

The return to the village was slowed by the number of children that needed to be managed. The older ones who had come for that purpose hadn't expected to deal with those numbers, and while they had lost few of the fighters, they weren't comfortable with the children. The Workfor society was built along strong hierarchical lines and only the elderly were expected to deal with children. Even with the extraordinary circumstances, the others found it difficult to help.

It meant the return trip took twice as long. But the spirits were high when they reached the village, even with the work still ahead.

Tristan had explained to Durigna the need for them to move away from the mountains, head south, away from anything relating to the Ancients, because the Prates had convoys traveling along those.

It took four days before they were ready, and Tristan was comforted when thinking about letting them continue on their own didn't trigger a need to see them safely all the way to their destination.

The price the Source had required of him had been paid. He'd even gone further in telling them to go to safer grounds. Now it was time for him and Alex to journey to his cure. Along with their guide.

There had been more arguing among the Workfor. Again, they didn't want Durigna to leave them, but she was the only one who spoke Standard, and such a long trek couldn't be done without being able to communicate.

Alex didn't mention that he understood them enough at this point to tell Tristan what the argument had been about, and Tristan didn't feel a need to share the information. The Workfor were the ones who had to deal with it.

They did so by assigning Durigna four protectors.

Ferol argued to go with them until the moment they went their separate ways. Tristan didn't have the details of those discussions. Alex had stayed away. But the emotions had been clear on their faces. As much as it pained Durigna, she was sending him away.

It put doubt to her claim that while the journey would be long, it would be safe. Unless this was because she felt someone of their rank, even an apprentice, needed to remain with the other. Hierarchies only remained when there was someone to enforce them.

As tearful as they were, the goodbyes happened. Durigna insisted on watching until the last of her people vanished into the distance. Only then did they set on to their own journey