The great staff has been dormant for centuries, kept deep within the Great Mage Tower of Eli’nueth.

Throughout the ages, many elven heroes had attempted to lay claim to it. The staff had deemed them all unworthy.

As time passed, the legend of the staff faded away, and so too did the hope of finding a new wielder.

Today, only a handful, beside the mage scholars of the tower, know the true history of the staff.

And so it would have remained... forgotten and locked away, if not for a strange and terrible twist of fate.
It was nearing midnight, with every step Milloween took the old floorboards beneath her creaked loudly. She turned a corner and looked down the hallway before her. Through a small window she could see the night sky, dark clouds covering the horizon as far as the eye could see. It was pitch black in the hallway, but her elven eyes helped pierce the gloom.

She coughed quietly and then almost sneezed from all the dust she was breathing in, the air was thick with it. She was standing in one of the countless old and abandoned servant passages. She had found them during her first year of school, and had used them to freely explore the tower at night. As far as she was aware, no other student knew of them, and she had used them mainly when she wanted to sneak down to the city or visit the kitchen pantries on the lower levels.

She was sure it was something her big sister would have frowned upon. The thought of the stern expression she would have given Milloween, while explaining in great detail how that was forbidden and she could get in big trouble
brought a smile to her lips. Her sister was the gifted one. Magic, knowledge, friends, it all came so easily to her, whilst Melloween struggled to learn even the most basic of spells. To be honest, she didn’t really resent her sister for any of this. A life of learning and books just didn’t seem very appealing to Melloween. She sighed at the thought. Life at the Tower had changed them both. While Melloween had withdrawn further inwards her sister was drawing an ever expanding web of interest around herself, excelling in virtually everything she touched and it was starting to go to her head.

Melloween snapped out of her reminisce as she cursed quietly at a particularly loud plank that shifted beneath her. She had made it only halfway down the hallway. If only she had paid better attention to master Arannd’il when he was lecturing about concealment spells! Since arriving at the tower, she had often wondered how her teachers could possibly have managed to make learning about magic boring...

But she needed to hurry, there were only a few minutes before the changing of the guard. Attempting to cast a complicated concealment spell, was not an option. She reached the end of the hallway and started to move her hand along the edge of the wall until she found a small protrusion. She pressed it and heard a quiet click from inside the wall: It was one of many secret doorways she had discovered while exploring the tower. Carefully, she slid aside the now movable wall and took a peek around the corner.
Before her lay a grand marble hall, with large pristine windows. At the far end was a great oak door adorned with intricate silver patterns. The sounds of the droplets hitting the windows were being amplified in the large open space. From her vantage point, half hidden behind a tapestry, she had a clear view of the room.

She had stood there many times before, concealed by the shadows. She couldn’t explain it but was often drawn here, her need to learn about the staff was bordering on obsession, but she had always been too afraid to go any further. Tonight will be different, she told herself. Just a quick peek, how could that possibly hurt anyone?

“The Staff of Eternity.” She giggled to herself. Who calls a staff that anyways? It seemed to her that something like The Eternally Broken Stick would have been more fitting. As far as she knew no one had been able to use the magical staff for centuries, and it had just been gathering dust in the tower for as long as anyone could remember.

One time she had overheard a conversation between Arannd’il and another teacher, it had been what started her fascination with the staff. Master Arannd’il had been arguing that there...
were only a few other artifacts like the staff in the world, and that they were each tied to the six types of magic. The other teacher had been dismissive of the idea. Saying if true; all six artifacts would surely be known to the world.

He also claimed that the legends surrounding the staff were exaggerated, no magical artifact allowed it’s master to tap into the flows of magic with such ease. It was that sentence that had stuck with Milloween. She had always had a very difficult time, tapping into the flows of magic, and anything that might help her do it, sounded too good to be true.

She had tried to ask Master Arannd’il directly about the staff, but he had told her in no uncertain terms, it was not for a student of her age to delve into such things. But she needed to find out if it was true. She had always been so terribly curious, and it had occupied her mind for so long. *What if the staff worked for her, just a little bit? It would solve all her problems!* She had even snuck into the library’s forbidden section, looking for any references to it, but still her questions had not been answered.

She needed to get into that room and tonight seemed like the perfect opportunity! The two guards were gone, the candles were not lit, and the coast was clear. That stopped her in her tracks.

*The guards are gone?* The thought nagged at her. The clock had not yet struck midnight, and the guards were normally like clockwork. They would never leave their post early.

*Wait! Was that movement?*

She could have sworn one of the shadows next to the door
was moving oddly. She looked more closely and saw a glint of metal laying on the floor. It looked like one of the spearheads used by the tower guards. Putting aside her growing sense of fear, she started to sneak towards the door to investigate.
Milloween silently made her way across the hall and bent down to examine what she had seen. Up close it was obvious that what had looked like a shadow was actually one of the guards; lying on the ground, wrapped in his cloak. His spine was bent at an impossible angle, as if a giant fist had crushed him and then tossed him aside. A sense of dread filled Milloween, and she did not know how long she stood there, transfixed; staring at the corpse.

