

The Last Emperor

Chapter 30 – Dark Angels

“Aeony had a few magical abilities; all dark angels had a few simple spells they could cast, or innate magical gifts. It was a useful side effect from being created by powerful sorcerers, using ancient chaos magic. All that chaos energy left something behind. For Aeony it was an ability to hide, to be almost invisible among the shadows on a dark night. She also knew a few battle spells, though she tended to stick with her claws and a blade, when violence was needed.”



It had been decided that Maya needed someone to protect her. Runa would have been Maya's choice, but she was busy vetting new recruits for the imperial army. Several fighters were outside the building in the healers' compound, with Nethra inside. To Maya, it all seemed a bit over the top. “She's definitely dead, been dead for a while.” Said Maya. “So thoroughly dead, that I don't foresee her being a danger to anyone.”

“A powerful cleric, according to Caspian.” Said Nethra. “He may even remember her name, eventually. Someone sent her body through a portal and they may come to get her back.”

Galla should have been there of course, but she was busy elsewhere. That was the problem. With the attack on the City of the Lost God beginning, everyone was busy with something. Maya had been told to learn what she could about the dead cleric, especially how she'd died. As far as Maya was concerned, that meant one course of action.

“I'm going to do what I'd do if she was a female Dredger, who'd died recently.” Said Maya. “A mysterious death that might turn out to be murder. I'm going to carry out a full autopsy.”

“Oh.....Messy.” Said Nethra.

“I know.....And I'll need you to help me.” Said Maya.

“Fine, just tell me which gooey bit to pick up.”

Ideally there'd be another two healers there, at least. Everyone was busy though, all involved with the war. Just undoing and removing the cleric's gown was difficult. It had been worn for a long time after death. The material had sunk into the skin and didn't want to be taken off the body.

“Water.....We need a lot of cold water.” Said Nethra.

Maya could hear Nethra as she went outside and shouted at the fighters. Quite soon she was back, accompanied by several of Muzzie's warriors, all carrying buckets of water. The warriors seemed to have no curiosity about the dead cleric. Soldiers' tales at work again probably, too many horrendous stories about the dead returning as the undead. Muzzie's fighters couldn't wait to leave the building. “The water will soften the bodily fluids.” Said Nethra. “With luck.....Her gown will then come away from her skin. Or, her skin will come away from her flesh. Either way, you'll be able to carry out an autopsy.”

Three buckets loosened the gown and the fourth did the trick. The expensive looking gown came away, without dragging any skin with it.

“She looks.....Quite pretty for her age.” Said Maya. “Or would have been pretty....Before she died.”

“Not a hybrid.....She could be anything from a hundred years old, to several thousand.” Said Nethra.

“Her private parts look strange.” Said Maya. “Any idea what she was, when she was alive ?”

“Let me look her over.” Said Nethra.

Maya ran a knife over a sharpening stone, while Nethra touched the body and actually sniffed at it. Nethra was different, everyone knew that now. She had certain useful abilities linked into being a Chinnura, a multiverse’s super creature.

“I know Faal thought she was human, but.....I don’t think so.” Said Nethra. “Not a pure blood demon, not even part Genova. The breasts are pretty standard, but the Gods gave her something strange between her legs.”

“I know.....Do you think it must have caused her pain ?” Asked Maya.

“Trust me, Maya.” Said Nethra. “Somewhere out there will be males of her kind, who think her sex parts are wonderful. Whatever she is would have become extinct, if sex wasn’t pretty damn good for them. One day, you’ll understand what I mean.”

Maya had asked her mother about those sorts of things, once she’d started to find Dredger boys interesting, rather than annoying. Her mother had told her firmly that nice Dredger girls didn’t ask about such things. But, if nice girls didn’t ask, how did they learn ? Maya had asked Galla, which had been a mistake. The apothecary had told her everything, in scary detail.

“So, not human, hybrid or pure blood.....What is she ?” Asked Maya.

“I need to taste her.....An arm muscle will do.” Said Nethra. “Just a tiny amount of flesh....Once I taste the female, I’ll know what we have on the table.”

“Fine.....Don’t dig out too much of her muscle.”

“I just need a tiny taste.” Said Nethra.

Nethra used one of Maya’s medical instruments. A long thin blade, made of the finest surgical steel. In went the blade and Nethra moved it slowly from side to side. She then inserted a long, thin pair of tweezers. There it was in the jaws of the tweezers, a tiny piece of putrid looking flesh. There was even a smell of putrefaction coming from the small piece of dead flesh.

