To Rule By Right

A Dark Tale of Fantasy

Wayne C. Hannis

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To Rule By Right

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Chapter 1

He looked at the young woman lying on the opposite side of his large plush bed. She was naked and seemed to be sleeping peacefully. Her eyes were closed and the bruises on her neck stood out like fresh tattoos on her pallid skin. She was older than him by a few years and very beautiful; her

dark hair flowed around the pillows. He smiled, thinking of the pleasure he took from her last night. She was given to him by the gods and she fulfilled her purpose of serving him in life and death.

Stretching, the young man walked over and opened the finely crafted double doors that led to his balcony. The early spring air of mid-morning was chilled in the shadow of the Ahern Citadel and the sky was full of high thick clouds, his room immediately brightened with a grey light. Looking over the burnished stone balustrade, he saw the turbulent muddy rapids of the Tasmorian River rushing down from the melting glaciers high in the north. The cool air in his lungs made his body serge with anticipation. In four days, he would be nineteen and Prince Coel Ahern would no longer be just prince, he would be King Coel Ahern. The sixth Ahern to rule Tasmorea. For three hundred years his family had ruled Tasmorea ever since Daloseos united the northern kingdoms. It was a grand heritage and after his father King Bowen died suddenly fifteen years ago, the Heir Apparent had waited. Today he would start his journey to claim that inheritance. Once he acquired the White Mantle of the King- which was made from a single coat of a Winter wolf, he would take what was his. Coel pictured himself wearing the mantle, 'I will look so powerful,' he thought.

Coel imagined he could see the whole of the Land from his vantage point in the citadel. He looked far to the north. On the fringes of civilization was The Frozen City- Saractica, encased in ice for most of the year, it was the wealth of the kingdom from mining precious stones from deep within the mountains. Strong walls protected it from the constant attacks of the warmongering Hobgoblins, who would ride their Winter Wolves into battle.

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'What a sight that would be.' Coel thought, swelling with pride.

Coel turned his gaze to the west; beyond the horizon; beyond the fir and spruce forests that blanketed the Tasmorean Lowlands- he envisioned Daloseos. On the northern most shore of the vast Lake Shanderan, the city was home of the Emerald Throne. The Council of Ten Lords sat there but Coel scoffed at that thought. Just a bunch of old men in his opinion. “And my opinion is the only opinion that matters,” he stated to himself. Also, his Uncle Oril- Regent of the realm, Coel had not seen his uncle for nine years. The last time was when he was officially named the Heir Apparent. “And by all accounts, Uncle, you've kept my kingdom well. As an Ahern, I wouldn't have expected any less.”

“But soon this will all be mine,” his ambition was more than ruling a back water kingdom in the cold wastelands of the north, however. “Mine by right of birth, given to me by the gods. To rule by right.” King Coel would establish an empire.

Going back into his room, he looked down at the young woman and noticed rigamortis had set in- her jaw locked in a position that seemed to be mocking him. Coal slumped his head and shoulders. He hated it when rigamortis set in- it was so hard to dispose of the corpse. Struggling with the weight of her stiffened body, he carried it to the balcony and unceremoniously dropped her over. He watched her fall, hitting a few rock outcroppings on the way down and then splash into the river far below without a sound.

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Chapter 2

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Yagor Ar-mown, (To Fear the Elevated Citadel) rose high above the deep, dark waters of Lake Shanderan. It was cut from the stone of the natural talus and was as old as the thousand year old spruce trees that grew on the cliffs. The palace was like a monumental stone edifice, casting its shadow across the land, as it looked down on Daloseos, the capital of Tasmorea. A population of ten thousand was well protected behind its thick fortification wall, rising high as it climbed the mountain reaching for the castle. Multitudes of people had come to the city for the coronation of the new king and it was cause for great celebration. For fifteen years Tasmorea was without a king and they had waited with great expectation. “The Return of the kings of old,” some said and “The reincarnation of Daloseos himself,” others believed.

