

# ruin

THE NEXUS

SAMSUNLOBE



## Chapter 01 – Birth and Death

“We all have an inner voice. Sometimes we choose to listen to it and other times we choose to ignore it. What happens when the choice is removed? What happens when the voice has control? When choice is removed the true nature of a person's soul reveals itself.”

Vitonyis

“I would rather have enemies than friends. At least you expect an enemy to stab you in the back.”

Meena.

Ruin's top knot fluttered in the air turbulence created by the horned head of Pyris-Voltensaeger. The massive Fire-Drake had recovered well from its injuries and was enjoying the descent through the clouds. Ruin clung tightly to leather straps that were wound around the massive beast's neck. He was enjoying it also. He struggled to see as the wind whipped tears from his eyes. He tucked his head into his chest before once more bearing his fangs against the elements. He could see the blurred coastline ahead.

He looked to the right and smiled as he saw the long blonde hair of Efferial trail behind her just like the tail of Pyris-Kalventidoor snaked out behind the second Fire-Drake. Below, and to the left was the black shape of Moden-Yenisventin, the Dark-Wyrm. Sat behind the creature's jagged horns was the sorcerer, Kail. The wind seemed to avoid him. Ruin smiled at the thought.

The only passenger not enjoying the flight was the white Fenwulf, Sköll. He was clasped as gently as Voltensaeger could manage between his claws. Whether it was the feeling of entrapment by the cage-like claws or the unnatural sensation of flying, Sköll was making his displeasure known. The howls trailed off in the wind like a dying scream as they dived towards the island of Pureia. It was Ruin's homeland, but more importantly, it was home to the Nexus - birthplace of the Wyrms.

They landed on a deserted beach near the Cape of Rays. Not that it was unusual that the beach would be deserted. On the contrary, Pureia had been the first casualty in the awakening and the whole island was devoid of human life. The beasts, birds, insects and the rampaging flora and fauna now reigned unchallenged, at least in the lowlands.

The two Drakes and the larger Dark-Wyrm had isolated themselves and were deep in a silent discussion. Only the occasional bob of the head indicated the thoughts that were passing between them.

Ruin and Efferial had been busy gathering firewood after initially trying to find Sköll. The huge Fenwulf had bolted as soon as his paws had touched the sand. His legs were already running as they came into land, as if he had been wound up like a spring, ready for release.

Kail had sat cross-legged on the beach, his head slumped forward. He was paler than normal. The mental anguish and exhaustion he felt after

using his considerable powers seemed to take longer to recover from than the physical wounds suffered by the others. It had only been a few surges since the battle of Malforge and the sorcerer was still struggling to regain his composure. Ruin had thought it was something to do with the jewel embedded within his chest, The Immortal Star. It was a magical prison that contained the essence of the former Queen of the Wyrms, Freymendour. Although she gave Kail immense power, Ruin was convinced she took more than she gave.

Kail had wanted to make the journey to Pureia the moment they had reunited with Vitonysis. The sorcerer had insisted, but the combined arguments from the other Decimators had made him wait.

Ruin had been unconvinced about the whole adventure. They had travelled the country trying to assemble a band of warriors that were capable of standing against Wyrmkind. They had achieved that, and now they were agreeing to split once again. It didn't make any sense. They were stronger together. They had proven that at Malforge. Their combined might had levelled the city guards before they had taken down two Drakes and an Ash-Wyrm. The latter due in no small part to the arrival of Kalventidoor and Yenisventin. Conveniently Ruin had forgotten this and was keen to add to this victory. Kail had reminded him of the failings of their forebears and how they had been undone by overconfidence and bravado.

Now here they were. Three Decimators, Two Drakes, a Dark-Wyrm, and a skittish Fenwulf. It sounded like the start of a bad joke.

Kail waved his hand over the pile of firewood and flames leapt into life.

“You are supposed to be resting” chided Efferial. “Ruin has a flint, he is capable of starting a fire.”

Ruin threw a log onto the fire.

“Yea, but that was much easier” admitted the Barbarian.

Efferial scowled at the burly warrior.

“We are fine” said Kail quietly.

“Well you don't look it” continued Efferial. “I only wish we had something fresh to cook on this fire, rather than this dried meat. It's like eating shoe leather.”

