

FENRIEL NIGHTBOURNE

CHARACTER BIO

- Downcast Lapsed Inquisitor
- 3rd-Level Oath of Zeal Paladin

Down. Down. Down.

The wind rushed past my face as my consciousness coalesced, spirit linking with flesh through the veil. Memories of the celestial plain, the heavenly mount, and the other arch seraphs filled my mind's eye. That quickly gave way to a blurred sense of surreal confusion.

In place of celestial radiance and eternal balance, these newly mortal eyes saw only the ever-changing lands of Etharis. And they quickly approached.

I blacked out once again, the shearing forces from rapidly falling tugging at my new earthly body. The holy fire surrounding me left me with a final cradling warmth. A reminder that I would never again feel the embrace of the celestial lands.

A stirring, striking on my face. My cheeks stung lightly. A breeze rustled my hair. The scent of burning wood mixed with sweat and iron.

"There you are, now," a voice said. Gruff, low, and human. "He's coming around."

Cool water touched my lips and slid down my throat, at least what didn't end up on my naked chest. The soft grass beneath me nestled my body while bristling against me, an odd contradiction of sensations.

Those soothing feelings were juxtaposed harshly by pain. Intense pain, everywhere. It hurt when I moved. It hurt nearly as much when I didn't move.

I grabbed my head. The throbbing in it began to settle, and my vision cleared as my eyes opened and focused on the man before me. A beard about his face covered most of his weathered, rough skin. He was clad in heavy plate and chain, and a viciously curved blade was sheathed at his waist.

"You did a number on that tree back there," the man said, laughing. "Not the first Downcast we've found. Likely not the last."

"Strange," I sounded out, moving my jaw and vibrating my vocal chords in tandem with clacking my tongue and teeth together. My body knew what to do, even if I wasn't cognizant of it.

"You don't know the half of it, friend. I'm Duvelle, commander of the local inquisition. I don't sense any arcane affinity about you. Do you have a name, soldier?"

He signaled to one of his men behind him, and they walked forward with some rags to cover me.

Memories flooded me, triggering a sharp pain behind my eyes.

I saw my celestial body being dragged down. I saw the physical manifestations of their judgment censuring me. I felt the radiant chains searing my essence. Their holy spears pierced my seraphic soul. Then finally, my



DOWNCAST PALADIN
LEANNA CROSSAN
(GHOSTFIRE GAMING)

divine vessel was made into flesh. The ultimate insult to a being of pure incandescence. The final disgrace to one so full of grace.

The shock left me in waves, giving way to something else entirely.

A rage built within me. A zealous fury over what had been done. I knew not why I was dragged into this mortal plane, no memory of what sin could warrant such a punishment worse than death. I only knew that such an injustice could not go unanswered.

"Fenriel," I said, fervor filling my countenance.

"Very good, sir," the knight said, eyeing me curiously.

My eyes darted back and forth as memories cascaded before me. I frantically searched through anything that escaped the celestial veil in hopes of finding a what or a why to explain my fall.

"Many of your kind die within minutes of falling. The despair takes them. Bodies overwhelmed by the loss, being cut off from the heavens," Duvelle told me. "Something tells me that won't be the case with you. Good. We can use that."

My neck snapped up to look at him, bitterness and animosity uniting with the need for vengeance within me. He reached down to help me stand.

I will see my place within the celestial kingdom returned, I vowed silently before taking his hand. Or I will see the ones responsible burned.

"You've come so far since that day we found you, Fen," Duvelle said, taking a sip from his waterskin. It was full of malt whisky that anyone could smell from ten paces.

I rubbed my sword against the whetstone, recalling the previous night's efforts.

Two boys. Children, really. The younger one had asked why as I skewered his brother, shuttering the fire in his hands that would've burned me. The flames flickered out as the light left the boy's eyes.

During training, my commander informed me that arcane affinity runs in families. Even if the younger one didn't show signs of elemental evocation, my task was clear. I followed my mandate and left no blood relatives. They'd had stories. Dreams. Names. Futures.

I took that from them.

I saw a drop of red on the whetstone. My finger had edged too close to the blade as my concentration lapsed. I pulled it up to my mouth and sucked, tasting iron.

"You did well. Just like I taught you," he reminded me, a sneer across his face. He was always proud. "That's what I love about you, Fenriel. Always willing to do your duty for the Inquisition. I knew it from the moment I saw the fury in your eyes. You had something to prove."

I grabbed a small piece of cloth from my pack and wrapped it around my finger.

"We're moving out," the commander continued. "Be ready presently."

I nodded in acknowledgement, unsure if he noticed the spite on my face from two years of doing his dirty work. Two years of being his executioner.

