

Episode 1

A ghastly wind blew over the remote hermitage of Mascon. In the outer service hall, the veteran Knight of the Round Table paced the cold floor solemnly. To the monks, it was yet another day when the climate was decidedly bizarre, but Sir Bors knew better. Looking out into the courtyard, he knew the source of his unease was not in the surroundings, but within himself. Having retired from service when King Arthur died, the old knight had spent his years in the hermitage studying the ancient Lore of the Galans, the creative and curative powers of the universe. So captivated was Sir Bors that he did not even flinch when the throne changed hands, but an inner voice told him this morning that he could keep out of politics no longer. The wooden doors of the hermitage had been closed to travelers for a long time, but Sir Biltras and Sir Ulfer were not to be deterred. Together with the retinue of three initiate knights, they had tracked the whereabouts of Sir Bors for a week on this secretive mission and had sworn on their knighthood to bring Sir Bors back to Constantine's Court.

It was to be a covert mission – even a group of seven knights may have been considered too many for this endeavour. But one thing was clear, they were certainly not going to turn back at the doorstep of their quest. The hermitage of Mascon was once an important training centre of the Galans in the days of King Uther Pendragon, but today it stood only as a dim reminder of its former glory. Ulfer and Biltras were stopped by two sleepy monks on duty for the day but their persistence eventually prevailed and they were subsequently brought before the abbot of the hermitage, in full view of Sir Bors who looked down on them from his sparsely furnished chambers. Surveying Biltras and Ulfer from his window, the veteran knight suddenly felt a keen sense of age creeping up on him. In his younger days, he must have looked like one of them, in Arthurian armour, helm and sword. But then, he was sure there were more battle-scars on him than the two put together. They apparently were not as battle tested, as once would have been the case, to earn their current rank. *Has the knighthood declined?* thought Sir Bors sadly. His memories of the greatness of the Round Table had certainly not diminished over all these years and he beamed with pride at the remembrance of his old exploits.

Sir Bors had been great friends with the heroes of the inner circle of Knights – Sir Gawain, Sir Galahad and of course, Sir Lancelot of the Lake. He had always marveled at Sir Galahad, the Knight of the Red Cross, arguably the most powerful of the Galanic Knights and certainly the purest of them all. He had learnt much from Galahad, especially the intricate high level charms of healing. But even now, the old knight could still not fathom the subtleties of Galahad's spells, grasping only a tenth of what he remembered from Galahad's spell books. Even so, Galahad was only interested in curative invocations. Resting comfortably on his couch, Sir Bors sighed. If only he had been around when the treacherous Mordred turned against King Arthur, things would definitely be very different now.

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Sir Bors had earlier requested the abbot to send the two knights back to Constantine. The knighthood was a thing of the past and ever since Sir Lancelot retired, he had decided that he was not going to be involved in court intrigues again, an oath he swore before Almighty God, an oath binding till death embraced him in its soft wings.

Sir Bors shuddered at the thought. As a young knight, he had taunted death and scorned the works of the evil one. Death had seemed so remote then. But now, Sir Bors realized with horror that he was standing but a few feet from the gates of eternity, leading to eternal bliss, or everlasting torment. Suddenly, he heard a thunderous blast and instantly snapped back to reality. The sound of the heavy wooden doors being blown into smithereens caused the abbot and monks to gasp in horror. The harsh words that had passed between the knights and the abbot were quickly forgotten as everyone in the hall stood rooted in their places in dread anticipation of the unwelcome visitors. Sir Bors solemnly emerged from his chamber and walked towards the courtyard, each step heavier than the last, gazing uneasily into the dispersing cloud of smoke and dust. The unwelcomed visitors had come for him at last.