“I like it” said Ruin tearing a piece off with his long fangs.

“You have no taste, so your opinion doesn't count.” She looked back at Kail.

“We are recovered” said the sorcerer. “We are saving every ounce of our being for what is to come. Please do not worry”

“About that” started Ruin. “When will we be discussing what is to come? You told me that this journey would decide the fate of our race and of the world to come. It would be good to know why we have left the others?”

“The fewer of us there are, the fewer mistakes” replied Kail.

“If you wanted to avoid mistakes, then perhaps we should have left Ruin on the mainland” smiled Efferial.

“What have I done this tide to deserve your vicious tongue” probed Ruin.

“Nothing” admitted Efferial. “But you have enough saved up to last a lifetime.”

“Well that may not be that long” said Ruin through a fake smile.

“We are here because of the Nexus” interrupted Kail.

“What about it?” asked Ruin.

“The Nexus holds the future of this world in the balance. It is the birthplace of the new brood of Wyrms.”

“Then we are here to kill them?” inquired Efferial.

“It is Ruin who will make that decision” said Kail calmly.

“What other choice will I have?” Ruin shrugged his shoulders.

“We always have a choice. Ruin must make his and in turn the newly hatched Wyrms will make theirs. We have foreseen it.”

“Then instead of speaking in riddles, why don't you just tell me what's going to happen and what decision I should make” growled Ruin.

“You would do what we told you?” asked Kail.

“I am here aren't I?”

“Only because you have chosen to be here. If you had truly believed that staying with the others and travelling into Crimaeus was the right thing to do, we would not be having this conversation.”

“Maybe” grumbled Ruin.

“What is it you expect from us?” questioned Efferial. “I know there is more than you are telling us.”

Kail looked up, the amber light danced across his sunken features.

“When the tide breaks we will travel into the mountains. The Nexus is there. The new Queen guards it. Sigil-Lamentillis. She is the most powerful being on this planet. We must distract her long enough so that Ruin may find the new brood. They will be unguarded and vulnerable. That is all I have foreseen. After that point there is only darkness.”

“So you and Effi will be playing catch with the Queen of the Wyrms whilst I surround myself with twenty or more unborn Wyrms, which I cannot kill.

“Fifty-six” said Kail.

“What?” replied Ruin.

“There are fifty-six in this brood, and we didn't say you couldn't kill them, we said it was your choice.”

“Brilliant. I am known for my sensible decision making. What happens then?”

“As we have said. Everything after this point is closed to us. This is why the future hinges on this event.”

“You are sure of this Kail?” asked Efferial. “What if you and I cannot distract the Queen? What happens then? And not that I don't trust Ruin to make the right decision, but what happens if he is not himself and cannot make the right decision?”

Efferial looked worriedly towards the barbarian. He returned her concerned glance.

“If we fail, then our struggle and that of our race is at an end. Whichever part of Ruin answers the call is fated to be so.”

“I am no clearer now than I was before we left” admitted Ruin. Suddenly the warrior grabbed his sword and turned. The large white Fenwulf padded into the fire light. He had the hind quarters of an Ovun in his jaws. He opened his mouth and the chunk of meat thudded into the sand.

“Dinner is served” smiled Ruin.

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Feeling rested, Ruin was awake early and ran across the wet sand to where the three leviathans slumbered. Ruin stopped short of the muzzle of Yenisventin. He stared at the horns and bony ridges that twisted around its skull. There was a kind of beauty in its chaotic form. The eyelid slid open revealing a golden orb.

[ Greetings warrior ] the thought bounced into Ruin's subconscious.

"My apologies" replied Ruin. "I didn't mean to wake you."

[ Sleeping, I was not. ]

Ruin shrugged his shoulders.

"I wanted to discuss our plan of attack. I wanted to see if you have any guidance on how we should tackle the Queen."

The two Fire-Drakes stirred from the sand and raised their heads. It was Voltensaeger who replied.

[ In agreement, we are. The plan is sound ]

"What? You have a plan already? Care to share?"

[ In communion with....] There was a definite pause. [ Kail, we have been]

"Well that's great, can you tell me what we are going to do?"

