

City of the Lost God

Part 14 – A Summoning

“A sword of some kind. The orb goes into some detail about its ability to kill any mortal creature that flies, walks or crawls upon the ground.”



“I can’t just disappear again,” said Caspian, “we must quickly find a way out.”

He started to walk towards the nearest cloth drapes on the wall, pulling at them while Vella kept very close to him. Neither of them had got used to being naked yet, but Vella was still particularly upset about it.

“What are you doing Casp ?” She asked.

“There might be a door or window behind them.”

The ragged and rotten cloth gave way, showering them both in dirt and dust. Vella started crying, so Caspian held her and then wiped the worst of the dust off her with his hand.

“We have to keep looking Vella,” he said, “some of this old cloth has letters on it.”

She bent down to examine the cloth and there was a small amount of lettering still legible, but none of the characters meant anything to her.

“It’s ‘King’ in old Demon, from before the last great war against the humans.” Said Caspian.

“But King who Casp ?”

“Whoever he was it was a long time ago. I don’t think even Adamaz was alive when this hall was last used.”

There was very ancient wood panelling under the drapes and in places they could see the solid stone of the wall below. Caspian moved on and started pulling at the next set of drapes, Vella helping him to tug it away from the wall. With no warning an eight legged furry insect landed on Vella’s hand, it was so large that it almost covered the back of her hand and it hissed as she brushed it off, Vella started to scream.

“Vella stop screaming !”

Caspian broke up one of the numerous old chairs, pulling off a heavy wooden leg and handing it to Vella.

“Here take this and if anything scares you, or comes near you, hit it hard.”

Vella held the chair leg and a certain look came into her eyes. She hit him with the leg, hard and right across his left thigh. Caspian jumped back and started to rub the place she’d hit.

“What was that for Vella ?”

“You wanted the crown Casp, now find us a way out of this fucking place !”

“Alright, alright.”

Together they pulled at the drapes, find nothing but solid panelling and two more of the large insects. One got away, but Vella managed to hit one with the chair leg, leaving a long mark of black ichor across the wall. They were both tired and ready to take a break, when a drape fell back to reveal a door. There in the panelling was a wooden door, complete with an inviting silver handle.

“Careful !” Said Vella.

Caspian put out his finger and touched the handle, while Vella held the chair leg like a club. Satisfied he wasn’t going to get some kind of shock from it, Caspian firmly grasped the handle and they were both instantly back at the point where they’d originally arrived in the hall. They both looked around in disbelief, but they were now stood together about seventy yards from the door in the panelling.

“Damn,” said Vella, “perhaps if I try to open it this time ?”

She started to move away, but Caspian just stood there examining the floor. Vella stopped walking and just watched as he rubbed his bare foot over the wooden blocks the floor was made of.

“Why here,” he said, “why did it bring us both back to this very same spot ?”

If he hadn’t been in bare feet he’d never have felt the slight difference in one block, the way it slightly wobbled under his big toe. Caspian lay down on the floor and ran his fingers over the block, noticing a slight gap at one end.

“I need something to lever it up with.” He said.

“I saw something.”

Vella was gone, her nakedness forgotten as she ran to the destroyed chair and brought him back a thin metal bracing strut. She was filthy and her feet were now covered in tiny cuts, but Vella smiled as she handed him the small metal strut.

“Perfect Vella.”

The metal strut fitted the gap and Caspian quickly had the block removed and he was looking at something gold coloured. It was too big to fit the hole, so Caspian felt the blocks and the one furthest from him felt loose. As he removed that block he could see the object under the floor was a golden orb, about the size of a decent Thraag egg. He put his finger against it, but the orb wouldn’t budge and none of the other blocks were willing to move.

“Let me try.” Said Vella.

She lay flat on the floor and put her slightly thinner fingers under the orb and lifted it out of the hole in the floor. The orb was covered in tiny writing, but in the poor light nothing was legible. As they both stood up the hall was gone and they were back in the small library behind their old room again. If it hadn’t been for the orb in Vella’s hand and the amount of dirt they both had on them, Caspian might have put it all down to a dream.

