

## Chapter 21 - Martyrdom Makes Sacrifices of All

“-. Alonsus Faol .-“

Hagall saved his life.

“Astonishing.”

A ‘lesser’ stave Wayland called it, but the symbol Alonsus had etched on his own breastbone still managed to ward off that first wave of destruction, and had defended him from all other direct magical harm ever since.

“Even now you still live.”

The same wave of magic that killed everyone else in the room, and those outside too as it destroyed the doors, the walls, even brought down the ceiling, it parted around him by a thumb’s width, as did all spells that tried to do him harm after that.

“I compliment you on your stubbornness.”

King Llane, Queen Taria, Anduin Lothar, the guards, servants, all throughout the keep – so many – all fallen, all dead, strewn over the floors.

“Never has one person managed to defy me purely on the strength of his self-delusion, let alone for so long.” The invisible destruction was an ocean all around them now, the demon was carrying it like an aura, but even as it continued to press upon Faol, the mage – the demon gestured and telekinetically lifted a massive slab of fallen ceiling.

“Scutum,” Alonsus rasped as he almost didn’t intercept the slab of wall. As it shattered, he felt the shaking in his skull, his bones, the staves – they turned aside hostile spells, but thrown masonry was a different matter. “Light, be our-argh!” The floor split beneath his feet and he fell to the room below.

*Levita-ngh!* The destruction – still – the Fel – it harmed the spirit itself, Faol couldn’t cast anything while that wave – that ocean – *Together then!* The Light could suppress pain, but as his leg snapped

at the knee he chose not to spare himself, and instead screamed it out as loud as he could, through voice and spirit both.

“Hngh!” Medivh – whatever possessed him grunted as he felt all of Alonsus’ agony through the psychic scream. “Irritant.” The thing hissed as he nonetheless managed to slow his fall to land properly, though his posture wobbled in the same leg. “You actually made me feel pain.”

It was the first time Alonsus had been able to retaliate, he’d lost track of time of how long he’d been – not fighting, it had to be hours. Hours during which the possessed mage had steadily escalated his attacks. It was all Alonsus could do defended himself enough to try to save – someone, anyone, he couldn’t save anyone in the end, they were all dead to this – this – the pain – it deafened the ears, blinded the eyes, the mind –

“Weep not for your failure, it was inevitable,” Medivh – the demon said with a mockery of kindness, even as he began to blast him with beams of destruction every other while. Alonsus remained immune still, but the creature had taken it as a personal offense – a challenge – “Sometimes there are no paths to victory, no clever tricks. Sometimes you do everything right, everything exactly right, and still you fail. Sometimes the day just ends, and you didn’t save it.”

A mighty blast of wind threw Faol against the wall. He didn’t know how he mustered the Aegis to survive. He thanked the Light for Wayland’s epiphanies, if not for the protection and healing symbols he’d etched into his own bones – these runes that were not given to harmful miscasts like the hodgepodge of scripts that mages were forced to mix and match via trial and error, even the elves didn’t know where they all came from-

*Wayland didn’t do it, Alonsus mind betrayed him. Didn’t etch his bones full of them, is that because there are risks he didn’t share, or he just distrusts himself? Hesitates to use his own-*

“Do not let your heart be troubled,” Medivh’s mocking tone took on a threatening cant as the hurricane pressure finally broke. “Lest you realize the eternal punishment that awaits all mortals who presume to defy their god.”

Alonsus slid down the wall and nearly fell further, but he refused to bend his knees. Even though the Light still hadn’t healed him back, he wouldn’t kneel, not to this thing. “True – god,” he panted, leaning against the wall. The agony of flesh mixed with the feeling of rarefied heat inside his chest.

“A– true god – would not have – such – an uneasy vanity as to hide your real face from mere – mere mortals.”

“You taunt me,” the demon mused as another chunk of debris lifted from the ground. “Even now, after you’ve seen how outmatched you are.”

“I’ve – exposed you,” Faol rasped, lifting his eyes to meet those of the monster. “You – cannot trick these people anymore.”