[ Lamentillis is strong. Our combined might will be needed if we are to defeat her. Our presence on this island, hidden from her I have. My brothers and I along with Kail and the woman will tackle the Queen. Give you as much time as we can, we will. Find the Nexus you must ]

"What then? What do I do then? Kail says I will have a choice. I'm not sure what other option I will have other than to kill them. That is why we are here isn't it? To stop the newborn from joining the fight."

[ When you are at the crossroads, know what path to take, you will ]

Ruin stared at his boots and idly moved the sand to one side. He lifted his head and stared into the glowing eye of Yenisventin.

"Kail tells me he can see nothing beyond the coming moment, only darkness. Is it the same for you?"

Yenisventin moved back onto his hind legs and raised himself up. Ruin knew he was communicating secretly with the others. There was something both they and Kail were keeping from him.

[ The future is not clear. The pathways are cloaked, concerns me this does. Offer further guidance on what awaits you in the mountains, I am unable ]

Ruin spun as he heard voices from behind. Kail and Efferial walked towards him.

"Where's Sköll?" asked Ruin.

"Good Morning to you also" replied Efferial.

"The white wulf heads towards our destination, as we must" said Kail.

"I guess he didn't fancy another journey in the claws of a Fire-Drake" smiled Efferial.

"Time runs out" said Kail. "We must go."

The sorcerer walked past the big warrior flicking his hood over his head. He climbed the foreleg of Yenisventin and grabbed the leather straps looped around the beast's neck. Within moments the Dark-Wyrm was soaring high into the clouds. Ruin clasped Efferial around the wrists. The humour in her features vanished in an instant as she saw the concern in Ruin's face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I have a bad feeling about this. There is something Kail is not telling us. Be on your guard."

"Concern? For me?" Efferial's humour and gentle smile returned. "As far as I can make out you and I have been destined to reach this point in our lives. Think of it as the next chapter, but this time we get to write it rather than act it out." Efferial leant in and kissed the warrior on his cheek. With a swish of long blonde hair she made her way towards the waiting Drake. "If things start to go wrong, I'll look after you" she winked.

Kalventidoor flapped his leathery wings and two vortices of sand danced across the beach as he took to the air.

Ruin knelt. He dug his hand into the sand and bringing them up he let the grains fall through his fingers.

[ Do you pray to your Gods? ]

The question surprised Ruin and shook him from his contemplation.

"This is my homeland. A lot has happened since my exile. I now find myself here once again with the balance of humankind teetering on a decision that only has one outcome in my mind. If this responsibility truly falls at my feet, then I will make it, but I was hoping that if the Gods existed then maybe they would be forthcoming with some guidance."

[ Doubt is a natural feeling. Understand this world, I do not. Made choices have I. Live with these I will. It is the way of things. Killed you I would have, when we first met. Followed my kin and slaughtered your race, I would have. Now I see the error of those choices. Changed my perspective you have. If you can do this for me, then there is hope for my brothers and sisters, even those unborn ]

Ruin climbed onto Voltensaeger's back.

"You see something of the future don't you?" probed Ruin.

[ If you knew the future, would you change your actions? ]

"That would depend on what it holds."

[ Changing your path, changes the destination. Not all destinations come with an onward path. ]

"I am not afraid of death. I just don't want to waste my life."

[ My final challenge is not in this place. That is all I see. ]

"That's good enough for me" said Ruin. "If you're going to make it off this island then so am I."

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The Wurm riders rose through the clouds and ahead the peak of Mount Chaste stood like a island in a tranquil sea of white. As they closed the distance the smaller snow capped peaks of the Pureity Mountain range poked through the billowing blanket of cloud. Ruin pulled his cloak

tightly around his shoulders as the cold air threatened to steal his breath away. He was about to shout to Yenisventin but then remembered that would be pointless. There was no way he would hear him over the rush of air. He concentrated.

[ How long until the Queen knows of our presence? ] Ruin repeated the question over and over in his head.

[ Heard you the first time I did ] replied Yenisventin. [ The longer we remain shielded the greater our chance of surprise ]

Suddenly Ruin felt the presence of something massive above them. It plunged the riders into shadow as it spread its wings to slow its descent. Ruin looked upwards and saw the multi-coloured form of the Celestial-Wyrm plummet from the sky like a meteor. The crystal lined jaws of Lamentillis were open wide and Ruin grimaced as the long white teeth sunk into the neck of Yenisventin. The two Wyrms and Kail vanished below into the clouds.

