

## Book II: The Harrowing

## Chapter II.1: The King Is Dead

“-. February 2, Year 581 of the King’s Calendar .-“

Lordaeron’s border was closer to Alterac City, so their army should have arrived first. They didn’t, because they were constantly harassed by foul weather thanks to my nine, no longer so little spirits. They were really blatant about it too, spreading ice ahead of their path, slowing the march, frosting wheels and hinges, pulling water from every stream and lake to make clouds, even blowing all that rain parallel with the ground to make it spew into every tent they could find.

The only thing that didn’t get harassed was their supply train. Roilbroth had shown up in the aftermath of the detonation and didn’t want to miss out on any further excitement. He was the main reason I let the others loose on the army to begin with. Even as the elements turned the march into literal hell, the broth elemental made sure the supplies stayed intact, and even that they always had warm meals to eat.

It wouldn’t do for them to begin starving. I wasn’t exactly worried about pillaging, since they had abundant supplies. Terenas seemed to have brought a great surplus specifically in case they needed to render aid, which earned him some benefit of the doubt. Still, I was taking no chances. The route he’d taken was the most populated road between the Lordaeron border and Alterac City. Also, and Terenas Menethil wasn’t the old and wise king he would be later in life. He had neither the popularity nor force of personality he’d build up over the next forty years.

Possibly this was due to the lack of children. An unstable dynasty made for some strong unrest. His current wife was rumored to be barren. Explained why he wouldn’t have an heir until much later in life.

Not that the cleric auxiliaries would have approved of pillaging either, they were already attributing their misfortunes to Tyr’s disapproval of their unlawful violation of sovereignty. They didn’t buy Dalaran’s fearmongering about me either, because the Light gave them the opposite of bad feelings about the so-called Enhaloing, whenever they prayed. Same with the enmity of nature

that I'd unleashed on them, which was further emphasized by the discriminatory nature of Roilbroth's mercy.

Unfortunately, the leverage of the clerics was very limited because the whole reason they were there was to provide relief to Alterac City. They couldn't in good conscience abandon the army if, say, a group of soldiers proved too weak to the urges of flesh and raped a woman or three on the way. It hadn't happened, but there was always that handful of bad men.

Most ironic of all, there was tension in the ranks ever since the clerics bound one of my spirits in an attempt to converse – the Church had such knowledge, apparently.

I already knew that the people of Arathor's time hadn't just abandoned their prior traditions and knowledge wholesale, and this confirmed it. The rites of communion with the elements, or at least of binding them to a form for verbal communication – and restriction – had been picked up by the Church after the genocide of the druids by the Zandalari trolls. In bits of pieces which they didn't actually use, but they had it.

Not under lock and key either. Nobody had expected this sort of trouble when they marched, but the knowledge was present regardless. Some of the clerics had just looked into it out of their own curiosity, even if it wasn't part of their standard education or training. The Church seemed to have few restrictions on what a cleric was allowed to research on his own time, after anointing, and the older materials were regularly transcribed. It spoke well of its authenticity as an institution.

Alas for the Clerics of Lordaeron, forcing one of my elementals back into his misty form didn't do anything to the others. This allowed them to daisy-chain their perception and connect me to the trapped one. Their combined range was hundreds of kilometers greater than what I'd managed with Richard, that first time. For this reason, the only thing the clerics got when forcing Foamgust to corporealize was a soulgaze with me.

None of them went mad, but the emotional shock certainly made it seem that way for the first day or two. In response to this, King Terenas ordered that the ritual array – and the trapped Foamgust – be handed over to the Dalaran delegation attached to the army. The King had tried denied them outright advisory role, but keeping them at arm's length made it easy for them to sneak in additional conspirators disguised as camp attaches.

When the heavy harassment by the elementals made them give themselves away through defensive spells, they managed to persuade the king to let them stay in exchange for protecting the army from further mystical torments. Terenas, being a good king, prioritized his men's wellbeing at his own honor's expense.

Dalaran may not be serving any demons or void gods, but they had deviousness all their own.

I was amazed when the clerics didn't comply, and instead released Foamgust. They even denounced further action in a public enough manner than it became an issue of army morale. I was sure they'd go the other way, half the clerics who I soulgazed experienced such a crisis of faith that they could barely call on the Light, a couple couldn't do it at all anymore.

But while that was true, it was also true that those affected were too coherent, and their visions too consistent for any accusations of madness to stick. Also, the *other* half became suddenly wiser and much more powerful than before, so much that they more than made up for the diminishment of the others, on the whole.

Terenas still let the mages attend to it in secret, but by now the nine were too incensed and alert. They made a mess of every attempt at creating a ritual circle, until the mages had to use direct sustained casting to keep all other entities from the ritual grounds while they set it up. This weakened the circle itself by diluting and polluting the affinity of the reagents used, such that the nine were able to resist the summoning.

Not that they needed to exert themselves all that much, the rite was misaimed to begin with. Unlike the more holistic methods of the church – and before them the shamans – the arcane methods of the Dalaran mages were very rigorous and precise. Which meant that, when they designed a rite to corporealize spirits of air, it *didn't* have the leeway to latch onto anything similar. In this case, spirits that *seemed* to be of air but were actually *water* and *flame*.

Perhaps it would have eventually occurred to the mages to come at the problem from a more lateral direction, assuming they remembered that mixed elemental life forms existed. Never mind consider the possibility of this being such a case. But the question was moot because they were finally here.

Lordaeron's army had finally reached the edge of the plateau that Alterac City stood upon, just hours after Alterac's own army did. The latter was accompanied by *some* of the forces of King Liam Trollbane of Strom, who'd negotiated a very uneasy armistice with General Hath while they were on Alterac soil.

If General Hath wasn't so far removed from the trouble at court, if he didn't need to come see things for himself, if he wasn't so in tune with the mood of his men that he knew half his army would desert the moment news of events trickled downwards – prompting the various nobles to take their levies and leave, now that they didn't have relatives held hostage at court anymore – Hath wouldn't have consented at all.

That was what the General told Richard, at least, when the two met.

I wasn't there for any of it, and I didn't much spy on things either. I'd done my part running interference, or at least asking the nine to run interference in my stead. Now that the invaders were all here, Richard was doing his level best to deal with them without smiting the foreign kings where they stood.

Apparently, while Terenas Menethil tried to be even-handed, Liam Trollbane thought lowly enough for both of them of treating with a mere duke. I wasn't clear how much of the latter was actually Menethil pretending to indulge his fellow king, or Prince Thoras with whom he was on warm terms after having him as a guest for so long, but it wasn't the best look regardless.

Strategically, General Hath's actions were the most apt. It *was* true that he'd brought Strom's forces close enough to potentially make common cause with Lordaeron against Alterac, if Menethil decided to besiege the city for example. But Hath couldn't have anticipated their coming at the time. More importantly, he had only allowed King Liam in with a single cohort, which were just enough men to cover his retreat if it came to a fight with the full legion Hath had taken along with him.

Hath had also made clever use of the landscape to disguise the ever-growing size of his 'advance scout' parties, the deeper they traveled into the heartland. This way, he effectively encircled the Strom army on the last stretch to the capital. Because of this, the Strom cohort was completely surrounded now, not quite cut off from retreat but certainly isolated from any potential reinforcements.