“Quick Casp, take the crown off and put it somewhere you can’t touch it !”

Caspian took the crown off and threw it into the corner where they’d found the bones of LLud. Vella was still holding the orb and she moved it nearer to the light globe.

“The writing is too small to read.” She said.

Caspian took the orb off her and put it in a drawer in the desk. Then he held her and kissed her very gritty forehead.

“Tomorrow I’ll get a magnifier and a bright lamp. But for now Vella, let’s get washed and go back to bed.”

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“Less bodies to collect every night.” Said Ash.

Podd stacked the ones he wanted to keep on the cart, the ones going to the mass grave he left to one side for collection later. Ash though dug through everyone’s pockets, a few coins could often be found on even the most impoverished looking corpse.

“We’re still not collecting them all ?” Asked Ash.

“Only so much room in the boiler lad, only so much soap people need, only so much bone meal for their crops.”

Podd now chose the best, the ones with hopefully the best grade fat, but sometimes it was hard to tell until he got to work with his knives. With some the plague ate right through them, left black ooze right through their insides. Podd pulled down the cover on his cart and started to push it along the pot holed street.

“Come on Ash,” he said, “push hard and there will be time to get the others into the ground before breakfast.”

The City was paying him a copper a head to deliver the dead to the plague pits. It wasn't much and it barely covered his time, but Podd knew a few favours now would mean a blind eye turned to his private collection. There were no taxes in the City, but a few coppers to keep the bloated bodies off the streets and out of the rivers was collected by a special plague levy on the merchants.

“There's always one waits until we're finished,” said Podd, “see what she wants lad.”

The door of a shack had opened and a woman was waving a lamp and beckoning them over. Podd watched as Ash went over to her and looked inside the shack. There seemed to be a lot of discussion and Ash was reaching into a pocket, but Podd felt no inclination to go and see what the fuss was all about. It had been a long tiring night, so he sat down with his back to one of the wheels of his cart and rested. Not with closed eyes, oh no, not in the slums, but he rested until Ash came back, dragging a body rolled up in a worn out blanket.

“I knew you'd want it,” Said Ash, “I only gave her three coppers and one of those was for the blanket.”

Podd stood up and placed their lamp next to the blanket as Ash unwrapped whatever was inside it. At first Podd thought the boy had been conned into paying three coppers for the body of scavenger. The carcass had four legs, a powerful head and a jaw full of sharp teeth. The strange thing though was the front paws, they were human hands.

“She knew you collected unusual things,” said Ash, “and she found this creature dead, right outside her back door about an hour ago.”

“You did well Lad, let's get it on the cart and look at it better back at the yard.”

Podd had seen creatures touched by chaos and he'd seen most of the scavengers that lived on the rifts, but nothing like the carcass inside the blanket. He wrapped it up and again and put it on top of the pile of bodies on the cart.

“You did very well indeed lad.”

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Olvir had enjoyed his night at Bredon's Edge. True the tavern was really just a back parlour in a farmers house, but the ale was good and they'd found him a bed for the night. After a large breakfast he walked towards the road and found the team of trackers alert and watching the road.

“Any sign of them ?” He asked.

“A few farmers with crops went past at dawn, but none of Sajaha's team.”

It was the only road, Olvir had checked with the farmers in the tavern. He found a fallen tree to sit on and was just getting comfortable when he heard the sound of wings and Silsk landed beside the road. When Aeony silently landed behind his group of trackers, Olvir realised he was in a lot of trouble, even if he wasn't sure why.

“I knew something was wrong,” hissed Silsk, “I felt it, why aren't you watching the Ring of Volkin ?”

Olvir could see the dark angel was out for blood as her tail swung ominously in his direction.

“Something came to the ring, something we couldn't fight,” he said, “but this is the only road their waggon can use to get back to the City.”

Now Aeony was stood next to him, her fragrance of sex and threat filling his head.

