

6.

“The Legend of the Black Eagle?” Daniel asked, looking as surprised as the rest of the listeners. Ibrahim smiled with a grim satisfaction and was about to open his mouth to speak when Touraz suddenly started lifting his head up whilst growling loudly.

Everyone froze.

“What’s the time?” Ibrahim asked quietly.

Alfred checked his Breguet watch.

“Midnight’s passed”.

“Stay still and quiet. Touraz, on me.” Ibrahim slowly went to the door trying to catch even the slightest wave of the wind as he pressed on. He stooped and stayed still for a moment, then...

Knock, knock, knock.

Two hours earlier

A stormy night was breaking into the dark and sleepy Prussia. Cold wind howled through the tall and crude pines, making them twist in creaking agony, like they were bowing before the massive dark fortress that dominated this highly unpleasant and appalling area. The huge castle was lit with lights that looked dark green from afar. It looked deserted at first glance, but on further scrutiny a beholder realised it was indeed inhabited, by the kind of presence one would be unhappy to meet.

Inside, somewhere within the fortress, nine men dressed in black robes began assembling in an empty stone hall, eight of them

kneeling in an arc before the ninth man who seemed to be their leader. He was tall and dressed in black from hooded head to the missing toe. His face was too frightening for the world to behold and was thus hidden beneath a black mask with holes for the eyes and mouth.

The man stood, with his arms crossed, in a circle of moonlight coming through the hole in the ceiling, but the light didn't embrace him, as if whatever the black armour concealed wouldn't be touched by the white light and rain. The remaining men stayed in their positions with their heads down, each of them sporting faded, almost gray hair.

After the strongest thunderclap so far had crossed over the holed ceiling and split the moon in two for a moment, the man on the very right asked a question, still keeping his head down:

“What is our next move, my master?”

The boss moved his head slightly.

“You claim that you've located the Baron's former pawn?” he replied with a deep, bass voice.

“Yes, master, he's in Egypt,” the other man stated.

“Good. It is time to pay him a visit. Prepare the portal,” the masked man ordered.

The rest of the men stood up and formed a row in front of four short staffs; the first attached to the floor, the second and third to the two pillars supporting a beam which bore the last staff fastened to the bottom of that beam. One of the men stepped forward and pulled out an Orb. He clenched his fingers tightly around the perfect shape, which produced a bright shimmer and a loud, glistening sound echoed through the hall. Jets of light broke off the Orb, floated to the staffs and connected them with

each other, forming a large blue diamond. One by one, members of the elite force of The Order of the Black Eagle stepped through the newly created portal, disappearing within its sparkling space. The boss stayed and waited for the portal to deactivate. When the hall was once again lit only by the light coming from the hole, the tall figure suddenly shone with pale, blue light which dematerialised after a few seconds, along with the man.

Ibrahim opened the door and stood facing a tall man in black robes sporting a black eagle silver brooch on his lapel. “How can I help you, sir?” Ibrahim asked dispassionately.

You cannot. Daniel can...

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