[ It begins ] The thought was urgent from Kalventidoor [ Get to the Nexus. Aid my brother I will ]

Before Ruin could protest he felt his body jerk backwards as Voltensaeger dived towards the mountains.

"We have to help them" shouted Ruin as he eventually regained his grip.

[ They buy us time. Tarry here we must not ]

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Efferial reached down and wrapped the leather straps around her legs. Standing astride Kalventidoor's dorsal fins she pulled Skybolt from her back. They had retrieved the magical bow on their adventures within the Forest of Thorns. She had quickly learned that the bow did not require a physical arrow. Whatever substance she could conjure in her mind when she pulled the bowstring would materialise on the knock.

The Fire-Drake had folded its wings against its body to speed its downward trajectory. The flailing mass of Yenisventin and Lamentillis

slowly came into view. Efferial struggled to see as the rush of air against her skin filled her eyes with tears. She squinted, wiping her face with her forearm.

"Get me closer" she hollered.

Lamentillis still had her colossal jaws clamped around the Dark-Wyrms neck. Kail's body was flapping in the wind held at a distance from the stricken beast by a single leather cord. The Queen dwarfed Yenisventin. She was at least three times the size of the Dark-Wyrm. It made her an un-missable target.

Lightning crackled against Efferial's cheek as she drew the bowstring. She loosed the electrically charged arrow and it arced towards the Celestial Wyrm. It bounced from her back and fizzled out. The following volley of flaming arrows was as ineffective, each bouncing harmlessly from the pearlescent scales. Kalventidoor opened his wings to stabilise his descent and trying to give Efferial a steadier base to fire from. Efferial started to panic as every substance she could think of failed to penetrate the Queen's magical armour.

"Can't you do anything?" she yelled.

[ My fire would incinerate your friend. A more direct approach may work. Hold tight ]

Kalventidoor dived once more, this time directly towards the Queen. Claws outstretched the Fire-Drake thudded into the back of Lamentillis. His momentum turned the falling group over and over in the air. Efferial almost lost her bow as they tumbled towards the fast approaching mountains.

Kalventidoor tore the scales on the Queen's back and bit down furiously trying to get purchase around her neck. The Queen flapped her wings violently and shook her head trying to dislodge the parasite on her back. The Fire-Drake desperately scraped its claws and repeatedly bit down on the Queen's carapace. Horns and scales were torn away but nothing could break the death hold Lamentillis had around the Dark-Wyrm's neck.

Efferial looked down. It would be moments before they would all be

smashed on the mountain tops. Kalventidoor read her thoughts and spread his wings. The sudden updraft ripped more scales from the Queen's back. The Fire-Drake halted the fatal fall. Efferial looked below.

"Kail!" she screamed.

The sorcerer was still flapping in the wind spiralling around his leather lifeline, close to breaking point. Power glowed around his free hand. Efferial watched as a fiery pulse thudded into the queen. For the first time Lamentillis was in pain. The Queen released her grip on the already dead form of Yenisventin. Spreading her immense wings she almost instantly arrested her fall. She focused on the spinning body of the Dark-Wyrm and the tiny sorcerer that was held in its death roll. She opened her mouth and molten fire poured down like a volcanic torrent. Kail drew his knife and cut the cord that had stopped him falling so far. He felt instant relief as the pressure on his wrist vanished. It was short lived as he tumbled through the air and smashed into the deep snow.

The pain from the fall was drowned out by the meteoric impact of Yenisventin slamming into the mountain. The sound echoed through the peaks, avalanches were triggered and a cloud of snow shot high up into the air. The white tendrils were suddenly turned to steam as the burning outpouring from the Queen flooded across the ridge and over the twisted corpse of the Dark-Wyrm staining the ground black.

Efferial had dropped from Kalventidoor's back and was jumping through the deep snow towards Kail. The Fire-Drake tried to return a volley of fire. The Queen flapped her giant wings once and the burning breath only managed to scold her rear claws. The Fire-Drake dived behind the nearest ridge as the Queen changed tack and vomited acid in his direction.

Kail had sunk some way into the deep snow. The crisp white powder had saved his life, but the jolt of the impact was severe.

"Kail! Are you okay?" called Efferial as she scrambled down towards her friend.