Perhaps most clever of all, Hath brought with him many of the captains that had only obeyed the crown due to hostages, either their own or people of other officers they were loyal to. This prompted them to form all-new bonds of mutual loyalty, as always happens when suddenly faced with an external existential threat.

I didn't really understand why Liam Trollbane would put himself at such risk. With anyone other than General Hath, the King of Strom might well qualify as a self-made hostage. But after what Nozdormu told me, I had strong suspicions. It wasn't impossible Liam was as bold as his son was *supposed* to grow into, or maybe he thought of General Hath's honor just that highly. But I was more inclined to believe that Dalaran played a hand there too. It would be enough to just help him communicate with Terenas. Perhaps Dalaran mages were even on hand to teleport Liam and his forces away.

Alternatively, Prince Thoras or his minder had some device that served similar purpose, letting him talk to his father across borders. It would make sense for Dalaran to sell communication devices like the one Antonidas had used to put me in contact with the Council of Six. Maybe King Trollbane had more than one, allowing him to also coordinate with the bulk of his army that was left behind. It didn't seem to be the case, I didn't have *all* the spirits on harassment, one of them was doing scouting for me. The Strom army was staying put on its side of the border.

I didn't directly involve myself in any of this. Richard was torn between feeling honored to be given complete power – as if it were mine to grant or withdraw – and feeling like he shouldn't have it. I hadn't had to outright talk Richard down from declaring me king against my will, but at this rate I might have to.

In his defense, it made fair enough sense – out of all surviving noble houses, he actually had the weakest blood connection to the late royal house. Richard also remained convinced Alterac would be best off in my hands, and I agreed.

Conversely, Valea Twinblades had already secured enough peer support that Richard was king in all but name, despite him not being available for a marriage alliance on account of being already wed. She, alongside Marquess Balinda Stonehearth and Baron Valimar Mordis, had even managed to rally support and troops quickly enough prevent the civil war that the heirs and regents of the

newly dead had almost started. Certainly a lot of old scores were being settled, entire lines ended or attained, but I had no problem with that when they were so thoroughly deserved.

More so, the three conspirators would back Richard even if he put all power in my hands. I had a reputation now, as savior, avenger, dragonslayer, inventor, miracle worker, prophet, you name it. Even legitimacy wasn't really an issue in the face of maximum popularity. With Richard him and Twinblades' coalition backing me, I could seize power quite comfortably.

But that was only on the domestic front.

As Liam Trollbane and Terenas Menethil both showed, neither Strom nor Lordaeron would accept that outcome.

*What did Dalaran tell these people, I wonder.*

Perhaps too much. Perhaps not enough. Perhaps neither, and the two were just doing what warrior-class aristocrats were raised to do – challenge and fight the biggest threat to their nations. I had no claim, I was too dangerous, Dalaran had made sure the level of threat I posed could not be obfuscated, and I had flaunted the world order itself by annihilating the nobility and royalty of my country as a mere commoner. Such a precedent could not be borne by monarchs, even the best of them.

Kings didn't mean what they used to. They certainly didn't mean what they meant on Earth in the Middle Ages. The medieval king was the vessel of law and tradition, and so he had power insofar as he upheld those laws and traditions. The medieval king, therefore, often ruled on the side of the realm's estates *other* than the nobility. That was why there were many good kings over the course of history, but never good politicians.

The humans of Azeroth didn't have those sorts of kings anymore, barring maybe Stormwind. Instead, Perenolde, Menethil, Trollbane, even Greymane were closer to post-Enlightenment absolutist monarchs like Napoleon and the Hapsburg Empire.

Neither Terenas nor Liam had actually given any ultimatum yet, but Trollbane, at least, was quickly building up to it. He'd only held back on that for so long because Terenas persuaded him they should see me in person first, and Richard make it impossible if they become too combative.

I told Richard to follow his best judgment in all things, including relative to me. I was more concerned with a couple of more important matters, which for once I would not be able to fulfil on my own. It was time to bring in the other people with a stake in those matters. Or, in the case of certain angels and their godly patrons, an axe to grind.

Though perhaps hammer and anvil would work better.

“Val’kyr,” I called one day, while lightforging the rose stumps in Master Kelsier’s garden. By dint of familiarity – and my protective ward – I was being hosted by the same person on whose behalf everything happened. “What’s Odyn doing?”

~My Lord still broods.~ Geirrvif answered. She was still with me, even now

“Broods, or wallows?”

No reply that time.

What did he wallow in? Weariness, depression? Despair? “Can you carry a message for me?”

~I can relay any words spoken.~

“Ask him if he’s retrieved Tyr’s body yet.”

Her shock startled me.

~... The Golden One – you know where He lies?~

... I didn’t want to make assumptions, but if Odyn hadn’t even shared *that* with anyone, he must be doing worse than I feared. “I do know, and so should your king.” My memories had been completely exposed when I made the snap decision to link spirits with Odyn back during the snowstorm. “Please convey my question.”

The Valkyrie made no secret of her astonishment, but she took me at my word and flew away at the speed of thought until I could not spot her even in the spirit world, where I could see a much farther than my normal eyes.

She didn’t come back that day, or the days after. It was enough for me to get worried. Given the circumspect glances my host sent me at mealtimes, I was being quite obvious about it too. Or



maybe it was just my general mood at what shape my plans were taking. Retaliation against the gods of evil was all well and good, but the preparations leading up to it were going to be murder.

Those preparations got several times more complex when a certain someone came knocking on Kelsier's gate, with guest in tow.

"Jorach." I addressed the master of assassins who'd just been admitted through my wards. As had the other one. "Who's this with you?"

"My name's Aedelas Blackmoore, your worship," the thirteen-year-old spoke for himself, bold as brass as he pulled free of the man's grip and stepped forward to bend the knee in front of me. He wore red and gold livery with the crest of a black falcon on the tabard. "I beg you, let me make my case."

What case? For what?

Aedelas Blackmoore...

That name belonged to the man who would become the master of Thrall, the false orc messiah, and eventually the overseer of all the orc internment camps after the second war. A nasty piece of work, doubly so when he was perpetually drunk. But also competent enough while sober that he defeated the Horde and conscripted the survivors, thus making a combined army strong enough to make himself King of Lordaeron, after killing all three of King Terenas Menethil, Uther the Lightbringer, and Anduin Lothar.

Supposedly.

In an alternate timeline.

Though with what I knew now, that was probably less of an alternate timeline and more a *former* timeline, which had been undone through the Re-Temporization that Nozdormu described.

I looked at the assassin master. "How'd you find him?"

"He found us," Ravenholdt replied. "Or, rather, he found Ravenholdt Manor. His family was in possession of that information, contrary to our beliefs to the contrary."

Was that because they thought they'd stayed secret, or had purged such information in the past? How many murders were involved? Of high-profile nobles, even? "And?"

“And my new second-in-command approved of the boy’s nerve enough to send him my way, after he made his case. He could be taught to become one of us, but ever since the Fowl War we prefer to avoid direct entanglements with nobility above a certain rank. Also, he lacks the proper disposition.”

The boy had a murderous glare now.