“Oh, please don’t eat that.” Said Maya.

“I’ve eaten far worse.” Said Nethra.

Maya looked away, as Nethra tasted the tiny piece of bad meat. When she looked back, the female cleric was sat upright on the table. The cleric, if she really was a cleric ? Said a few words that sounded like clearing her throat. The mystery female laid back down on the table, as a green mist covered her body.

“Got her.....She’s a Uah.....A Uah Trin to be exact.” Said Nethra. “The Uah are supposed to have been extinct for tens of thousands of years.”

“You did notice she’s not dead now ?” Asked Maya.

“Yes.....It’s all very strange.” Said Nethra.

Curiosity overcame caution, as Maya touched the green mist covering the female Uah Trin. More gelatinous than mist like, the substance bent inwards as Maya prodded.

“It will only bend in so far.....My guess is that it’s a shield of some kind.” Said Maya.

“Difficult to be sure....Everything about her now looks green.” Said Nethra. “But.....Her skin looks to be healing. The green stuff might be a healing force of some kind.”

Maya got her face as close to the green stuff as she could. Nethra was right, her skin wasn’t perfect, but it was better than it had been. Their guest was healing. There was something else too, but Maya looked for a while to be certain.

“Chest moving, lips moistening.....Our Uah Trin is breathing.” Said Maya.

“Are you sure ?”

“No, of course I’m not totally sure.....We need Galla.” Said Maya.

“Not going to happen, she’s too busy in Annill.” Said Nethra. “I’d suggest Faal, but he’s with General Dhūlen for a few days.”

“With all the clever people Muzzie has around him.” Said Maya. “There must be an expert on the Uah Trin.....There must be someone. How much do you know about them ?”

“I know very little....Uah is the name of their kind, and Trin means of the people. They originated on a round world in the Menderan Empire. They were worshippers of Estrin, but I heard they spread out across the multiverse and developed other interests.” Said Nethra. “That’s it.....My total knowledge of the Uah.”

“It sounds like we need to talk to Estrin.” Said Maya.

“Do I need to mention how busy she is ?”

“There must be someone.” Said Maya.

“There is someone, who I’m sure will know all about the Uah.” Said Nethra. “I can probably call him here, but I’m sure you won’t like him. No one seems to like him.”

“Right now.....I’ll settle for an expert I hate.” Said Maya. “Who are you thinking of conjuring up ?”

The female Uah made a slight noise, as she moved to a new position on the table. Still covered in the green stuff, but there was now no doubt about it. She was breathing.

“He’ll love this.....Famous for enjoying a good puzzle to solve.” Said Nethra. “I think we need him.....I can summon LLud Narren.”

“Irritating, but he did save my life when we were in Gorshan.” Said Maya. “I came close to being a late supper for the monsters that lurk there.”

“I remember you mentioning that.” Said Nethra. “Shall I summon him ?”

“Yes.....Do what you need to do, to get him here.”

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Aeony had a few magical abilities; all dark angels had a few simple spells they could cast, or innate magical gifts. It was a useful side effect from being created by powerful sorcerers, using ancient chaos magic. All that chaos energy left something behind. For Aeony it was an ability to hide, to be almost invisible among the shadows on a dark night. She also knew a few battle spells, though she tended to stick with her claws and a blade, when violence was needed.

“Rain.....Cold rain and winds from the north.” Aeony muttered. “I knew it would rain.”

The rain was an ally; it kept the citizens of the city off the streets. Add on the cold wind and she’d easily entered the City of the Lost God, without being seen. Past the rubble that had been Muzzie’s bar and north, to the small square behind the Towers. There was a building there, quite an unassuming stone building that went back some way from the square. There was a secret portal in that building, to get into the Dome. Everyone knew the secret of course. The portal was activated many times a day. So often, that peoples’ hands making gestures, had left dirty marks on the wall. Aeony wasn’t going to use that portal, not today.

“Oh, my memory.....Galla is right, none of us is getting any younger.” Aeony mumbled.

There were several portals in various parts of the square and those really were secret. So secret, that it was likely some had been forgotten and left unused since Tomma-Goran had walked the streets of his city. One was a back way into the flooded cellars beneath the Towers. Aeony wasn’t going that way; she wanted to reach the outside of the Dome, the part used as rooms for the librarians of the Great Library. The annoying thing, was that she’d once used the portal almost every week, yet her memory was playing up.

