

The Last Emperor

Chapter 41 – A Coronation

“Oh yes.....I can leave the shop closed today.” Said Galla. “Bird can deal with any customers banging on the door.”

“What does he do ?” Asked Muzzie.

“Mostly.....He calls them stupid and tells them to go away.” Said Galla.’



Some were calling it Muzzie being crowned, while others called it a coronation. Aeony really didn't care what it was called, though Caspian had been telling everyone the proper term was a coronation. He was the head of the Great Library and was usually right about such things. She was just happy to be standing to Muzzie's right and about to receive her own crown. Crowned first as imperial consort, or something like that. It had been a surprise, until Muzzie had told her, just before they'd entered the temple.

“Will it mean we're linked, joined together forever ?” She'd asked him.

“Only if you want to.....Do you like the idea of us being joined, forever ?”

“Ask me again in a hundred years from now.” She'd told him.

Being asked would have been nice, but Muzzie was like that. He'd meant it in a nice way, so she chose to accept it that way. Not marriage of course, a hybrid emperor could never marry a dark angel. There might be unrest among the population, over such a thing. Besides, they'd had the conversation about some kind of marriage ceremony. What was the point in marriage; there could never be children born of their union. Imperial consort suited Aeony and she'd have her own golden crown.

“Do you accept the duties of Imperial Consort ?” Asked Neola.

Duties ? No one had mentioned duties. Aeony was happy with sharing Muzzie's bed and the sex was really nice, great actually. What else was expected of her ? Aeony decided to say yes and argue later about the details.

“Yes, I do.” Said Aeony.

A ripple of applause grew, to be a great many cheering voices. Neola placed a really beautiful crown on her head and Aeony was happy. Being crowned queen of the dark angels had been a great day, but being crown imperial consort in Leng.....Felt even better. Estrin was there, even though no one had expected her to come. She was cheering and applauding. One of the nine cheering a dark angel in Leng. If the world was about to crack open it was definitely the day for it. The world remained intact, as Neola stood in front of Muzzie.

“Muzzie.....I am very happy to be placing a crown on your head this day.” Said Neola.

There was more to say of course, many words in many languages. Neola seemed to remember it all, though she did occasional look at some notes in her left hand. Some of the proclamations to declare a new emperor were in the standard language of the rifts. Some was in Old Imperial and some was spoken by Neola, in the dark language of the worlds beyond Leng. By the time Neola finished, the air in the temple was actually tingling with power.

“Do you accept the Imperial Crown ?” Asked Neola.

As if he'd understood even half of what had been said to him. Aeony knew some of the proclamations were almost the nursery rhymes of Leng, long remembered, but of dubious authenticity. The crown, that was the important thing. Once Muzzie had the crown on his head, no one would dispute that he was the Emperor of All the Rifts.

"I accept the crown.....I accept the title of Emperor." Said Muzzie.

"I hereby name you for the official records of Leng." Said Neola. "You will henceforth be known as Emperor Osranetherer the First."

Or Muzzie to just about everyone, though that wouldn't get into the official records. Nor would any word of Muzzie agreeing to be the first of his line, but not naming a successor. It was all the game, the way people in power manipulated those below them, even emperors. Neola motioned Muzzie to crouch down, so that the Imperial Crown, could be placed on his head.

"The nine give the new emperor their blessing." Shouted Estrin.

"As do the Lords of Chaos." Yelled the Silver Lady.

Aeony had looked, but the numbers attending the coronation were huge. The Lady had promised to be there and there she was; a long way back from the front and in amongst those who'd arrived with Ginnda-Aanash, the Hive Mother.

"The demons of Segin-Unadaris give Muzzie their blessing." Said Ginnda. "May the emperor and his descendants, rule for many millennia."

It seemed Uula Podda was determined to add something to the general good wishes and traditional blessings. Her wailing didn't harm anyone, but it did cause the temple to shake a little and vibrate.