“It's unlikely they'll bother pushing the waggon back, you should have kept close to the ring.” She said.

Olvir turned to look directly at Silsk.

“But the treasure,” he said, “surely they'll need the wagon to.....”

Silsk hit him hard in the chest with her clenched fist. It was something she'd often done to Merrick, so she knew exactly the right amount of force to use. Olvir wouldn't die, but for a few minutes he'd flap around on the ground, gasping for air like a fish on the river bank.

"Get the search started." Silsk said to Aeony.

None of the trackers had moved, they'd known Aeony a long time, so they'd remained still and simply watched Olvir as he struggled for the next breathe.

"Two of you go back to the ring and see what happened there," said Aeony, "and the rest spread out to either side of the road and look for tracks. If they came back cross country there must be signs and we might still catch them. Be back here well before dark if you expect to get paid."

They were gone, melting into the trees and trying to find tracks of anyone leaving the ring and heading for the City. It was a fool's errand, even in a hurry Lilleth never left tracks to be followed. Silsk pulled Olvir up and leant him against a tree stump. His face was still flushed, his breathing uneven.

"I'm not going to kill you," said Silsk, "you're too useful."

She ran a talon over his jacket, easily slicing it open to reveal the muscled torso beneath. Her talon cut his flesh, not deep enough to impair his fighting skills, but enough to make him scream.

"You failed me Olvir and no one ever fails me twice. Your face is pretty, but I think a good scar here and there might actually improve it."

Her arm moved so quickly that Olvir jumped back after the cut was made. The skin of his right cheek was torn right through to his teeth, which showed through the awful wound. Olvir put his hand up and started to scream again as he felt his ruined face. He got to his feet to run, but Silsk hit him hard across the forehead with her tail. Olvir fell to the ground and into merciful unconsciousness. Silsk kicked his leg, but lost interest now the object of her wrath could no longer feel pain.

"Heal him enough so he can do his duties," Silsk said to Aeony, "but leave ragged scars. Every time he looks in the mirror I want him reminded of the cost of failing me."

Silsk flapped her wings and took to the air, heading back towards her tower.

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Caspian held the lamp close to the orb and began using the lens to look at the various sets of inscription engraved on it. The letters were small and it wasn't an easy task, but gradually Caspian had a piece of parchment covered in his own writing, which he hoped was a true copy of the important parts of the message on the orb. Vella had been patiently sat watching him, but as Caspian relaxed back into his chair she could no longer hide her curiosity.

"Well Casp, what does it say?"

"It's the same thing repeated in seven languages, luckily one is an old demon tongue I know quite well."

He picked up his notes and seemed to study them.

"It gives the location of several items of power left behind by a King Arcardis. He was a human King, one of the last and a person with immense powers, if the writing on the orb is to be believed. There are five of these artefacts. The first we already have, the plain metal crown. There is mention of something called the Hand of Arcardis, buried at the ruins outside of the City. I suspect Sajaha is looking for the hand with Muzzie and Lilleth."

He looked at his own writing for so long that Vella had to prompt him.

"So what are the other three items Casp?"

“Two are far out on the rifts, one at Ingar Gols deep into the 3rd rift and another at Ingar Sans, which is in the desert at the edge of the 4th rift. They might as well be beyond gateway Vella, we’ll never be able to find them.”

“And the other item ?” Asked Vella.

Caspian held her hand, she could feel him trembling with tension.

“It’s here Vella, the orb says it’s below our feet, in the deepest level of the cellars.”

“What is it ?”

Caspian read his own writing once more.

“A sword of some kind. The orb goes into some detail about its ability to kill any mortal creature that flies, walks or crawls upon the ground.”

Caspian stood up and fetched the crown from where he’d thrown it the night before.

“Casp, be careful !”

“It did its job Vella, the crown is the key to all the artefacts. Get close enough and it will take you straight to them, just like it did to us. My guess would be that the crown took us to the lower levels of a ruin in old town to get the orb.”

Vella picked up the golden orb and rolled it around in her hand.