It was among the throng on the streets, a man hurried down the avenues on the outskirts of downtown. The sky was heavily laden with thick grey cloud and his thoughts were as shadowed as the sun. With his brown cloak pulled tight over his head, he blended into the old stone and the people he passed. As he came down the hill and around the corner, the familiar sign of the 'Snow Dragon Inn' appeared. He quickly entered the establishment and hardly noticed the picture of a snow dragon breathing its frost breath on a group of dragon hunters.

The room became dark as the doors closed behind him. And as his eyes adjusted to the dim light he began to see, far in the back at a secluded table, were the two men he sought. Vaundr Iowerth- leader of the Council of Ten Lords, and Meogin Kamill- Commander of the Legions of Tasmorea. The three men gathered in the tavern whenever they had a matter to discuss that

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no one could over hear. He called this meeting for a reason as he hoped to avert a war.

“Glad you could make it, Oril,” Vaundr said as Oril took his seat with his back against the wall beside Meogin.

He sat back as the owner of the inn- an old friend, brought over a dark ale and placed it on the table before him. “Thank you, Atlon.” Oril said.

“Your welcome, Sir,” was all Atlon said and returned to his business.

Leaning over his mug, Oril said in a hushed tone, “They will be leaving Citadel Ahern at dusk and he'll have the Radah Guard with him.”

“The Subjugation guard- that says something doesn't it.” Vaundr stated. “At least he's no longer in the citadel, that place has protected him too long. We have to stop him within the next three days, before he gets here. The whole council has sanctioned it.”

“No,” Oril bluntly stated while staring right at Vaundr. “We're doing this my way.”

“I'm riding out tonight to meet up with him at Winter-acre Bridge in two days. It’s Othion Tacur that has to die. And remember- I don't want my nephew hurt in all this. Coel will be king!” Oril stood firm on his belief.

“Look,” Vaundr debated. “You know as well as anybody what’s at stake here, Oril. If Coel does take the throne who knows what the consequences will be. We can't let that psychotic bastard take the throne.”

“Watch you tongue Vaundr, remember what family still rules in Daloseos.” Oril stopped for a second letting go of his frustration of the matter and took a drink of his ale. “Look, we've been over this many times in the last ten years. You know that’s not the reason the council doesn't

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want him on the throne- so don't play games with me. The people want their king and they've been waiting fifteen years for him. We have no proof, only hear say and circumstantial evidence- no proof of his being responsible. And I think he's innocent. Othion is the true danger; he's the one that killed my father and brother. He can't get anywhere near the throne again."

Oril realized his voice was becoming louder, so he took a deep breath and released years of anger and hatred while looking over at Meogin. Who was listening to the conversation, deep within his own thoughts.

"The people want their king- the army serves the people." Meogin said, as his thick black leather armour creaked while shrugging his brawny shoulders. His dark skin stood out in stark contrast to the usual patrons of the bar so he had his cloak pulled high on his head. A life time of service to the Tasmorean people commanded respect by both men. "What of the Radah guard?" He asked Oril.

"I haven't heard much of them in the last few years." Oril commented. "They've been mostly ceremonial in the past- so there's no reason to believe that has changed."

"The council won't agree." Vaundr shook his head.

"Well, the council won't matter much if he walks up those steps with me and the people at his back- now will they. At least then they'll have a chance of surviving. We do this my way. Agreed?"

Both men nodded their head's in acceptance.

"Meogin, prepare the army- bring two battalions out to Fallwood Hedge. Let's just hope we can avoid a conflict and you'll only be an escort. If I can't convince Coel of the truth about Othion, we'll have to take him by

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force. And remember- I don't want my nephew hurt! So, I'll meet you both at Fallwood Hedge. If things go well I'll be with him. And the people will have their king." Oril downed his ail and left the two men to ponder his words.

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Chapter 3

There was a knock at the door and Coel's shoulders and head slumped, irritated by the disturbance. He could not decide if he should wear his fur lined cloak- which made him look regal or his black leather one- which made him look sinister. Coel roughly heaved the latter at his servant Mack, who stood close by holding his head down in fear.

