

*It has been shown to me in the drifting morning mist, fire and blackness will spread across the lands. Cities will burn. The young and old will be slaughtered in the streets and in the fields by the agents of Darkness.*

Quickly he moped the floor trying to remove all traces of dirt from the polished inlaid marble. Lord Redmond of Maradon's Solemn Council always liked the floors to be perfectly clean for each council meeting as he believed that a clean organized chamber reflected directly on the Council. Everything had to be in its place, the pens and parchment needed to be neatly arraigned on the table, the carafes of water and wine needed to be filled to the brim and the glasses filled with exactly four small pieces of chilled granite cubes so as not to dilute the flavor of the wine. The wicks on the oil lamps each needed to be trimmed to perfection as a flickering lamp would distract Lord Kragg. The Council chamber also needed to be at a comfortable temperature with all window shutters tightly closed and secured with a small fire well established in the hearth. If the room wasn't just right the Council members would be distracted and it could change the mood for the entire meeting. This is what he was paid generously to do. Make everything perfect so everyone was comfortable and there were no distractions. As he finished wiping out the glass globes over the oil lamps and straightened the mirror on the wall, he paused to arrange the gold tassels of the rug before walking out of the room. As he shut the door quietly on hinges oil this morning, he wondered if he had remembered to leave the shutters open on the window. Peeking his head back inside he saw that the shutters were indeed open, just like they were supposed to be, everything was perfect and ready for the council.

*Fire will consume all, fields will burn, mountains will crumble, and the cities of man and fey will be covered in darkness. The Creator will cry in agony at the destruction of his people and his creation.*

The fool of a butler had a mind that was very easily manipulated thought the dark priestess as she stood in the dark of the kitchen doorway clothed in the blue livery of a Tyr palace servant and stared across the courtyard at the open window. The red glow of Erion illuminated the world this night, making the rain appear like blood as it fell and formed red pools on the cobblestones. Looking back at the window she noticed movement in the room across the courtyard indicating the Councilmen had entered and had taken their seats at the council table. She slowly took a deep breath and opened herself to her god allowing the dark power to fill her and flood her soul with warmth and vitality. Closing her eyes as her god's presence consumed her, she felt the green stone in the necklace around her neck becoming increasingly hot against her chest. Repeating the prayer to her god, she was sure that she was on the edge of being consumed by the raw power as she opened her eyes to look through the blood colored rain to the open window 100 yards away. She thanked her god for finding her worthy and smirked as she released her gods will towards the open window of the distant room. The room acrossed the courtyard erupted in fire and were the window once stood, the side of the keep exploded in flying rock, glass and flame, littering the courtyard in debris, furniture and burning bodies. The explosion rocked the entire courtyard causing dust to fall from the ancient rafters above her head. Wiping the dirt from her face and eyes she stumbled to the doorway to gather her laundry basket and run madly down the hall crying like a scared woman to any who would listen that the keep was under attack. As the other

servants entered the hallway she easily blended into the sea of blue livery and disappeared into the royal palace of Tyr.

*The wailing of masses will drown out the thundering hooves of the riders of darkness and in the end when all hope is forsaken, when empires fall, and the sorrow of living becomes a cry for death, the gods will forsaken the world and the daemon will take up the swords of the fallen titans to rule the races.*