“We should show all this to Muzzie Casp, he’ll know what to do.”

“No ! If he’s got the hand of Arcardis he’ll want the rest and he’ll ask us where we got crown and the orb.”

“We could lie Casp, say you found them in an old box in the great library.”

“Do you think Muzzie would believe that ? He’d keep asking and asking until he found out about the upper dome and the money we found. Plus Vella.....we did kill one of his customers !”

Vella nodded at him.

“There is only one person I’d trust to go to the cellars with us, no questions asked and keep his mouth shut.” Said Caspian.

“Who Casp ?”

“Merrick.”

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“No one comes here,” said Babaef, “there are too many stairs for most to bother with.”

The room was quite large and a few boxes had been put against one wall, but obviously a long time ago as they were disintegrating with age. The main floor area though was clear, if a little dusty.

“Can we be sure of privacy ?” Asked Chillan.

The half mad elderly sorcerer seemed at least a hundred years younger now he had a purpose in life and his mind appeared to be regaining its sharpness. Babaef held up a large metal key and used it to lock the door.

“Pinthrad had it and never even looked up when I asked for it.”

Babaef walked across the dirt and grit and stood in the centre of the room. He motioned Chillan to stand beside him, before taking a piece of parchment from his pocket. He’d copied an incantation from the ancient book of the guild and he read it aloud in a clear confident voice. As he reached the end he felt Shadow moving under his robe and gave his pet a gentle stroke to settle her.

“Next I must offer blood,” he said to Chillan, “the power is always in the blood.”

Babaef took a small knife from his pocket, the kind used by physicians to bleed the sick. He pushed the sharp metal deep into a vein in his arm, deep enough to put a small pool of blood on the floor, but not deep enough to cause any serious damage. He wrapped a clean cloth around the wound and waited, but nothing happened. Chillan started to give him enquiring looks and Shadow was

becoming increasingly active. Babaef suddenly realised what was missing and he removed his pet from inside his robe and put her on the floor at his feet.

“Reveal yourself and open the doorway.” Said Babaef.

He stepped back as Shadow grew and kept on growing. At seven feet tall and only a foot from the ceiling, his pet stopped growing and started to elongate her claws and teeth. The floor changed too, a lightning strike pattern emerged that led to a circle about five feet across and in the middle of that circle was Shadow. Chillan was making strange whimpering sounds and was right against the wall and looking at the door. If he hadn't locked the door, Babaef was in no doubt that his new minion would have been fleeing up the stairs. Babaef looked back at the circle and realised why. Shadow his furry playful pet was gone and had become a truly terrible beast. Claws long enough and sharp enough to behead or disembowel at a stroke, strong powerful legs, but the real horror was in the teeth. Shadow now had at least six rows on long razor sharp fangs, and she was snapping them together in a meaningful way.

“Enough Shadow,” said Babaef, “your task is complete, return to your usual form.”

The teeth retracted, the claws went back into the pads on her paws and quite quickly the terrible monster had become his tiny pet once again. He picked her up and she made the strange sound that meant she was happy. Babaef placed his pet back into his robes and once again concentrated on the parchment with the next invocation. Before he could speak a slight wisp of mist appeared in the summoning circle and a voice was enticing him to enter the circle.

“You asked for power,” said the voice, “you can have power. Step into the circle and you will receive what you need.”

Babaef hesitated, he hadn't spoken the words of summoning and he'd seen two other sorcerers who'd been enticed into a summoning circle. One was lucky, he'd been quickly turned into a heap of dry cinders. The other they'd managed to pull from the circle and he'd lived for another sixty years, as a crippled crazy man, earning a few pennies from begging outside Winshin's.

“Who calls me into the circle ?” He asked.

There was a mocking laugh he recognised all too well.

“So, man with no friends, you seem to be doing quite well. Step into the circle.”

Babaef stepped forward and felt the energy flow into him, like being hit by lightning, but the feeling was warm and positive.