“Imp mosaic at northeast corner.” Aeony mumbled. “No.....Jangar mosaic on the western edge.”

The rain really was a blessing. It hid her well, turning her into a dark bundle of clothing discarded in the bad weather. Aeony leant over the mosaic of a Jangar beast and made two simple hand gestures on the ground. The familiar bright purple portal appeared, she'd got it right. Aeony instantly entered the portal and it closed behind her.

"I hope he has the wine I like." She muttered. "I'll have earned it tonight.....Out in this weather."

Aeony was on a narrow ledge, that ran right around the outside of the Dome. Four or five inches of stone ledge, with the Dome one side and a thousand foot drop on the other. True, dark angels could fly, but with the biting wind that gusted too fast to fly in, she was in genuine peril. Her left foot slipped on the ledge, so she dug her claws into the close fitting stones of the Dome.

"He'll have gossip.....He always has gossip." She mumbled.

How long had it been since she'd come to the Dome at night, to drink wine with Adamaz ? It was a game they all played and invariably got wrong. How long had it been since they'd been abducted and ended up helping Muzzie with his destiny ? Everyone had an idea and no one got it wrong by years and years. Vagueness over time seemed to be a rift thing. Monuments to fallen heroes always had a date they died, but almost never a date for their birth. Caspian knew how long they'd been helping Muzzie; he had a table at the back of his journal. Everyone got it wrong, but Caspian knew. Not decades, but long enough for Olvir to change from being a child, to being a young man. Aeony clung to the Dome and when the narrow ledge ended, she jumped down to a wider ledge. It was two feet wide and was under a row of windows.

"I must have been crazy to do this so often.....Summer and winter." She muttered.

Third window along, Adamaz had always left it unlocked and slightly open. Whatever creature the head librarian had become over the course of many millennia, it didn't feel the cold. In winter she'd often found him sitting in a chair, the window open and ice creeping over the windowsill. Good, probably out of habit, Adamaz had left the window open, just a little.

"Adamaz.....It's me." She said, quietly.

"Come in, Aeony." Said Adamaz. "After Vella coming to take Olvir away, I've been expecting you to visit. I have a new unopened bottle of the wine you like. You're brave to come during such bad rains."

"As I always say.....I won't melt in the rain."

He was awkward, it had been a while since they'd sat in his rooms and enjoyed a glass of wine. Human wine, there were still some who traded in it. Officially a heresy to drink it, but they both loved it. Had Adamaz wondered if she'd be there with a knife to thrust between his ribs ? It must have crossed his mind.

"I came as a friend.....In case you were wondering." Said Aeony. "Thank you for helping Caspian and Vella take Olvir away. That will never be forgotten."

"Just don't tell anyone.....Or I might get a visit from the city militia." Said Adamaz.

The wine was good and Adamaz didn't enjoy bright lighting. His rooms were always in semidarkness, which Aeony quite liked. Comfortable furnishings and soon he'd send an apprentice to get them food from the kitchens.

"Now.....Excuse my directness." Said Adamaz. "Old friends can be direct though, and honest. Why have you come to see me ?"

"To listen to the gossip of an old friend, knowing it will be useful." Said Aeony. "Anything you can tell me about the leadership of the city militia, would be appreciated. Then more specifically.....We need plans of the old sewers that run under Old Town. I've been there many times, as has Muzzie.

His brother was even imprisoned there for years, though that is a story for another day. Decent plans could save many lives.”

“Coming in through the old sewers.....A good idea.” Said Adamaz.

Adamaz went to the door and muttered at one of the apprentices. Several were outside his rooms, whenever he was there. Kvels generally, the creatures who could go from hunting on two legs, to hunting on four. Some called the change a curse, but many of the apprentices were now just about unstoppable. Adamaz actually encouraged the library staff to be blessed by the bite of an elder Kveld.

“By the time you leave, you’ll have every plan the library has, for the old sewer system. I’ve also ordered the meal you usually like.” Said Adamaz. “I would of course.....Like the plans to be returned, once you’ve finished with them.”

“I will return them myself.” Said Aeony.

No hurry, Adamaz had the knack of getting things done, but never seeming to rush. Where Muzzie could go from relaxed to frantic in a heartbeat, Adamaz always felt calm and controlled.