“These people who are dead?” At Medivh’s gesture, the air seemed to pull away from Alonsus, leaving him without breath. “Dead because you could not leave well enough alo-GH!”

*There’s only You, Me, Us, connected, Two judgments, **Three** Spirits, One single Truth regardless of either of our beliefs, the Light Revea-!*

“BEGONE!” the Demon lashed out with its Fel power and wrenched Medivh’s eyes out of the Soulgaze just a moment too soon. “Agh – you – you dare...”

*I’m a fool*, Faol cursed himself as his soul ached, if only he’d practiced the skill more, Medivh – the demon – if it had been Wayland, would it still have resisted the technique? So easily-

“You willful, proud, foolish old man!” The demon snarled as he lashed out with a wave of fire. His other hand covered half his face, his eye – it looked like death. “In trying to serve your Light you would doom yourself *and* it by looking into the Void itself! Do you have the barest inkling what-“

“A god preaching fear?” Alonsus interrupted him, despite the dread he’d almost glimpsed. He was not interested in what lies a demon had to spread, and you never let an enemy reclaim his balance, even an old man like him who’d never fought anyone knew that. “A mere man can contain in his love more than he can contain in his hatred, warmth raises more than the cold can descend... Even at our worst, the easy spreads more than the uneasy, light reaches more than darkness can reach, the power that unites is greater than the power which separates! If you’re so above us, if a mere man can do all of this, what excuse do you have?”

For a critical moment, the demon was rendered completely speechless.

Alonsus didn't know if he was panting more from exhaustion or pain, but he had a truth to face now.

At the end of the day...

He was no warrior.

He had no idea how to capitalize on this opening.

"... I acknowledge your will, Priest," Medivh's voice was like a judge sentencing a man to eternal hell, and Alonsus, in that moment, completely believed him. The mage's hand looked like a claw as he raised it high. Outside, something rumbled loudly. "I will make great use of it in the wars to come."

*Doubt flesh's every word*, Alonsus thought grimly. Only now the epiphany for how to finally retaliate came upon him, when it was too late – no! *Doubt every word, find your own light!* Alonsus mentally recited from Tyr's scriptures, even as he conjured runes and words from a much newer source in his mind's eye, forming sentences and incantations with the ones that blazed beneath his flesh-

"Now-

*The long and the short have the same middle, the small circle and the big, the small globe and the big globe lean on the same point, all which is great hides in the little, the seen and the unseen occupy the same space!*

**"Be Silent!"**

A mighty crack like a peal of thunder shook everything as *not* lightning but a *flaming meteorite* smashed through the ceiling to impact where Alonsus stood.

The meteor eradicated his whole half of the room and the hallways behind him, and broke the floor along with the next three all the way to the basement, and further still as the shockwave cratered the earth where it struck. Behind him, the castle creaked ominously as load-bearing struts were cracked through.

But none of it touched him.

Alonsus stood as the meteor passed through him, and he fell after it when there was nothing to stand on anymore, but he was slow to fall, because he was as light as the air, as invisible as the light amidst the Light, and even more untouchable than a ghost.

*It worked.*

He'd always known, down to his soul, that the Light was Grace bestowed only upon true need...

But Wayland was right as well.

Once it *had* Graced you, the Light did not mind being *wielded*.

He landed in the dark of the castle's war vault. He pressed a hand to his chest as he took a deep breath. He was of the world but also not of the world, closer to the Light than Life and Matter. The fire, dust and smoke could not touch him now, and the air itself couldn't touch him either. But it was enough to breathe the Light.

Even so, the relief at surviving only did what the demon hadn't, and brought Alonsus to his knees at last. His body was broken, his spirit was tired and so raw it felt like it might well disperse... Every moment the demon unleashed his destructive magic took a toll as his spirit had to exert itself on the stave's behalf. The creature's disdain was his salvation there as well, it could clearly focus its attacks into tight beams of annihilation, but it had deliberately escalated in steps just to see how much Alonsus could take – the thing...

It had been testing him, meant to...

Recruit him? Or whatever shell was left after he was demoralized and unmanned, it truly was a demon, Light help him.