The sound of shuffling feet could be heard even before warriors in golden yellow armour bearing the emblazoned shield of the Morgana's legions poured in and positioned themselves on either side of the entrance, facing each other. Biltras gasped at the sight of the magnificent Cavalier leader as he made his entrance on a large war horse. His features were striking, with eyes that instilled fear across the land like an angel of death. Sir Bors felt a tinge of apprehension at the sight of this forerunner of doom - Lord Cariolanus, commander of the Yellow Dragonarmy. A battle scar ran from his forehead down to the left cheek; a scar he received from none other than Lancelot himself; a scar which constantly reminded him of his deep hatred for the Knights of the Round Table. Lord Cariolanus was one of the rare few who lived to recount an encounter with the invincible knight, a feat which firmly placed him amongst the most feared of all men in Queen Morgan's court. Reining in his great horse in the middle of the Courtyard, Cariolanus fixed his gaze on a lone figure in grey robes. The only ornament that adorned him was a medallion hung around his neck.

"Sir Bors, Knight of the Round Table. I hope I'm not intruding, revered one." Cariolanus gave a slight bow and smiled sinisterly to himself. Biltras and Ulfer jumped at his greetings and frantically scanned the hall for the old knight, cursing themselves for not having noted his presence earlier. Sir Bors slowly descended the steps of the hall towards Cariolanus, impressed at his keen perceptions. The windy morning made Sir Bors' robes flutter, and Cariolanus' cape flew like a banner. Neither moved, their eyes locked in mutual disgust for the other.

Though Biltras and Ulfer were not seasoned knights, as Knights of the Crowned Shield they could read from their faces that an onslaught was imminent, and what little of their magical Sphere Tactics they had, would come in handy.

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Suddenly Cariolanus gave a hard tug at his bridle and spun his horse around. Instantly, five warriors comprising adepts and guardians rushed towards Sir Bors, holding their two-handed swords at shoulder level in a formidable formation. The monks quickly scurried out of the courtyard into the hall while Biltras and Ulfer, having given the knight's battle cry in unison, charged at the warriors without a moment's hesitation. Ulfer noticed these minions were clothed simply, with little or no armour on them. *Must have been the apprentices and neophytes newly recruited.* Looking towards Biltras – the other knight was similarly returning the same, knowing look.

The Yellow Dragonarmy was notorious for its fearless attacks and courage in battle. Cariolanus had personally supervised the training of his fighters and designed the attack stratagems. Hence, any group of fighters could coordinate instantly with another when the need arose, even if they are untrained in one-on-one combat. *“Sir Bors – if I remember, you were excellent in marshalling battalions into battle. Unfortunately today we do not actually have the luxury of a full scale legionne battle. But if you so kindly indulge me, I would like to see how you measure up to those great exploits I have heard from the ranks of the dragonarmy.”* With a wave, the adepts and guardians retreated and formed up in front of the Yellow Dragonlord, and two advocates joined the ranks. *“Cariolanus – I do not wish to cause further damage to this quiet hermitage. Send a Duo, a Star and I will fight you one-on-one. Three turns, if you win, I will accompany you to see Morgana. If I win two turns, please leave.”*

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Dawn broke over the dark horizon, but brought forth no warmth. The first rays of light spilled through the damp forest of Edela as Sir Delyus, Knight Errand of the Dolorous Blade reined his steed to a halt. He had been riding northwards from Castle Camelot relentlessly for two days. Wiping off the accumulated mud streaks and dirt from his face, Delyus spied his destination in the distance.

“There’s Bedegraine castle at last,” he heaved, exhaustion dissipating at the sight of the tinted spires. His companion Claude, Knight of the Broken Spear or Splitspar Knight as his class of melee fighters are commonly addressed - gave the ancient castle a dispassionate stare. *“So this is the castle where King Arthur was besieged only two autumns ago,”* he groaned. He did not take kindly to defeat, much less defeat by one as the legendary Arthur. He was sure that his new generation of knights would not be so easily vanquished. Even so, Claude trembled at the thought of having to battle the Morganic army, especially since the Dark Queen has been supplementing her forces through hirelings – from the Houses of Mercenaries as far as the plains of Gerroch. The troops under the Dragonlords have suffered heavy casualties in the last stand against Cador, and a large recruitment exercise is underway to fill up the Apprentice and Neophyte ranks. Brutes, Thugs and others have rallied themselves to whosoever pays the heftier gold, or for some cause the sword finds reason.