“You have something to say, kid?”

“They’re on my land,” the boy glared at the Old Fowl. “They’ve been conducting their business from our land since time immemorial. It’s an insult and offense-“

“Ravenholdt manor has been on that land since before House Blackmoore was ennobled.”

“-and if not for the Crown’s own patronage, any one of their individual acts would see them drawn and quartered.”

“Is that what you came to tell me?”

“No, sir.”

Good, because that wasn’t in my hands anymore, it was all up to Richard Lionheart now. “Go on, then. Make your case, whatever it is.”

“My father, Count Aedelyn Blackmoore, was executed for trading the knowledge of your black powder to Gilneas.”

So. My actions had apparently changed those circumstances too. Even as far back as that.

“It did not matter to the late king that it was not a state secret at the time, or that he’d allowed my father even greater leeway before, in his service as General. I do not know if my father did it on purpose, or if his communications with the Crown were sabotaged. Perhaps he kept it to himself *because* he knew it would be leaked or interfered with.”

All of which could and did happen on the regular at the Alterac court.

“What I do know is that Gilneas are the only nation to successfully dismantle the monopoly of the Alchemists. For this reason, they are the only place where people with necessary skills were already available, never mind in numbers high enough to meet shipment quotas of strategic

relevance. Something that Strom *would* have taken advantage of if my father's envoys didn't get there first, thus tying up Gilneas's entire export capacity of the substance."

Well damn.

"For this critical strategic victory that my father did not even *try* to obfuscate, something impossible regardless on such a scale, the King summoned him to court, whereupon my father learned he'd already been found guilty in absentia of selling state secrets, supposedly in a trial of his peers. He was executed for treason that very day."

Aedelyn Blackmoore was executed for selling state secrets in the version of things without me too. Were the circumstances so twisted then as well? "Kid, look at me."

The boy bravely raised his face and met my eyes.

Some people might say I've been cavalier with using the soulgaze, and some people would be wrong. All the same, it wasn't something you used as a hammer, especially on boys that were still developing their personalities. That said, it didn't take a soulgaze to see if someone was lying. The Light Reveals smaller things too.

Why this wasn't used everywhere in that future I remembered, I could only attribute to the Light's powers actually being much rarer, and harder to fine tune in this manner than portrayed. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because you gave him justice, and to our house *and* me. I didn't think it was possible, but you did it. I'd sworn to avenge him, no matter what it took, no matter on who, no matter that there was no way I could've, I -" the angry boy took a deep breath and forced the next part through clenched teeth. "I even resent you for stealing the chance away from me."

The adult Blackmoore would lose his change at revenge and seek refuge in the bottle, but the thirteen-year-old in front of me right now had more discernment than Aiden Perenolde and all his court combined. "But?"

"But the clerics always say vengeance is only for those too weak or lazy to pursue real justice. I didn't believe them before, but I do now." The boy looked at me with earnest, clear eyes. "I don't have any reward to offer, I'm not of age and the man assigned as my regent was chosen specifically to beggar my house and my lands by the time I'm grown. I can't stay in Durnholde Keep just to

stew and watch it all unfold, I'll go mad or worse. I'll end up in a bad place no matter what. Please, Lord, let me serve as your squire instead!"

Curse my soft heart.

How could I in good conscience say no?

“- February 12, Year 581 of the King's Calendar .-“

Prosaic as it might seem, everything I'd gone through had only made me appreciate Azeroth all the more. This world was raw, honest, and its men undomesticated. It wasn't an *easy* place to live in, but it incentivized *good*. It certainly wasn't the sort of place where you went to jail for defending yourself from a home invader, for example. Even at his worst Perenolde didn't do that. He had to either work with deniable assets or invent false accusations wholesale. Even then, most people didn't buy it.

Someone once said that history is an eternal struggle between warriors, merchants, bureaucrats and priests, and they were right. My own addendum to that was that any one of them could sent the world to hell, but the world only lost its capacity to get itself *out* of hell when bureaucrats held power. Because while the other three could fill the role of a bureaucrat – and each other too – bureaucrats were always just bureaucrats. For this reason, they used and abused everything around them so they could remain bureaucrats, including the people and country.

The purpose of the civil service is to serve the purpose of the civil service.

On Azeroth, the class of the ruling elite was the warrior, which was objectively the best ruling elite there could be. Merchants used you, bureaucrats abused you, priests talked down to you, and all of them had trouble relating outside their spheres. Warriors were unique in that they *struggled*, often right alongside the commoners they ruled. They shed blood, sweat and tears like the common man to earn their place, so they were the only ruling class that could actually relate to the suffering of their citizens. Conversely, the common people saw them struggling, even dying in battle for them and their country, and so they felt that the warrior king's position and power in society was earned.

Unfortunately, in this case it was that same brave, bold and earnest nature of warrior-kings that had been turned against them, by the most dangerous kind of bureaucrat there was – magical ones.

Conversely, it fell to the priests to bring some sanity into this newest mess.

Alonsus Faol arrived on a deceptively sunny winter day. He wasted no time on pleasantries, ignored both kings' invitations to accept their hospitality – never mind that they had no hospitality to give on foreign soil – requested with Richard to see me immediately, and only slowed his pace once, to tell Uther to keep his report to himself for a little longer and instead help keep any Dalaran mages from our business.

Something had changed about the Archbishop, something so deep and fundamental as to alarm me. I first thought it was his choice to inscribe staves on his own bones. It was something I'd decided against for myself so far, because my life kept landing me in situations where I couldn't afford *any* amount of power being permanently tied up. They also could have become ruinously crippling after the dragon, never mind what happened in Alterac Castle, since the cost of their upkeep would have exceeded what spiritual power I still had.

Not a good thing when I was rendered unable to even think about turning them off, never mind succeed when I was in so much weakness and such pain. I'd have had to erase them just before going into battle, or in the middle of battle when I couldn't afford the time or loss of focus, which defeated their purpose. The defensive ones were redundant for me anyway, since I had a protective forcefield over my skin at all times.

I did miss out on a lot of utility. Hopefully now I'll have enough time to grow enough not to need to cripple myself again. I probably wouldn't become a sky-hopping martial artist any time soon, but grand dreams were always useful to have.

Alonsus hadn't come out unscathed either, from whatever happened. His spirit and his Light were both dimmer than before. I wanted to hope my very vague fears weren't true, what Reflection I could do in my weakened state only gave me more hope for the future than before, not less. But he wasn't well, he'd come with just Turalyon accompanying him, and when he requested to talk to me in the absolute most possible secrecy, spirits and wards and all, I almost didn't need to guess.

Alonsus Faol told me what happened in Stormwind.

It was a long time before I was able to find any words to say.

Llane Wrynn dead, his wife dead, Varian Wrynn would never be conceived. Because he would never be conceived neither would Anduin. *Maybe* the same souls would be born to different parents, but if something like Fate existed, never mind in such strength as to force agents into being regardless of causality, it wouldn't have suffered my own birth and actions. Either way, they wouldn't be the same people. Probably wouldn't even have the same names.

The ensuing talk took the whole night. By the time we were spent, I had reached a sad and difficult conclusion. Barring a properly premeditated and controlled exposure of Sargeras without collateral damage, this outcome was better than almost any alternative, save the one where everyone miraculously survived against all odds.