"We are breathing. That is a good start." The sorcerer tried to smile but his face was wracked with pain. Frantically moving the snow Efferial cleared a way down. She gently slid her hand behind Kail's head.

She looked down at his legs. They were clearly broken in several places.

"We're not walking away from this one" said Kail practically.

"I can carry you" pleaded Efferial.

"Our back is broken"

Efferial said nothing. Her glassy dark eyes said everything she needed to say. The insignificant moment of peace passed as the roar of Kalventidoor assaulted their ears. Efferial looked up as the Fire-Drake smashed into the side of the hill, his right wing encased in a tomb of ice. The Queen was about to finish her prey when she halted in mid air. She swung her head to look towards Mount Chaste. Leaving the disabled Fire-Drake she hurriedly made her way up the valley.

"We must stop her. Ruin needs more time." Kail coughed. Dark, almost black blood stained his lips. "Get us to Kalventidoor."

"You're in no state..."

"Now Effi. We are out of options."

Efferial reached under his armpit and hauled the sorcerer onto her back. Kail's agonising scream rang out through the Mountains of Purity. Efferial dragged her friend's broken body towards the frozen Drake. The Queen's icy blast had covered Kalventidoor's wing and the majority of his lower body. It had pinned him to the mountainside.

[ She is too powerful ]

"The tide has not turned yet" muttered Kail. "Effi. Get us to the ice."

The tall woman pulled on Kail's cloak until he slid onto the outskirts of the icy trap. The sorcerer closed his eyes and plunged his hand into the translucent substance. Quickly the ice retreated as if some magical heat ray attacked it. Feeling the ice ease Kalventidoor ripped himself free, sending ice shards in every direction.

"Can you fly?" asked Kail.

[ Yes ]

"We must stop her, she must not reach the Nexus."

With Kail hanging desperately around her shoulders Efferial clambered onto the Fire-Drake's back and within moments they were airborne. Kail moaned as the needle like pain in his back threatened to steal his consciousness. He focused his mind away from his body. He needed to stay in this moment. He reached out to the Fire-Drake.

[ Whatever it takes. You must stop her ]

[ Understood ] came the response.]

Although much smaller than the Celestial-Wyrm, the Fire-Drake was much faster. Kalventidoor climbed quickly through the thin air and then dived. His wings pinned to the side of his body. The Fire-Drake lowered his head to increase the efficiency of his plummeting form. The snow on either side of the narrow valley walls wafted into the air as the speeding giant passed. Kalventidoor opened his jaws and with exact precision bit down on the trailing tail of the Queen. With his teeth clamped shut, Kalventidoor let himself fall. His weight dragged them all earthbound.

Efferial let go of the harness and both she and Kail tumbled through the air once more. This time they fell from a much lower height. It could have been only a hands height as far as Kail was concerned. As he thumped into the snow his useless legs buckled beneath him and his face slammed into the cold surface. Efferial timed her flight and rolled expertly on her shoulder as she hit the snow.

The Queen roared in frustration. She swiped furiously at the smaller Drake ripping half of his carapace away. Kalventidoor staggered backwards. He breathed in, attempting to unleash his Drake-fire, but the Queen was too fast. She rushed towards him and bit down on his shoulder. Her long teeth pierced deep into his body. At the same moment she brought her rear legs up and raked them down across the Drake's unprotected belly. The razor sharp talons disembowelled Kalventidoor. The Drake slumped onto its back as the Queen opened her jaws and aimed for his neck. Powerless to resist. Lamentillis tore his throat out. Kalventidoor's bubbling scream faded into the wind. The Queen raised her bloody maw and her golden eyes sought out the two

humans ahead.

[ Killed you, I should have. Make the same mistake again, I will not ]

Efferial crouched next to Kail. He moved his head towards her.

"All is not lost. Have hope." The sorcerer breathed heavily. Efferial looked up to see the Queen stamp towards them.

"I hope you have a plan Kail."

"Wyrms teeth" he muttered.

"What do you mean?" asked Efferial thinking her friend was delirious.

"Your bow. Wyrms teeth" he repeated.

