

# WILL WIGHT

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**SPOILERS!**

**KICKSTARTER  
SPOILER SCENE!**

## BLACKFLAME

CRADLE : VOLUME THREE



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BLACKFLAME

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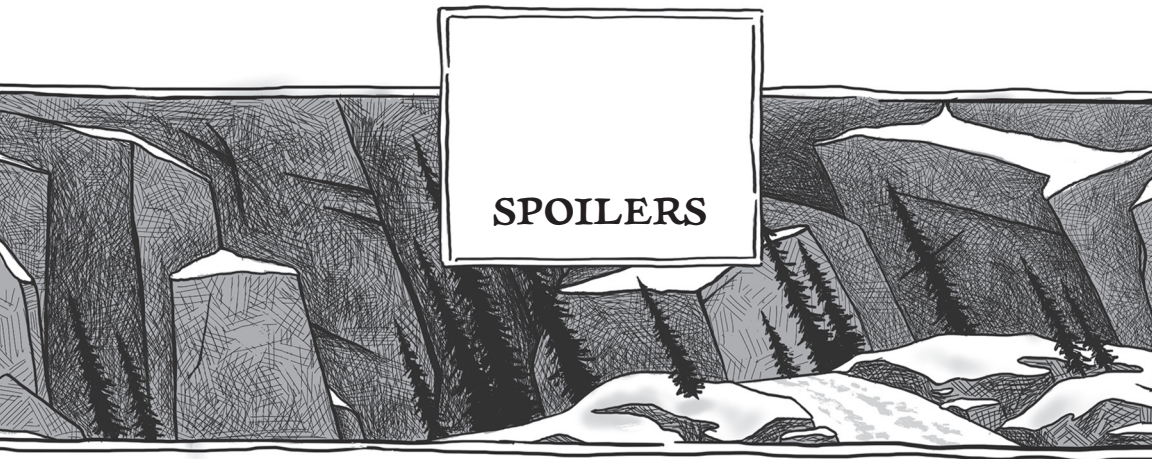
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**Kickstarter Bonus Scene #2: SPOILERS!**

**LOCATION: CHAPTER 18 OF *BLACKFLAME***

**SPOILER WARNING**

**AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED:** If you have not read *Cradle: Volume 10, Reaper*, you are not authorized to proceed beyond this point.

**Enter Spoiler Territory at your own risk.**

**You have been warned.**



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Without turning his head, Eithan saw all the Jai clan elders arrayed against him. They had caught him in a boundary field, twisting the vital aura to trap him here, on this plateau of dark stone.

In his Copper sight, the field appeared as an upturned bowl of swirling color, blocking him from the outside world.

Six of his enemies were Truegolds, weathered and influential men of the clan. The seventh, Jai Daishou, was on his way. Eithan could already see him approaching.

He tried to pull up a smile, but it wouldn't come.

"Gentlemen," the Underlord said, "this is a mistake."

He spun the broom in his hands as he spoke, watching the faces around him through the distortion of the boundary field. Wrinkled and white-haired these Golds may have been, but they weren't old men.

Not to him.

To him, they were very, very young.

All six watched him warily, but they also wore the faintest of smug smiles. They were so proud of trapping him. So confident.

So pleased with themselves for catching Death in a cage.

The broom felt familiar in his hand as he spun it lazily. With every turn, it felt more like a scythe.

Jai Daishou fell to the stone from far overhead, landing lightly in spite of his infirmity. His long, white hair gleamed like metal, and he wore white-and-blue robes suited for battle. He lifted his spear of white hunger madra like a scepter and looked down on Eithan from outside the boundary field.

Then he shook his head, adopting a mask of sadness. "Your path of recklessness led us here, Eleven. You have done as you wished,

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acting on the whims of youth without respect or consideration. This is a harvest you have planted.”

Involuntarily, Eithan stopped spinning his broom.

He was working so hard to distance himself from Ozmanthus. He wanted nothing more than to change from the man he'd been.

But Ozmanthus' pride was still in him. And this boy of scarcely a hundred spoke to him of youth and disrespect.

Eithan couldn't trust his words, so he said nothing. He watched the six Truegolds gather around their Underlord, nodding their approval even as they clustered close for protection.

He steadied his grip on the broom, keeping a rein on his emotions.

Jai Daishou's mask cracked, showing irritation. “You could hear me if I were on the other side of the mountain, Eleven. Speak like a grown man, for once in your life, and perhaps we can come to an accord.”

Eithan listened to the Underlord dig his own grave and spun his weapon in another lazy circle. Subconsciously, he had started to move the broom as he would a scythe.

Not a practical weapon, the scythe. But a stylish one.

Anger bloomed in Jai Daishou, written plainly in his expression and his increasing heartbeat. He shifted into a battle stance, cycled Stellar Spear madra, and leveled the Ancestor's Spear. “Then you'll forgive me for testing the skills of the youngest Underlord in the Empire.”

What if Eithan had been who he pretended he was?

What if he really had been a mere Underlord, stumbling into the Blackflame Empire by chance, doing his best to lead his relatives on this continent?