The child of the ancient ones spoke to Faal, who then translated for everyone in the temple.

"The child names Muzzie as Friend of the Ancient Ones." Shouted Faal. "He is their friend and his friends shall be theirs. His enemies will also.....Be the enemies of the Ancient Ones."

If Muzzie needed a show of support, it was there, in that temple in Leng. At exactly the right moment, Uula Podda had told all of those present, that Muzzie was blessed as emperor, by the most powerful beings to ever walk the rifts. Aeony had no idea how long Muzzie might live; life expectancy of hybrids could be anything from a hundred years, to several thousand. Muzzie had already been around for a long time, but he did have a little Genova in his ancestry. No matter what, no one was likely to attempt an assassination; not with the Ancient Ones watching his back.

"Caspian and I would like to offer our service and blessing, to the new emperor." Yelled Vella.

Once Vella had spoken, all of the eight imperial advisers had to speak. Bird was there too, despite officially being banned from the crowning ceremony. Birds are hard to keep out of anywhere and Galla's pet was shouting mild abuse at everyone.

"If my creature will be silent?" Shouted Galla. "I would like to add my blessing to Muzzie and his heirs."

"Silly Galla.....Muzzie is last emperor." Squawked Bird.

The crowd laughed at Bird and it all became very messy, but relaxed. Even Neola was laughing, as Bird called several of her high council, fools and idiots. Aeony found herself laughing, but those offering blessings continued.

"I offer Muzzie my life and my bow." Shouted Runa.

"I too.....Offer my service to Muzzie, for as long as he needs it." Yelled Maya.

Maya for once, had actually been invited.....Though she hadn't been expected to speak. Aeony found it interesting, that many who'd wanted to get away; to return to their homes. Were now offering to serve the new emperor for the rest of their lives. Everyone turned towards Nethra, the Chinnura, who was the last of the eight to speak.

"I too have been cursed by prophecy." Said Nethra. "I feel for Muzzie, as he tries to make sense of it all.....I still wonder what I'm supposed to achieve. I too, offer my blessing to the new emperor. Whatever I might become.....I will always serve Muzzie."

Aeony almost expected a group of Genova to appear, claiming to be Muzzie's family. It was chaotic in the temple, but everyone seemed to be enjoying the ceremony. Such things were supposed to be serious, with a huge amount of dignity. On the whole, Aeony liked the coronation how it had turned out. Though.....She could have done with far less Bird.

"Bird.....Cease your insults." Yelled Aeony. "Or you'll soon be feeling the sharpness of my claws."

Still wearing her crown, Aeony broke etiquette, by hugging Muzzie. Why not ? Nothing else was going to the official rules of the temple. Not content with a hug, she kissed him, hard on the lips. That caused an audible gasp from the already excited crowd.

"Oh, this crown is so heavy." Muzzie muttered. "Good to hear so many nice words, but I want to get out of these robes and take off the crown."

"Come on then." Said Aeony.

"Can we do that ? Is it allowed ?" Asked Muzzie.

"You can do anything you like, my dear.....You're now the emperor." Said Aeony.

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~ Two Years Later ~

General Dhūlen was found by his servants, at his estate on the third rift. Dead during the night, killed by what was probably a professional assassin. Killed quite quickly and there must have been a lot of pain involved. Skinning a hybrid is skilled, noisy work; yet his staff claimed to have not heard the slightest scream, or cry for help. Many were blamed; he had managed to make a lot of enemies during his very long life. No one blamed the emperor, though it was noted that Muzzie hadn't attended the funeral of his old friend. Strange, considering Dhūlen had commanded the victorious army, which had taken the ancient city of Quron. In the absence of any other obvious murderers, his staff were blamed. All his servants were tortured to death, yet none admitted their guilt in the murder. By order of the new emperor, the Dhūlen estate was given to Belso Gurd, famous warrior and hero of the empire.

