



CHRONICLE 3

THE BLUE BLADE

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“The Blue Blade”

The morning was freezing, colder than usual, as the townsfolk prepared for another harsh winter’s day and the festival of Morozko, the town’s legendary founder who perished three centuries ago. People were setting up lamps and hanging festoons with various embellishments while others prepared the meats and dishes that would be served at dusk, the moment the festival officially began.

Karennin stepped out into her front yard and stretched her arms and yawned. Although she had retired to bed early, the warlock was exhausted. She was not as active as she had been, and decades of service in Thamarya’s forces had taken their toll.

Towns were always looking to hire a spellcaster, and when she heard there was an opening in a little town known for its spa and tranquil life, she didn’t hesitate. It was the perfect spot for her: cold and dull.

Morozko had a population of 2000 which inflated to 6000 during the festival, which lasted an entire week. Her duties during the festivities were to oversee the nightly fireworks and a Phantom Pantomime, which consisted of a whole pantomime carried out by illusions created and directed by Karennin. This year, she selected the story of the town’s founder.

As she enjoyed the morning’s cold, she noticed that there was no wind; something unusual for this time of year, as Morozko, was also notorious for its freezing mornings due to the arctic winds from the Frost Lands. The warlock tapped her chin, lost in thought when she was interrupted by the town’s mayor, who asked her to breakfast and discuss some matters.

The warlock and mayor had breakfast together in the Two-Headed Dog, the town’s largest tavern. The mayor ate some black bread, with hams and a couple of ales, while Karennin enjoyed her Caxcane coffee, and some fruits. The mayor was worried about security, given that the new leader of the town’s guard was inexperienced. Karennin nodded, knowing that the mayor just wanted to share his worries and be heard. When he finished, the warlock patted him on the shoulder, “It will be okay,” and smiled, projecting warmth and serenity.

After an hour, Karennin excused herself and headed to the firework storage. She had spent weeks preparing them, getting the compound amounts right, and keeping them dry. The hardest part had been to train the assistants to handle the fireworks. She still wasn’t certain, but there was little she could do now. Karennin had made it very clear that she would oversee the fireworks but activate them; that’s what the assistants were for.

When Karennin finished tending to some of the assistants who had burnt themselves, and caused a minor fire which she was able to put out, she headed to her house. She had not finished making annotations to the pantomime’s script.

As she strolled in the snowy path that led towards her house, she noticed a group of children surrounding something on the ground.

A second later, she heard a dry thud beside her. Karennin turned and saw a black bird, a raven, dead on the snow.

The warlock kneeled down and grabbed the bird, feeling a jolt of numbness on her fingers which spread to her spine. The raven was icy cold, unnaturally so.

Another thud echoed beside her, followed by some children yelling, “Look, another one fell close to Karennin.” The warlock raised her head and gazed into the sky, analyzing it like a painting with hidden meanings. Unsatisfied, she lowered her head and searched for other falling birds. Nothing.

Karennin picked up the raven in front of her and, in one swift elegant movement, grabbed one of the children by the coat and lifted him, “Say nothing of this to anyone but me. If you see more, come and tell me.” The child nodded in fear without pronouncing a sound and sprinted away with the others as soon as Karennin loosened her grip.

The sound of flickering pages reverberated through the entire house, mixed with the gentle orange light of numerous candles scattered across the inside. Hundreds of books and scrolls dispersed around the floor formed dozens of fort-like piles as Karennin sat on a large rectangular table poring over one blue book looking for something. Her eyes were tense, dry, and red from the draconian effort she had put them through. For hours she had been trying to find something about the dead ravens.

The first thing she had done reaching home had been to detect magic on the animal, which returned no results. She opened the bird and, after carefully inspecting its innards, concluded that the raven had been healthy. Karennin had no idea how the bird had died, so she dived into her books.

The chatter on the streets increased with every hour as more tourists arrived in Morozko for the festival’s opening. But none of that ruckus disturbed Karennin, her eyes saw nothing but the ink on the books, and her ears had become shields that deflected all voices.



