt his stomach lurching until they finally came to a stop.

As they got off, Shiv found himself inside something between a study and a watchtower. The windows and floor around this place were transparent—which made Shiv realize he didn't much like heights—while a large wooden desk sat in the center of the room. Two chairs stood behind it. One looked worn with time and use. The other was coated in a thick layer of dust, but pristine otherwise.

Roland pulled out the worn chair and sat down. Shiv stood before the desk, still in his chef's attire. He folded his hands behind his back to feel more like a soldier reporting to his commander than a prisoner awaiting sentencing.

"So. Here we are." Roland breathed out slowly. He shot a weary look at the chair beside him. Shiv tried not to wince. He didn't have to guess who it once belonged to. "Sometimes, I wonder what Rose would say to me. I think I can

guess. She was always the better between us. More noble.” He paused. “Not really all that nice, though, to be honest. She had a temper.”

Shiv felt like a voyeur. He didn’t want to know these things. Especially about someone his parents killed.

“I knew your parents too.” Roland’s expression flattened, and he closed himself to hide his rage. But the man failed. The hate burned in his eye, making the structure around them rattle. Shiv eyed the glass floor warily, worried it might break.

Roland Arrow could likely survive a fall from this height without issue. Shiv would be a smear.

The Omenborn could see the entirety of Blackedge from up here. He could even glimpse beyond its boundaries and see the sprawling ruins of the old world, and the great chasm that swallowed so much of it.

There, between that cleft that split the land, was the Abyss, the darkness always lurking, always hiding more dangers. Day after day, more creatures climbed out from the black, necessitating Slayers to keep them in check. Creatures like lesser vampires.

Above, the sun and the shattered fragments remaining of the moon that once was were slowly coming closer together, verging on superimposition. The eclipse was near.

“Georges. Did he tell you that he spoke to me?”

Roland’s question pulled Shiv back to the present. “Yes. About bestowing a Path on me.”

Roland watched Shiv for a while, like a hawk observing its prey. “And you helped him make the food? All of that.”

“Yes. Along with your staff.”

Roland nodded. “A pity. It really did taste good.”

Shiv’s heartbeat quickened. Something inside him turned sour. “Why is it a pity?”

Roland answered his question with one of his own. "Do you know what you are?"

Shiv stared at him. Was this a trick question? Or something to make Shiv humiliate himself? "An Omenborn?"

"No. That's what your parents made you. That is their fault. Do you know what you *are*?"

"I... I don't know what you mean. What do you want to hear? That I know I'm a monster? That I'm sorry for existing?" The last two sentences escaped Shiv with years of bitterness in tow. He regretted speaking those words immediately.

Roland let out a breath. "You are my responsibility."

The Omenborn didn't know how to respond to that.

"Your parents didn't just murder my wife and unborn daughter. They didn't just scar me and my son. They destroyed you too. Everything you are. Everything

you could be. They chose to ruin that. And to this day, I just—I don't even know why. I don't know!"

The Town Lord almost snarled those last words. It took everything Shiv had not to take a step back.

"I don't know," Roland whispered, before he mastered himself again. "But they ruined you. That Curse... It's still there. The capital couldn't find anything wrong with you, but it's still there. You look at it every day, don't you?"

Shiv swallowed. "Yes."

"And so that is what you are. My responsibility. More than—more than being unable to forgive them, to look past who you are, I have to watch you. I have to keep you controlled and monitored. Because I don't know what your Curse might bring—if your parents are even done with their demented scheme."

"It's been eighteen years," Shiv muttered.

“I’ve seen acts of vengeance run far longer than that.” Roland leaned against his table. “I have a confession for you, on the eve of this festival. The Slayer Team that keeps going out to find you after your excursions?”

“Tran’s?” Shiv asked, confused.

“Yes. If you managed to earn a Path, they were to capture and return you to me.”

Shiv felt sick. Even Tran was...

“I couldn’t risk anything. I can’t have you with your own Path. Not without considerable restraints.”

“More Curses,” Shiv breathed. “Yours. To counteract the one you cannot control. The one you fear.”

“Yes,” Roland said. He had the decency to look ashamed.

Shiv couldn't help it. He laughed. Everything about his life was some kind of sick joke. "I... Why? Why not just kill me?"

"You know why. I don't have it. I can't. It's not your fault. But I can't let this go. And I can't muster up the wrong in me to murder an innocent."