Sargeras had been exposed ten whole years before he could build the Dark Portal, years before Medivh would even get the *idea* that other worlds might be inhabited, never mind contact them. Even aside from that, he was now a lone rogue magician, however powerful, instead of having the entire kingdom of Stormwind to pull the strings of.

Conversely, Medivh himself seemed to not be completely gone, given the way that disaster concluded. He would at least suspect the gravity of what was truly wrong with him, if he hadn't figured it out already. Hopefully Magna Aegwynn wouldn't make things worse on that front.

When I told Alonsus this, he didn't disagree. He met the final confirmation that I knew the future with grim acceptance. Even after learning some of how detailed my knowledge of the future was, he was only struck speechless for a short while.

I was very worried about him, and I told him so. In response, he asked to soulgaze me again.

It was the first time someone came out of it stronger than he went in.

"I understand now why you were so circumspect last time," he told me with a raw tone of voice. "Why you would have so little mercy to spare to the human evil occurring here. You fought it instead of enduring it for so-called peace, and even when it proved so much more than you were prepared to face, you didn't fail. Unlike me."

"It was hardly failure."

“Had I used Medivh’s power for some manner of attack, or perhaps to bolster *him* with the Light, the demon wouldn’t have had anyone to eradicate the second time. All those people could have been revived after he fled.”

That I couldn’t deny. He was the one who’d been there, he knew his hindsight best.

I could’ve still apologized, but it would’ve been a lie. Sometimes the best-case scenario is the least of bad options, and this was such a time. “What will you do now?”

“What could I possibly do?” The look he gave me then- “When my Prophet sees more worth in me than all but the most sublime truths of the Light itself, when he values my life above entire dynasties, what else can I do but pledge fealty?”

His words resonated within me so strongly that I was completely lost for words. After how Uther reacted, I’d braced myself for more of the same, but...

Eventually, I cleared my throat. “Unto death, then?”

“And beyond and further. Unto oblivion. Nothing less will be enough to see such a foe slain.”

I couldn’t disagree with that either.

“Death is just a new start in the end, isn’t it? The living proof of that is before me right now.” Where always before had been kindness and attentive regard, Alonsus Faol’s eyes now conveyed holy fervor. “The End is the Beginning.”

It was, though this was no comfort to those who had died.

Not for the one man who survived everything and everyone he loved either.

I felt for Anduin Lothar, but from what Alonsus told me, Stormwind was already much better off with him king, even if it didn’t feel that way. Lothar was more popular than the late king and queen, he had the support of all the realm’s estates, he was in full knowledge of who his enemy was, and he was also the leader of the Brotherhood of the Horse. That brotherhood of knights had practically the entirety of Stormwind’s cavalry under its management, and was the main reason why Stormwind’s military would be able to hold off the entire horde for five years all on its own, during the First War.

With him on the throne, maybe the High Elves would give more than a token gesture of help, when Stormwind called on the ancient debt they owed House Arathi.

In comparison, the Alliance of Lordaeron only barely beat the horde in the Second War, despite having the militaries of four different nations to draw on, on top of Stormwind's remnants. At least until Alterac betrayed them to the orcs.

Any argument about the orcs adding trolls or goblins or what have you to their forces was easily countered by the sheer number of people they lost up to that point. The horde replaced *some* of its lost troops, but it never reached the size of the complete orc population of Draenor that it was at the start. Even after that, it had to use dark magic to rapidly age infants to fighting age, and those were poor shock troops indeed.

If the Alliance hadn't made the internment camps, the orcs probably would've died off within a couple of generations, because of having used up most of their children as expendables.

I thought of all these things, and more, while Alonsus touched base with Uther and got his side of the story.

Only up until the Enhaloing, though, as the flash of light seen across multiple countries was now being called.

The rest, as I'd promised, was all up to me.

Uther miraculously *didn't* consider me a liar, but it still took a soulgaze with the Archbishop, and finally one of his own with me, to make him relent on wanting the whole thing to happen under Judgment Unmerciful.

"You don't deserve the light," Uther rasped after it was done, and he had to sit down. "But I don't either. I suppose no one does. It's grace, pure and simple, and we're all unworthy. But the Light loves us anyway, and it seems to trust *you* even after all you've done. *Because* of all you've done. How terrible can that one demon be, that it would come to us even when none of us have earned it?"

More dangerous than the whole world, and he was just the leader of a myriad legions of fel monsters devouring all life across the cosmos.



Uther still believed I could have handled things better, and he was mollified when I agreed. But he no longer felt he was in a position to judge me, and was as surprised as he was touched when I *didn't* agree.

Fortunately, we were still able to avoid Uther having to compromise on his morals. The Church, it turned out, had more than that one type of Judgment rite.

“Behold, the Light shines bright and clear, ready to receive thy confession. Wherefore, be not ashamed, neither afraid, and conceal nothing from It. But speak, doubting nothing, all things which thou hast done, and so shalt thou find yourself within the Light’s Grace once again. Lo, its Holy Radiance is upon us and I am but a witness, bearing testimony before the Eternal Fire of all things which thou doest say to me. But if thou shouldst try and conceal any iniquity, thou shalt have the greater sin. Take heed, therefore, lest, having stood within the Most Wholesome Radiance, thou depart unhealed.”

I gave my confession in the middle of the public square at midday, seated face to face with the Archbishop high up on the public platform. Not the one where criminals were put in stocks and gibbets, the other one where the mayor or king would normally hold speeches. As the Rite of Judgment Most Merciful ignited, the Light shone down on both of us like radiant columns of diaphanous gold reaching high.

The recitation had some elements I didn’t expect, elements that were definitely new. The Eternal Fire that *begot* the Light plainly didn’t exist as a religious concept before my coming, never mind be invoked during liturgy. At some point since I hosted him on the mountain, the Archbishop had updated church canon.

It was the first time since the healing that I’d been out in public. It was also the first time the two kings finally came within my line of sight, and I theirs. Thoras, too, was there, looking half-way between conflicted and vindicated.

I ignored all of them. Had they come in good faith it would be different, but they chose to come as invaders. *Without* the basic courtesy of declaring war first. For the untenable position it put Richard in, and the other people of this country in their darkest hour, I had no goodwill left to give.

I gave Alonsus all my attention. I was thorough. I held back only my insights about the old mollusks, since they were a matter of planetary security best discussed privately, if at all. The Rite did not disapprove.

But I didn't lie, and I held nothing back of the rest, no matter how much the foreigners disbelieved me, or Dalaran might have hoped I didn't share with the common man. The whole time, Turalyon was sat behind and to the right of the Archbishop, judiciously writing down every word I said, at my request.

I knew what word of mouth could do, and I especially knew what propaganda could do. I was taking no chances.

I'd half expected the Dalaran mages to try and interrupt when I started talking about dragons and their allegiance, maybe prevent my voice from being heard by everyone. Perhaps they wanted to see what I would say of Krasus? It certainly put the Magocracy in a better light than they deserved after this stunt.