*My Light is not enough*, he concluded bleakly. No normal fiend was this, such power... *A hundred priests*, his memories scrambled to tell him. *It took a hundred priests to contain Medivh when he awoke his powers the first time. His father still died, he was the only one who died, was it murder – no! Not important, what's important is...*

"*Brothers,*" he clasped his hands tightly together and cast his prayer into the distance. "*Sisters,*" he reached out as far as he could through Far Sight without drifting too high – too far from the city – there was a forcefield around the castle? Or a spell? Was that why no one came to help? "*Anyone who can hear this plea, please lend me your Light, your strength!*"

At first there was nothing but shock and confusion, and Alonsus wasn't sure if he'd just imagined it – they were already distraught? The destruction! The meteor would have been seen from all over the capital!

But then a second Light responded, like a pillar of gold shining up through the spirit world. Then two, then five, then a dozen, more, from every church and chapel. They didn't know, didn't understand, couldn't see more than Alonsus' unseemly feelings, but they answered in his greatest hour of need. Their Lights were... so much dimmer than Wayland's, but they were sincere, they were here and...

And they cast their shine through the spirit world like a shimmering aurora that reflected off gleaming helms and feathered wings.

*Angels!* Alonsus thought with a burst of hope that seemed to bolster all his brethren as well. *Angels are here, this means – I can – Wayland said he only had to – we can still save these people!*

The hope was like being born again, in the total fullness of strength. His spirit calmed itself. His body mended itself. His clothes were ruined, but his modesty was still intact, which was enough. Unimportant next to the task before him.

Faol filled himself with all the power he could take, bent his knees, and jumped up. High and higher, he was lighter than the dust, enough to ride the air itself. Up above, where Medivh's voice was no longer the only one spewing curses and incantations.

He cleared all five stories in a single bound.

He found himself in the midst of fire, wind, water, lightning, and hatred churning through the dust from the fallen meteor as arcane might manifest three ways.

Unevenly.

Unfairly so.

“-ncil of Tirisfal, come to stamp down the upstart in the nick of time, is that what you think this is?” Medivh taunted – who? “You could have leveraged your status and your power against my mother and I long before this, even set me up to fail outright! How unfortunate you were so focused elsewhere.”

“Power alone does not confer the right to play god!” Came the voice of Grand Conjurer Huglar as he descended through the ceiling wreathed in the rippling haze of an air elemental. “But you’ve roused us now, and even the Guardian’s Powers will reach their limit eventually.”

“Cleaning up your own mess is not playing God, it’s just being responsible,” the demon had the gall to lecture as his arcane shield became more and more visible under pressure from arcane missiles and gale-force winds. “Speaking of, where is my mother? I was sure you’d go running to her first thi-“

The floor under Medivh was destroyed by a sudden upsurge of water. He had to tighten his forcefield in a ball just barely wider than he was tall, and he outright bounced off the ceiling, and the far wall too before flying down to land again.

“Perhaps we have unintentionally allowed a bad situation to become untenable, but if so then you are correct,” said Grand Conjurer Hugarin as he rode the current of his own water elemental up from the lower floor. “Owning that is the only responsible thing to do. You will not be able to hide behind your mother’s skirts this time. The power that has been so misused, that Magna Aegwynn would not relinquish out of pure hubris, it will be reclaimed here and now.”

“Even if it means committing murder?” The thing had the gall to ask as he stood amidst the corpses of hundreds he’d just slain.

Huglar and Hugarin responded with twin blasts of elemental force.

Fire, earth, water and lightning-crackling winds collided with a loud shriek of wafting steam. It kicked up even more ash and dust in the air, and Alonsus quaked in the air from the aftershocks.

*Aegwynn, stolen power, old grudges that don’t – what?* Alonsus looked around and saw that all traces of Fel were already gone. Medivh’s aura worked to dispel magic traces even more easily than it unmade life, was that how he stayed hidden for so long? *They don’t know they’re fighting a demon!*

Alonsus considered calling out, tell them, explain... there was surely a way to control the air even when you couldn’t touch it, Huglar was doing it right now. Could he do it to speak? But how would it help? They already were fighting their hardest, he’d just distract them and Medivh...

