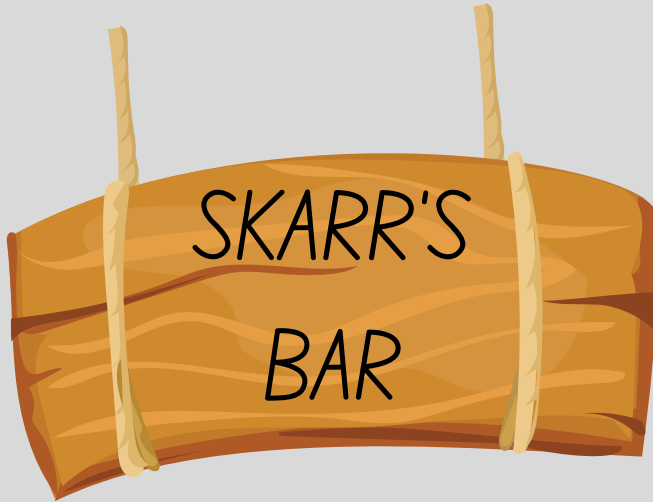




Skarr enters the bar with a bundle under his arm, yet his senses tingle as he walks behind the counter. Much like the night before, when he had sensed the party lying in wait for him, something feels off once more.

"Quin? You back there?" Skarr hollers, his voice echoing through the quiet building.

A groan comes from the kitchen, setting Skarr on edge. He may not be as spry as he was some few hundred years ago, but Skarr still moves with expeditious nature.

"Quin!" He booms as he charges into the kitchen. If something happened to Quin, Skarr would never forgive himself.

"I'm alright," Quin mumbles through strained grunts. "Gimme a hand, will ya?"

Skarr walks around the large island the bisects the kitchen, only to find an unconscious Ozymandias tied up with butcher's twine.

"Do I even want to know?" Skarr looks down at Ozy, shaking his head. "Did he give you any trouble?"

Quin finishes a double knot around Ozy's ankle, dusting herself off once done. "He came in while I'uz back here workin' on night shift foods. When I walked out ta greet 'im, he asked fer ya. I told I'uz on o' tha owners 'swell, and ifin he had business wit usin, I could handle it. An' that's when he bumrushed me an' started spoutin' nonsense 'bout takin' what ya owe 'im from anyone ya know."

Skarr stares at his knocked out former friend. He ponders what the odds are that Ozy goes quietly, though they can't be high. "I'll deal with him. You just rest up."

Quin shakes her head, giving Skarr's shin a light smack with her rolling pin. "Dadgumit, how many time I gotta tell ya we're in this together? Yer troubles're my troubles. We gon' start figurin' this stuff out together, er there ain't much of a partnership 'tween us."

"You're right," Skarr says with a sigh. "Here, help me tied up his hands too."

Between Skarr and Quin, they manage to firmly secure Ozymandias and drag him up to the office. Skarr tosses him onto a chair, then takes a seat to await his awakening. Quin fetches a couple cups of coffee to hold them over until then.

"How long ya think he'll be out fer? Di'n't think I hit 'im that hard."

Skarr lets out a brief chuckle. "I've met some fine weapons in my day, but few as mighty as that rolling pin of yours."



Quin laughs, punching Skarr in the arm. "Yer just sayin' that 'cause I'm a mean, green, fightin' machine!"

"You're something alright." Skarr playfully shoves Quin, as gently as he can.

"Ugh..." Ozymandias groans as he begins waking up.

"Ope, here we go. Show time." Quin readies her rolling pin once more.

Skarr scoots closer to Ozy, giving him a few love taps on the face to help waking him up. "Up and at 'em. We've got questions for you, you old fool."

Ozy groans again, leaning away from Skarr. "If anyone is the old fool, it is you. I paid my dues when you killed me. Now I'm just taking back what's mine."

Skarr scoffs, leaning back. "And what is it you think I took from you? What could I possibly have that you want, that you couldn't get yourself? You survived death after all. What more do you want?"

"I want what you have. That gift from below. The black blood." Ozy spits at Skarr. "Dying made me unworthy in your master's eyes. When I found my way back here, I had to prove myself. Thankfully, I had help from powers your titan brain can't fathom."

"Try me," Skarr booms.

Ozy smiles, a weak, twisted smile. "I made friends out there in that veil between here and far away. You know of where I speak. And those friends decided to help me earn my place in the history books. All I have to do... is kill you."

"Haha!" Quin bursts into laughter. "An' what makes ya think that's an' easy feat? From what I hear, ain't a fool alive that can tango wit tha like o' Skarr! What makes ya any diffrent than tha rest?"

Ozy groans as he shifts against his restraints. "I know things only a dead man can know. Things that only someone who has been to the Realm Between Realms can fathom. And old Hadrach has been there too, so he knows. He's seen the World Tree. He's seen the mists. And I guarantee that he has heard the whispers. You know the ones I mean, don't you, Hadrach?"

Skarr sits back, taking in the words. There is only one thing he can mean.

"The Cage is weakening."