Suddenly, a sound snapped her out of it. Like a muffled shout, it came from the other side of the oak door. She felt a magical presence... Something dark, unlike anything her teachers had ever shown her.

For a split second, Milloween thought of fleeing and calling for help, but she wasn’t supposed to be here, and it felt as if something was pulling at her mind, almost pleading with her to look inside the room. She made a decision. Gathering what courage she could muster, Milloween carefully pushed the door, and it quietly slid...
open. She was in no way prepared for what she saw.

It was a dark circular room, with tall ornamented windows and shelf after shelf of trinkets, books and beautiful works of art, but they all seemed to pale in comparison to the item at the center. Hovering above a plinth in the middle of the room, was what could only be “The Staff of Eternity.”

There was a strange soft glow emanating from it, and her eyes were immediately drawn to it. The staff was beautiful! Made from intricate golden metal wrapped around a dark wood handle, the gold metal seemed to change hue everytime she blinked. At the top of the staff was a massive crystal that seemed to reflect objects and places that could not possibly be in the room. A sunny field. A floating city. A land cleaved in two by some unimaginable power. A dark castle in a swamp, dead creatures toiling away at its foundations. A lowly squire wielding the sun itself.

The images came faster and faster and she was transfixed by it, until suddenly she was pulled out of it by a moan. It made her spin around. Without realising,
she had walked halfway across the room! She looked down and saw the other guard in front of her. He was on his knees, his hands clutching a dark object protruding from his chest, a truly horrific sight! She suddenly realised just how cold it had become, and noticed her breath was coming out as small puffs of mist. Outside she heard the rumble of distant thunder.

The guard was trying to speak but only managed a quiet gurgling sound, his eyes were fixed on something near the center of the room. She had seen it as well. Something dark, moving in the shadows as she entered the room, but it had not made any sense to her then. Her mind was trying desperately to suppress the thought of it. This thing.. This darkness! It was not meant to be seen by mortal eyes.

With a gathering sense of fear unlike anything she had ever experienced, she slowly turned around again, and forced herself to look at the impossibly dark shadow, now looming over the staff.

It really wasn’t so much a shadow, as it was the absence of light. It seemed
to consume all the luminescence around it, and shape it into a dark and vaguely humanoid body, with twisted wings protruding from its back. It was holding out one of its massive dark claws over the staff, and started to chant.

The words hurt her ears, and she could not make out what it was saying. Truth be told that was probably a blessing, as she could feel the immense dark magic the creature was pulling to itself and wanted nothing to do with it. She was not the most magically adept elf at the school, not by a longshot, but by now her head was aching so bad from the gathering power she wanted to scream.

How could the creature hold all that magic without ripping itself apart? Master Arannd’il had repeatedly drilled into them the dangers of tapping into too much magical power, and Melloween herself had been left feeling drained from casting even simple spells. What was happening in front of her now was anything but simple. Surely a spell of such power must have alerted her teachers? The creature’s horrible chanting was reaching its climax, and she knew it would mean no good for anyone if it finished.

There were sounds in the hall outside, frantic shouting and the stern voice of Therial, the Master at Arms. By the sound of it, the battle-hardened veteran was calling on reinforcements. It was starting to dawn on her, that they would not make it in time - whatever spell the creature was doing was almost complete.

Not knowing what else to do or why she felt such a need to protect the staff, she started to run forwards. As she was gathering speed she drew in what magic she could, and with courage she didn’t know she possessed, hurled herself at the
shadow.
It wasn’t elegant or pretty, she just slammed into the side of the creature with all the magical force she could muster swirling around her, and ended up sprawled on the ground. Touching the creature was like being submerged in ice cold water, and all the heat was ripped out of her body in an instant.
But it had worked, the creature gave way, stumbling sideways, unable to continue it’s chant. By pure force of will Milloween made herself get up, having never felt so cold. Somehow, she had ended up standing between the creature and the staff. It looked down at her, with eyes of pure black hatred, and she realised just how foolish she had been. She did not stand a chance here, neither did her teachers, nor the guards.
She was rooted in place unable to do anything but stare into its abyssal eyes, and in them she saw a terrible truth. The demon and its masters were eternal, an evil that had existed since before the dawn of time. Whole civilisations had died at the whim of this being and it’s dark masters. She was nothing... A fleeting speck of light in an impossibly dark and vast universe. It had been pure luck that she had managed to surprise it while it was casting its spell, and it was going to punish her for her insolence.
Chapter 3

The demon spoke. It’s voice sounded like a thousand screams overlapping, and it’s words echoed around the chamber in ways that shouldn’t have been possible.