Medivh *wasn't* trying his hardest. "You claim to be the world's guardians," he taunted as he matched them spell for spell without having to incant. "But what power do you even have when you couldn't take back what you gave my mother? Only the invisible strings of insidious influence, and it's tainted everything you've done. What use were you during the Gnoll Wars? Or before?"

The air elemental flowed apart to make way for a charge by the water one. "A war *you* started!"

"A war I finished!" The tsunami split around a wedge-shaped wall of stone. "The Council of Tirisfal, hah! Busybodies all rotten from the inside with maggots crawling out. It all built up, little by little, over time. That's why Aegwynn took this power for herself. And she was right, wasn't she? After all, she made *me!*" The air began to grow hot and dry with the sound of crackling flames. "Someone with equal powers to her, and she didn't need to lose her own for it! The power of the Guardian exists twice over now, how it must burn that you didn't think about doing this yourselves. Is that what you plan? I wonder, do you have broodmares lined up alrea-"

Alonsus emerged from the dust and destruction right at Medivh's back.

"What-?!"

Like a ghost, Alonsus flowed through the man-demon's shield and reached *past* the demon's look of disbelief to grab Medivh's spirit instead. "Thus didst Tyr spake: virtue does not derive from faith-"

"Res Omnem Annihil!" Complete matter destruction passed through where Alonsus stood, unmaking everything in a yard-wide line behind him.

"-it precedes it! That is why the Light bothers with us at all!"

An even mightier attack came through the spirit world, but while Alonsus felt like he was coming apart, his chant went on, the attack passed, and he was still there.

"You-how?!"

"Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil for I dwell in the Light's embrace!" Closer to the Light than the world, so far out of the world of substance that even the worst of spells were merely glancing blows.

"We'll see about that!"



Another assault every bit as strong struck him, even as Huglar and Hugarin unleashed their strongest spells upon their enemy. The demon's shield of stolen power rang like a gong and began to crack.

“Medivh!” Alonsus called to the insensate spirit within. “Awake!” If the mage had handed himself willingly, he'd be awake to serve and obey, not cut off from his own mind by this net hellfire! “I am with you! The Light is with you! Do not worry about salvation, the Light strives to save you, all of us, always! The first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you, it has always been! Accept it! Receive its Grace, as I did!”

With an unearthly roar, the demon lashed with his arm. The blow passed through Alonsus like he wasn't there, but the entire floor tilted such that the elementals had to flow and reform, and both mages were thrown off balance.

Not Alonsus, for his grip was firm and he was already adrift. “Let Grace work through you, with all your power!” Inside his grasp, Medivh's spirit tossed and turned, like in a nightmare. “Do not hesitate, do not second guess! Recognize the possibilities in the moment and rise to the challenge offered, embrace them with courage! Hope has not forsaken you yet!”

“You mean that's not-?” Huglar muttered elsewhere.

“If not Medivh, then – no – it can't be! Huglar, don't let up, we have to bring him down or-!”

“Pathetic!” The demon snarled as he was forced to turn his power towards defense from the other mages. “On the cusp of your greatest achievement only to undermine it all by false promises to a fool and a weakling, how very dro-“

“Silence, you wretch!” For the first time, Alonsus Faol's voice overpowered the monster's. “Your own nature is proof against your blandishments! Even you possess virtue, or you'd have long destroyed yourself! The only way evil achieves *anything* is if one retains virtue enough to be a threat! Courage to defy all convention, perseverance to resist the suicidal call of the knife, discipline to hone skill, temperance to control your intrusive urges while your schemes bear fruit! Beast, man, god, titan, even demons no matter how debased, all are nothing without such things! Of us all here, you are the *least!*”

Medivh's face twisted hideously. “You presume to judge me?!”

“I am the Archbishop of the Church of the **Holy Light!**” Alonsus roared with a voice that rang like a hundred bells. **“It is my right and responsibility to JUDGE THE LIKES OF YOU!”**

The Rite of Judgment Unmerciful descended upon all three of them, bright and terrible.

