1 The Iron Gauntlet

Centuries ago, Clan Clearstone discarded the dignity that came with being a human being in exchange for the power associated with the workings of magic, the energies of other worlds. With that power they set themselves above the humans among whom they were once numbered; with that power they chose to conquer and terrorize the Clans. And in short order, they learned that no power of other worlds, of other beasts, is sufficient to long defeat the massed strength and power of true humans, of the children of Mishael.

In the wake of the Clearstone Uprising, chaos threatened to take the Clans. Unwilling to slaughter the creatures that Clan Clearstone had become, the newly-formed Clansman’s Clasp took a drastic step and OutClanned the entirety of Clan Clearstone -- still, many of the Clearstones refused to acknowledge the authority of the humans who had defeated them, and continued to battle to the death.

It was in response to their threat that the Iron Gauntlet was formed. The ultimate fighters, culled from the ranks of the Clan’s soldiers, the Gauntlet are trained in the ancient art of the Sworddancer, a way of life and a style of combat that predates the earliest history of the Clans, and learn to become one with their blades. You are one of that select few, sworn into the defense of the Clans and the human beings.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the Clan’s existence in recent years has been the Western "Citizens." The Westerners, after first starting a war through the treachery of one of their own, and then refusing to leave well enough alone after the war was ended and the borders between the human and Western lands sealed, have now arranged for a "peace summit" on this Castle. Amazingly, the Clansman’s Clasp has accepted the offer, despite the fact that the Castle you currently stand on fairly *reeks* of magic!

Your motto has ever been "Never Forget." Perhaps you fellow humans have forgotten what occured when magic was allowed to infiltrate the Clans. Perhaps they have even forgotten that it is magic that the Realm has used to attack your people for the last five years, prevented only by the grace of Mishael, who has protected your lands from the touch of magic. Forgotten they must have, for they have agreed to talk peace in a Castle supported by magic, maintained by magic, entered and exited by magic. They have agreed to talk trade relations with a nation that sells magic and buys it, where every commercial exchange and every military endeavor has traces of magic within it. They have even agreed to make legal the practice of witchcraft by the Clan’s Left Hand, a sisterhood of witches and warlocks that has remained hidden since the Clearstone Uprising! Have they gone mad?

Mad or not, they are the Clasp. And it is your duty to protect them and enforce their will, despite your reservations about the courses of action they choose. At the least, they have legalized witchcraft only under their own instructions and in the service of the Clans as a whole -- on the other hand, the Left Hand has remained underground and secretive, despite their purportedly legal activities. It remains your task as members of the Gauntlet to find this coven and expose its members -- perhaps by that time, the Clasp will have come to its senses and you shall be able to deal with them as they deserve.

Here, too, you are likely to find emisaries of the Right Hand, an organization of thieves and cutthroats that has infested the Clans and Castle Clearstone. Not long before you arrived here, there was a rash of thefts within the Clearstone Territories, and a number of valuable items were stolen from the Clasp and their families and servants. What they are planning, you do not know, but on a castle such as this one they shall no doubt attempt to steal and retrieve mystical artifacts here, as well as continue their activities against the Clasp. The Clasp wishes to see *them* found, and you shall find them.

But the Gauntlet has not forgotten its original purpose. The Gauntlet will never forget. You learned your greatest lesson three decades ago, when your own leader, the ultimate Sworddancer Storm Bluemist, was discovered to be a dealer in magic. Not just any magic, either -- Storm had perverted the training of the Sworddancers and had forged a weapon, a *jivatmaya*, that drank the souls of its victims. Worse even than that, he was attempting to teach his perversions, his dark magic, to those he had vowed to protect from it's touch.

Storm was declared OutClan, and the Gauntlet went on. And now, perhaps it is but coincidence, but you cannot help but think that the Clan's being stranded on this Castle, due to the failure of the "teleport platforms," is Mishael's punishment for having forgotten your past and his lesson. It was that Lord who granted to the humans free will, the power to remain untouched by forces of other worlds, and now His children have begun to throw off that gift. Coincidence or punishment, however, the failure of those platforms has left, of the members of the Gauntlet scheduled to appear on the Castle, only two: Hawk and Dirk Brightwind. Luckilly, however, Stratus Bluemist has made his way onto the Castle after escaping the clutches of the Westerners; he has been a prisoner of war for over a month. He, too, is one of the Gauntlet.

You are outnumbered by the Western Guard of the Realm, which has arrived in force to what should have been a peace conference. Here, too, has arrived the Wizard's Conclave, allowed to exist in the Realm to flaunt Mishael's will. You have been stranded here by the magic of your enemies, away from the protection of the Shrine of Mishael. Your only defense is the armor you have brought, carved of the mythril of Clearstone Mountain, which defends you from the forces of magic...small protection indeed, when you are surrounded by it as you are. But still, you are the Gauntlet -- and the Iron Gauntlet never gives up.

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