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Though these new blood are poorly equipped, they could still ensnare us anywhere through the roving Eyes of Morgana... he mumbled absently, brushing off such loathsome thoughts and clicked his horse to a trot alongside Delyus. *Could Sir Ector still be alive?* Not that it mattered much to the snickering Claude, *What good can an aged man like Sir Ector do, anyway?* Claude frowned and muttered something about being sent on a wild goose chase under his breath.

Claude remembered sleeping through most of the lore classes of warfare, barely passing the final tactics paper. He vaguely recalled the epic struggles as recorded in the First Elven Wars – legends of treachery and dark deeds as the Great Elves plotted against the Dark Elves and waylaying the Forest Elves in an elaborate diabolical scheme to gain dominion. Claude shuddered. Even as anarchy threatens to unleash its fury in Bretunia, there have been fresh rumours of Elven skirmishes in magically-cloaked lands, as reported through the scryers.

Delyus remained silent, his mind preoccupied with something else. *Locate Merlin - Archmages are not easily annihilated. I'm sure he's still being magically imprisoned... King Constantine, current ruling liege of the House of Cador is counting on it...* As they rode on towards the castle, the bleak castle grew before them, looming above the canopy of Edela's autumn trees. The horses trotted to a stop, showing signs of nervousness and refusing to budge. Suspicious, the knights quickly dismounted from their steeds. Claude hurriedly reached for his sword by his side as Delyus tied their mounts to an oak tree, soothing them with tender strokes. Cautiously they made their way on foot, Squirrels scurried away as they approached the dilapidated castle. The moat had dried up years ago, but the drawbridge still looked hardy enough. The rampart and crenellations had long fallen into ruin, but the postern gates stood stubbornly against the assault of time.

The duo advanced into the inner bailey, Delyus walking nonchalantly ahead. Sword in hand, Claude swung his blade. Splitspar knights are skilled in battling with spears, but Claude had seen it fit that he is as adept in using swords, axes and any weapon that can cause melee damage. Disdaining the Knight of the Dolorous Blade class as they spend too much time in Spiritual matters, Claude had opted to join the Splitspar Knighthood instead. That was eight years ago. When he was but Squire Claude...

The corridors soon led to a large hall. One of the chambers lining the hall glowed, lighted from within by a dim light. In the dead silence, Claude thought he heard his own heartbeat thumping thunderously in his skull. His palm was wet from gripping the sword but he continued, nervously, following Delyus' lead. The door was but ten paces ahead. From behind, light from a slit-hole guided their steps. Delyus gripped the hilt of his well-worn sword; his pace slowing to a crawl; arched like a prowling panther, ready to face any threat that lurked behind the doors.

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Rays of sunlight cast long, moving shadows. Delyus reached for the door and it gave an eerie creak... Perspiration beading his brow, Claude prepared himself for an attack, his eyes darting around for possible escape routes. But the opened door revealed only a hollow chamber; barren except for..... Claude suddenly froze. The shadows...instead of seeing two images, he noticed a third on the stone floor. Instinctively, he swung his blade around with all the energy he can summon in a single heave. But it sliced through thin air, the effort nearly causing him to tumble over. Stunned, Delyus turned around, his sword poised to attack. Though he saw only Claude readying for his next blow, the Knight Errant's trained senses, had however, picked up a presence behind him. He quickly executed a back thrust, aiming a powerful blow at his unknown opponent with his right foot, but he too - hit nothing. Suddenly, he felt his left foot being swept cleanly off the ground and he crashed to the stone floor with a loud thump.

