

Scene 1 Beginnings-

It's been a long trip to this point and here you stand at the end of your journey. 20 days ago you left the safety of your family's estate with three of your house guard and a spring in your step. You celebrated your 12th birthday on the road as you made the trek through Aria and up into the Maradon mountains you realized that for the first time in your life you were going to face the unknown with nobody to come to your side if you were to fail. The journey was not without trials and tribulations of course, more from the weather than from any earthly foe your party was delayed and at some times stopped as most of the 20 days were filled with cursed snow, ice, or rain, making your trip almost unbearable. Your house guard were left in Ice Haven per the contract your family signed with the blademasters and you had to travel the last day on foot through the snow and ice to reach the fortress before you now. You have discovered during the last day that it is very difficult to breath due to the mountain air and every step causes you to gasp for air. As you worked your way up the mountains you saw your destination almost an hour ago through the blowing snow as you made your way up the switchback path that leads from Ice Haven up to the large fortress known as the Academy. The fortress is a simple stone castle almost 500 feet on a side with the parapet walls rising up almost 50 feet above your head. As you stand almost knee deep in snow trying to desperately catch your breath in front of the two large black wooden doors that make up the keeps entry, you suddenly feel very alone and vulnerable next to this cold chunk of rock that almost feels like it was ripped from the earth in some perverted way. Even though you are wearing the best fur lined cold weather clothing money can buy, stopping to stare at the keep causes the cold to seep into your bones, and you to feel the stinging cold in your toes and the ends of your fingers, warning you that you need to keep moving. You fumble with the inside of your coat pocket for the signed contract, pull it out in your gloved hand and slowly trudge through the snow to a small wooden door set into the wall next the main entrance. As you approach the door opens slightly and a man wedges his way out of the partially opened door to greet you. "Damn snow makes it hard to open this thing once in awhile". After he gives the door a good shove to open it further he turns to you "I assume you are initiate Dawnbringer. We have been watching you arrive for some time now and I have been sent to welcome you to your home for the next four years. I assume you have the paperwork with you? Good and I see you have only brought the essentials with you. Come with me and I will show you to your quarters".

Your guide appears to be in his mid thirties (and looks like Russel Crow from Galdiator) and is wearing layers of warm cloths and a cloak that looks like they are made out of home spun brown wool . The tops of his shoulders, and his cloaked head are covered in ice and snow indicating he has been outside for some time waiting for you to arrive. As you walk through the courtyard to the keep, you are taken back when you see about 9 men engaged in sword fighting and archery wearing nothing but loin cloths. The

sound of steel on steel pierces the cold afternoon air like a sword through paper. At first you believe that the cold has gone to your mind and you must be hallucinating but then it sinks in that these men truly are fighting with very little clothing on in the middle of a snow storm in the court yard. As you continue to walk by you notice 9 other men standing nearby fully clothed in winter garb watching the fighters and talking amongst themselves. For the first time doubt starts to fill your mind and your heart starts to race. "Hurry up lad we are losing daylight". Your guide yells back over his shoulder as he ducks through a low hanging doorway and makes his way into the keep. You enter the door way and knock the snow off your boots before following him down a dark hallway periodically pierced with light coming in through archery slits set back into the thick walls. Finally your guide stops and motions to a door and says "This room will be yours. There is a small fireplace but be sparing with the wood since you will need to cut your own in the future. I will return in an hour with a hot meal and some drink after you are settled in. Then we can make introductions and orient you to your new home". With that your guide leaves you standing in the narrow cold hallway with only the darkness and your own thoughts for company, still clinging onto the your contract and listening to the rhythmic clanging of steel .