“When our meal comes.” Said Adamaz. “I’ll tell you everything there is to know, about our corrupt city militia.”

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Faalr’h Ha’radask was glad he’d ridden Mikan through the Void Gate that morning. His Shuud of puzzling ancestry could be skittish, but being up there, head and shoulders above everyone else.....That feeling was priceless. Out of politeness, he dismounted to talk to General Dhūlen.

“We lost one camp guard, but killed seven of them.” Said Dhūlen. “I can’t see them trying another night attack, but if they do.....We’re ready for them.”

The seven dead fighters from the City of the Lost God, were lined up on the ground. Some had horrific injuries, while one or two could have simply been sleeping. Arrows were precious, too precious to be buried with a dead enemy. Looking hard, Faal could see most of the seven dead, had been killed by imperial archers.

“You must have three thousand fighters in Bredon’s Edge by now.” Said Faal. “The enemy might send scouts, but I doubt if they’ll attack in any real numbers. As you say though.....If they do, you look ready to deal with them.”

Bizzi had stopped for a few moments, but the leader of the Dredgers was busy. Several hundred of his people were building defences around the camp, while the Hive Mother’s pure blood demons were busy enlarging the stockade back at the Void Gate. It seemed a weird setup to Faal, but Bizzi seemed happy and at the end of the day.....It was his job to build homes for the army and walls to defend those homes.

“All of their dead are in militia uniforms.” Said Dhūlen. “If possible.....I’ve told the camp guards to try and take one of them alive. There’s turmoil in the City of the Lost God, and it would be nice to know what’s going on.”

There was gossip, some of it being told by Muzzie himself, even though he moaned about unsubstantiated rumours. Talk of the top level of the city militia being executed, with the Sorcerers Guild taking control of the defences. It seemed, if any of it could be believed....That the Great Library was cut off from the rest of the City of the Lost God. Almost under siege was the term Muzzie had used. If it was right, it was good news.....If it was right ?

“So many rumours.....Yes, a few facts would be nice.” Said Faal.

One of the dead enemy fighters looked so undamaged, that Faal knelt next to him and rolled the body over. There it was, the arrow hole in the back of his head.

“You have skilled archers.” Said Faal.

“Some of the best.” Said Dhūlen.

Faal looked across an orchard to the road, the route some of the army would take into the city. Others would come from the north, skirting the great river. A third group were now going to enter the city through an old and largely disused sewer system. For some reason Muzzie wasn't keeping General Dhūlen fully informed on his plans. Not that Faal minded, he never had liked the Terak. If Dhūlen was heading for a massive fall, he wasn't that concerned. Faal would try to make sure he was well out of the way when the shit began to fly.

“A while yet.....When I have eight thousand warrior in Bredon's Edge.....We'll march down that road.” Said Dhūlen.

“That will be quite a sight to see.” Said Faal.

Nothing was going to be wasted; Bizzi's Dredgers weren't simply building homes that would be abandoned after the siege. Farmers from Aarabash had already been promised the fertile land, and decent homes to live in. The defensive wall would give them protection against the occasional, wild animal attack.

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When Nethra talked of calling LLud Narren, conjuring him, or summoning him; she wasn't talking about sending a runner to fetch him. The powerful magician had probably spent more of the last few millennia dead, than alive. Not fully dead, but not fully corporeal either. He'd wandered the rifts like a kind of wraith and that had consequences. Although he was now a living, breathing and sometimes irritating sorcerer again, he could still be summoned, as though he still walked through the wastes of eternity. Nethra could sense him, so she could summon him....At least in theory she could.

“LLud Narren.....One time sorcerer to the great Tomma-Goran.” Said Nethra. “I summon you to this place.....I command you to appear. We have need of you.”

“That's the seventh attempt.” Said Maya. “How long does it normally take ?”

The Uah female was still under a green mist and still showing signs of healing. Nethra knew a little about the Uah, but not enough to take an intelligent guess at the female waking up as a friend, or a foe. A female cleric of the Uah, who had evolved from the now extinct Ushong. Everything seemed to depend on the intent of whoever had sent her to the portal on the Ring of Volkin.

“There is no normal for this kind of thing.” Said Nethra. “I'll keep trying until it works.....Eventually it will work.”