Jai Daishou would kill him here. No one would even blame him.

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This would be Eithan's fault for not bowing deeply enough before his superiors.

Sometimes Eithan remembered clearly why he had hated Cradle for so long.

Then again, even in his boyhood, Ozmanthus Arelius would have sneered at this pathetic ambush.

It wasn't as though Eithan could use power beyond his advancement. Not without ruining everything. For all intents and purposes, he was just a well-trained Underlord.

With his broom, Eithan pointed to the boundary flag. "Whose idea was the boundary?" he asked.

Jai Daishou snorted. "I knew I would need something to prevent you from running for your life."

He gathered madra into his spearhead as he prepared a Star Lance Striker technique. Taking their cue from him, the other elders did the same thing.

They intended to pepper him with Striker techniques while he was physically restricted by the boundary field. This was a murder, not an honorable challenge between Lords.

So Eithan decided to respond in kind.

"Thank you," he said. "Now there are no witnesses."

No one to see what he was really capable of.

Soulfire spread through Eithan's broom, reinforcing it to be capable of withstanding his madra.

Seven blinding white Striker techniques rushed at him, but they weren't covering one another. Instead of spreading out, the Truegolds were huddling next to their Underlord, so there were plenty of open angles.

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Eithan saw them all, slipping through one of their blind spots. He surrounded himself with the crudest form of the Hollow Armor, essentially just a layer of madra all around his body.

The boundary field allowed the passage of madra, and he was covered in madra with no gaps. He slipped through easily and casually crushed the skull of the closest Truegold.

Only then did Jai Daishou turn, eyes wide.

Ozmanthus would have laughed. They were so *slow*.

Before the next Striker technique flew from Jai Daishou's spear, Eithan slipped back into the boundary field.

The elders had started to scurry around the boundary flags, trying to keep the enemy in sight, but Eithan had ten thousand eyes. He saw one elder pass a little too close.

He leaned out of the barrier, grabbing the Truegold by the back of the robes and hauling him inside.

Just being dragged through the boundary crushed many of the elder's bones and shredded a good deal of his skin. He screamed, but that didn't last long before Eithan put a stop to it.

At that point, Jai Daishou made a better decision. He called his Truegolts back and began gathering madra for a *real* attack. A Forger technique with power that was impressive enough for an Underlord.

Seven Forged spears fanned out above Jai Daishou, each shining white, refined in soulfire and blazing with sword aura. They blasted through the air, blindingly fast and timed to give no time to react. Even Eithan could be killed by this.

In theory.

In practice, Jai Daishou wasn't skilled enough.

Eithan mentally ticked off all the mistakes as though he



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were critiquing a student. The Jai Underlord had made three major errors.

First, Jai Daishou's own boundary field weakened the Ruler aspects of the technique. Why had he wasted time and energy layering a Ruler technique into it?

Habit. Jai Daishou had practiced this with a Ruler component, so now, in the heat of battle, he did as he always had.

He should have trained to modify his techniques on the fly.

Second, the timing between the spear wasn't tight enough. Jai Daishou probably saw no gaps, but someone with Eithan's sight and Raindrop Iron body saw dozens of openings.

He should have gotten others to help him find flaws in his techniques. Sparring partners and enemies alike. Arrogant as he was and had always been, Ozmanthus Arelius had always looked for ways to improve.

Third, Jai Daishou didn't know Eithan's Path. He had no idea how suited the Path of the Hollow King was to weathering a large-scale Forger technique.

He should never have planned an ambush against a longtime rival without knowing that rival's Path. That was only asking to have your trap flipped around on you.

For all those things, Jai Daishou got a failing grade.

Eithan dodged some of the spears, shoved some aside with his broom, and caught some on the Hollow Armor. All the while, he moved forward.

The entire cliffside was obliterated in white light, but by that time, Eithan wasn't there anymore.

He stood behind the Jai clan, unnoticed for the moment. Eithan

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had taken wounds. There was a gash in his shoulder, blood in his eye, and his outer robe had been reduced to scrap fabric.

Acceptable losses for weathering an all-out attack from someone on the same level of advancement. He could still move the shoulder and he hardly needed his eyes. The loss of the robe was irritating, though. It was one of his favorites.

Eithan took that irritation out on the men who had tried to kill him.



Less than a minute later, Eithan breathed heavily as he leaned over the defeated Jai Daishou. No matter how much skill he had, he was still working with a mere Underlord body.

“Close one,” Eithan panted out.

He had never had a problem with taunting defeated enemies.

Jai Daishou wore a gratifying expression of total horror. “Tell me how,” he demanded.

Eithan paused with scissors to his neck. “I’ll tell your Remnant,” he said.

Then he slit Jai Daishou’s throat.

The Underlord’s body slumped to the ground. A moment later, a skeletal white Remnant began to rise.

As promised, Eithan met the Remnant’s eyes and explained. “You weren’t good enough.”

Then Eithan blew the spirit apart with a half-formed Hollow King’s Spear and hobbled away from the bodies.

The Truegold Remnants had already fled.



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