Their magic wouldn't have been enough regardless, my spirit helpers could reproduce my voice to the farthest of reaches, make me heard loud and clear to all but the completely deaf regardless of spells. Which wouldn't last past the first casting anyway. Both Uther and Richard's men were on standby to stop playing along with the mages' pretenses of being just regular army staff.

The mages decided to hold onto their deniability though, despite that it had stopped being plausible a long time ago.

When I reached the end of my story and *didn't* explain the exact mechanics of 'Khaz'goroth's Breach', the foreigners didn't seem to know if they should approve of my discretion or gape in disbelief at me so brazenly admitting to my crime.

The Kings only snapped out of their shared stupor when Alonsus stood up and held out a hand to hover over my head.

"O Holy Light, the salvation of Thy children, gracious, bountiful and long-suffering, Who bequeath us life and the free will to do and to sin, yet still desirest not the death of a sinner but rather that he should turn away from his wickedness and live. Show Thy mercy now upon Thy child, and grant unto him the strength and the will to surpass any and all transgression, whether

voluntary or involuntary. Reconcile and unite him unto the Flame Eternal, through the Holy Light from whence all things become in all humility and majesty, now and ever and unto ages of ages. So I have witnessed.”

With that, it was over and I was more than ready to go back to Orsur’s house and rest.

The two kings were appalled. Even with minimal backup in the middle of an enemy city thoroughly secured by Richard against the undeclared siege outside, they undoubtedly would’ve had me seized if I hadn’t chosen my path to be in the completely opposite direction. I was escorted by Richard’s most loyal men at that. Around us, the people of Alterac also crowded together to deny the foreigners any chance of getting to me.

Terenas Menethil, Liam Trollbane and their respective hangers-on had to settle for cutting in the Archbishop’s own path. They demanded answers and reckoning and justifications, what on earth was His Holiness thinking, just letting me go after I’d gone and confessed to everything?

“Take care what you say, your majesties,” Alonsus rebuked them both. Thanks to the little ones, I could hear their confrontation as though I were right there. “I am a priest, not a judge, and certainly not an executioner. Though if I *were* either of those things, I would abide no less than equal treatment under law for *all*. Think about that, before you accidentally give the church the powers it enjoyed before Emperor Sigmund. Had he not separated the canons of lay and church jurisprudence, it would be *you* I’d be judging right now. Though since we’re here...”

I made it out of the square just as Alonsus began soulgazing the Dalaran emissaries, but Phaseshift let me see and listen in regardless.

Alonsus didn’t find any demons, which was good. But the experience seemed to be very distressing to the mages, which was bad. Either way, the fact he resorted to such a drastic measure, and in such a heavy-handed fashion too, told me more than I wanted to know about how much his experience down south had affected him.

“-. .-“

The relation between the monarchy and church was still undergoing a spectacular failure when I made it to Orsur’s home and got an all-new surprise.

It seems that the reason my Valkyrie hadn't come back was because her god wanted to give me his reaction in person.

"Is it true?!" Blindi all but screamed in my face, grabbing me tight by the lapels before I'd even shut the gate behind me. "You know where he is?!"

I couldn't help but feel bewildered. "Yes? I thought you knew? I was in your head, you didn't let me go until you scoured my memories-"

"I scoured the memories you *offered*, I do not *mind-rape*, which includes not taking advantage when a good and earnest soul has a moment of weakness! Especially when the boldest and kindest of mortal children leaves himself completely exposed and defenseless to total obliteration!"

I couldn't contain the sudden rush of fondness for the being in front of me.

Blindi practically recoiled from my reaction, letting me go and lurching back. His face flashed from chagrin to apology and back almost too quick to catch, before his eyes seemed to sink into a wretched, terrible apathy. "Whatever your own experience when you visited me in my Hall, it was just that – yours, not mine. Now answer my question."

I sat with him on the bench where I practiced lightforging flowers. Then I told him all I recalled about Tyr's fate, and what *might* have occurred after. I told him about Tyr's fight with the C'thrax and his death. I told him about the disk that supposedly held his memories. I told him about my issues with the story too, especially that Tyr supposedly coded the disk to not be accessible except by all five dragon aspects working together. From what I saw of those events, I thought Tyr was lying and there was more than just memories in that disc.

"More how?" Blindi demanded.

"I saw Tyr's entire body rebuilt anew, with only the driving will absent. It didn't make total sense to me. If it really was just memories, they could have been accessed somehow at that point or before, even just by hijacking the new body's brain or whatever the equivalent is, to retrieve whatever was useful of his knowledge. The Discs of Norgannon show that storage devices like those can be interfaced with by titan consoles. The process was a bit too neat too, and why would Tyr be the only one who has such a backup? A dedicated facility even, full of ancient Titansteel

ingots forged by Aggramar himself, supposedly, and an automated machine that can just build new titan bodies from mere blueprints. I don't buy it."

"And you shouldn't," Blindi grunted, rubbing his face with both hands, eyes shut tight. "Titansteel is special because you *can't* work it without direct animus infusion from someone with the necessary skill and power. Same goes for the more involved functions of our machinery. It's the same reason why one of us needs to actually interface with the Forge of Wills or Origination in order to get anything done with them. The War of the Ancients would have been a trifle if we could churn out whole armies with just the flip of a switch, never mind spare bodies for ourselves. What else?"

"According to Nozdormu, the Infinite Dragonflight doesn't exist anymore so you don't have to worry about Chrono-Lord Deios or whoever else stealing the memory disk and tossing it through a time vortex. You'll have to take it to Uldorus in the dragon isles, though. To make the new body itself you'll need the Silver Scale, an ingot of pure silver shaped like a dragon scale. It should be in Valdrakken-

"Sod the lizard den! I know where it is, but who cares? I make bodies for a living and Tyr is my twin brother! Who do you think his physician was during our eons-long war against the squids? The body he died in isn't even the one he started with. *Where is he?*"

"He's at-" "No. No, not here, not now, not like this. "... You'll have to come with me to find out."

Blindi's face snapped in my direction with an indignant glare, but it fizzled out as quickly as everything else. He pressed his fingers hard against his eyes and gave a hollow laugh. "So that's how it is."

I had no idea what 'that' was, and I didn't bother to ask. "You could, of course, look back to that day and scour the memories I *didn't* offer. Then you won't need me at all."

"Fie on you, you don't need to taunt me, I know my own worst impulses just fine. You'll be glad to know I have no kindling for them either."

"No," I denied him. "I'm not glad to hear that at all."

Blindi dropped his hand and curled his lip, clenching his fists on top of his knees. "Where is the disc?"

“In Uldaman, in a secret wing.”

“And where is this place?”

Now I was the one who couldn't help myself. “You don't know that either?”

“The whole reason why C'Thraxxi are so dangerous is because their masters constantly interfere with attempts to divine their actions. No one knows what commands they will give. They have potent shadow magic of their own as well, those who can discover and track them even while traveling alone are precious few. Of my vakyries, only Eyir and a handful of her handmaidens can recognize their obfuscation fields, never mind see or travel through them safely. That's why I haven't been able to locate Tyr's resting place all this time. Archaedas is also more than competent at covering his tracks, including working without disturbing the surrounding area. I assume he built it underground?”