Reply Reply to all Forward

Scene 2

It is well past sunset when you find your guide sitting across from you at a small age worn table eating vigorously. You feel the ache in your gut start to subside as you eagerly use a wooden spoon to scoop up chicken and dumplings from your own wooden bowl. As your guide hovers over his food, he finishes it by taking a heel of brown bread and wipes out the bottom of his bowl before sliding the bowl away and drinking what remains of his wooden glass of goats milk. As he sits the glass back down on the table he leans back in his chair slightly and looks you in the eyes. His stare is very intense and it makes you feel uncomfortable under the penetrating gaze of his light blue eyes. "So why would a lord such as yourself who is second in line to the throne want to come all the way up here to train with us in the sleet and cold in the middle of nowhere. You could be relaxing next to a big fire at your estate right now eating salt pork and drinking spiced wine". He gives you that penetrating gaze a while longer and then turns his gaze to the old ceiling timbers colored black through centuries of wood smoke and use. "I suppose it doesn't matter, you are here now so you might as well know the rules of this place. The most important thing is to obey the masters without question. They have trained recruits for centuries and they know how to hone your mind and body into a deadly fighting machine. The second most important rule is to respect your fellow recruits. There is no fighting among the recruits except in a duel sanctioned by the masters". Your guide turns his gaze back to you and nods towards the dresser across the room. "Your new cloths are in the dresser over there. Dress warm and report in the court yard at first sun." With that he pushes his chair back and walks to the small doorway. At the door your guide puts one hand on the old door frame and turns around to face you with the fire light catching the side of his face. "While I was looking through the archives I found there once was another Dawnbringer who was a grand master over 1500 years ago, his name was Ariel Dawnbringer and he was rumored to be the best swordsman of his time. Not much was written of him but it was written that he was vanquished due to his inability to hear the voice of his god which caused him to go astray. The ancient texts mention how his soul was severed from his god or some such thing." Your guide looks up towards the ceiling but you can tell he is looking past the ceiling as he speaks in the darkness "There are many gods in this world Sithis, some wish to capture our souls for their own selfish pleasure and some wish to use us as pawns in their elaborate games, but a few of the gods use us for the good of mankind. I pray that you find the later Dawnbringer and I hope in the years ahead, long after you leave this place and its teachings, you find a different fate than your ancestor. By the way, my name is Master Brandt and I'll start your training in the morning." With that he ducks through the doorway and slowly closes the door to leave you once again with only your thoughts and the fire light for company. As you sit at the small table with your eyes closed and listen to the cold wind howling outside like a wounded animal you feel very alone as you tell yourself "I am a Dawnbringer and I will survive".

Scene 3

You walk into the moon lit dark court yard well before sun up dressed in your new cloths consisting of layers of brown wool lined with fur. The wind is howling over the walls of the keep and down into the court yard, blowing the light snow into swirling clouds. From the corner of your eye you see a few practice swords lying in the corner half buried in the light snow leaning against a few straw bales. Walking over you grab one of the wooden swords by the handle and then pick up a second sword lying on the frozen cobble stones. As you go to stand the second sword upright in the corner you suddenly stop and realize that the second sword feels just as comfortable and natural in your hand as the first sword did. Musing over this you hit the swords together to knock the snow off them and start to swing one sword and then the other just like your father had been teaching you before you left. Hearing the howling wind and also listening to the sound the swords make as they slash through the frigid air is almost hypnotizing as you practice your foot work and body positioning. After about 30 minutes a small black door opens at the far end of the courtyard and a man walks through dressed identical to you carrying a glass of liquid that trails steam. He looks unfamiliar to you but you would guess that he is one of the other students who has also arrived early for training on this fine day. "So you are the new initiate that arrived yesterday"? I thought I was an early riser but you have me beat. We'll see if you're still out here this time every morning after a few months of being beat to death and working so hard that you cant even grasp a sword hilt in this cold." He pulls the cloak tighter around himself and slowly sips the steaming liquid from the cup. You can tell by the way this man stands and the way in which he walks with his sword at his side, he knows how to handle his weapon. Even sipping a hot drink which you now believe is apple cider, he looks as if he could draw his sword and cut you down in the span of a breath. "I have been here for three years training on this god forsaken rock. Freezing my ass off in the winter and sweating my ass off in the summer. Last summer I spent two days in bead after I passed out from the heat. They called it a test but I call it torture. I'm still cold from spending all that time out here yesterday in nothing but my undergarments, practicing until I couldn't feel my fingers anymore and I dropped my sword. My name is Sayler, and son you have no idea what you have gotten yourself into".