Efferial suddenly understood. She turned towards the approaching leviathan and pulled on the bowstring. 'Wyrms teeth' she thought. A yellowish-white bone shard appeared. She loosed the arrow and followed its path. The arrow thunked into the thick hide of the Queen. The tiny spikes did not slow the unstoppable Lamentillis. By the time she had reached the two humans she had more than thirty white arrows jutting from her body.

Efferial fell to her knees next to Kail. Despite the cold, a bead of sweat dripped from her forehead from her exertion. Kail reached out his hand took hold of her wrist, just as the shadow of the queen blocked out the light.

[ Abomination ] The thought rattled.

"You have no idea what we are" replied Kail. A sudden calm had taken over the sorcerer. Efferial could feel the power in his grip. The essence of the old Queen was clearly keeping him breathing. Without her the sorcerer would have been a crippled husk.

[ You are mistaken in your venture. That I know ]

"We have delayed you for long enough" said Kail defiantly.

Something akin to laughter came from Lamentillis.

[ The Nexus? Your brave barbarian friend? Disappoint you, I will. This is not the Nexus. This small hatchery is simply a decoy. The real Nexus, birthplace of my new brood, is safe. Hundreds of children await my return, far from here. Kill you I will. Kill your friend I will. Then return and watch my newborn offspring rid this world of your vile plague, I will.

Efferial cast a worried glance at Kail. She saw the truth in his face.

"Then at least you'll not take these hatchlings with you. We have always sought clarity. Your treachery has given us that."

Kail reached out to Ruin with his mind.

"Ruin. We are deceived. This is a decoy. This is not the Nexus. Kill them. Kill them all."

The Queen turned her head towards the mountain, and then back to the sorcerer.

[ It is a sacrifice, for that I am prepared. Are you? ]

Lamentillis opened her mouth and steaming fire poured out. Kail pulled Efferial close to him as he used the last of his strength to shield them both from the fiery death. With his other hand he reached up towards the Queen. With his palm facing her he slowly closed his fingers forming a fist. The white arrows that had just pierced the surface of the Queen's hide slowly started to bury themselves deeper into her flesh.

Un-fazed Lamentillis reared up on her hinds legs and then smashed her forelegs towards them. Efferial could feel the magical shield buckle under the weight of the attack. The Queen repeated the action. Kail collapsed and the shield vanished.

Tears rolled down Efferial's face.

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The Queen had initially surprised the trio, but Voltensaeger headed

onwards towards the peak. It had not been the distraction they had planned, but it was a distraction nonetheless. The Fire-Drake rode the updraft as he surveyed the mountain for a landing site. There was a small plateau a short distance from the summit. It provided the only flat spot.

Voltensaeger spread his wings and expertly came in to land. Ruin leapt from his back and thudded onto the snow covered ground. It was harder than he was expecting. He moved the snow to one side with his boot and saw the ice beneath. Kneeling down he cleared a bigger area with his arms.

"Looks like a frozen tarn" said Ruin.

[ It would be a suitable place for the Nexus ]

Ruin swung Mortis from his back and plunged the demonic blade into the ice. He carved a square shape. The blade slid through the frozen surface like a knife through butter. It was as if the ice moved away from the blade rather than the sword cutting through it. He pushed the bobbing chunk he had cut out under the water and peered into the darkness.

"This is it" he said. "They look like eggs. They are un-hatched."

[ Take a better look, we should. Stand aside ]

Ruin moved back to the rocky shore. Voltensaeger opened his mouth and poured Drake-Fire across the flat area. The thin covering of snow evaporated within a few grains. As the Fire-Drake continued to smother the frozen tarn in flame, a large watery hole started to expand from the centre. Steam filled the air as Voltensaeger finally closed his jaws. He had turned the icy lake into something resembling a volcanic hot spring. Ruin started to wade in.

[ Be wary. My fire will have only heated the surface. The undercurrent may be too cold for your mortal frame ]

"I'll be fine" shrugged Ruin as he threw his thick fur cloak onto the snowy bank. He swam out a short distance. Taking a deep breath the warrior's boots disappeared beneath the surface. The Fire-Drake

watched as air bubbles broke the surface, before eventually the fanged smile of Ruin emerged. He shook himself, unknowingly imitating his wulf cousins with his actions.

"They are all there un-hatched. Except one."

[ Strange. Sense a new born, I cannot. Be on our guard we must ]  
"Exactly how big are these new-born?"