“Yes.” I hesitated. “Ironaya and Archaedas are in stasis there, as are the troggs. The latter's stasis system is failing, in the future I saw the troggs awoke when the defenses were breached by dwarven and gnomish explorers. Then the things tunneled all the way into Gnomeragan and genocided the gnomes to less than a tenth of their total population. Be careful, whatever you do.”

“I should be careful? Have you looked at me lately? I can't go spelunking with this body!” Blindi sagged and looked morose and spent. “Tell me the location.”

For this I was more than willing to welcome help. “It's-“

“Wait. No.” Odyn pinched his nose. “On second thought, you're right. Don't tell me that either, yet. Truths spoken aloud have a tendency of becoming easier to find, no matter how good the security. I'll go there when you go there.”

“Alright.” I almost thought I was being given a quest, but the feeling was different. Like *I* was the one the questing hero was waiting on, not the other way around.

Neither of us said anything for a while. The more time passed, the more sad and wizened the man next to me felt.

“Tyr's resting place is where I'm going first.” It was the first time I'd voiced my new plans aloud.

“Come with me.”

It wasn't an offer or request I'd make of anyone else, but I wasn't one to let depressed people wallow in despair. Especially when I was the one responsible.

"... You're so much like him, you know?" Blindi finally said faintly, and I saw Odyn's outline interposed over him face for a moment. His molten beard had been completely shorn off. No, not just shorn, ripped out at the root. "Or maybe it's just wishful thinking."

"If you have energy enough for wishful thinking, you're already doing better than before. Imagine how much better it will be if you don't just vanish on me this time."

"Enough. Drop the pretense, it ill suits you. You don't need to nag, I'll come along. I'll be nothing but a burden like this, but if that's what you want then I'll come."

"Then I'm glad."

"You really are, aren't you."

Further conversation was halted by the gate suddenly being smashed open by a kick, then immediately slammed back closed by the man who stormed in like an angry hurricane.

"If I have to deal with those two treating me like their inferior in my own country one more time, I won't be responsible for the consequences!" Richard had at some point gone from quietly indignant to absolutely livid. His wrath stalled upon noticing our unexpected guest. He took a slow breath. "Lord Odyn, greetings. Please forgive my display."

Blindi smiled crookedly. "I'm owed neither your deference nor decorum. I'm only the town drunk."

"I know well how much more than that you are, High One."

"I'm also trespassing."

"It shouldn't take a god to recognize that, or the rights and honors it loses you." Richard looked at me. "I've run out of excuses to stall them, and I think the Dalaran attaches are just about ready to drop their incognito act and do something extreme. If we're going to somehow pre-empt them making even more of a mess, it has to be now."

"I assume they want it as soon as possible?"

“Quite.”

“What are their terms?”

“A meeting on neutral ground. Enforced by *Dalaran*, because being the instigators of this entire farce doesn’t seem to be enough for them. *I* am apparently too compromised and not of high enough rank for them to accept my guarantees, though they were careful not to say so where I could hear. I only heard it because your little spirits keep using me for mind-talk practice.”

“Oh is that all?”

“They want an anti-magic field. Also something they were careful not to let me hear until they drove me to wit’s end.”

“I see.” I exchanged a meaningful glance with Blindi, then looked at Richard seriously. “Tell them I’ll only agree if the Archbishop is there.”

“In addition to my guards, I hope.”

“No, keep them back with you, the plan goes forward as we discussed. Unless they want their neutral ground to be outside the city?”

“They had the audacity to claim that it shouldn’t matter if it’s outside the walls, since it’s all Alterac soil and therefore still slanted in favor of us. Never mind that they’re all but besieging the city.”

“That’s easy enough to solve – we’ll hold the talk where the castle used to be.”

“... They *have* been making constant noise about that. It’s ghoulish, but they’ve earned worse. It pains me to give them what they want though.”

“Believe me, Richard,” I said grimly, “I’ll more than make up for it.”

“By thumbing their nose as you leave, yes. Don’t remind me.” The break in conversation was heavy and disquieting. “... It should still be you.”

I agreed. There was much I could give the country and the world if I became king. I’d do better than Aiden Perenolde, at least. “You’ll do fine. I believe in you.”

Richard wasn’t able to muster any answer to that.



“Was Aedelas spirited away successfully?”

“Yes, Ravenholdt sent word back with Emerentius. A trusted man, if there is such a thing with his sort, will take him to the appointed place, though I can’t fathom what you need to do so far east.”

I watched the man, conflicted over letting him pick up the pieces. Again. I hadn’t told him any of what I was planning this time either. “If you ask it of me, I’ll tell you everything I plan. You’ve more than earned that much.”

“... Will it put you at risk?”

“Maybe not me, but what I hope to do, yes, and the people I mean to do it for.”

“Truths spoken aloud become much easier to find,” Blindi murmured a repeat of his earlier words.

“Then no.” Richard smiled mirthlessly. “I will endure, as before.”

“If more people had your grit, people like me would be unnecessary.” I rose to my feet. “You go make the arrangements. I’m off to make my goodbyes.” I looked at Blindi. “Where do you want to meet?”

“Never mind that, Geirrvif will be back soon with a couple others, just send her with another message. Or she’ll fly to me herself if you come upon a zone of shadow. She *might* be strong enough to endure it, but that depends on how much weaker it will be. *If* it is, such things can linger a long time, even if they seem dead.”

“It will be completely eradicated.”

Blindi stared at me. Then he slowly nodded and left.

I watched him go, then set about my last loose ends.

Orsur was every bit as worried and outraged as Richard was, but there wasn’t much he could do. Or time to do it, he easily could have been away from home. He was extremely busy overseeing the logistics of food relief and repairs, and otherwise helping the rest of our guildmates to keep the city running. Under the circumstances, the Wheel Everturning had somehow ended up being the ones everyone went to for questions and answers.

I could only be relieved that the family from Tarren Mill were the only ones who pulled out, after everything was said and done.

The meeting took place later that day, but only after more than expected resistance from the other side. They were concerned, justifiably in hindsight, that the place where the Enhaloing took place might serve me as some sort of place of power. That only made it more fit as a neutral ground though, considering what *they* had done to exert power. Not just on the way here, but now too.

Which is to say, they didn't agree until Richard consented to let them thoroughly secure the site, which Richard grudgingly agreed only on the condition that they come at it from the opposite side of the plateau. Where the castle and attached mountain once stood, there was now only an empty, flat, unwallwed wedge.

There were barricades facing that side, but they were hasty, flimsy things, some homes even faced those ways with missing walls where the castle wall used to be. If this were an *official* siege, the army of Lordaeron could be said to have successfully breached the defenses and taken control of an entire capital district, as well as the center of the city. Conquering the rest of the place would be a matter of manpower from this point on, which they had more of than General Hath and Richard combined.

Not counting the army left at the border, or the men being assembled by Twinblades and her allies. None of whom would make it in time.

Regardless, it was done.

There was hostility. There was posturing. There were valid concerns. If not for the Archbishop's moderating presence, I was sure they'd have tried to put me in chains. Liam Trollbane took point and practically treated it like a trial, with himself, Terenas and Alonsus as tribunal.