Scene 4

Salyer catches the sword as you toss it to him without taking his lips from his glass of hot cider. He tosses the glass into a snow bank, stretches the muscles in his back and arms and takes a fighting stance with the practice sword. As the snow blows between you and your new opponent you briefly wonder if you have made a wise choice. "If the rumors are correct, you have the potential of being one of the greatest blademasters of all time. I have heard that your skill with the sword is only beginning but your endurance and quickness are to be admired. I am one year from graduating so I will take it easy on you....for now." With that he takes a fighting stance and grasps his weapon with both hands. Your opponent looks like a black shade against the white snow on the ground and if not for the snow, neither one of you would be able to see each other in the darkness. You do not wait and immediately engage your opponent with numerous attacks from both of your swords, trying to keep your feet under yourself and not slipping on the slick cobblestones. As the blood starts to flow and your breathing becomes more labored you realize that your blows are being easily blocked as your opponent takes an entirely defensive stance. "Your form is sloppy but your footing is sound and your attacks are very quick." says Salyer as he continues to parry your attacks, his breath now becoming labored. "Master Brandt will be a good match for you as he also prefers the two weapon style." Suddenly Salyer does not parry one of your blows but rather dodges and deftly lunges with his weapon at your head. You manage to parry the surprising attack as you feel the cold wood graze the side of your face. Salyer anticipates your parry and strikes at your leg that is closest to him. You quickly readjust your footing as his sword hits the cobblestones, scattering the snow in all directions. Suddenly he stops and takes two steps back from you as you raise your weapon to strike again. You hear a voice behind you say "halt" as you turn you see Master Brandt standing only five feet away wrapped in his cloak. Master Brandt looks at Salyer and says "you are dismissed initiate, Master Sandridge has summoned you to the armory". At that Salyer, still breathing hard bows, turns, and walks away towards the far end of the courtyard with the snow swirling behind him. "Your skill with the sword is even better than reports have suggested. You have much to learn initiate and your learning starts now. You will wear your weapons at all times of the day, you will sleep, eat, work, and study while wearing your weapons. After a time I will provide you with real swords of your choosing from the armory. Follow me initiate and I will show you the most sacred part of the academy. Master Brandt leads you to a small black door at the end of the courtyard, you both travel down a narrow hallway to a set of double black doors where he stops and turns to you. "This is called the Hall of the Masters and it is a most revered place. When a blade master dies his body is returned to this place and buried with all of his brothers and sisters for eternity in the catacombs underneath The Hall. The greatest of the blademasters have statues erected in their honor and it is in front of these champions of the past where you will eventually be tested to determine if you are worthy of being called a blade master." With that he opens one of the large doors just enough to enter and enters the chamber. You follow closely behind and readily notice the change in temperature. The Hall is about 200 feet square with a large sunken area approximately 1 foot deep in the middle of the floor. Around the edges of the sunken area are 30 large white marble statues approximately 10 feet high depicting the great blade masters of the past. You are surprised to see a number of the statues are female. Master

Brandt slowly walks around the perimeter of the pit and motions for you to follow him. The two of you walk around to the opposite end of the pit where sits eleven chairs. The chair in the middle being raised slightly higher than the rest. "This is where you will eventually be raised to blademaster" "All ten masters will sit in judgement of you along with Grand Master Dimitrius." "In turn each Master will challenge you to combat and judge if you are ready to join the brotherhood. If Grand Master Dimetrius determines that you are worthy of carrying a bladmasters knots, then you will be accepted as one of us." Master Brandt slowly turns from the Masters chairs to look at you for a long moment and then tells you to follow. He leads you around the pit to the other side of the Hall where a large marble statue stands in a fighting pose wearing plate mail armor and holding two swords crossed in front of his chest. "This Ariel Dawnbringer, one of the best swordsmen of the first age and the first of your bloodline. If you look closely you can see your likeness in his features. The artist caught his likeness perfectly with every detail of his armor, weapons, and features exceptionally carved." Madter Brandt turns his head to look at you and says "There may be two statues of Dawnbringers in this hall someday if you follow my commands exactly and without question. Come, it is almost sunrise and we need to get started." With that he turns and leads you from the warm hall back out into the frigid morning air.