Nethra repeated the summoning, adding a few lines of an ancient text, to add a bit more oomph. In truth, she'd never summoned a 'once dead, but now living,' entity. There was a good chance the summoning would fail.

“Maya.....Do you have any Ashunt oil ?” Asked Nethra.

“Yes, Galla uses it for everything.....I have a small bottle.”

It was known to give some healing spells a bit of zap, though Galla probably had a long technical word for the effect. Nethra took the top off the bottle and poured the thick liquid around her feet, to form an untidy circle.

“Hey, that's incredibly expensive.” Said Maya.

“And well worth every gold piece.....If it works.” Said Nethra. “I need peace and quiet now, Maya. No asking me question until it is done.....One way or another.”

Nethra had been lazy, using the common tongue for the summoning. There was a ritual in the old tongue, once the most common language of the rifts. That had been a long time ago, the days when her grandmother's, grandmother had been the holy woman of her tribe. Nethra remembered the

words her own mother had spoken one dark night, when the signs had looked good. A long dead leader of her tribe had been brought back from the wastes. Just long enough for him to say where he'd buried something precious.

"LLud Narren..... Sident, Sident, movrae argental."

Nethra felt something in the room; various creatures of the dark were attracted by the old dark magic. Nothing attacked her, so she spoke the second line of the ritual.

"LLud Narren..... Sident, Sident, amorentil, nevesh."

The Uah female sat upright and screamed at her. No words, just an ear splitting scream. She then lay back down on the table. Maya looked about to make a comment, so Nethra put her finger over her lips. The universal sign to shut up and keep quiet. Just one more line, though Nethra was a little worried about what she might be conjuring up. LLud Narren hadn't been a nice person for most of his dark and unpleasant life.

"LLud Narren..... Sident, Sident, leminah, augmeni."

There was a definite cackle, as though a hundred dark angels had watched the ritual and approved of it. Quite near to the door of the building, a brown liquid seemed to be dripping the wrong way, dripping up from the floor towards the ceiling.

"May I speak now?" Asked Maya.

"Yes, the spoken part of the ritual is over."

"What is happening now?" Asked Maya.

"I have no idea." Said Nethra.

No need for small lies and exaggerations anymore. Nethra had never seen a pool of brown liquid form before. She was in unknown territory and the summoning would either work, or it wouldn't. It really was all down to the will of the Gods now, and quite a bit of luck. The liquid stopped dripping in reverse. There was another cackle and something fell from the small pool on the ceiling. Alive probably, the something grunted as it hit the ground.

"Well.....That could have gone better, but he is here." Said Nethra.

The creature straightened itself and coughed a few times. It was still to speak, but there was no mistaking the face and posture of LLud Narren.

"That looked a little brutal.....Are you alright?" Asked Maya.

"Someone needs to promise me.....That you'll never do that again." Said LLud. "On a world I didn't recognise, I was pulled through a huge brute of a creature. I went right through it and out of the rear end. I doubt if the brute survived the experience. Rule one for a summoning.....Never summon anything that is already solid and totally corporeal."

"I am truly sorry, LLud." Said Nethra. "Our need of your expertise is great though and time is of the essence."

"Ahhh.....I see you have an old friend of mine." Said LLud, while looking at the Uah female.

"You know her?" Asked Maya.

"Yes, it's Dhali Pril, though I've seen her looking better." Said LLud. "I seem to remember we were briefly married, though that was a long time ago."

"Well.....You're obviously the right person to talk to." Said Maya.

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There had been a Pinthrad as clerk to the Sorcerers Guild, since the guild had been nothing but a few magic users meeting in a back room somewhere. It had become a tradition and Ezzel Pinthrad often thought that if it hadn't been for a little bad luck.....The Pinthrad family would have been hereditary leaders of the guild. Every organisation needed those at the top, those making the decisions. Then

there were those at the bottom, who actually did the work. In the middle were those like Pinthrad, who entered figures in ledgers and organised everything. Deep down somewhere, Ezzel knew he lacked a certain something. Basically, he was too timid to enter the top level of sorcerers. But as his wife had often reminded him.....

“We’re reasonably wealthy and no one expects the clerk to go out and slay anything. Count your blessings, Ezzel.....Count your blessing.”