Their behavior wasn't ultimately unreasonable. All in all, it was set up like an international trial of *peers*, almost. What I imagined might have happened if someone *other* than me had slaughtered the Royal House of Alterac in a coup d'etat, only to be subsequently defeated in war by the country's allied neighbours, at which point they'd put the usurper up on trial and restore the rightful bloodline to the throne.

Said bloodline would be Trollbane, since all the Perenoldes would be gone, leaving the way free for them to assert their claim and final annex the whole country since Alterac was originally *their* homeland. But everyone was pretending that wasn't the case here, which was more than I expected. It was more than Richard got, even, in all this time of dealing with them.

All I did was stand there. While Liam Trollbane read the list of accusations, I just stood there. While he made every reasonable denouncement in between demands for answers and guarantees, I just stood there. When the gathered crowd couldn't be kept away even by the now revealed mages, I continued to stand there. I didn't speak even when Thoras Trollbane requested to be recognized and asked me why I'd snubbed him before, when he came to my mountain at great personal risk to offer help.

He knew why I'd done it. He came to my mountain as an infiltrator, and he stayed as an infiltrator even after the risk of discovery by Perenolde was no longer a concern. He'd only thrown out that question in an attempt to provoke a reaction.

All but Alonsus Faol did their best to never directly meet my eyes. Both Liam and Thoras slipped several times despite their best efforts, but I didn't take advantage.

I did not treat under false pretenses then, and I wouldn't now.

Finally, *finally*, Terenas Menethil stood up and bid Liam Trollbane to settle down so he could speak.

"Wayland Hywel." He called me, and he did directly meet my eyes. "Or do you prefer Ferdinand Rogasian? Is this why you have chosen to ignore King Trollbane, because he did not address you by your Nome de Plume?"

"Terenas Menethil." Perhaps he was just playing his role in the good cop / bad cop routine, but I didn't begrudge him that because he'd also spoken in good faith. It was surprising, but also the truth. Unfortunately, that didn't make up for the unlawful and combative approach of everything else he'd done to come here, manipulated by Dalaran or not. "As one who has seen your future and your death, I have an advice and a warning."

I didn't know who was more struck, him or the mob. "... That is not why we are here."

"It is only here and now that I offer. Decide."

Liam Trollbane looked fit to explode at how brazenly I'd upturned the conversation, but he didn't interfere.

I idly looked over the gathered throng while I waited. Dalaran had gotten their wish for an anti-magic dome, but it made no difference. My power dwelt inside me, far deeper than such constraints could reach. Perhaps last year it might have managed, but my spirit was too dense and robust now. I couldn't push it out, but I didn't need to. I merely needed to infuse the Light in the space I occupied, and channel it into one lone command.

Arcane, heal thyself.

My spirit, weak or not, could be restricted but no longer suppressed.

At length, Terenas made his choice. "Speak, then."

"When you finally have your heir six years from now, don't call him Arthas. Especially if 'the very forests of Lordaeron whisper the name.' The thing that dreams under those woods is nothing good." I flexed my fingers, acting as if I didn't register the many reactions to those claims. "It shouldn't be an issue shortly, but who knows what else might try to get in my way?"

"What do you-?"

I shrunk to the size of a gnat mid-way through jumping directly up.

I burst out the top of the anti-magic zone like a bullet and was gone with the wind before anyone could so much as flinch.

“-. Terenas Menethil .-“

*Dalaran was either mistaken or they lied.*

It was a realization that Terenas had felt inexorably settling over his shoulders since even before the confession, but now it was undeniable.

Before he could decide how to deal with it, however, the King of Lordaeron became uncomfortably aware of a knife pressing against his back.

“What is this treachery?!” Liam erupted to Terenas’ left, where he had a knife at his back and another at his neck. Looking around, Terenas saw that Thoras had his own assassin at his back, while the soldiers they’d brought to secure the area were being rounded up by Richard Angevin’s many more numerous men. They were dressed in commoner’s clothes, and some in rags. He’d mixed them in with the crowd.

From up on his high platform, Terenas looked northward and saw some of his army charging forward to relieve them. He didn’t know if he should let them or shout orders to stand down, to prevent the bloodbath that now seemed inevitable.

He didn’t know what he was about to say, even as he opened his mouth, when a gigantic dragon seemingly made of gold swooped down from the sky to cut their path.

There was no roar.

Instead, a great wall of Light appeared ahead of the charge, stopping it dead.

All noise steadily ceased.

“Liam Trollbane.” The Duke of Hillsbrad said as he stepped in front of them. He gave the Archbishop a respectful nod, but when he turned to the two of them he looked almost ready to command murder. “On account of the agreement you made with General Hath, and because you kept to its letter if not its spirit, you may take your men and leave Alterac. General Hath is disarming your force as we speak, after which he will escort you back to the border, whereupon your arms and freedom will be returned. Then we will have peace.”

“You do not have the-“ Trollbane’s words cut off when the knife pressed hard enough against his throat to almost draw blood.

“The alternative is that I take you hostage to guarantee your son’s good behaviour. Then you can espouse on all your personal issues with me for the rest of your long and comfortable life.”

“You gave guarantees, Angevin!” Thoras Trollbane shouted from his spot below. “How will the Light stay with you, if this is your honor?!”

Richard ignored him, watching King Liam instead. “You’ve been remiss in your son’s education. Otherwise he’d know that honour is reserved for those who *haven’t* been part of a secret foreign

conspiracy to interfere in my country's succession, after sending your prince-son to sabotage the late royal house you're so keen on defending now, all the while agitating the border through feints and other tricksome operations. He also seems to think he's entitled to the protections of hospitality without it being accepted. Or offered."

Trollbane looked at Angevin with incandescent rage, but said nothing more.

Angevin turned to him then. "Terenas Menethil."

Despite everything, Terenas couldn't help but think that the duke looked so very young, but also brave and formidable. Everything Terenas dreamed to see an heir of his own. Dare he hope Rogasian's claims of being a Prophet were-?

"You saw fit to invade my country without bothering to declare war first. By your *own* country's laws, you are outside the bounds of *all* principles of civilized warfare. I could have you publicly tortured and executed without trial, along with all your men, and no lawful charge could be laid at my feet."

"It was never an invasion, it was a *relief mission*, as I've told you repeatedly," Terenas repeated himself for what felt like the hundredth time. "I was alerted to a major impending humanitarian crisis and responded as quickly as I could. The only reason I brought such a large armed force was in case I confirmed for myself that the situation here was truly untenable. I did not declare war for the same reason, I did not want to give legitimacy to what could well have been a mad usurper. If what happened here happened to *my* bloodline and country, I would hope Alterac would take the same steps on our behalf. As I've also told you repeatedly."

"On account of the manner in which you snuck in the Magocracy's *snakes*, I cannot take you at your word."

"Take me at my actions then. Ask any of your people who we met on the way. My men aggrieved no one and captured no redoubts. Instead, we dispensed supplies and all other aid we could, which we brought in great surplus for precisely that purpose. No few of your own citizens even asked to join with us, even begged for asylum. Will you judge them liars as well? Traitors?"

"The saboteurs, you mean. The ones that should be just about finished incapacitating your officers."