Fifth Scene:

Master Brandt walks casually from the warm Hall of the Masters, down the narrow hallway past torches flickering in their wall sconces. Black smoke wisps from their dancing flames, traveling up the wall and creating paths of dark soot. Master Brandt opens the small door to the court yard and steps through into the dim glow of the morning dawn as snow swirls around his legs. As you exit the keep and shut the black door behind you he slowly turns to face you. "The first step in your training is to learn how to rid your mind of all emotion. If a blade master is to be focused in his art then his mind needs to be clear so nothing interferes with his execution of the various forms. I want you to close your eyes and try to rid your mind of all emotion and distractions by thinking of a black void. Picture the void as a silent thing that absorbs all thoughts and emotions and then slowly start to fill the void with your feelings, emotions, restlessness, the cold in your hands, every feeling you have both physical and emotional need to slowly be given to the void. That's good. I see you already calming. Now start to think about the different fighting forms your father has taught you such as parting the grass, walking through water and wind over the mountains. Now open your eyes and follow me". Master Brandt walks slowly and leads you out from under the thatched overhanging roof, deftly grabbing two practice swords sitting next to the wall and walks into the dim frozen court yard. As he turns to face you with his two practice swords he takes a fighting stance. "Finding the void will be the most challenging thing you will ever do but it is the most important of all the lessons you will learn. If you do not find the void then emotion and stray thoughts will interfere with your execution in battle and that could be deadly. Every minute of every day you will practice finding the void and letting your thoughts and emotions flow into it until you are calm and focused. Eventually it will come natural to you in an instant and in any situation. Emotion is the death of a blade master. It is also just as important to let the void go when you no longer need it. Are you ready? Once again picture the void and when you are ready, your training begins".

Master Brandt trains with you all day with only a 5 minute break for lunch. For close to 8 hours you attack, parry, ripost and learn how to use two weapons in combat. He shows you the various forms for two weapon fighting, many you have never heard of before. Towards the end of the day you actually drop your swords a few times because your arms are so tired you cannot grasp the hilts. You stumble a few times trying to dodge his blows due to the weakness in your legs. He quickly cracks you in the ribs or behind the knees when you let your defenses down. Towards the end of the day he abruptly stops, shoves his swords through his belt and gives you a very curt bow. "Training for today has concluded student, I will meet you in the kitchen for dinner and then you should probably get some rest in preparation for tomorrow". After dinner you drag yourself back into your small room, take off your boots and quickly pass out from exhaustion. This routine continues for a number of weeks, months, and years as you learn not only swordsmanship but also become very familiar with all sorts of thrown

weapons, archery, polearms, crossbows, and daggers. Your training includes weapon training as well as physical conditioning, running, splitting wood, and anything else Master Brandt thinks will increase your strength and stamina. Every week you become more proficient in using various weapons and learning to use terrain and the environment to your advantage. Master Brandt becomes very impressed with your skill and determination and after a few months you begin to look at him almost as a father figure. For three years you train in this manner, honing your skills, mind, and body, practicing one fighting form after the next for hours on end.

It was nearing the end of summer when you find yourself sparring with Master Brandt in the rocky hills above the academy. You have been pushing him hard today trying to get your first hit and you have almost succeeded on a number of occasions only to have him side step or deftly parry your blow at the last instant. Your breath has become very labored in the thin air of the mountains and you are starting to feel the sting of yesterday's sunburn on your back as sweat soaks your shirt. It is there on the side of the mountain in the waning light of the late day that it happens.....

Scene 6

As you stand across from Master Brandt with every muscle in your arms and back aching, your breathing labored in the thin air, and sweat stinging your eyes, you find yourself trying to focus on Master Brandt's instructions but some reason you can't hear anything he is saying. His lips move but your ears cannot hear any words coming from them then your vision starts to dim with blackness closing in from the sides and it appears as if you are looking down a tunnel. You are aware that your body has stopped moving as you feel yourself in free fall....falling.....falling....falling. Suddenly the your body stops falling and feels as if it is weightless and you hear voices in the distance coming closer as your vision fades to total darkness. In the dark you hear clearly "Lord Dawnbringer we have found its tracks" you recognize his voice as that of Lord Reynard, your father's good friend and hunting partner. Your heart skips a beat and you feel yourself fill with emotion when you hear your father's voice respond "Excellent, remember I get this one Lord Reynard, you've shot the last two and this could be the last one in the kings wood" both men laugh and then hear the sounds of reins slapping the horses hind quarters as the men ride away at a quick gallop. You try to move your arms to reach out in the direction of your father's voice but you are restrained by some unknown force. "Remember you have one shot Lord Dawnbringer and then it is mine and you owe me 5 crowns" Lord Reynard says as both men laugh in the moment. You then hear what sounds like a single horse and then a second horse nay loudly as both hit the ground with a muffled thud and the sound of flying dirt. Chaos ensues as you hear multiple voices shouting, the sound of steel on steel, men screaming in agony, and orders being given by someone. There is a loud rumble like rolling thunder only louder with numerous voices screaming in pain and then.....silence.