When Mack was twelve, Othion Tacur gave him to his Master as a present for his Heir Apparent Celebration. Mack hardly remembered anything before that, only flashes of his mother and father- and perhaps a sister, living beside a creek. Although it seemed to Mack that Coel had always been his master. The horrific things he had seen and felt his master do- all those nice girls that went into his Master's room and never came out. Like KatieÁnn last night. Mack was going to miss her; she was always nice to him. He was glad there was no blood. Sometimes when it was bad, he had to clean it up. Sometimes, he would even see the bodies. Those were the nights he could not sleep from hearing the muffled screams that would emanate through his Master's door. Mack hoped his Master did not let KatieÁnn suffer too long.

Mack cringed and let out a muted grunt feeling his missing tongue, as he caught the heavy cloak. He backed up a step, hoping he would not see

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his Master's temper. He had learned his lesson a long time ago when- without thinking- he stood up to his Master. The resulting punishment left him without the ability to speak. Mack's eyes never left the floor.

“What,” Coel yelled in anger as he flung the door open.

Othion Tacur stood on the other side. Dressed in his travelling clothes, brown leather pants with a padded jacket and a grey cloak. With the dim grey light from the hall, he seemed like a spectre from the grave. It always made Coel feel apprehensive when encountering him like this. Othion's long black hair was tied back into a pony tail which reached his lower back and his beard was braided and both were streaked with grey. His eyes were a penetrating blue, with crowfeet in the corners. Coel hesitated a moment before the imposing figure. He held a thick walking stick, made from dense pine. The palm of his hand rested comfortably on the head of a tiger. The kind that roamed the jungles of Quelin, far to the south; with its enormous head and striped coat. Its mouth held a small chrysoberyl stone, slightly larger than a marble but irregularly shaped, the opalescence made it seem like a spool of silk. Coel was always fascinated by the staff.

Looking at his teacher, Coel invited him into the room. Upon entering Othion looked at Mack and told him to leave. A moan from a missing tongue was his only reply as Mack rushed out the door eager for any chance to escape.

“We leave before the sun is down my Prince, are you ready?” Othion asked Coel.

“I can't decide which cloak to wear for the journey,” was all Coel said.

“The fur lined one,” Othion commented. “We'll be travelling all night

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so it'll be cold.”

“Your Uncle is moving the army out just like expected. So everything is going as planned,” Othion said in confidence. “The Radah guard are waiting out side the citadel and the reserve force will remain hidden.”

“So, I'll have no worries than?” Coel said looking at Othion.

“And I have my magic,” Othion said with a smile on his face.

“Magic?” Coel responded. “You put too much trust in magic, Othion. It's the concrete, I want. Magic is too... abstract.”

“You should feel lucky to have magic,” Othion debated. “There are worlds out there that don't have magic and people on those worlds that wish they did. Let me show you how abstract magic can be. Before we leave I have a present for, my Prince.”

Coel loved receiving presents, especially from Othion. "What is it?" Coel asked not being able to contain his enthusiasm.

“Follow me and find out.” Othion said turning towards the door.

Othion led the way down through the carpeted halls of the citadel, past ornate pictures and statues of stone that represented the glories of Citadel Ahern. Down, through the crypts and dungeons, into the very bowels of the mountain.

“Where are we going Othion?” Coel said getting impatient.

“We're there, my Prince.” Othion stopped in front of a stone wall and raised his walking stick. Using the heel like a key, he inserted it into a niche on the bare stone and twisted. A great stone slab opened, grinding inward to a chamber.

Othion stood to the side and passed Coel the torch allowing him to

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enter first. The light of the flame pushed the darkness aside instantly and Coel could see that it was a small natural cavern. The rough walls and ceiling formed over time by water. There were few stalagmites and stalactites reaching for each other. A small stone table, off to the left, sat a small chest. In the centre of the room was a pit carved out of the stone, like a grave. The whole place felt like a sepulchre. Othion closed the door behind them as he entered.

Holding the torch above the hollow cavity, Coel saw a jumble of wood, small rocks, bronze and iron arranged into a form that vaguely resembled a humanoid shape. The sticks were in the shape of a torso. The stones formed the hands and feet, and the bronze made the head. It was all covered with small sheets of iron. Coel couldn't understand it and he looked at Othion with a frown of confusion.