“You've done well Babaef and I approve of your new minion, Chillan is a good choice. There is much still to be done and you can now speak to me whenever you wish by entering the circle, but don't make yourself bothersome !”

Babaef remained in the circle while Nigon poured energy into him, so much energy and so many new skills that he worried what he might be losing of himself to make way for it all. Eventually the energy stopped and the edges of the circle faded.

“Are you alright master ?”

He turned towards Chillan and nodded. Babaef pointed a single finger at the pile of rotting boxes up against the wall and they burst into fire, consumed in seconds by flames as hot as the fires of hell.

“I am alright Chillan and I am ready for the next part of the plan.”

Babaef opened the door, but he held back and quite gently took a hold of Chillan's arm.

“There is just one thing.”

“Yes master ?”

“If you ever think of running away again, if you ever dare to abandon me. I will burn the flesh from your bones. Do you understand ?”

Chillan fell to his knees and put his forehead against the ground.

"Yes master, I understand and it will never happen again."

Babaef walked past Chillan and started up the stairs that led to the main areas of the guild building.

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Lilleth had taken them in quite a wide arc; she'd had a bad feeling about staying too close to the road. They were North of Winshin's, where the old road made its way into old town. It was a bad road, nothing on wheels could have used it and Lilleth was right in thinking that no one watching them would think of it.

"We could go straight to see Louelle." She said

"I've been away from the bar for too long," said Muzzie, "and I want a night in my own bed. The finger has been buried for thousands of years; an extra night won't do any harm."

They were carrying a lot of each other's things, packing while at the waggon that morning had been hurried. Lilleth went through all their packs and made sure they each had their own belongings.

"Sara would have loved this." Said Muzzie.

He was holding up a set of underwear, Lilleth's underwear that were at the bottom of his shoulder bag.

"You definitely wouldn't have got your oats tonight." Replied Lilleth.

Muzzie took out his water bottle and they sat for a while, both of them looking at the City stretched out before them.

"I'll go to the old town," said Lilleth, "see if Louelle is there. If she is I'll tell her about the finger and find out if she knows anything about it."

Muzzie knew she had several places to stay in the City. Some he knew about, but he never asked. If he didn't know where she stayed, no one could ever get him to tell.

"Come to the bar later, Sara will be pleased to see you and so will I."

Lilleth nodded at him and walked away at a good pace, following the road into old town. Muzzie watched something dark circling the towers and decided to keep under cover as much as possible.

He walked into a ruined building on The Lanes, the once thriving market area of the City. He knew a few traders who still lived there and one owed him a favour or two.

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Podd allowed Ash to watch him unwrap the carcass from the blanket, but then he sent him away.

"There's something unnatural here lad, be best if you go back to the yard."

"I won't tell."

"I know you wouldn't, but you're young and I've seen what being near chaos can do to the young."

Once alone in the hut where he kept the most precious items in his collection, Podd finally had a chance to really examine the strange dead beast. The fur was mostly black, with a hint of brown near the neck and belly. There was no blood or obvious sign of a wound, but the creature's back looked slightly arched.

"What have you found?"

Nethra still considered the invitation to visit the long hut as still being valid, so she turned up the lamp near the door and walked towards Podd.

"Have a care girl, there is the hint of chaos here, it would be best if you left."

She ignored him. Nethra had come to ask about the plague, but the creature now held her interest.

"I'm marked by chaos," she said, "if one of us need fear it, it's not me."

Podd pulled the heavy beast around and pulled aside the fur on its back.

“See, I thought as much, a weapon was used on this creature,” said Podd, “a spear and the point has broken inside the spine.”

Podd found a physician’s blade on the bench and cut the fur back to reveal a spear point going deep into the spine, the wooden shaft broken off an inch above the point. He scraped the metal edge of the spear point and it glinted at him.

“Silver,” said Podd, “I begin to see what happened to this poor wretched creature.”

“Surely such things are just legends ?”

“Nethra, after all you’ve seen, do you doubt that there is a simple truth behind most legends ?”