Then emerging from the shadows, a figure appeared. In one hand, he spun elaborately carved twin-globed scepter . With a deft sleight of hand, the semi-crystal globes whirled elastically around the scepter and vanished. A youthful voice rang out: *"Who are you and what business have you here? I charge you by your knighthood, speak!"* Moderately built and donning a grey robe and unarmed except for the scepter, Delyus concluded that he could not have been more than twenty years old. Delyus quickly picked himself up. *"We are here by order of King Constantine to seek the noble Sir Ector."* Claude, on the other hand, having been cowed, only clutched his sword tighter. The youth slowly intoned, *"Knights from King Constantine's Court..."* Though his eyes shone with sincerity and innocence, Claude was not impressed. With a firm voice, Tosham remarked, *"My master has no wish to speak to anyone, therefore please leave, noble knights, and fare thee well."*

As the youth turned to leave, Delyus persisted, *"On our knighthood, we shall leave this place without Sir Ector."* These words stopped the young makidon in his tracks. *"The whole realm of Bretunia is veiled under the threat of the evil Queen Morgan Le Fay and her fiendish Dragonarmies. Many of our strongholds have fallen and unless you help us, there will be no hope for us...for all of us!"* Delyus concluded with a determined plea and in a desperate attempt, cried out, *"Show yourself, my Lord Sir Ector - Where are you?"* His voice reverberated within the antechambers of the castle and echoed through the castle until it finally died down. For a few moments only silence reigned until a low voice boomed from within one of the rooms, *"Tosham, send the knights in."*

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Biltras, Ulfer and the three initiate knights stared blankly at one another. It was clear that this modified legionne battle will quickly determine the battle outcome of the day. Having never served under Sir Bors, Sir Ulfer secretly hoped the veteran's tactics will hold up. But what really mattered now was nevertheless the strength of his knights, since it was evident that they would need to fight two of the three turns... Cariolanus beamed with excitement. *"Excellent! Let's get underway immediately. As I am the guest, I will let the host choose the first mode."* The Yellow Dragonlord replied with a chuckle. Sir Bors looked at the knights before him, and the formation of his adversary. His options were limited. Nodding slightly towards Biltras and Ulfer, which was understood implicitly by the Duo – they readied themselves for the first turn. *"Aura of Judgement! Double Assail!!"* shouted Sir Bors as he covered Biltras and Ulfer with a surge of energy for this initial attack. The Duo rushed forward, feeling within them a rush of strength in their arms as they charged towards their foes.

Cariolanus smacked his lips and intoned. *"First Circle Colorless – Dual Disc Tactic."* At once, a gush of strong wind lashed through the Battlefield, sweeping Biltras and Ulfer off their feet. Straining against the magical assail, Ulfer barely managed to steady himself when two adepts appeared from within the storm, swiftly lashing their axes at him. Ulfer attempted to lift his sword to block the attack, but Biltras had already done so for him, aided by Sir Bors Second Circle Light Tactic, "Bolts of Judgement" targeted to weaken their opponents. Barely ten seconds into battle, Biltras and Ulfer were frantically parrying against their assailants. Though they found the onslaught aggressive, both knights knew that if they held out for just a little longer, they would detect some weakness in their opponents. Biltras warded the blows carefully, trying to familiarize himself with the enemy's strokes while Ulfer paid attention to their attacking pattern. Slowly, the duo began breathing more easily. The grin on Cariolanus' face turned to a scornful frown before finally bordering on anger as one adept finally fell facedown, gravely wounded in the neck.

Sir Bors, on the other hand, was quite pleased with these two young knights. Though determination. It was certainly encouraging to see that Constantine's knights still showed traces of the ancient pride and honour of knighthood of years long forgotten. Ulfer swung his sword in an arc over his head and slashed into the armour of the remaining adept. Blood gushed from his side as the Yellow Adept sank to his knees in anguish. Four novice adepts who had not joined the battle quickly carried their injured comrades away. Ulfer and Biltras rested their arms on their swords, desperately trying to catch their breath. Recovering, Biltras could not help noticing two high guardians, bearing the insignia of troop captain and carrying finely crafted flails, began to step forward to take the place of the fallen adepts.