"But you can make it my problem," Shiv seethed. He didn't care if the Town Lord was going to strike him dead; he advanced on the man and leaned down on his table. "So. What? Let's say I agree to be some kind of slave. Some dog you can collar like Georges with his debt. Will you let me be a Pathbearer then? Even just a Cook. Or are you afraid that might be too much power for me too."

Roland showed little fear but great exhaustion. It made him look twice his age. "I don't know. I don't think so. You... will still have a life here. You can still live."

"Like a dog in a cage."

"Like a person I'm trying to spare," Roland snapped. He stood up, but Shiv didn't back away this time. To the Town Lord's credit, he didn't turn the boy to bloody paste. "Come. Let me show you something." He gestured, and the glass dome around them came alight with moving spellforms. Roland pointed

to his right and highlighted the abyss in the distance. “I have to watch for all this. To make sure the enemy doesn’t rise.” He highlighted the many buildings below. “I have to protect them. And you too! Maybe even from yourself!”

Finally, he pointed to the other side, to the place where his rear garden extended to the very edge of the floating town. There, on the emerald green grass, were hundreds of people celebrating the coming of the eclipse. But the spell magnified the glass, zooming in on two people in particular: Adam Arrow and his fiancée.

“And I have to make sure he doesn’t lose anything anymore. He’s suffered enough. I can’t... He’s got centuries ahead of him. He can achieve great things—start his own family. Be a hero of the republic.”

“And what about me?” Shiv asked, almost too quietly. He never quite hated the entire world as much as he did right then. “What about what I could have done?”

Roland dropped his hand and sighed. “You can still live. Pathless can live well. A century if you’re lucky.”

“Why would I want to live that long in someone else’s cage? For someone else’s sin? You bring me here, you tell me how you feel, you tell me that I’m

your responsibility? No. That's a lie. I'm your *fear*. That's all I am. My parents hurt you so bad that you never even scarred, you just kept bleeding. And now you can't finish this. Now you can't finish *me*. So you choose the worst option of all. Nothing. *Purgatory*. You're a godsdamned coward, Roland Arrow."

The Town Lord grimaced like someone had just stabbed him in the chest. "I... know."

The admission made Shiv sick. And that was the worst thing he could have heard. The man wouldn't even commit to anger. How were they supposed to live this way? Halfway to hate. Halfway to pity. No way—

A sudden flash of light in the distance made Shiv squint. A large column of fire rushed up into the air from the middle of the town. Shiv blinked as he looked outside. "What are those Pyromancers doing now?" He looked up. The fragments of the moon weren't anywhere near the sun yet, so why were they bringing out the climax right now?

Then a deafening shockwave shook Starhawk's Perch, and Shiv realized the entire Slayers Guild had just vanished in a ball of fire. His mind went blank. That...

Suddenly, a series of distortions dotted the horizon. All over Blackedge, Shiv could see *things* blinking into the town. Colossal beasts of bone, blood, and flesh spawned among the celebrating people. More explosions rocked the town as a few residential clusters and what appeared to be a sky-farm went up in flames.

“No,” Roland whispered.

Just then, several points of heavy pressure clenched hard against Shiv’s body. He let out a gasp of pain as a horde of figures appeared in the room in bursting pockets of spatial magic. Before he could react—before any of the invaders could do anything as well—Roland Arrow exploded into motion.

A bow as radiant as the dawn combusted into existence upon his hand like a contained explosion. Then, in a motion too fast for Shiv to perceive, the man’s arms *multiplied* as he drew back on his bowstring with a hundred hands. Then, Roland loosed, and the room was filled with a rainstorm of comet-bright arrows. They circled about, shredding through the enemies before they even had a chance to act. At the same time, the Town Lord’s eyes turned a brilliant white, and the shriek of a hawk sounded high above.

From the light of the slowly vanishing sun came a brilliant bird of prey that crashed through the ceiling, shattering the glass utterly and landing on Roland Arrow’s shoulders. The cold air washed over Shiv when he finally finished his first breath. As he looked around, the smoldering remains of the unknown

enemy crackled around him, and the arrows Roland fired hovered alongside him and the burning hawk, ready for continued use.

Shiv stared on at his great captor and savior in stunned disbelief. This was the power of a true Pathbearer. Someone at the Master-Tier. And he knew he barely saw anything.

“We’re under attack,” Roland said, his expression twisting into a mask of wrathful rage. “Get down. Get to safety. Hide with the staff. I will deal with this.”