“To have faith is to trust yourself to the water!” Alonsus declared clearly. “When you swim you don't grab hold of the stream, you will just sink and drown! Instead you relax, and float!”

Something in Medivh's spirit changed, as if a man on the cusp of waking, still in the nightmare but aware enough to recognize what control he had over it. Control. Spirit. Power shifting away from the control of the fiend and to him. Spiritual power enough to match a hundred priests.

Alonsus knew just where to put it.

“Beyond the flow of time and thought of the gods, there lies the Living Eternal Fire, out of which all things come and which through everything takes shape. Everything and nothing are its breath, emptiness and fullness are its hands, motion and stillness are its feet, everywhere and nowhere are its center and its face is the Light. Nothing is made without the Light and everything that comes out of the Light is the Life which that takes form!”

Light began to glow up from every corpse in sight as he began to recite from an all *new* scripture.

“The hull of the fruitful thought is the will, without will thought dries up and is of no use. The patience of the seed is the power. Just as the will and patience of a seed make the feeble sprout push through the hard earth, so does the spirit sprout the soul a new life through the flesh!”

Light began to shine up from the corpses out of sight too, beyond floors, walls, even under debris where they'd been crushed – tragedy in the making, even now!

“I will see what relentlessly distresses the springs of the mind and soul of my fellow, I will bring him the peace and clarity in his mind, and so his life and mine will be like the ripe tree! My bones and my strength will not weaken, and when I return to where I came from, it will be full with the warmth of those who follow in my footsteps!”

Ethereal shields began to rise above the buried dead, shifting the rocks aside – the Arcane! Even insensate, Medivh's will was pure enough to shape it to their aid, Faol's words – they reached him!

“The End...” His voice was joined by those of his distant brethren, and even the angels poised above them in the air. “Is the Beginning!”

With a rattling breath, all who’d died that day came back to life.

“Oh ye of too much faith!”

With a sudden wrench like the pull of a hungry pit, the reborn spirits were ripped out of their bodies, all of them, all at once, all over again.

What?

With eyes still locked on the creature’s, Alonsus’ entire vision was overtaken by a starless void as the monster clashed minds with him. His consciousness wasn’t obliterated only because the soulgaze he’d invoked before finally ran its course, and even then it only saved his mind because of all his staves of protection.

As suddenly as everyone around him had suffered second death, the pull of the yawning dark yanked him back into the physical plane with a sickening wrench, just in time to feel as if his spirit was being torn out of him.

A backhand sent him tumbling away with force enough to almost snap his neck.

"You mortals, ever grasping beyond your purpose."

Alonsus rolled over, tried to look around with blurry sight. The bodies – everyone – almost everyone was dead again, they...

“You cannot fathom the all-consuming void. What can one mote of golden light illuminate within the abyss? Countless stars. Countless worlds. Countless lives. All fell to me. All brought to nothing. All the teeming chaos of creation? Brought to order. Then to flame.”

The spirits – they were loose, falling, pulled towards the creature wearing Medivh’s skin, it – the demon – he was *eating them*-

“I saw your mind even as you struggled to fathom a mere glimpse of my memory. You never faced any true danger, yet you struggle every bit as strongly as so many have done before. Your courage never wavered. Why? Arrogance? Ignorance? Or perhaps your hope was at the whim of another all along?”

Only sparks remained to rise from the dead, souls bereft of spirit, not even scraps left to live off of, the thing devoured them – the souls were left bodiless in both worlds, naked, drifting loose, away, down ravenous maws and up streams towards a grey sky. A weak pulse of light from the angels beyond lifted the ones falling down, but they only dimmed further. Up and away, beyond hope of life. They couldn't come back. They couldn't be brought back, none of them – the angels, they were dim and distant, had the fiend harmed them too? Even them? Great Tyr, what-?

“It can't be,” Huglar wheezed from where he'd fallen, near delirious from the soul-deep blow. “Sargeras?”