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"Luck is on your side, Bors" Coriolanus spat. *"Let's see how Constantine's knights hold up against level two guardians and advocates."* The Yellow Dragonlord adroitly conjured a magical trap where the adepts had fallen and raising his arms, and added for good measure, an additional field of black clouds where Biltras and Ulfer stood. Biltras and Ulfer, startled by Cariolanus' tactics, hastily stepped back, adopting a defensive stance. Biltras and Ulfer may not have realized it - but they had fallen victim to a subtle confusion tactic of the Darkness sphere. The three initiate knights hastily joined their commander and formed a Star Trio formation. Sir Bors deftly brought his palms together to invoke *"Magical Flare – a trap removal tactic"*. Tracing a symbol in the air with two fingers, Sir Bors muttered a string of words and pointed at the duo. The spell broke, causing the black clouds to disperse. Ulfer seized the opportunity and swung his blade at the nearest high guardian with a great heave, but he managed to block the slash from Ulfer and rolled away just before Biltras incapacitated his arm. Having been freed from the Confusion Spell, Biltras and Ulfer attacked with even greater vengeance, and likewise the initiate knights were putting up a brave fight. However, Cariolanus was not going to let Sir Bors gain the upper hand this time. Having gained a three-foot distance from the Star Trio, Cariolanus suddenly released the magical trap. The air around Ulfer and Biltras was sucked away, and their opponents rushed in with a PowerConsec attack, their flails glowing menacingly with a bright yellow haze. The spell was a sight to behold, enveloping the combat zone in a golden casement of energy.

"Good work! Do not disappoint me now," boomed a delighted Cariolanus from behind. With a great cry, the PowerConsec Star Attack fell upon the five knights before they could twitch another muscle. Sir Bors looked in disbelief at the sight – they were assailed with burning flails that seemed to appear from out of thin air! Biltras fumbled with his shield trying desperately to block off the onslaught of flails, but the impact of the magically charged flails were so powerful that he staggered backwards each time a flail hit his shield. Cariolanus gave a twisted smile and chuckled to himself. The *"Blood Red Typhoon"* had been one of his most satisfying attacks. A Second Circle Darkness tactic, Cariolanus had improvised it to become even more devastating by embellishing magically charged flails that inflicts fatal elemental damage to this spell. It was a potent attack indeed, thought Sir Bors, as he watched first the three initiate knights, then Ulfer and Biltras drop to the ground, still trying to protect themselves from the last of the burning flails that lashed at them.

"If Sir Bors would kindly consent to follow us to Her Highness' Castle, I'm sure we can avoid further acts of violence. Otherwise we may have to resort to unnecessary brutal coercion." Cariolanus beamed with delight as he claimed his triumph with great gusto, thinking that this feat would frighten the aged knight into submission. *"You win this turn, tainted dragon fiend. But we still have one more to go before the battle is ended..."* Motioning to the fallen knights, some monks who had been hiding in the hermitage came forward to drag the five injured knights from the combat zone.

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"Very well, Sir Bors – here is my opening move." In a daze, Ulfer thought he saw the Yellow Dragonlord point towards Sir Bors and the oncoming cone of ice attack whirling towards the veteran knight. Biltras tried to gesture a warning – but he could not even lift his arms. Unhurriedly, Sir Bors drew a circle with one finger, and the torrent of magical ice stopped inches away from where he stood. Though it still roared like an enraged beast, the ice was unable to penetrate the magical shield which Sir Bors had created. Cariolanus watched in amusement as Sir Bors then lifted his hand and directed the cone of ice skywards. In an instant, the cone of ice exploded and small fragments like snowflakes fell harmlessly to the ground. *"An excellent diversion, Sir Bors."* Cariolanus boomed. *"I must admit it was quite a while ago when I last saw this Galanic invocation. Let me recall... I believe, it was Sir Galahad who last used it. Looks like he has passed it on to you, eh?"* Sir Bors was quite impressed at the knowledge and experience Cariolanus displayed. He had heard much about his opponent's prowess, and now realized that they had not been mere exaggerations. Before him was a powerful enemy, perhaps too powerful for him to handle...

