WILL WIGHT

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

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Wintersteel

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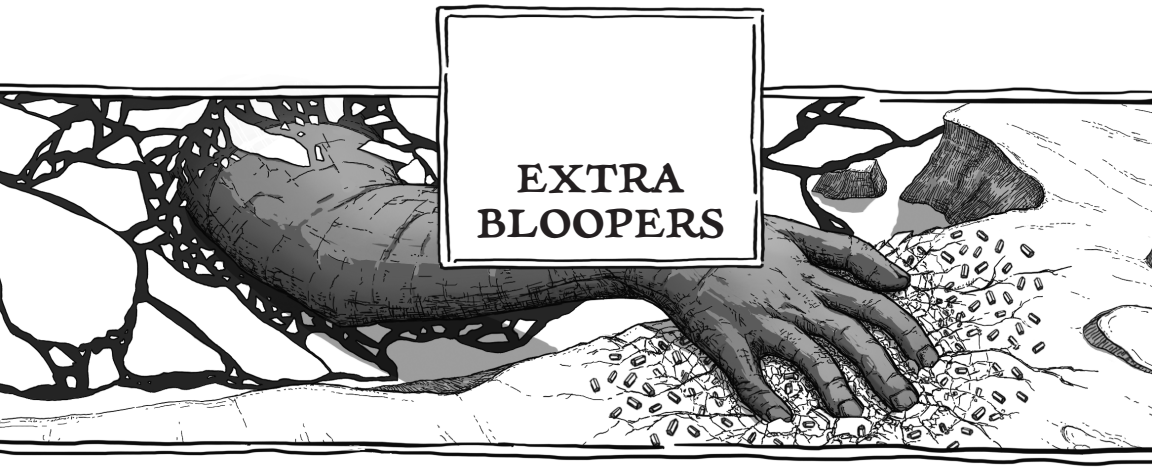

Eithan lay on the floor, bleeding with his breath ragged. “I’m fine,” he said as soon as Lindon showed himself. “No tears for me, please. I’ll be...” He coughed loudly. “...as good as new any sec...”

The word trailed off. He gave a clear death rattle.

Lindon stood over him in silence for a moment. Then he unleashed a wave of Blackflame. Eithan’s body was vaporized. Though it was probably just a trick of the heat, it seemed that he even sat up in panic a moment before the flames consumed him.

[Uh, Lindon, what did you do that for?]

“I cremated him. It’s what he would have wanted.”

A Remnant rose from the pile of ashes, looking very much like a man-shaped pile of blue-white fabric with a banner for hair. “I wasn’t really dead!” the Remnant protested.

Lindon blasted the spirit with Blackflame. "He requested a cremation for his Remnant too."

Meira pulled off her helmet specifically so she could glare at Daji with withering fury. "How did you survive to Underlord? How do you survive getting out of bed every morning?"

"You think this is easy?" Daji shouted back. "It takes *work* to be a cowardly, self-centered wretch! People don't see the long hours I put in, the sneering practice, the days spent whining over and over until my whine is *just right.* Now I'm going to have to betray Lindon, and I know he's going to kill me for it, but I'm going to do it anyway. You know why?"

Daji lifted his chin and gazed into the sunset. "Because I'm pathetic. The most pathetic excuse for a human being you've ever seen. And no one can take that away from me."

Seishen Daji strode away, head held high, as nearby Golds burst into applause.

The dream tablet was filled with the Blood Sage's voice, echoing in Yerin's head.

"These methods will lead you to the ultimate form of Blood Shadow. First, it will appear to be an exact copy of you. And after many years of

careful cultivation, it will turn into...a helicopter."

Yerin blinked. "What?"

"Yes, the optimal form of the sacred artist is, in fact, the helicopter. Think of it! What sword artist could spin her blades so efficiently? What wind artist could hover in the air with such grace? The pinnacle of sacred arts is, and has always been, the humble helicopter."

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