“Mortals, gods, titans, the Pantheon themselves could not contain me. They tried. And they died. Compared to them, you merely glitter. You fly around me, smaller than a speck of dust. I am inevitable. I cannot be denied. You strike this incarnation with all your might, set against it all your guile and it changes nothing. Now the end comes for you all, and it comes in fire.”

With a snap of his arm, a wave of infernal flame engulfed the fallen from of Huglar, turning him to ash.

Only the other conjurer was left. And Alonsus, and...

And...

“W-what have you done?” came the weak, shellshocked voice of Anduin Lothar.

Medivh's body froze just as it was about to incinerate the unconscious Hugarin.

“What is this, what – no, no!” Clothes shifting, disturbed debris, a man crawled on the ground with frantic, wheezing gasps. “Your majesty, milady, Taria – Llane... Llane!”

Alonsus looked aside. He saw the shambling form of the Lion of Stormwind crawling, hunching over the dead bodies of the king and queen. His eyes stung, the tears, they... they...

*Light curse me for a fool!* Alonsus thought in despair. *I was granted a miracle – thrice over and I wasted it!* If only he'd taken more time, a stave – the *Greater Hagall*, if he'd drawn the spell on the floor while Huglar and Hugarin kept him distracted, if he'd managed to activate it, would it have stopped all magic in its range? Even...

Even...

“What is this?” the lone survivor of the second death looked around with wide, dilated eyes. “What is this, when... how... Why? Medivh... What have... Tell me this isn’t what it looks like! Say it is a nightmare!”

As if Anduin Lothar’s voice was the key to some deep lock, the demon receded from the man’s face with a last ugly snarl, leaving just shock and incomprehension behind.

Medivh – he awoke – only now – too late, too late, too late!

Medivh looked around with blank incomprehension, stared at the corpses of the king and queen, stared at the broken face of Anduin Lothar who cradled the corpses in weak, trembling arms.

Then he disappeared in a rush of shimmering circles of arcane light. Vanished amidst discordant chimes. Away.

Alonsus Faol stared blankly at the spot he had been.

He’d found Wayland’s demon.

It was the most vile mistake of his worthless life.

### **“- Richard Angevin .-“**

Antonidas could only teleport them some distance outside of Alterac City, not even on the plateau proper. When he finally managed however, the three of them could do nothing but stare open-mouthed at the sky.

It was completely obscured by a gigantic mushroom cloud.

Uther moved first, setting off at a march towards the city with clenched fists and a stone-cold look on his face. Richard followed, forming Tyr’s sign by reflex to center himself. Antonidas was both the most and least affected of all of them, and he was also the first to break away. He’d been casting detect life spells, and he got increasingly strong returns up until they were just a hundred yards away from the last rise.

They followed him through the forest, and then a massive trail of destruction as if something large and heavy had impacted the woods at an angle. At the end, they found the bronze dragon that had so eluded and frustrated Lord Ferdinand. He was broken, bleeding, and nigh insensate when Richard approached. It took all his strength to cast a healing spell powerful enough to make a difference to such a large creature.

Even then, the dragon didn't stay conscious for long.

"What happened here?" Uther demanded when Richard's entreaties failed.

"I – I found my courage..." The beast's tongue twisted in its own mouth, then its eyes closed and it could not be roused again.

As they were wondering what to do about the beast, a second dragon came down into the freshly cleared heath, red and almost entirely undamaged. "I will watch over him." She said as if they had no choice but to comply. "You have far more urgent concerns."

They warily left, though Antonidas broke off from them as soon as they were out of casual detection range. "I must report this to Dalaran," he said grimly, turning back to where they'd come from. Towards where the Arcane wasn't so damaged as to make long-range magics impossible. "I will catch up later."

Richard and Uther continued on to the city, expecting the worst. Expecting chaos.

They got it, but only the tail-ends. Whatever calamity had taken place, the initial shock and outbreak of panic had already run its course. More people were shaking and weeping than running in chaos. When they reached the gates, there was no stampede of citizens fleeing whatever disaster had befallen the capital. Only some sparse groups that were as desperate to get away as they were convinced they'd already suffered the worst.