Karennin slammed another book and tossed it on the ground, gritting her teeth in frustration as she did so. The warlock looked out the window and saw a throng of tourists and townsfolk packing the streets; enjoying all the entertainment the festival offered. She lifted her head and noticed that the Twin Suns were setting on the horizon, their soft orange and pink glow bathing the landscape.

The warlock sighed deeply, the most profound she had given in a long time. She started to realize that some brief madness had afflicted her. "What came over me?" she thought. All those years of fighting the enemies of Thamarya had left her cautious to the point of being paranoid.

Unexpectedly, a deep voice began to throb in her house. "You are not paranoid."

Karennin recognized the voice. It was her master and patron who had endowed her with powers so many decades ago. "Master Maxa. You're back?"

Maxa was a powerful spirit of nature, one whose agenda was only known to himself.

"Beware when the winds stop blowing," uttered Maxa.

"What?"

"Remember your lessons!" howled Maxa.

"Which?"

"Beware when the winds stop blowing; when the birds drop dead from the sky..."

Karennin took some steps back, her mouth and eyes wide open as the last words struck a chord with her. She thought of that morning, how she had perceived no wind at all. And then the birds.

"Beware when the winds stop blowing; when the birds drop dead from the sky and a pale red light taints the night's sky," murmured the warlock, her brow now sweating as she looked out the window and saw that the suns had set, but the night was tainted by a peculiar red light.

"The riders!"

The revelation hit her with the might of a Warhammer as she felt her body too heavy for her knees, grabbing the table for support.

The warlock was on the verge of speaking when a sharp whistle echoed through the ceiling, followed by a loud explosion.

Karennin was thrown across the rooming and crashed into a pile of books. In the midst of standing up, the deafening sound of more explosions rocked the surroundings, followed by screams of panic as cannon fire descended on the town with a dragon's fury.

The cannons ceased their deafening roar, only to be replaced by the pounding of hundreds of hooves against the ground.

The riders were charging. Trumpets and bells rang inside Morozko as the guards rallied and prepared to fight off the attack. Without a word, Karennin reached for her scimitar.

"That will do no good."

"It's my job. I have to protect the people."

"Go to Morozko's mausoleum."

"What?"

"You will find help there. You've felt it. I know you have," said Maxa in a condescending tone. Karennin was perplexed.

She had felt something multiple times in the town's center but had been unable to pinpoint the origin.

The mausoleum was a mound built on the top of the only hill, overlooking the rest of the town. The mound remained closed to everyone, including the mayor, and had not been open to the public in almost two hundred years.

"Maxa, what exactly will I find?"

Silence. Her patron's voice was no longer there.

The cries of soldiers and the clash of weapons mingled like a chaotic symphony as the defenders tried to halt the enemy attack.

The guards fought bravely but were no match for the fabled Riders of Doom, the cavalry that no kingdom or army wanted to face in Eluan. Their heavy armor and devastating weapons cut through the guard's ranks as if they were hot lard.

The warlock wanted to face the riders immediately, but she trusted Maxa and his words. Karennin exited her house and headed towards the mausoleum.

It was pure pandemonium in town, with people running in all directions while fires and explosions consumed all the houses and structures.

The guards used their knowledge of the alleys to get the upper hand on the riders. Sometimes it worked, but most of the time, it did not.

As Karennin sneaked through the alleys and used her magic to avoid being spotted, she recognized the rider's banner: a great war horse raising its front legs in green and gold colors. It was the Galahad Stallions, the cruelest of all the Riders of Doom.

The warlock hurried, wanting to stop the butchery as soon as possible. Her heart ached as she heard and saw the numerous atrocities being committed by the riders who appeared to be unopposed. At a distance, she saw the mayor and the leader of the guard heading a counterattack.

A strange aura surrounded the mound. Karennin had passed by on numerous occasions, but she had never felt such energy emanating from the place. She was adamant about that. Something was stirring inside the mound, possibly awoken by the riders.

As she approached the door, she felt an unearthly cold, a chilling sensation that far surpassed anything she had ever experienced in town.

The door was round and made of polished teak, its surface flawless as the lack of a single splinter demonstrated, conveying that it seemed brand new and not hundreds of years old.