Podd pulled a tool box from under a table and after a little searching he found a pair of dentists pliers, the sort used to pull rotting teeth.

“I think he was changing back,” said Podd, “but the spear killed him and the silver stopped the reversion to his original form.”

“Him, you said him ?”

Podd pulled back the fur between the creature’s legs to reveal a limp phallus and two testicles. Nethra simply nodded at him. Podd used the pliers to get a good grip on the spear point and pulled. It wobbled and green ooze started to leak out of the wound.

“Now we’ll see if I’m right Nethra.”

The silver point was a good four inched long and it had severed the spinal cord and penetrated into the creature’s lung. As it came out nothing immediately happened, but then the jaw started to shorten, the fur started to thin out. As they watched the dead creature turned into the body of a person, a dredger hybrid, a young dredger hybrid.

“I know him,” said Nethra, “it’s Borlas, the quietest of the apprentices in the library.”

“He wasn’t born this way,” said Podd, “no one is. Someone has turned him, probably to spy on Adamaz, or maybe to use him as an assassin.”

Podd turned Borlas onto his back and picked up the physician’s blade.

“I need to see if he’s been feeding. If you’d rather leave ?”

Nethra shook her head and stayed put, so Podd dug the knife deep into Borlas and then dragged it across his stomach. He repeated the action to form a cross shape and then folded the bloody tissue back to get inside the dead librarians abdomen. The digestive tract was easily opened to reveal an old meal, already digested into a sloppy mess that smelt of fried beans.

“I was afraid we might find parts of a victim,” said Podd, “but it appears Borlas was a vegetarian. He must have been a spy, but for who is something we will probably never know.”

“We’ll need to tell Adamaz.” Said Nethra.

“No girl, we tell no one !”

Podd picked up the silver spear point and threw it into the pile of old weapons.

“Tell Adamaz and he’ll tell other,” said Podd, “then the dark angels will be start asking questions and before you know it, you and I will be in a room in the tower and more than likely we’ll die there.”

“What do we do then ?”

“Nothing, that’s how you get to live to a decent age in the City. Within the hour Borlas will be in the boiler and we never mention him again. Apprentices run off all the time, I doubt if anyone will ever come looking for him.”

“Can I at least have the spear point ?”

Podd nodded at her and Nethra recovered the wicked looking weapon.

“There are no markings on it,” said Podd, “but you should melt it down fairly quickly.”

“Why ?”

Podd sighed at her, but he held her arm in a friendly manner.

“Someone not only knew what Borlas was, they also knew the correct way to arm whoever they sent hunting him. You don’t want to be caught with one of their weapons in your house !”

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Adamaz watched Vella walk along the corridor and enter the portal to go home, but she was completely unaware he was standing in a corner just a few feet away. She looked miserable which was unusual. Adamaz was used to her having a spring in her step, a certain post coital glow, but tonight she looked concerned and deep in thought. He might have left her to walk home, but as she entered the portal he noticed a slight afterglow, Vella had recently been around power, real power, more power than he’d ever had.

“Let’s see where you go.” He muttered.

Adamaz followed her through the portal, almost smelling the essence of real power she was leaving in her wake. Where had she been, who had she seen ? Adamaz forgot all his usual caution and followed her down the street, only just ducking into a doorway in time to avoid being seen, as she stopped and looked back. Vella was getting street sharp, or perhaps she always had been and he’d underestimated her. She stopped another three times and carefully examined the street behind her, once she went around the block, doubling back on herself and waiting to see if anyone was on her tail. Eventually Adamaz ran out of patience and just a few feet from Muzzie’s he put out his hand to grab her around the throat.

“Vella, good to see you looking so well, fucking librarians agrees with you.”

Muzzie was at the bar door, saying goodbye to a regular. Adamaz pulled back into the shadows, watching as Vella laughed and playfully punched him on the arm. The girl might have had a saviour handy this time, but Adamaz was determined to have a quiet word with her, very soon.

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Part 15 will be posted over the Xmas holidays.