Some recognized Richard, or at least his crest, and the priestly robes Uther wore. Even then, a few managed to muster enough coherence to explain... far too little. But all agreed on the same things.

Dragons battling in the sky above Alterac City, and inside the castle as well, a great dome of golden Light over the King's Keep, people panicking, people fleeing, then a powerful flash of light...

Crowds were much thicker inside the walls, more so the further they pushed towards the main square. Here the evidence of a panicked mob was more evident, but also the evidence that it had been cut off at the knees. Walls were cracked here and there, the buildings of everyone wealthy enough to afford glass had their windows shattered. Worst of all, as they advanced to the heart of the city, they saw that the glass shards were actually the least of the worst.

Of the entire population of Alterac city, at least one in four of everyone couldn't see anymore.

By the time they reached the spot where the walls of Alterac keep *should* have been, Uther's face looked like it had been carved out of stone, and Richard had no idea what to think or feel about any of this either.

The only reason they stopped was the cyclone.

A gigantic cyclone of dust and ash whirled where the castle had been, thick, churning, whirling, lifting dust, ash and smoke up to the air as if to feed the cloud that now obscured the sky. The funnel pulled at their clothes and their hair as they came close. Then Richard passed through some invisible outer boundary and the sudden noise almost deafened him.

He stumbled back in shock. The noise was like the aftershocks of thunder, and he'd felt... He'd felt –

He'd felt something, like contact without contact – like he'd felt whenever Lord Ferdinand communed with the little spirits of his, and they tried to talk to him too.

“What is it?” Uther barked over the noise, and that of the muttering, fearful, weeping crowd at their back. “What did you see?”

“They're keeping the noise contained,” Richard replied, not knowing what else to say. “The noise and – something...” He dared push back into the din, and listened even as the wind and grains raked his skin. He stood still until he felt that touch on his mind. After enough time, enough impressions and images and random recollections of Ferdinand's random comments came together.

He pulled away, feeling faint. “Lord Wayland's spirits – they're containing the noise and – and the poison.”

“Poison?!”

“The air,” came the voice of Narett the Alchemist, to all of their surprise. “The air is poisoned, the spirits are keeping it in the air while it decays, or it will poison the earth for the next hundred years.”

Uther rounded on the new voice, froze in dismay at the sight he made, but it didn’t stave off his demand. “What in all of Tyr’s heaven happened here?”

The answer, it turned out, was something terrible. Something that needed Ferdinand to *do* something so terrible that it...

It completely unmade the country’s royal seat, and left upward of a quarter of the city’s whole population maimed and crippled.

Richard had no choice but to take charge of the city. When Antonidas caught up with them, he convinced him to help ferry soldiers over, like he’d done at the enclave. They needed more magical help than he alone could give, they didn’t have the luxury of being able to transport squads over a multitude of days.

For better or worse, Antonidas already had his own requests from Dalaran to deliver, for permission to come in in numbers. Richard didn’t bandy words and struck a deal for help bringing his own men over here.

The situation only seemed to get bleaker the more they learned over the next two days. They found Emerentius, but he was almost as damaged as the bronze one and just as impossible to rouse. The Dalaran mages tried to pull jurisdiction over him, like they had already done for the bronze dragon. The red one – Rheastrasza – vacillated between being at odds with them and at odds with Richard himself. Neither party seemed willing to accept that they had no right to Emerentius at all.

All the while, the citizens of Alterac that *hadn’t* been maimed were switching their animosity from the dead king – and Ferdinand himself – to these interlopers that had invaded their land when they were weak.

From Antonidas’ constant chagrin, Richard assumed the only reason Dalaran hadn’t absconded with either dragon already was because teleportation still didn’t work around the place. Richard



had only refrained from declaring it an act of war for the same reason. He shied away of the statement he would make if he dared do such a thing for the whole nation.

He dreaded what his scouts would tell him too, of the movements along the border, or their other armies and lords and landowners in response to the great flash that had been seen from all over the land.

On the third day, the tornado finally began to dissipate.

The spirits still rebuffed everyone trying to get near, even their spells.