Precious seconds go by before you hear approaching foot steps brushing lightly on the ground and a sword being drawn from a scabbard. A deep voice which sounds like a snake slithering over dried leaves says "Pull him...up...to...his...knees...so....that...I...may....see...his....face.

Wipe.....the...dirt...from.....his....face.....so that....I.....can....see....his....fear." You hear the voice again closer as if it were in front of your face. "You have....angered.....my.....masters.....Dawnbringer....and.....for....that....you.....and.....your....line.....will.....

feel their.....displeasure"! You hear you father mumble something incoherent and then his breath becomes slow and labored. Listening in the dark to your father's breathing and unable to speak or move, you start to pick up the faint monotone of someone chanting in arcane. Slowly you start to feel a tightness in your chest which becomes so great that it causes intense pain to radiate from your heart in all directions. You try to scream but no sound emanates from your throat as it feels like your entire

body is being lowered into the hot coals of a blacksmiths forge. The agony goes on for some time when you hear the sinister deep voice say finality "It..... is..... done".

You hear Master Brandt's voice yelling loudly at you "Sithis come back, you must come back, I will not let you go"! Your vision fades from blackness to a bright light as you awake, screaming uncontrollably, staring up at the blue sky and the face of Master Brandt. Every muscle in your body is aching and you are covered in sweat. As you roll over on your side, you vomit and immediately every muscle in your body cramps up and you are unable to move for a few minutes. After what seems like forever you finally make it to your knees, wondering what the hell just happened. Master Brandt gives you a shoulder as he helps you walk back to the academy and walks you to your room. "Get some rest student and be ready for tomorrow. I'm not sure what happened today but we will find out."

Scene 7

Two figures stand on a rocky ledge high above watching Brandt help Sithis down the mountain. One figure turns to the other with desperation in his voice and says, "Luna, What just happened"? The female responds in a nervous tone "Something which has not happened since the first age Arnos, forbidden power has been used which I thought had been removed from the minds of men". Arnos turns back to the two figures walking slowly down the mountain with concern in his voice and his hands clenched in fists he says "I can no longer feel his presence". Luna continues, "Dark arcane secrets have been uncovered which were meant to be forgotten, for the first time in 2,000 years I now know fear". Arnos responds, "The pieces are starting to move my dear, I only hope that he and his future companions are able to save this age which is only beginning". Luna says "He may need some guidance Arnos, but who can now contact him?" Arnos says "I will speak with Tyrion, there is one who may still be able to guide Sithis." With that the two figures turn their back on the realm of man and fade into nothing.

You wake the next morning slightly sore but feeling decent. Looking up into the blackness from your straw mattress you smell salt pork and coffee which is odd because the mess hall is on the other side of the keep. As you roll over in bed and sit up you see Master Brandt sitting at the small table sipping a cup of coffee. "Yesterday must have really taken a toll on you student, I have not been able to sneak up on you since last year. Come eat and renew your strength. I had the cook brew your coffee extra strong this morning and you will find your portions to be generous. Don't worry about your training this morning, come out into the court yard when you are ready". Master Brandt continues to study you and wait for you to join him and once you make your way from bed to the table you see that indeed your breakfast is larger than normal as hunger suddenly strikes, you easily eat all of the food before you. "I must admit you gave me a scare yesterday out in the woods. When you suddenly collapsed I rushed to your side thinking you had fainted from heat exhaustion but when I knelt down I saw something that unnerved me. Your eyes Sithis were black and I don't mean your irises were black but both of your entire eyes were as black as the night sky and your breathing had stopped. I checked your pulse and there was nothing". Master Brandt stands up from his chair and walks over to the dresser where he turns and looks at you. "Something happened on that mountain side that was unnatural Sithis. Nobody dies and then returns to life like that". I have seen men fall through the ice in the winter and appear dead and then come to life again but I have never heard of this happening. I believe that someday you will find out what happened and confront those who were responsible, but it will not be until you leave this place. What happened to you yesterday has led me to believe that I need to intensify your training. Whatever path lies ahead of you once you leave here, it will be treacherous and you will need every bit of what I can reach you in order to survive and fulfill whatever destiny the gods have put before you". "The academy has eyes and ears all over the realms making us the single greatest intelligence organization outside of the church and Magus Tara. Reports are coming in of great unrest in all the kingdoms, even in realms across the seas there is unrest. The north regions, the southern regions and even the realms under the mountains and under the seas are in great peril. I feel that the blade masters will once again be called upon by mankind to stand in the breach as evil threatens this world