The small white candle burned straight and steady in the still cold air of the palace cellar, illuminating the faces of the individuals standing in its close confines. The only sounds were that of leather straining under the weight of armor and a scabbard scraping along the wall as men moved about restlessly in the small room. A sudden rumble from above their heads caused the candle to tip over and roll across the table and onto the floor, coming to rest against the heel of a well-oiled boot. A metal gauntleted hand reached for the sputtering candle and sat it upright in the middle of the table as the candle slowly produced its steady light once again. Walking over to the small table in the room General Cormyre looked around at the seven men staring at him through the dim light. "It appears your spies were correct General, and we are no longer safe in Tyr. How are we supposed to fight the daemon and govern the realm when we are running around hiding like rats in cellars fearing for our lives" stated councilman Kragg? The other council men nodded in agreement and started to talk amongst themselves about their current situation when Cormyre spoke "Unfortunately this is going to be the new normal for some time councilman, we do not have many options available at the moment. In order to protect your lives and the lives of your families we must act as if the Solemn Council has been destroyed. Unfortunately for this to happen the military must announce the realm is now under marshal law". Councilman Kragg stepped forward "That is not an option Cormyre, the realm must see that we are alive and this attack is not enough to silence the Council, the people must see that Maradon will not bend in the face of this aggression! We will not cower in the darkness of some basement while the daemon scour the land, burn our farms, and kill our people, Maradon has never flinched in the face of the enemy. We have always stood firm in defending the southern realms"! As the councilmembers muttered agreement to one another General Cormyre spoke in a measured tone "Gentlemen, if the daemon know that you are alive, your lives and the lives of your families would be in jeopardy. I cannot spare a single soldier to guard all the noble houses of Maradon. The daemon will try again and next time my spies may not be as lucky at uncovering the plot". Councilman Blackstone Slowly stepped around the small table to stand in front of the General "Marshal law has not imposed in the realm since the last age, what would this look like under your watch General"? Looking at the illuminated faces of the other council members, Cormyre looked Councilman Blackstone directly in the eyes " I propose that even under marshal law you would still govern from the darkness. I will have my men report to you daily on the status of the kingdom and our war in the north and in turn you tell me how the kingdom is to be run and I will do it." Councilman Tyron stepped forward "How do we now that you will relinquish authority back to us when all this is over? Based on history, once the military has power it does not like to relinquish it". General Cormyre let out a sigh, handed his sword to Councilman Blackstone as he knelt before the council. "I General Cormyre do swear upon my oaths as Lord of my land, General of the Northern Host and Blademaster of Tyr that I will relinquish the power bestowed upon me at the first request of the Solemn Council or my life and the life of my first borne son will be forfeit". All of the Council stood in silence as they looked down on the veteran warrior before them. Slowly they all looked at one another and nodded in agreement before

Councilman Tyron spoke. “General you have protected this land since I was a young child, never wavering in your dedication and responsibility to the people of Maradon, You have served well as your father did before you. We do not need any you have always been fair and a good steward of realm. It is the will of the council that marshal law be enforced throughout the realm of Maradon and General Cormyre shall be elevated to the level of High Fist immediately. The General then rose and took his sword from the outstretched hands of councilman Kragg. We need to find you safe haven, a place from which you can still manage the kingdom but will not put you in danger. I will have you taken outside of the city to a location known only to Gentry and a select few of my men. From there we will portal to Aria and request a meeting with King Soren. Maradon is too dangerous at its time, you must rule Maradon from the palace in Aria. I pray to the nine the daemon have not infiltrated that as well.

The daemon had started their attack on Maradon’s northern border and would surely be pushing his forces south over the next month. Cormyre now saw the city of Tyr not as a last refuge but as a trap. How many of the daemon and their followers inhabited the city? Could they poison the wells, portal in directly from the gorge as the Magi seemed to do at will? As a soldier he had been trained on how to hold a defensive position or read the lay of the land to gain an advantage in battle. He could pick the best troops, supply them with the best equipment and provide excellent training, but subterfuge and assassination were not something he was comfortable with. Looking down at the six gold knots hanging from his sword belt he remembered his training at the Academy when times were simpler and less dangerous. The academy taught him to be an effective killer but nothing trained him for the adversary he now faced. Turning to his first in command he ordered the captain to head to North with all available troops and to summon Gentry and the Knights of Yendra to meet him outside of the city. Using his instincts he closed his eyes and summoned the void, slowly feeding it with the anger, disbelief and fear he now faced. As his emotions were consumed by the void his thoughts became clearer and his body relaxed in anticipation of the next thing he must do. Slowly and deliberately he strode to his horse and rode away with his soldiers in the rain of the Blood Moon.