[ Our kind are born fully developed. Size would depend on his standing. A Celestial new born would be a seventh of its full grown size ]

Ruin looked confused.

[ Three times your height ] clarified Voltensaeger.

The two of them turned suddenly as they heard a tectonic crash from the valley below. Even from this distance Ruin could see a blackened patch staining the white canvas.

"They need your aid. I will be fine here, although I am still not sure what it is I must do."

[ Plunging your sword into each egg casing would be enough to kill its occupant. Have enough mental capacity to fight its necrotic power, I doubt they will have developed yet ]

The Fire-Drake turned and leapt from the edge. His wings made a crack as he spread them wide and started to glide towards the melee below. Ruin could sense disappointment in the Drake's last thought. He had freely given the information on how to kill the unborn, but it was definitely accompanied by sadness.

Ruin turned to the tarn. What now? Had everything in his life led to this moment? Would he have to kill dozens of creatures that had yet to breathe air? Where was the nobility in that course of action? He hated Wyrms-kind for what they had done to his homeland and the tens of thousands they continued to slaughter across Mareta. If the Decimators could not stop them, they would eventually annihilate the human race. But this was wrong. He knew it.

What of the Wyrms and Drakes that had turned their back on their kind, Voltensaeger, Yenisventin, Kalventidoor and Haugmeningauer before that. Ruin liked them in their own unique way. In fact, he preferred their company to most humans for that matter. His thoughts wandered further to his own kind. Some of them deserved to be destroyed. The new Archmother Sameera for one. Humans were not beyond reproach, but they should be able to regulate themselves. Up until this point they had. Sometimes tyrants ruled, but through war and rebellion a righteous leader would finally ascend. The process was in constant flux, but that was human nature.

Ruin clasped his hands around his head. He felt an intruder inside his thoughts. He fought the trespasser but then relaxed as he recognised his friend Kail. He opened his mind as the sorcerer had taught him and Kail's message flooded in.

[Ruin. We are deceived. This is a decoy. This is not the Nexus. Kill them. Kill them all.]

The interruption vanished as quickly as it had arrived. Ruin fell to his knees. He looked through the ripples to the blurred white shapes below. He drew Mortis and waded in.

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Lamentillis threw her head back and roared in triumph. She was about to deal the killing blow when Kail and Efferial saw Voltensaeger clatter into her back. The canny Fire-Drake had sunk his teeth into the side of the Queen's neck so as she bucked her horned carapace backwards he avoided being jabbed by her many horns. Lamentillis shuffled up the mountain pass with the Fire-Drake still clinging to her back. Once on all four legs she shook her body vigorously. The violent movement threw Voltensaeger to the ground. Before he could regain his footing the Queen's tail battered him to the floor. Lamentillis stalked towards him. The Fire-Drake lashed out with his wing-claw. It had little effect on the huge Queen. She tore the wing membrane with her foreleg before clamping her jaw on the Drake's back. In one swift movement she span her head throwing Voltensaeger up into the air. The Drake smashed through the top of the ridge and disappeared in a cloud of rock and snow over the edge.

Kail squeezed Efferial's hand.

"Now is our moment" he assured her. "Help us sit."

Efferial knelt behind him and lifted him up. She watched as he unbuttoned his shirt. She stared open-mouthed as the sorcerer slid his own hand inside his chest. She shielded her eyes as he withdrew the jewel that resided within him. He held the glowing prism aloft.

"Lamentillis!" he called. "Your time is at an end."

The Queen stopped in her tracks as she saw the 'Immortal Star' in the human's hand. She tried to move away but her body was frozen.

[ No. You must not. We will talk ] she pleaded.

"Time for talk is over" said Kail calmly.

The light from the magical prison shone brightly and reached out to envelop the queen. The power of the jewel ripped the Wyrn-Queen's soul from her physical body. As the light dimmed Kail held the magical crystal against his chest and it sank back inside him. His body bucked and spasmed as it tried to absorb the foreign object, then the sorcerer lay still.

Efferial felt for a pulse. It was faint, barely detectable. Kail's body was limp. For the moment his suffering was over. Efferial looked up through her tears as the huge body of the dead Queen slumped onto the rock. She stroked his forehead gently.

"You've sacrificed too much. Rest now."