The Sorcerers Guild in the City of the Lost God, had once gone through a period of impecuniosity; they’d been broke, potless, on the verge of bankruptcy. It seemed that having some of the most wealthy people in the city as members, was no guarantee of financial solvency. A previous Pinthrad had talked the head of the guild.....Who had it been then ? Thrand, yes it had been Thrand the Elder who sat in the big chair then. Emperors and Kings had thrones; the guild had a big chair for their leader.

Thrand had agreed to hold functions in the guild building. All sorts of functions, from celebrations of births, to funeral rituals. Weddings had been the real money earner, they still were. It meant organising the catering, any required religious service and importantly, the registration of the marriage in the city archives. A saying had become prevalent among most would-be young brides.

“You’re not properly married, unless it’s registered by the guild.”

Pinthrad had it all down to an art form now and the money rolled in on a regular basis. Of course he skimmed a little off for himself. After all, one never knew when the good times might end. Not that they showed any signs of ending, even after recent unpleasant events at Bredon’s Edge and Muzzie’s infamous tavern. The threat of war seemed to make young couples want to make their love official; to get their union witnessed and registered. Plus of course, blessed by whichever God their family favoured. Blessings brought fertility and fertility filled the city with children.....

“How is it going ?” Asked Pinthrad.

“The militia are already talking about food rationing.” Said the caterer. “But.....For a client such as yourselves.....We can guarantee no shortages.”

Ezzel Pinthrad had the couple’s names in his ledgers, but they were just another two people who’d chosen to marry in the guild gardens. Their service was the standard blessing of the nine, with Estrin as their deity of choice. There were rumours Estrin now favoured their enemies, but such talk was punished, severely.

“Ahhh, the bride’s mother is happy.....Always a good sign.” Said Ezzel.

“Yes.....No moaning about the cost.” Said the caterer.

Complaints were rare; there was a waiting list to be married at the guild. Occasionally someone complained and demanded a reduction in the final bill. Ezzel never agreed to that, ever. Mothers tended to have several daughters. No one wanted their next daughter to reach marriageable age, only to be told they weren’t welcome at the guild. Families always paid their bill in full, eventually.

“That dress.....Beautiful, but pray that it doesn’t rain.” Muttered Ezzel.

Ezzel Pinthrad used the servant’s stairs; it was the quicker way to get to the rooms at the top of the building. Sökkolf was the current head of the guild, Sökkolf the sixteenth. Numbering was considered fine for emperors and Kings, but a bit arrogant for everyone else. Sökkolf the younger was waiting in the large chamber and sat in the big chair. Sökkolf had one of those families, the extended family that seemed to have an involvement in everything. He even had a close cousin who ran the city jail in Tandalla.

“And they have the nerve to call me timid.” Ezzel mumbled.

There were mechanical devices to take people from floor to floor. Those attending functions, thought it was marvellous to be carried up and down several floors, without the hard work of trudging up stairs. Ezzel was old school, he always used the stairs. He was breathing hard though, when he reached Sökkolf's office.

"Ahhh.....Pinthrad." Shouted Sökkolf the younger. "So glad you could join us.....Is the wedding going well?"

Sarcasm, yet without the weddings; they'd need to double the membership fees. Ezzel no longer became angry at such things. He'd skim a few more gold coins and buy his wife something nice.

"Everyone in the wedding party looks happy." Said Ezzel.

"Good.....Find a seat." Said Sökkolf. "If we reach an agreement, you're needed to write it out and collect signatures."

Find a seat indeed, Ezzel had his own place at the back of the office. Not all the guild were present, just the top tier, the people who made the decisions. Just under a dozen of the most wealthy and influential people in the City of the Lost God. Mostly male hybrids, but every year saw an extra female, or two, reach the top tier of the guild.

"Could I.....I need a moment of the guild's time." Shouted Norrex.

Norrex, yet another hybrid whose family had centuries of service to the guild. No Norrex the elder, younger, or somewhere in between. Norrex was the head of security for the guild and known simply as Norrex.

"Yes, but please don't test my patience." Said Sökkolf. "Quickly Norrex and just the salient facts."

"Our contact with Muzzie's army, say that Dhali Pril has been given to the new emperor." Said Norrex.

"That.....Is a huge piece of news." Someone muttered.

"It could change everything." Added Ezzel.

"What is Muzzie likely to do with her?" From the rear of the chamber.

"He'll use her as a weapon of course." Said Sökkolf. "It's what she was designed to be."