"Since an ice attack is much too downy – let's try something 'warm' perhaps?" Beckoning his minions to retreat, he raised one hand and a golden yellow orb of flame appeared, hovering two inches above his open palm. The ball turned from yellow to orange, and then burnt till it became bright red, growing bigger every second. The dusty air that had cooled due to the magical ice earlier was rapidly heated up and caused a turbulent coil to sweep through the courtyard, uprooting some of the smaller plants from their roots. Cariolanus deftly brought his arm down, and the ball of flame shot through the air towards Sir Bors at an incredible velocity. There was simply no time to dodge the fiery globe. Sir Bors uttered only a single word before the ground he stood went up in flames. Biltras watched in horror at the fire, expecting to see the knight struggling in the blaze. The heat was so intense his vision went blurry.

Straining his eyes, Biltras found Sir Bors standing at the opposite corner of the courtyard. Both knights fought to stand on their feet against the extreme pain and fatigue, and with the help of the monks, struggled valiantly towards Sir Bors, standing between him and the dreaded Dragonlord. *"Impressive maneuver, Sir Bors. I see that the queen has not underestimated you after all. The "Field Shifting" tactic was your only chance, and you managed to react within a split second against my improvised Annihilation spell. You certainly earned your seat well. Given time, I would really like to try more of my improvised spells on you, but as we are in quite a hurry, I'm afraid we would just have to wait for another opportunity... "*

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Waving one hand in the air, Cariolanus pointed towards the sky and uttered a complex string of unrecognizable syllabi. The sky suddenly darkened and a strange aurora began to form. The courtyard was immediately plunged into a state of disarray. Sir Bors watched in alarm. It was as if the atmosphere itself was being ripped apart. An eerie glow from the sky descended slowly and whirled furiously around its magnetic centre. Lord Cariolanus, and the bizarre whirling slowly clustered into a series of rings. Ulfer stared at the rings in wonder. He had no intention to run or fight. The sight before him was too compelling. The only thought in his mind was to bask in its radiance. It had captivated him. Resigning to the prospect of defeat was never the custom of the knighthood, especially for one the stature of Sir Bors. Biltras and Ulfer struggled to stand beside Sir Bors, still bent on 'protecting' him. They racked their feverish mind for a way to counter this perverted spell, trying one dispel invocation after another, but found nothing that worked. They stared bleakly, at the swirling rings of light moving slowly towards them. "*How does one fight this light ?*" queried Biltras. Ulfer gave him a curious look and said, "*You don't. You just let it – uh... embrace you.*"

Sir Bors was amused. Though Ulfer had phrased it crudely, he was nevertheless correct. In any case, even as they were speaking, the rings had formed around them from their necks to the waist, the sound of the whirling rings humming louder in their ears with each passing moment. Frustrated, Biltras slashed his sword at the rings. The blade slit through the rings without obstruction, but a streak of lightning ran through him, and he dropped the sword in a spasm of pain. The rings continued to descend until it hovered about one foot from the ground, and spanned in height at least two feet above their heads. The rings were roughly five feet in diameter, and enclosed the three knights comfortably in a dazzling golden yellow.