Terenas couldn't understand what he'd just heard. That – surely, all those people – they couldn't – men, women, even a child or two, barely in their thirteenth or fourteenth year. He looked back to the forcefield, and the great encampment beyond. He could see the disorder and – the charge! It had been too small, too few men now that he had time to think, barely organized-

“I'm told it's a paralytic. A slow-acting substance, ingested, but does nothing on its own until enough accumulates in the body, and a reactive compound is then introduced by air. Wisely, your men didn't let the newcomers into any important places, but it only takes a handful contaminated ingredients per meal, and it's easy to dump thankless tasks on the newest wretches. Nobody likes to peel potatoes for hours on end, after all.”

Terenas stared at the man. He couldn't process what he was hearing. Had he misjudged the man so completely? Was he a completely different creature than he thought, and he was only showing his true colors now? But he was supposed to have the Light, more so than almost any priest. “You – would use such foul means-“

“The principle of distinction only applies to *declared* war, and you broke it first with the mages regardless.”

*It does*, Terenas thought with a sick feeling. *From his perspective I did all he accuses me of.*

He'd only agreed to it after great debate, and only because he'd known for months that the kingslayer had been declared an outlaw by King Perenolde months prior, which excluded him from such considerations. But it would make no difference to bring that up now. It made barely any sense at the time too, but all the other options and possibilities made even less.

Terenas looked around and saw that the mages of Dalaran who'd misled him were in the very straits Angevin had just described. Terenas looked at the foodstuffs spread around the table and felt a knot form in his stomach. He flexed his toes and fingers. They didn't betray him, and his balance was fine, he didn't feel weak. Did that mean his security hadn't been breached? Or was he left out of the plot deliberately?

“Unlike King Trollbane, you *will* be my hostage for the next while. I can't expect that an army several times bigger than my own will just abandon the siege on my city and leave my country without some manner of guarantee. When *all* your men are back where they belong, and a week

has passed for each of my countrymen they might rape, kill, leave destitute or otherwise harm on the way out, then and only then will you be delivered back to your people. I hope you understand.”

Terenas Menethil didn't know who to curse first. Rogasian, Dalaran, Trollbane or himself.

Angevin looked away from him then, clearly not needing his consent or cooperation. How like a king. “I apologize for this unseemly outcome, your holiness.”

“Do not sell yourself short, this is nowhere near the disaster I left in Stormwind.” What was he talking about? “That said, I think it's best for all involved if I take my leave now. It is plain to me that I do not belong in or near any battle, averted or otherwise. I will content myself with preaching the words and deeds of those more worthy to be called heroes and saints than I.”

The king watched the Archbishop leave. As did everyone else.

Trollbane had some choice things to say about that too, but he could afford to since he hadn't disgraced himself half as much as Terenas apparently had.

Terenas Menethil took a deep breath, released it, and decided he would not be made a fool twice. He surrendered his forces and himself into custody.

Contrary to his expectations, Angevin didn't take charge of him himself. Instead, Terenas was remanded to the custody of Valea Twinblades, in her castle on the northern ramparts of the Alterac mountains.

Some days later, plagued by doubts and shaken further by the news that had finally made it up from Stormwind, Terenas was looking out the window when a *second* Enhaloing occurred. Far to the west. And north.

Somewhere *in his own kingdom*.

It was insanity, but somehow not the greatest insanity because his captors didn't seem surprised, or even alarmed. What was wrong with them? These people? This country?

Despite it all, Richard Angevin was as good as his word. He delivered Terenas back to his country and his freedom just as he promised, not a day sooner and not a day later.

There, finally, Terenas Menethil learned what had occurred.



Ferdinand Rogasian had traveled to the heart of Tirisfal Glades to blow up a lake.

A lake that was apparently Tyr's grave.

Tyr's grave was real. Tyr was real. Tyr, the mythical father and deliverer of mankind, had died in mortal combat with some manner of hellish creature, after which he'd been buried by giants, in a tomb that later became a lake, as the crater left behind by the titanic struggle filled with water. A lake at the heart of Tirisfal Glades that no one had ever given enough of a glance to even mark on any of his maps. Tyr had died in Tirisfal Glades. Tirisfal. Tyr's Fall.

The tomb was completely gone now. Not a trace of it remained, it was gone along with the entire lake. Only a new, deeper crater was left behind, caked in a thick layer of dust. With time, the new basin would fill up with water again, faster now since the edge cut through the greater bed of a nearby stream. Also not marked on any of his maps.

Perhaps the most galling thing was that this had all been known all the while by the keepers of the tomb in question, who were apparently a secret order of knights that predated Lordaeron's entire history. They called themselves Tyr's Guard. *Had* called themselves. They'd been there, keeping watch over the tomb, since before Terenas' country had existed. Since before even the Empire of Arathor had existed, an unbroken charge taken up by mankind after the last giants died off. Vrykul, they were called. The giants from whom humanity descended, however that worked.

It was a preposterous story, one Terenas could barely bring himself to believe. He *wouldn't* believe it, not when he had to take it at the word of just one single man, however old and wise-sounding and skilled in arms. The now *former* quartermaster of Tyr's Guard, happily free of his charge on account of his mission being done, Tyr's body having at long last been retrieved on dragonback to the resounding choir of holy angels.

The monster had still been there as well, whatever it was, except not as dead as Tyr himself, thus went the story. So the Prophet used the legendary Strom'kar the Warbreaker – *Thoradin's long-lost sword* – to finish carving its foul head into pieces. Because Thoradin had also found the tomb in his time, and nearly set the monster loose before sacrificing himself to drive his sword into its brain. Where it had waited ever since.

*Then* Rogasian chopped the rest of the thing to pieces, swam back out to shore, erected an impenetrable forcefield by walking around the lake twelve times, then promptly blew the whole thing up. Because 'it's the only way to be sure.' However he kept doing it.

When Terenas finally made it back to Capital and laid down in his own bed for the first time in months, the same three thoughts kept chasing each other in his head.

The first thought was that there was a boy out there, with impossible power and equally impossible nerve, charming dukes and peasants, slaying monsters and kings, and all but worshipped now by a peerless knightly order more ancient than the human race, who'd sworn themselves as his retainers unto death.

The second thought was that a peerless knightly order more ancient than the human race had been operating in Lordaeron for the entirety of the country's existence, and Terenas had never caught the slightest hint about it. It was impossible to imagine a more shameful failure of domestic governance. The next course was clear – he'll have to set all foreign ambitions aside for the next decade or three, or however long it took until he actually had a handle on his own home country.

His last thought before he blew out the candle was the most bloodcurdling. Of the five unbroken human dynasties that had existed until a bare two months ago, two were now dead. One to a demon, the other to the saint who'd come down from heaven to contend with said demon. Or so the Archbishop consented to tell him under utmost secrecy, when Terenas went to confront him over publishing the Confession.

It took hours for him to fall asleep, his wife's arms feeling like a dead weight over his neck.

*When you finally have your heir six years from now*

Six years. Six more years. Did that mean they just had to keep trying? Or was his wife barren and he'd need to set her aside? Would they manage to conceive, only for miscarriage to end her life? Would he be made a widower, and not even be allowed to mourn in peace because the king must have an heir no matter what?

Sleep only came to him near dawn, but it gave no rest.

The fear and the dread stayed with him, even in his dreams.