Suddenly, a groan came from behind Coel. He shifted the light toward the sound and a small boy, about the age of eight slept on a dirty cot. Coel turned back to face his teacher as the light caught him full on the face. Othion stood straight, with a sinister smile on his face.

“Magic, My Prince,” Othion said as he walked over to the boy. Coel could see he was in a drug induced state, semiconscious but unable to control his body. Othion roughly picked the child up by the scruff of the neck.

“Stand on the side of pit,” he instructed Coel.

Going over to the small chest on the table, Othion opened it brought out a medallion. It was the size of Coel's hand with an irregular blue stone in the centre, with softer white crystal running through it. It was the same

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rock that was laying in the pit. The stone was cast within dark pine wood, with runes carved into it. The stone and wood were surrounded by a thicker layer of bronze and iron swirling together. The pendant hung on a gold chain. It was beautiful and Coel loved it instantly. Othion moved to the side of the pit and put the medallion around the boy's head.

The boy whimpered and tried to struggle as Othion bound his hands behind his back and grabbed him by his blonde hair. Othion hung him over the pit and took a curved dagger from its sheath on his belt. He began to chant a magical incantation. The runes on the pendant began to glow. Bringing the knife to the boy's throat, Othion took a long deep cut almost severing the head. Directing the flow of blood, he covered the jumble of material completely. As the blood flowed over the medallion, he continued to repeat the chant. Othion did not spill a drop. Once the flow of blood stopped, he took the pendant off the boys neck and gently positioned him on his knees with his head still hanging over the pit.

As the last few drops of blood dripped from the pendant, it began to soak the wood and a silver light began to shimmer around the materials. Coel noticed the medallion begin to glow with the same light. Astonishingly, the materials began to rise as if being filled by some unseen thing. It all became molten beginning to take shape and grow together. It was being surrounded by the iron, as if it were armour. The ugly thing stood to its legs and turned to face the medallion.

“It's a Shield Guardian,” Othion said passing the pendant to Coel. “As long you have this medallion, it will protect you and obey your command. Do you like it my Prince?”

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“Like it, its amazing.”Coel responded enthusiasically.

“Good. I'm glad it pleases you, My Prince,” Othion said while bowing. “But come now we still have things to do before we leave.”

The Shield Guardian followed Coel out of the room, while Othion roughly kicked the body of the boy into the crypt. Closing the heavy stone door behind him, Othion sealed the chamber forever.

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Chapter 4

Mack looked back as they were coming out of the mountains and he could see Citadel Ahern, precariously perched on the steep rocky cliffs. It caught the last ray of the sun and sparkled in the fading light. He found himself starting to enjoy the trip, as they followed the winding road out of the mountains. Making himself comfortable on the top of his Master's trailer, Mack watched the trees go by. He was quite content with a protective cover that kept him dry, and a blanket to keep him warm. It surprised him when he started to imagine jumping off the roof and running- but he knew it would be futile. His Master would just find him and beat him for it. Mack shook his head getting the images out and tried not to think about it again.

The contingent slow as they came to the old wooden bridge to accommodate for the crossing of the Tasmorean river. The sound was deafening from the fast rapids echoing through the ravine. As Mack watched from his vantage point, he saw thirty men cross first. Two were on horses, carrying his Master's banner. He could faintly hear the stomping feet of the soldiers. His Masters trailer rocked as it rolled over the bridge

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and Mack had grab on to something or lose his balance. Eight swordsmen on either side, two abreast, four long, crossed with it, hugging tight to the side.

Mack studied his master's creature again. It was extremely ugly and Mack did not like it very much. It never left his Master's side. Even now, with his Master inside the trailer, the thing never left the door. Looking back as the trailer entered into the forest, Mack watched the night close in behind him. Othion's four-in-hand, was swallowed up right away by the darkness. Followed by forty men at arms that marched across the river without a sound. At the very end was the kitchen. The drivers of each trailer never moved and never spoke, just sat as if they were inanimate objects.

As they left the river behind, it all became quiet and the dense forest dark. And it seemed to Mack that there was something deep within the forest. Something evil following them, hidden by the trees. Mack did not like that feeling at all. He pulled his blanket tighter around his shoulders and with the swaying of the coach moving down the road, Mack quickly fell asleep.