Karennin's hand became glued when she placed it on the door, freeing only by using fire hands to melt the abnormal ice that had seized her skin and refused to liberate it. After the spell wore off, the warlock observed parts of her palm singed, with skin removed and some blood dripping from it.

Her gaze returned to the door, which she saw was ajar now. Karennin entered the mound.

Frozen moss covered the ground like a delicate layer of sugar, while light filtered into the area through minuscule apertures on the walls. The smell of deep earth suffused the air, and an abysmal silence dominated the mausoleum as all exterior sounds were blocked.

The interior was empty except for a large block of stone. Its edges were straight and the surface smooth, the work of an expert crafter. The block was void of any detail except a small engraving written in old thamaryan which said: "Here lies Morozko, founder of the town, and defeater of Morblank, King of the Ice Trolls."

Karennin scoured the entire block looking for a way to open it. Nothing. Frustrated, she decided to use a spell. The warlock snapped her fingers, but again nothing. Karennin cursed the gods for bringing the Riders of Doom to town and inability to open what she believed to be the resting place of Morozko.

After she finished cussing, a triangle of light formed on the block's lid, followed by the feeble aroma of lavender, an ingredient used for casting wards or magic locks.

Inside the triangle were two circles symbolizing the Twin Suns on the bottom angles while the silhouette of a keyhole lay in the center.

From past experience with magic locks, Karennin stated the magical word for "Open." Nothing. She repeated the word but accompanied by the gestures for "Open." Once again, nothing. She tried every combination she could remember, but her efforts came to naught.

Karennin was about to have one last try when the sound of stomping hooves, and horses' nickering crept inside the mausoleum.

"Fuck." The warlock gave another magical command to no avail.

Consumed with frustration, she banged the triangle with her clenched fist. Karennin prepared to hide or find an exit when she perceived something different. One of the suns (the one her fist had landed on) had moved a couple of inches.

"Oh, praise the Twin Suns!"

Inspired by a moment of genius, Karennin moved one of the suns towards the keyhole. The instant they touched, the sun glowed with more intensity until it faded away, leaving behind a much larger keyhole that burned with more iridescence. She hurried and repeated the same action with the remaining sun.

A loud grinding of gears echoed in the chamber as the triangle of light disappeared. A line of light formed on the block's lid from side to side, after which each folded open like windows.

Karennin leaped on top to see the inside of the block. Her jaw dropped, and her nostrils struggled for breath as the corpse of a human male was revealed. The body was in perfect condition, the skin intact, and both hair and beard beautiful as if they had been groomed recently. The man was in his late forties, as patches of grey hair revealed, and his clothes were simple except for the steel breastplate gilded with ethyx in various patterns.

"Is this the help?" thought the warlock as she tried to ascertain if the body was alive, undead, or in a magical trance.

Her magic showed that it was a plain corpse.

"Fuck!" rumbled Karennin. As she was about to jump away she noticed a blue blade resting beside Morozko's remains.

The sword was different shades of blue, and the surface looked like steel, but something made Karennin think that that wasn't the case. She didn't need to detect magic. Pure and unbound energy and power radiated from the sword.

"This is what Maxa meant, surely."

A loud creaking sound rumbled in the mausoleum as the door was kicked open, followed by the clanking of heavy armor.

The warlock tried to grab the sword, but her hand was shoved back by an invisible force. She made another attempt but was burned by the freezing aura that surrounded the blade. Knowing her time was up, Karennin cast an invisibility spell on herself and stepped away from the block.

Nine riders surrounded the block. Karennin gapped in wonder and fear as she analyzed the bulking shapes. All of them were broad like a door and nearly as tall. Their solid armors were made of heavy steel and stained with so much blood that their regular metallic, green, and gold were almost unperceivable.

One of the riders, the leader, wore an impressive red coat. The leader stood beside the block and peered into its interior.

"There's the sword," said the leader, the helm distorting the words. The leader bent over and reached for the weapon.

Karennin grinned as the rider was also rejected by the magical sword. On the second attempt, the rider's gauntlet began to freeze. The leader removed it in a single swift movement, revealing a robust white hand with long and delicate fingers.