Biltras stormed at Cariolanus in anger: "*Lackey, now that you've captured us, how do you propose to transport us? Levitate us perhaps, or march us there?*" The statement made Cariolanus roar out in laughter. "*Surely you have seen how Sir Bors teleported a while ago? Well, he would have told you about portal teleportation, except you were ... such novices.*"

With that, he exclaimed, "*Einej sotri Harabez*" and as they watched, a gate seemed to materialize before them. The monks nearby quickly scurried away. Those in the inner halls peeped to stare in amazement at the portal. There was a strong temptation to look inside the gateway and see what was on the other side, but none of them moved, knowing full well that the door led only to one place - Castle Morgana. "*Now gentlemen, if you are ready, we are going to take a short trip to Her Majesty's castle,*" Cariolanus concluded.

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Turning to the chief abbot, he gave a slight bow before waving his Yellow Legions and his three guests into the portal, himself entering last. As he disappeared into the gateway, the portal began to close up and the aura of magic dissipated into the air. All that was left in the courtyard to remind the monks of the fierce battle that morning were the three still unconscious initiate knights, the blood-stained tiles and uprooted plants - the aftermath of a most unnerving encounter. These could be put in order soon enough, thought the abbot; but the imprints of horror that was planted in their minds would take a long time to disappear.

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The air over Edela forest was unusually damp this time of the year. A thick fog had enfolded the trio, slowing them to a trudge. Delyus motioned Claude to gaze towards the eastern clearing, and behold, a section of Constantine's castle guards emerged from the shadows. Claude frowned. Yet another piece of the plan he has been conveniently kept in the dark. Delyus reined his steed as the twelve knights-in-training approached him, giving him a snap knight's salute as they come to a three feet way from the mysterious youth of Bedegraine Castle, Tosham. Barely, two hours ago, they had been in the presence of Sir Ector, and though it had been with much cajoling and pleading, Sir Ector and Tosham had developed a plan to help the Arthurian cause, and had sent Tosham to aid them – on a precarious mission to free Merlin, if indeed the archmage was still alive.

Tosham had noticed this section of knightlings carried their own sets of weaponry and bore different emblems. But it was still dark, and he could not make out the subtleties. Instinctively, the makidon reached for his twin-globed scepter, and having caught a single ray of the sunlight, the crystals glimmered and began to whirl, creating a rather breathtaking aura of magical brilliance. Held over his head, Tosham's scepter cast a faint azure glow which penetrated the enveloping fog within a ten feet radius. The scene before him was rather a rather strange sight. There were a dozen knights, but behind them, there was a cloaked minion. He was clearly not a knight, yet somehow he seemed to fit into a pre-determined battle structure...

"Thank you Tosham" Delyus bowed. "I have only heard of the magical properties of the twin-globed scepter artifact. To see it in action today – it is my privilege. King Constantine has appointed me commander over this scout section to ensure our safe passage." Claude sneered. *"Will the scepter do any good in battle? Or this clumsy section with the equally confounded support minion of Delyus: Tactician Erus."* Grasping the blade by this side, Claude mused. *I am better off battling with my sword. Engaging the enemy in a section battle was never my battle mantra.*

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“Greetings. Troop Commander Delyus. King Constantine sends word that Prince Uriel Loron has left Castle Camelot in search of Excalibur. We have orders to locate the Prince and ensure his safe return.” Delyus nodded, visibly distressed at the news. Tosham noted the knight who has stepped forward to be the most senior of the twelve. A knight of the Dolorous Blade, like Sir Delyus, only a couple of rank juniors. Sword in hand, he motioned for the rest of the knights, Crowned Shield and Splitspar to form up in front of Sir Delyus. The cloaked Tactician Erus walked alongside the mounts, and managed a weak smile when Tosham greeted him. *Prince Uriel Loron.* mused the makidon – a princely runaway... Tosham had never met royalty, and he wondered at the path ahead. Forests and foliage are his delight, for makidons are natural pathfinders in the woods, but the path of treacherous men... that is a different story.

