

Malignance

Everyone in the City of Fire knows Rhuana, daughter of Rhuanach. They know her because her ancestors are drenched in prophecy. Even she, in her youth, is referenced in several prophecies stored deep within the bowels of the Ashen Repository, and most were recorded long before she was born. Few of the prophecies make any sense—only the ones written by the Smoke Prophet and his lineage are even announced to the city; fortunately, the lineage of Sulien has had much to say about the lineage of Rhuanor, and many of their prophecies are well known. Rhuana's great grandfather was predicted to become a martyr in war; a giant squashed him flat, but a final spell ignited his blood, creating an inferno which consumed the giant and its army. As was suggested by the scrolls, Rhuana's grandfather went on a pilgrimage to restore a fallen citadel. It was preordained that her father would learn the speech of volcanoes, and now the language of rumbling eruptions pours from his mouth just as easily as the common tongue. And, as spoken by the Smoke Prophet himself: Rhuana would burn the sky.

Rhuana begins every day by looking in a small, golden mirror. She stares at this mirror for many minutes, with an angry slant to her eyebrows, and sometimes mutters to herself about past and present grievances. Rhuana's reflection is one which many people might envy—skin pure, hair red as roses, eyes that are easy to love.

Fire is in her blood. It catches on her words. It obeys every command. Sometimes Rhuana walks around the city with her head ablaze, eyes smoldering embers and chin tilted up—it's almost as if she's saying, "Can *you* do *this*?"

The day came when Rhuana fulfilled her prophecy. She stands on her balcony, looking upon a city that spirals down from the top of an ancient volcano. Rhuana begins by chanting a powerful spell, one she learned after many long nights in the archives, and flexes her fingers as far as they can go. The ritual takes its toll from Rhuana, carving away at her flesh with every word. Each hand moves in circles above her head, and from the tips of her nails comes fire. Unstoppable fire. Fire that consumes metal and wood, fire that chews bodies and spits husks, fire that burns the air itself. The sky chokes on the blaze, unable to bear any more pain, and vomits Rhuana's molten apocalypse to the ground. The City of Fire burns that day, and for many days after. Flakes of ash fall upon Rhuana's skin, smoothing the jagged, black symbols wrought by her sorcery.

She returns to the Ashen Repository. A single obelisk of obsidian remains amidst the carnage, reflecting the surrounding firelight. But in the distorted, wobbly reflection are also the features of Rhuana's face. Hair ablaze, eyes unrecognizable, flesh disfigured by wicked arcana, and teeth bare, lips curled into a vicious, *victorious* smile.

"Could *you* do *this*," she says to the corpses.