A Simple Cog

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D. Moonfire

Chapter 1

Arguments

The war between Kormar and Gepaul started many years before the first blade was unsheathed.

—The War That Wasn't

The door slammed hard into the plaster wall and knocked down a few errant portraits before swinging back just as violently. The door smacked the man following behind the baron right in the chest, staggering him back. Shaking his head, the older man managed to clear his head and burst through the door.

"Baron, I insist! Please, don't—"

"We have no choice, Flarius," the baron didn't look back as he spoke in his cultured Tarsan accent, practiced before a mirror since he was eight. The young baron stopped in a hallway and smacked one of the gas sconces. It swung down and a loud booming rang out. Flarius shuddered as the baron turned two others and the floor sank down into stairs leading below.

"B-But, my lord, your father said this was only for emergencies!"

The younger man's eyes flashed as he spun around.

"And what do you call an army heading inland?"

"You don't know—"

"I know what an army is when I see it," snapped the baron. Without giving the older man a chance to speak, he raced down the stairs.

Flarius hurried down the stairs as fast as his aging bones could move. He only made it half way before he heard light footsteps coming down the stairs after him. Looking up, he saw a familiar face of his personal maid, a gamine he picked up from the streets of Sorfil.

She made to help him down the stairs.

He waved her off. "No, Gisel, try to stop him. He can't ever turn it on."

"Yes, master."

She slipped away from him and raced after the baron, the tapping of her black slippers fading quickly. He swallowed hard, dreading the future and hurried down the stairs as fast as he could.

At the bottom, he came to a hallway lined with copper pipes. Heat boiled off every surface. His wool suit, perfectly appropriate for early fall, hung heavily on his shoulders as he hurried to the end. By the time he reached it, he had to lean against a brass railing to peer down the shaft into darkness. He grunted and tugged on the call chain. In the depths of the shaft, two gas lights glowed as an elevator rose for him. Still gaping for breath, he winced at the sight of a bit of Gisel's dress clinging to one of the many pipes.

"Be safe, girl."

The elevator rose up and Flarius' mouth dropped as he saw an armed guard standing on it. Armed with a saber and a new rifle, it took him a second to recognize the man.

"Jacob!?"

Jacob just nodded.

Panting, Flarius stepped on the elevator and Jacob flipped the switch. Half a century old hydraulics rumbled and the elevator dropped quickly. Flarius watched the endless pipes and gauges flash by. When he spoke, he tried to be as casual sounding as possible. It belayed the storm of his mind raging. "When did he buy it?"

"Three months ago."

Flarius frowned unhappily at the revelation. Around him, the heat cooled down but it was replaced with the sound of immense machinery rumbling deep in the caverns below the baron's mansion.

"Thirsty?"

The guard just grinned.

Flarius reached into his pocket.

Jacob stepped back, hand dropping to his saber.

The steward pulled out his flask. "It's peach brandy."

Flarius left it with Jacob and he hurried down a musty tunnel. As he entered the brass and iron control room, he realized the baron waited for him.

The young man grinned broadly. "Ready for history?"

The older man leaned against the railing. "Please don't do this."

"It is for the safety of Kormar."

"Your father said to use this only," he almost choked out the word, "when all of Kormar was at stake, not just your barony."

"How do you know this isn't a surprise attack by Gepaul?"

"You don't know who is coming. Gepaul are our allies, not enemies."

"Then Tarsan or somewhere else."

"You attack without knowing your opponent?"

The younger man's eyes narrowed. "I know it in my heart."

"Young hearts make many mistakes."

"And old ones don't make enough!"

Flarius reached out to stop him, but the baron triumphantly yanked on the final lever and activated the enigmatic machine. Pressure built up as the room began to turn around on massive gears. Fear and sweat dripped down the older man's back as he felt the caverns rumbling, dust and steam rising up everywhere.

Then, an explosion as springs snapped and bolts sheared apart. Steam tanks ruptured and hydraulics exploded in the darkness. Something shot out of the darkness and then Flarius only saw light.

Chapter 2

The Light

Too many fools only knew how to activate a spell but have little regard for the consequences of their actions.

—One Spell Too Many

Flarius groaned as he opened his eyes. Water dripped from every surface as he tried to remember where he was. The hard metal floor dug into his back and Gisel knelt over him, blood dripping from her shoulder.

"What happened?"

She smiled sheepishly, "It broke down."

She help him to sit up and he looked around at the now silent control room. The metal pipes were twisted and smoke rose from control panels.

"Who knew that his father would have gotten anything wrong?"

She spoke up softly, "Um, begging the pardon, master, he didn't make no mistake."

He looked over to see her holding a simple cog between two bloody fingers. With a sigh, he pulled out a bit of white fabric from his pocket and wrapped her fingers. His fingers

deftly removed the cog and he put it into his pocket. "I hope we did the right thing, girl."

"You promised his father."

He reached up with a soft smile, to rub his thumb a-gainst a smudge on her soft cheek. "An oath is an oath. Made over a lager in the middle of the night, but thank you for helping me keep it."

About D. Moonfire

D. Moonfire is the remarkable intersection of a computer nerd and a scientist. He inherited a desire for learning, endless curiosity, and a talent for being a polymath from both of his parents. Instead of focusing on a single genre, he writes stories and novels in many different settings ranging from fantasy to science fiction. He also throws in the occasional romance or forensics murder mystery to mix things up.

In addition to having a borderline unhealthy obsession with the written word, he is also a developer who loves to code as much as he loves writing.

He lives near Cedar Rapids, Iowa with his wife, numerous pet computers, and a pair of highly mobile things of the male variety.

You can see more work by D. Moonfire at his website at https://d.moonfire.us/. His fantasy world, Fedran, can be found at https://fedran.com/.

D. Moonfire

Fedran

Fedran is a world caught on the cusp of two great ages.

For centuries, the Crystal Age shaped society through the exploration of magic. Every creature had the ability to affect the world using talents and spells. The only limitation was imagination, will, and the inescapable rules of resonance. But as society grew more civilized, magic became less reliable and weaker.

When an unexpected epiphany seemingly breaks the laws of resonance, everything changed. Artifacts no longer exploded when exposed to spells, but only if they were wrapped in cocoons of steel and brass. The humble fire rune becomes the fuel for new devices, ones powered by steam and pressure. These machines herald the birth of a new age, the Industrial Age.

Now, the powers of the old age struggle against the onslaught of new technologies and an alien way of approaching magic. Either the world will adapt or it will be washed away in the relentless march of innovation.

To explore the world of Fedran, check out https://fedran.com/. There you'll find stories, novels, character write-ups and more.

D. Moonfire

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