"No use. The magic is too powerful," said the voice that transformed into a woman's as the helm was removed, revealing a beautiful face with a snub nose and green eyes.

"Send word to our master that we have located the Frostblade. Only his magic will be able to remove it from here. But, before that..."

With the speed of a striking cobra, the rider turned and threw a dagger that nailed itself into Karennin's thigh, who yelled in pain and shock.

The warlock removed the dagger as the nine riders rotated to confront her.

The rider's leader nodded to one of her subordinates, who lifted his claymore and swooped down on Karennin.

The sparks flew on the ground as the huge claymore crashed on it. Karennin, having teleported, now flanked the rider, who managed to spot her just as she pronounced the word "Fire" and released a fireball that shrouded the rider in flames.

The burning rider rolled on the ground, howling in pain as the magical fire burned through his armor and skin, while the other riders unsheathed their weapons and lunged at the warlock.

Through careful, balanced timing, Karennin managed to teleport around the riders, avoiding their attacks and giving some of her own with her scimitar. The exchange was a flurry of blows.

This was the strongest resistance the riders had encountered during their attack. Had they known they were to battle a spellcaster, they would have bombarded the mound and later searched the remains for the Frostblade.

Sweat glistered on Karennin's forehead as she felt the strain on every one of her muscles as she teleported from foe to foe. After killing a second rider, Karennin, knowing that her strength was almost depleted, teleported to the exit, where she was met by the crunch of her ribs as the leader's hammer thrust her against the block, which cracked in half at the impact.

Karennin dropped like a sandbag next to Morozko's body, which hung from the shattered block.

A lake of the warlock's blood started to form on the floor as she felt her last remaining breaths abandoning her body. She didn't feel her back, which was a worse sign than feeling pain.

The rider's leader whistled as she strolled towards Karennin's broken body. She grinned at the warlock as she raised her hammer into the air. As Karennin gurgled blood from her mouth, she managed to pronounce her master's name as a single tear ran down her cheek.

The hammer swooped down with a giant's strength. Its purpose, to splatter Karennin's head all over the floor and spread it like butter.

The weapon stopped cold one inch away from Karennin's head. She opened her eyes and observed how the leader's mount opened wide with disbelief as her weapon was shoved back at her.

A slight breeze engulfed the room, leaving little visible shapes that gathered on a single spot and formed the shape of a humanoid with antlers. The riders remained still, unsure of what was happening and what new foe they faced.

"Maxa!"

Taking his name as an order, the antlered spirit attacked the riders, taking the largest of them, and breaking both of his arms in a single motion while dodging an attack from behind.

The riders encircled Maxa, who, fighting with the elegance of a dancer and the speed of a hummingbird, managed to evade numerous mortal blows.

The spirit had the upper hand on the riders, killing two more, and leaving only five alive. Amidst the fighting, the leader took out a red vellum with a large "T" written on it and spoke the activation word.

Suddenly, Maxa felt his feet nailed to the ground. He battled to lift his leg and dodge another blow, but he managed it. The spirit could still move, but the enchantment significantly reduced his speed.

Blades pierced the spirit's physical body. Something impossible, but the rider's weapons all carried magical symbols granted to them by their master. Maxa screamed as the riders managed to land more attacks.

Karennin watched in helplessness as the riders were defeating her patron, something which she thought impossible, but Maxa's cries of pain proved that their enemy possessed formidable dark magic at their disposal.

The warlock tried to move, but her body did not respond. Her heart beat faster as fear and impotence overcame her. She had not felt like this since childhood when she watched from her hiding place as a band of marauders butchered her family and the villagers. History is cruel, its tendency to repeat itself making it heartless, as Karennin observed how Maxa was falling to the riders.

As she lay defenseless on the ground, Karennin heard her name being called by a soft and unfamiliar voice. It hadn't been Maxa or any of the riders, and she felt no other presence inside the mound. "Karennin..."

The warlock was now glaring at the Frostblade, which had been splattered by her blood. The weapon had called out her name. She was sure of it. The weapon had an eerie blue glow as it repeated her name again. The Frostblade had accepted her blood; it had accepted her offering.