once again. Ready yourself my student and surround yourself with loyal allies for you will need them in the days ahead". Mater Brandt finishes his coffee, slowly walks from the room, and quietly shuts the door leaving you once again with your thoughts.

Scene 8

Your training continues for the next year without any more unusual occurrences as Master Brandt pushes you to the limits of your performance. The other recruits have told you to inform the Grand Master about the “special treatment” Master Brandt is showing but you refuse because you feel up to the challenge and don’t want to disappoint Brandt. After one particularly hard day, laying in total darkness in bed, staring into the darkness above, and listening to the howling wind through the cracks in your window shutter. Glimpses of light can be seen through the shutter’s cracks as a large thunder storm approaches from the south. In the darkness with your hands behind your head, anticipating your initiation into the bladmasters tomorrow morning, you feel restless and decide to take a slow walk around the keep. As you get up and fasten your cloak around your neck, sadness comes over you as you realize that after tomorrow you will no longer be a resident of the Academy and this room will eventually be given to the next recruit. You have lived and bled for four years of your life within these stone walls and have stared at the ceiling for endless hours over that time. Leaving the room and shutting the door behind, you walk in silence down the corridors of the keep, remembering the smells of the food, the ringing of swords in the courtyard in the early morning, masters yelling orders at their students, the camaraderie of the other initiates and the feeling of security you have here. This will all be dearly missed as you move on to the next chapter of your life. Walking with no particular direction you find yourself standing in front of the two large thick black doors which mark the entrance to the Hall of the Masters where tomorrow morning you will be tested according to tradition. Each Master will test you in various weapons and fighting styles with all the Masters and the Grand Master determining if you are worthy to wear the Bladmasters knot. Snapping out your thoughts you blink your eyes in the darkness a few times trying to focus and bring yourself back to the present. You reach for one of the large black doors and pull it open easily revealing the dimly lit interior of The Hall. Stepping through, the sight of the large white marble statues overwhelms every other sight in the room as the white statues almost seem to glow in the dimly lit darkness. Walking around the statues, admiring the craftsmanship of each statue’s detail you come to rest at one statue that you have a particular interest in, that of Ariel Dawnbringer. You run your hands over the cold stone of the statue and marvel at the detail in its face and armor and wonder who could have crafted such a wondrous object. You hear a voice behind you answer your very thoughts. “It’s builder work in case you were wondering”. You turn to see a person standing by the wall about twenty feet from you. He is wearing plate mail and a white tunic, stands exactly your height and looks remarkably like your father. In fact you believe this is your father until you realize that he does not have your father’s voice. “It took 10 builders six months to carve that from a cliff face in Talantia which is now called Maradon.” The man was speaking in common but you can’t put a finger on his accent. “They did get a couple of details wrong though, the swords are supposed to be crossed with the left sword in front of the right and the grip on the swords is slightly off”. The man walks next to you and stands looking up at the white statue with admiration. “So you are Sithis Dawnbringer? Yes, of course you are” the man says seemingly talking to himself. “Tomorrow you will be accepted into the ranks of one of the most trusted and noble groups of men the world has known since before the first age and after that your part in this struggle will begin, actually Sithis it has already

begun" as he looks at you from the corner of his eye. "I know these facts because I have been watching you for some time from afar. I heard your first cries as your mother birthed you and I was there watching as you grew older into the man you are today." The man turns to face you and you feel his gaze sizing you up almost like he is evaluating your worthiness. "My time here is limited Sithis and I know that you have many questions. Tell me my heir, what is on your mind"?