It was a half day's march to the next town over, a small village ten days southeast of Voros well off the road. Commander Duvelle had said that it was a routine inspection. The next town on our route. None of us knew the name of it, if it even had one.

We traipsed into the village and were met by looks of fear. A common response to our arrival.

"That's the house," Duvelle said, pointing at a lone shanty on the left. "Take point, Fen. And don't knock."

Two of our men, both dragonborn, were already walking toward it, as if they'd scouted here previously. They circled around behind to guard the back door in case of runners.

My heart sank as my gaze met the ground. My feet refused to move. I rested a hand on my sword hilt, looking for some small sense of comfort that wouldn't come from a weapon.

I was being ordered to murder again.

"What's the problem, soldier?" my commander asked from behind me. "Do your duty. Move."

I marched forward up the small wooden porch, decaying wood creaking below my boots. I tried the doorknob. A lock kept it from turning.

My gaze lingered back toward Duvelle.

"What's the matter with you today? Get on with it already," he said, shaking his head in exasperation.

I kicked the door down, sword drawn and steadied in front of me. Inside, I heard a woman's scream accompanied by the tender, muffled cries of a newborn.

"Who is it? Who's there?" a call came from the dark. The woman's voice. "I have nothing you would want. Leave!"

"Arcane Inquisition," I said stoically.

The dark of the room, lit only by a small candle on a table, did nothing to hide the fear on the woman's face. The shocked dismay of sudden death coming for her.

She knew, as all did, that the Inquisition asked no questions, took no prisoners, and held no mercy.

The woman stood, holding her baby in her arms. She made no attempt to flee. She only cradled her child and sobbed as I approached slowly.

"What's your name?" I asked, my sword still leveled forward.

"Neve," she said plainly through tears. "And this is Neyah."

"Fenriel, what are you doing in there?" Duvelle asked from outside. I could hear his boots clacking against the porch behind me. He never liked watching me work. A coward at heart.

"This woman shows no signs of arcane affinity," I said.

"Oh, really?" Commander Duvelle ridiculed me cynically. "That's never stopped you before. She used an illusion spell to swindle a merchant passing through here. First hand account. She dies. The child, too."

Her sobs continued as she lowered her forehead, touching it to the newborn's.

"The word of a merchant is enough to warrant death?" I asked. "Maybe she said something about the quality of his wares. Maybe she refused his advances."

"And what's her life worth?" Duvelle asked. "A whore in a shack contributes nothing to us. She has no future to steal, regardless. Kill her now so we can move on from this heap."

The woman's eyes no longer looked at me with fear. They pleaded with hope.

I turned, never lowering my sword. My eyes lit with righteous fire.

Duvelle backed away instinctively, dismay smearing his bearded face. He drew his own weapon, an act he did so rarely I forgot he knew how.

"Treachery? Or dereliction? Which is it, after all I've done for you?" he asked me scathingly.

"All you've done *for* me?" I asked, scoffing. "I've been your weapon since I woke up under that burning tree. This is neither treachery nor dereliction of my duty. For the first time since I can remember, my heart is filled with zeal."

He whistled, and the back door to the cabin burst open.

"Get down!" I yelled to Neve as I ran through her flimsy table and thrust my sword into the first inquisitor I saw. I kicked, pulling my sword out and sending his

flailing body back against the other guard. I turned and parried a slash from Duvelle's enormous greatsword that would've cleaved me in half. The commander backed away, dodging my own swing.

With a spin, I clashed my weapon against another blow from the remaining guard, deflecting it in such a way that it narrowly avoided hitting the woman and her child.

His blade was stuck in the wooden floor board. I put a boot on it to rip his hand from it and smashed my leg plate into his eyes, crushing the point of it into his helmet and smearing his brain across my knee.

Duvelle was still backing away cautiously from the door frame as I stepped outside.

"Treachery, then," he said to me coldly.

I continued stepping forward.

"You are a wicked man," I said. "I felt this from the

moment I set these mortal eyes on you. I know not what sin brought me to this world, but I know now that I deserve to be here after what I've done in your Inquisition's name. And it stops this day."

The look of rage about his face echoed mine. He rushed forward, heaving his sword over his body in a death blow.

I stepped to the side and allowed it to hit the dirt, ramming my shoulder into the man and knocking him on his back.

The fiery radiance in my eyes leaped into my blade, setting it aflame.

"Don't kill me! Please!" he begged. As all the others had begged me.

"This oath I swear," I said with cruelty only suitable for those such as him. "Death to the wicked."



MAP OF ETHARIS
GHOSTFIRE GAMING