

Ilnos donned his necklace over his head. The thick, wooden beads hung low on his dark blue, monastic robes. Light gray mountains decorated the bottom of the garb, and stylized, icy winds flowed between the stitched peaks.

He looked at the small mirror in the ritual preparation room. Ilnos patted every crease, hid frayed, loose ends, and straightened the collar of his vestments. He tied his brown hair into a thick, central braid.

The room was silent.

Ilnos opened the latch on his storage coffer. A collection of his carefully crafted wooden scroll cases filled the box to the brim and were neatly organized into rows.

When Ilnos had received a scroll, he had shaved, whittled, and painted each intricate case, like all the monks, in the Monastery of the North, a temple dedicated Arlarus, the god of magic.

Ilnos placed a brown scroll with orange constellations mapped in dots, another wrapped in dark blue and white, like a river on a cold winter's night, and a final one with silver footprints etched on a black backdrop, on the ground next to him.

He admired his earlier, more amateur works one by one. He chuckled at the themes, motifs, and obvious mistakes permanently scratched into the surface of the small but strong treeiron planks.

The door on the other side of the ritual preparation room opened.

Ward Lyrus stuck his head into the chamber. He was a balding, rotund man with large hands and feet, and broad shoulders and chest.

Lyrus was the Monastery of the North's chief librarian.

Ilnos remembered Lyrus before he achieved the rank of Ward. He was only a few years old when Lyrus had transferred to the temple, but he'd never forget the first time he saw Lyrus' daunting stature and heard his deep, hardy laugh.

"Brother Ilnos, are you prepared?" Lyrus asked. He walked into the room. "Grandmaster Remn is ready when you are."

Four pieces of ancient, yellow parchment orbited Lyrus' body. He approached Ilnos.

Ilnos closed the coffer and set it on the nearby table, which held the mirror. He flicked his wrists upward and the three scrolls that he had set aside unraveled and hovered cyclically around him.

Lyrus extended his arms and went to hug Ilnos. His thick fingers nearly touched his four rotating scrolls.

Ilnos embraced him.

"I'm ready for my meeting," Ilnos said.

"The day you've been working for since we found you is now here," Lyrus said. He clapped Ilnos on the back. "Are you excited for your task?"

A task was a quest issued by the head of the temple, the Grandmaster, which bettered the religion, monastery, or lives of others. Upon completion of the task, the member who completed it was granted the title of Master.

"I think so," Ilnos said confidently, "but I'm anxious to hear what my quest will be. What if it's too challenging?"

“It will only be too challenging if you make it so,” Lyrus said. “Although, for you, I would expect a great mission. Grandmaster Remn thinks highly of you.”

“That’s the problem. His expectations may be too high—”

“Ilnos, you should know that too whom much is given, much is expected,” Lyrus said. “Master Remn trained you personally and trained you well. You should welcome a challenge. We don’t give the rank of master to everyone. Just ask me.”

Lyrus laughed.

Ilnos took a deep breath.

“You’re right. There’s honor in accepting a difficult task and overcoming it.”

“Are you ready to go, then?” Lyrus asked.

“Yes. I’m ready.”

The two walked out of the prep room and into the inner sanctum.