“Insect. How dare you defy me! Your torture shall be endless.”

As it spoke, the words seemed to rip a name into Melloween's subconscious.

_Herald of Night._

It echoed in her mind sending shivers of primal fear down her spine. The creature started to move towards her, and at the same time pulled something out of its body. A dark blade made of shadow, impossibly curved and twisted, the blade screamed as it was drawn. Something primal, deep inside
Milloween, told her that touching the blade was going to be a fate worse than death.

She was desperately trying to think of a spell that would help, when she noticed a light behind her. It was the staff. The soft glow had intensified and was lighting up the room. The creature hesitated, suddenly seeming unsure of itself. It was such a strange emotion to see on such a horrific creature, it gave her a sliver of hope and broke whatever dark spell was holding her in place.

Then suddenly the scene burst into action.

The oak door was flung open and the Guards, with Therial in front, were standing in the doorway. Therial’s magical armor shining brightly in the light given of by the staff. Her hope grew. *Surely Therial, a hero of her people was a match for the creature, maybe she would still survive this!*

But it was not to be, most of the guards just froze in fear, some stumbling and falling to their knees when they saw the immense living shadow. Therial stood his ground and released a spell of pure arcane energy at it, the spell simply flickered out and dissipated before it got halfway. A second later a tendril of shadow sent him and a bunch of the guards flying, the creature hadn’t even bothered to look at them.

The look of pure dread she had seen in Therial eyes had terrified Milloween even further. As long as she had known him he had been an immovable rock afraid of nothing.

The floor suddenly started to shake, trinkets and books falling down all over the room. The creature ignored all of this, its focus only on Milloween and the staff. It drew back
its screaming sword for a blow Milloween was sure would cleave her in half. In her panic she did the only thing she could think of, spinning around desperately and grabbing hold of The Staff of Eternity.

For a second, it was like all the air had been sucked out of the room, the world was impossibly silent. An instant later the whole tower shook as if struck by a giant hammer.

Light... Light so impossibly bright, it made her think she would go blind, filled the room. It took her a second to realise the light was coming from her, her whole body was glowing. Her hands, one still holding the staff, were moving impossibly fast in front of her and with a will of their own, drawing an intricate pattern in the air that she didn’t recognize. *No, wait, she did know it!* A thought had popped into her head, seemingly out of nowhere: It was *Aritoc*, one of the great runes.

The screaming blade was now hurtling down towards her. *How was any of this possible?* she thought to herself. In her hand the staff was shaking violently and electrical sparks were traveling all along her arm. Before she had a chance to consider it further, the magical rune she had been drawing in thin air was completed. She was astonished: A rune so intricate should have taken hours to do, even for the most learned of Arch Mages, but somehow she had done it in less than a second.

More thoughts and images appeared in her mind, too fast for her to comprehend, but on some deep, inner level, she felt a connection forming with the rune. She suddenly knew what to do next. Her eyes met the demons again, and this
time rising above her fear, she unleashed the power of the rune straight at the Herald of Night.

Time ground to a halt as the demon froze mid swing. The space around the creature seemed to bend strangely, as though it was being pulled apart. Slowly, at first, but then more and more, twisting the form of the creature, ripping it apart. Space seemed to curve around the demon, cutting it off from the dark magic it needed to sustain itself.

Another thought manifested itself in her mind, and she suddenly realised it was weaker than it let on, so far from its own realm, and the Void magic that sustained it. A tear in reality had opened up around the creature, and it was sapping what strength it had remaining. She could see vague but terrifying silhouettes moving on the other side and she forced herself to quickly look away.

The creature was halfway through the portal, its shadowy claws scraping the ground trying to hold on to reality. Whatever she was doing was working! The creature roared in anger and with a voice laced with hate, it promised eternal vengeance on her and all her kin. A loud ripping sound filled the air and the whole tower shook once again as the demon lost its grip and was torn back into its own realm. She couldn’t believe it, it was done!

The room abruptly returned to its normal self. Somehow, it was already midday, she could see bright sunlight coming through the windows.

Her mind was drawing a blank, as she was trying to make sense of what had just happened. She looked down at the staff in her hands. The metal was shimmering, and purple sparks
fell from the crystals in cascades of light. It looked like a crack had appeared in one of the Crystals on it’s tip.

She turned to look over at the guards standing in the doorway, and was relieved to see Therial. He was alive, leaning on a guard for support His ancient magical armor was nearly split in two down his chest, it must have kept him alive, many of his guards were not so lucky.

More people had gathered behind them, all of whom were looking at her with a strange expression on their faces.

She felt incredibly drained, and her legs gave in. As she was falling, she realised what the expression on their faces was. It was awe... It was the last thing she thought of, as the floor rushed to meet her, and she passed out.

The End