When Richard pressed forward, though, they let him pass.

Walking through the wind wall was like trying to pass through a hundred small razors, but the spirits somehow managed not to draw blood too deeply, and the Light healed what they couldn't hold back.

At last, Richard stumbled into the eye of the storm. There, at the center, it was completely calm.

And naught else.

Alterac Keep had been completely reduced to powder.

It reached all the way to his knees as he pressed forward. If not for the Light empowering him he wouldn't have had strength enough in his legs to dig through.

Finally, at the middle of a wide crater-like pit, which wasn't so much a pit as a basin dug by the willful air, he found Ferdinand.

He was lying on his side, motionless and with eyes half-open, half-way buried in the blanket of powder.

Richard called to him, talked to him, asked, said any number of things, but Ferdinand didn't acknowledge him. He only reacted when Richard touched him, blinking once before allowing himself to be pulled out of the chaff. Back to his feet. Onwards out of the closing dust devil, even though he just stared ahead without saying anything the whole time.

Finally, finally, they emerged from the dust devil together.

There was no rejoicing. Or condemnation. Just a long, drawn-out, judging silence.

The sun began to pierce through the dark cloud in the air after too many days.

It brought no hope, and no joy.

Just a shambling multitude of walking wounded, who could not find any wonder in miracles anymore.

Ferdinand pulled his wrist free of Richard's hand, walked forward, and sat down on the first thing in sight that was solid enough to bear his weight.

“Bring me first the blind.”

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## Casualties

### Stormwind

**Note:** Attack was limited to inner keep only, hence the small numbers.

1. Fatalities
  - a. King Llane Wrynn (cannot be resurrected)
  - b. Queen Taria Wrynn (cannot be resurrected)
  - c. Grand Conjurer Huglar, Council of Tirisfal (burned to ashes)
  - d. 100 men-at-arms (cannot be resurrected)
  - e. 132 servants (43 children) (cannot be resurrected)
  - f. Total: 236
2. Survivors
  - a. Anduin Lothar
  - b. Grand Conjurer Hugarin, Council of Tirisfal (comatose)
  - c. Medivh, Guardian of Tirisfal (missing)
  - d. Total: 3
3. Foreign Casualties
  - a. None
4. Foreign Survivors
  - a. Archbishop Alonsus Faol, Church of the Holy Light

## Alterac

5. Dragon fatalities
  - a. Onyxia, Black (disintegrated)
  - b. Sinestra, Black (disintegrated)
  - c. Korialstrasz, Red (Krasus, Archmage of the Kirn Tor) (disintegrated)
  - d. Total: 3
6. Dragon survivors
  - a. Rheastrasza, Red
  - b. Kairozdormu, Bronze (crippled, comatose)
  - c. Emerentius, Gold (crippled, comatose)
  - d. Total: 3
7. Court fatalities
  - a. King Aiden Perenolde
  - b. 734 nobles
  - c. 322 servants (32 children)
  - d. 332 men-at-arms
  - e. Total: 1339
8. Court survivors
  - a. Isiden Perenolde (king's nephew, heir dispossessed)
  - b. 98 nobles
  - c. 2145 servants and household guard
  - d. 636 men-at-arms
  - e. Total: 2880
9. Foreign fatal casualties
  - a. Sir Saidan Dathrohan, Stormwind (devoured by Sinestra, remains disintegrated)
  - b. 35 servants and household guard
  - c. Total: 36
10. Foreign survivors
  - a. Lady Mara Fordragon of Stormwind

- b. King Archibald Greymane of Gilneas
- c. Prince Genn Greymane of Gilneas
- d. 100 servants and household guard
- e. Total: 103

11. Fatal collateral (Alterac City)

- a. 133 elderly (heart attacks)
- b. 34 accidents
- c. 15 suicides
- d. Total - 182

12. Non-fatal collateral (Alterac City)

- a. 3235 non-crippling injuries
- b. 234 maimed
- c. 334 mental breakdowns
- d. 22,566 rendered blind
- e. Total – 35,173 – 8,804 (overlap) = 26,369