It annoyed Ezzel, that they called him Pinthrad the timid behind his back. He knew it; there were friends who told him it still went on. Yet when a massive decision needed to be made, the great top tier of the guild, became indecisive. Leave it too long and they might end up being attacked by both sides. A vote was needed, but Sökkolf was scared to ask for a show of hands.

"Can we decide now?" Asked Norrex. "A vote, or an executive decision.....But a decision needs to be made."

"Yes.....We've been here for days." Someone said. "My family must be quite worried by now."

Some families would be worried, while others would be happy to get a little relief. Unlike some, Ezzel didn't have several mistresses. He had a wife who he was sure would be missing him. He was definitely missing her.

"Alright, we'll take a vote." Said Sökkolf. "The result needs to be clear though, a good majority wanting the result. If not, I will make a binding decision on the matter."

It had begun with the city militia, who were having quite a few problems. Internal battles and murders, because everyone wanted to be the leader. Half of their war cabinet had died from internal strife and insurrection. Needing a good solid ally, the militia had asked the Sorcerers Guild for a clear and public announcement of their full support.

"First vote.....Raise your hand if you think we should support the city militia." Said Sökkolf.

In theory that was the vote, support the city militia, or find somewhere else to live. There had been an approach though, by those supporting Muzzie and his eight key advisers. Muzzie was becoming

impressive, with his links to the Hive Mother and having Estrin travelling with him. The bar keeper wanting to be emperor was no longer a joke. Even if his bar was now a heap of burned timbers. Now the very old and almost legendary cleric was with him. Dhali Pril was a terrifying weapon, if Muzzie was capable on controlling her.

“Second vote.....Raise your hand if you’re in favour of supporting the new emperor.” Said Sökkolf.

Two of the guild voted for both options. It was unexpected but not against the rules. Two tellers helped count and note down the result of the vote. Sökkolf muttered at the tellers, but there could be no dispute. Ezzel had counted the hands too, the result was clear.

“I have no need to use my vote.” Said Sökkolf. “There was a clear majority. The Sorcerers Guild will be supporting Muzzie in the coming battle.”

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Caspian was beginning to see why Faal liked riding his Shuud. He had on his armour of office and on his belt was the famous sword of Mozzrik the Usurper. A little extra height would have been nice though. If they won the battle for the City of the Lost God, he was definitely going to find a beast to ride. Before they faced the walls of Quron of course and Vella would need her own creature to ride. Vella was next to him, looking at the city that had once been their home. No Muzzie with them and General Dhūlen was commanding the warriors at Bredon’s Edge. It was all about to happen and Muzzie was busy elsewhere, with his own plans.

“Watch us until we reach Podd’s yard, Vita.” Said Vella. “Then you need to take Olvir back through the Void Gate.”

Caspian hadn’t wanted their son anywhere near the fighting, but he’d been so keen to see his parents leading the attack from the north. There were dangers, the dark angels in the Towers, could be on them in an instant. Surprisingly, the road into the city was quiet, almost tranquil.

“Yes, no dawdling, Olvir.” Said Caspian. “Do as Vita tells you.....Understood ?”

“Yes, I’ll be good.” Said Olvir.

The Sorcerers Guild had caused Caspian and Vella to be there, leading close to thirty five thousand experienced fighters. He was Caspian the hero of the siege on Segin-Unadaris. The army loved having him at the front, leading them into the city. The guild had decided to support Muzzie and his army. They would fight for Muzzie, unleashing havoc and destruction upon the hated city militia. There was just one stipulation on their signed agreement.

‘The great library is under siege, in all but name. The militia may overrun Adamaz and his apprentices within days. Soon we will be under attack in the guild building. We need to see the banners of Muzzie’s army, as they enter the city. We need help and we need it now.’

A little early, but no one was worried. The army were ready, even the greys from Annill. It seemed the minor health problem, was just that, minor.

LLud Narren was somewhere among Muzzie’s warriors, with Dhali Pril. He was still claiming to have once been married to the cleric, a very long time in the past. Dhali Pril never commented and actually, rarely spoke. There was talk about the cleric being a weapon of some kind. Even if it was nonsense, the rumours were doing wonders for morale.

“We march.....For Muzzie.....For the empire.” Yelled Caspian.

Vella repeated the call and when it was repeated by thirty five thousand, it became deafening. At a full charge the army skirted Podd’s yard and hurtled towards the City of the Lost God.

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