Using all her remaining strength, Karennin stretched out her hand, with one of her fingers barely caressing the blade. The moment her skin touched the weapon, she felt a surge of energy run through her body. Her bones and muscles stiffened and rose her to her feet without her ordering them to do so. The veins and cartilage in her body hardened as her fist gripped the Frostblade.

The warlock now stood, but she felt she wasn't in control. It was her body, and she could feel every movement of her muscles, and her senses perceived all, but there was a sensation that the actions were dictated by an outside force, and she was a mere puppet.

The riders only noticed Karennin was standing as one of them was cut in half before them. The single blow had gone through the heavy armor as if it had been made of paper. There had been no friction, and it occurred in less than one second, leaving the rider no chance to scream.

The other riders abandoned their attacks on Maxa and focused on the new threat. One of the riders lifted his arm cannon and fired at almost point-blank range, creating a cloud of smoke that obscured the area.

When the smoke lifted, Karennin was still standing holding the blue sword, while the heavy steel ball was cut in half like fruit on the ground. The warlock had just been a witness as the Frostblade flew of its own accord and cut the cannonball in a fraction of a second.

Undeterred, the riders attacked Karennin, who cut them down one by one until only the leader remained, who lifted Maxa and held him between them like a shield.

"Drop the weapon, or I will kill your friend."

Karennin tried to open her hand. Nothing.

She tried again. Nothing.

"I can't control it."

The rider ignored her as she repeated the order to drop the weapon. Karennin's heart wriggled in desperation; she adored her patron, the spirit that had saved her as a child, and to whom she had sworn loyalty. She would never put him in danger or betray him. She wanted to drop the sword above all else.

"You don't understand, I can't..." Before she could finish, the Frostblade thrust forwards, going through the spirit and the rider.

Maxa's physical body started to collapse, turning into dust that was absorbed by the Frostblade. Before his face crumpled, the spirit mouthed a single word to Karennin: "Courage."

The leader, meanwhile, hung like a skewered chicken, gazing in amazement at the sword running through her stomach. The armor was in perfect state, with no damage around the area where the Frostblade had gone through, only the opening through which it penetrated the mortal steel.

Karennin's grip on the handle loosened. An icy wind invaded the mound as the Frostblade faded away like an apparition.

The warlock noticed that the pain had gone away, and her body was without a scratch, as if she had never been wounded.

She looked at the riders' leader, who had not been as lucky. The moment the blade disappeared, she had sunk to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

The leader was dead. Her skin was frozen, as were her dark eyes.

Karennin began to feel a deep pain inside. It was grief. Maxa had gone. She wanted to cry and scream, but she was too exhausted. She felt as if she had carried the weight of Eluan on her shoulders.

She leaned on one of the walls when she noticed a cloaked figure bending over the remains of Morozko.

"So here is the brave Morozko."

The figure rose to his feet and walked towards Karennin, who noticed that he made no sound as he walked.

"Who are you?"

"I am the guardian of the Frostblade."

"Guardian? Where were you?"

The figure walked towards the riders' leader, "I was observing. The weapon has a will of its own. As you experienced."

"What is it? Is it cursed?"

"Curse is a good word to describe it."

The figure knelt beside the leader and analyzed the flawless wound.

"Why did the weapon vanish?"

"It has gone to another place to test and find if anyone is worthy of wielding it."

"Is there?"

To this question, the figure turned and shrugged its shoulders.

"Can anyone killed by it be resurrected?"

The figure approached Karennin.

"Your patron is not dead."

The words hit Karennin like the rider's hammer.

"The Frostblade kills any mortal creature it touches, but with spirits, it absorbs them. Your patron is now trapped inside the weapon."

"Can I free him?"

"I don't know," replied the figure with deep sorrow.

Karennin walked to the exit without a word. Just as she was about to leave the mausoleum, the figure said, "Good luck."

A terrible blizzard assailed the mountain pass, freezing everything in its path and mercilessly burying many rocks and creatures under feet of snow. Not even a white dragon could have fought off its deadly effects. However, one figure alone challenged the storm.

A single person was making her way through the cold and snow, one person who had a specific purpose, a mission, and whose heart burned, and burned with one thing and one thing only, "courage."