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~ Many, Many Years Later ~

The Silver Lady had a bunch of Ashunt blooms in her hand; she'd promised him Ashunt blooms when the time came. It was her first time in the City of the Lost God for some time, the new empire kept her far busier than she'd anticipated. She had no official title, or remit, but everyone knew she was the real power on the first rift.

"Did he suffer much.....At the end ?" She asked.

"Given his age and that he had died once before.....His death wasn't painful." Said Galla. "Not exactly unexpected, but who doesn't think their own death is too early ?"

"Did he say as much ?" Asked the Lady.

"He wanted a few more years.....Which was beyond my ability to give him." Said Galla.

The Lady nodded at the apothecary. They'd both had occasions where what people expected of them, was impossible. It was sad, but that was how the world worked and there was no use in taking it personally. Galla was beginning to look as she'd looked hundreds of years before. How she'd looked before using the miracle intended for another. She never moaned about age catching up with her though, not one complaint. If only everyone was like Galla.

“We’ve a perfect view of the imperial palace from here.” Said the Lady. “Bizzi and his Dredgers did an amazing job of building it. It’s said that people come from all over the rifts, to look at its beauty.”
“Here.....In the gardens of the palace.” Said Galla. “It’s the perfect place for his tomb.”
“Whose tomb ?”

Muzzie was striding towards them, looking little different to how he’d looked when crowned in Leng. No Aeony with him, she now had close to five hundred dark angels to command. Muzzie had his usual personal guard of seven.....Seven of the toughest warriors in the imperial army.

“Bizzi’s tomb.....As you know quite well.” Said the Lady. “I promised Bizzi Ashunt blooms on his tomb. Come to think of it, I promised you Ashunt blooms on your tomb. I can see it will be a long time until your tomb is occupied. Must be the Genova blood in your veins.”

“Muzzie will outlive us all.” Said Galla.

“He’s already outlived General Dhūlen.” Said the Lady. “Not that I’m going to say any more about that. I hadn’t seen Bizzi for some time, Muzzie. Galla told me he wasn’t doing too well, at the end.”

“Does anyone ?” Asked Muzzie. “You brought him back once from the wastes of eternity. Every year he lived after that was a plus. Maya misses him.....He was almost like a father to her.”

“Maya.....Now she really might outlive us all.” Said the Lady.

“Only if she stays with Uula Podda, the Golden One.” Said Galla.

The Silver Lady knew the gossip, the Dredger girl had gone with Uula Podda to the islands beyond the Sacred Sea. Others of Uula’s kind had once been seen there, even though it had been a long time ago. If Uula was to lay a large number of eggs, she was in need of a male to fertilise them.

“Come Muzzie, let’s do what we came here to do.” Said the Lady.

Ashunt Blooms, all three of them had brought fresh Ashunt blooms for Bizzi’s tomb. Expensive in the summer, but it was approaching winter in the City of the Lost God. Fresh Ashunt flowers were more expensive than the purest gold. Bizzi had been a loyal worshipper of hers since being a child. The Lady felt she owed him a few blooms on his tomb and a tear. She cried a single, solitary tear.

“Can I interest you both in refreshments at the palace ?” Asked Muzzie.

“Oh yes.....I can leave the shop closed today.” Said Galla. “Bird can deal with any customers banging on the door.”

“What does he do ?” Asked Muzzie.

“Mostly.....He calls them stupid and tells them to go away.” Said Galla.

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~ The End ~

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First, let’s look at a few stats. The completed book is 266,946 words, or about 890 novel length pages. Ideally a trilogy, but a lot of people seem to have enjoyed reading all 890 pages. I think it might be longer than Ulysses.

There will be a return to the rifts, I promise. Probably not until early 2026, but we shall return to see how Maya and Uula are doing, while searching for the last home of the Ancient Ones. Will we see Muzzie again ? Of course we will. And yes, it will be another very, very, very long book.