Before long, the trio and the section had reached the forest clearing. To Claude’s dismay, the dragonarmy greeted their arrival. Sir Delyus spotted at least a section of troops in the distance, aptly concealed within the forest hedges. Some fifteen feet ahead, a fearsome figure clad in the armour of the Brown Dragonarmy, steered his warhorse forward and exclaimed with gusto. *“My master Breune, Brown Dragonlord is expecting Prince Loron’s company...” he began, and your escort services are no longer required! Tactician Pleonadis, battle formation”.* Tosham was not amused. Lifting his scepter, the makidon began reciting an invocation sequence when Delyus halted him mid-sentence. *“Makidon Tosham, the enemy is signaling to engage us in a Tactics battle. See how the opponent Tactician has begun lining their minions in a section formation of twelve?”*

Tosham swallowed the rest of his syllables and observed that Tactician Erus was similarly preparing for the battle ahead. The Knights of Crowned Shield and Splitspar started to form two groups of five and two knights of the Dolorous Blade stood apart. Claude dismounted from his steed. *The clash ahead is going to be nasty,* he sulked. No sooner has his boots landed, a clear command bellowed, *“Tactician Pleonadis, use Cloudy Skies tactic!”* Claude cursed under his breath. He savours the clash of steel on steel, but magical tricks are for the weak at arms. Tosham witnessed a different scene. A thick wall of dust and smoke had bellowed between him and the enemy. There was no way to see through the fog, only shadows mullled within it. Right now, five very *real* shadowy minions are charging this way.

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Tactics Anthem Edition - *Seals of Light*

Delyus motioned to Erus, and the tactician quickly dispatched the order for five knights to block the enemy's advance. "*Star Trio deployment.*" Delyus shouted. "Erus, slow the attack – use Thousand Daggers." The Tactician intoned a couplet of musically-charged notes, much like a spiritual chord and Tosham was amazed to see that the enemy had temporarily stopped the advance, and the ranks behind seemed at a disarray as some dropped to the ground for no as though pierced through the heart. Delyus' knights seized the chance, and dealt a quick lethal blow on the still confused enemies. "*Good work Erus! Send our next wave...*" No sooner had Delyus started to formulate his next move when a giant fireball smashed the ground where his five knights stood ten seconds ago. Ten bodies strewn along the deployment field, and from Claude's vantage point, an enemy Guardian had breached the frontline...

Without waiting for Delyus, Claude unsheathed his longsword and plunged himself in the Sandstorm, locking blows with the Guardian. With a quick leap, he faced him and knocked his opponent's flail flying. Hearing a scrambling sound behind him, Claude rolled to one side and dodged a direct blow to his skull from a Solo Advocate who had entered the fray. The move caused the dumbfounded minion to lose his footing and trip over his fallen companion. "Claude! Look out – rogue..." The words were lost in the howling wind. Claude smacked his lips satisfied. He certainly did not expect things to be so smooth – two down. Swinging his blade, he scanned the combat zone for his next target. A flash of light from the enemy ranks caused Claude to turn. From behind him, a figure appeared, dagger in hand. Aided by Pleonadis "*Dark Frenzy*" tactics spell, the minion lunged at Claude – disarming his sword and now going for the kill.

Tosham intervened by sending a single bolt of radiant energy from the scepter towards the minion, stunning him temporarily. Claude staggered to his feet, losing all sense of orientation. Pleonadis had saw it fit to cull his remaining troops and bring in the new reinforcements from behind the trees and sent at least three sections charging at Delyus, Tosham and the remaining units. Suddenly, Claude froze. In his disoriented state, he had missed a mace smashing right into the back of his head. He stiffened, and tried to turn around, but his body felt like jelly. Another blow ensued, searing his neck. Claude felt his body go limp, and the world began turning pitch black. He could hear Delyus shrieking in pain as a fireball crashed into him and the sound of another thundering blast near Tosham and Erus, but even louder in his own ears was the unmistakable sound of his armoured body hitting the ground.