Late during the night, while travelling through a particularly bumpy part of the road, Mack woke from a dream. A nightmare he would frequently have, where he would be cleaning up the blood from his Master's latest victim- the endless blood, he could never clean it all up. His Master would then come into the room and start beating him for not doing a good enough job. The two moons- Chádash, the bigger and dominant one and he younger sister, Káshaph- the moon that brought magic to the Creation, streamed light upon his face. His senses were heightened when he became

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aroused and he heard voices behind him.

Hanging his head over the side of the railings Mack looked back without making no sound. All the guards were gone. Mack assumed they were probably scouting in the forest. Only the stone creature was there walking silently beside the door to his Master's trailer. In the darkness, he saw Othion hanging out the door of his carriage talking to someone just on the tree line. The dim light from within cast a long shadow that followed on the ground. Mack thought he over heard them talking in Goblinkind. Mack squinted his eyes to see. As the stranger walked in and out of the light, Mack saw that he had shiny metal plate armour on his shoulders and legs. On his left side he wore a broad sword, the curved and serrated blade catching the dim light. Mack focused harder on the person's face. He wore no helmet on his head but his course hair was pulled back into a tight pony tail reaching to his waist. The nose was flat, with a small chin and he seemed to have more fur than skin. Mack had never seen a hobgoblin before but he was pretty sure this was one. Mack continued watching as the hobgoblin spoke and nodded its head at Othion before it disappeared into the trees. Mack looked back at Othion, and saw Othion staring right back at him. He jumped and quickly pulled his head back inside the railing. It took him a long time to settle down, but it still was not until the sky started to get light did he drift back to sleep.

It was a normal day for Mack. As soon as his Master woke, he got him breakfast, then helped him dress in preparation for the day. As they travelled- occasionally they would pass through a small village or hamlet- sawmills and small patches of farmland mostly, cut out the forest. Those

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people who could not make it to Daloseos, would come out to cheer as the future king passed.

“Look at them Mack,” Coel said. “The little people. Doing what they should be doing- working for my needs.” He looked back at Mack and snickered. “Well- say something.” he gave Mack a hard cuff across the head and Mack gave a muffled response. “Your right Mack,” the prince said interpreting Mack's words, “They do love me!”

As Mack looked out the window he saw the forest begin to thin and feeling the steep gradient of the road, realized they were heading to an old castle he could see in the distance. “Highhurst,” Mack heard his Master say. “ It's the largest community around. An old castle built on top a high hill- and I'm supposed to have lunch here.” After spending a few hours in the town, his Master came back in a surly mood and told Mack to get on top. Mack new those moods. It was going be one of those nights where he would hear muffled screams coming from his Master's room. He crawled into the back corner of the roof and hoped there was not going to be blood.

It began just after dark, while passing through a crossroads, Mack heard his Master leave with his Shield Guardian. It was not long until they returned. The Shield Guardian packed an unconscious girl about his age. They were always about his age and Mack felt hopeless when he saw her. She groaned as she was roughly passed into the trailer. His Master quickly closed the door behind him and the Stone Sentinel took up its unending vigilance. Mack berried his head in his blanket and covered his ears.

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Chapter 5

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Riding hard through the night and half the day, Oril reached Winter-acre bridge. It was a small community with a large inn on the west side of the Winter-acre river. This was the place he chose to meet his nephew. But first he needed to see someone who lived north along the river. He had sought her out in the past whenever he needed help and she was the only one who could help him now. Although, Oril had not seen her in many years.

The trail was muddy with streams of water pooling up along the old waggon tracks that were partially over grow. The only sign of life were animal droppings and a few tracks, Oril could hear no birds or squirrels giving their warning calls. The Dense old trees shadowed him on both sides as he made his way north. He Oril could hear the river through the trees on his right. The roar of the rapids resonated all around him. The route made its way into a small clearing and opened up to a small wooden bridge, which seemed to be constructed out of the roots of the trees. It led to an old house on the other side of the river. It looked as if it had always been a part of the landscape. Moss covered the roof and dead vines climbed the walls. And massive trees grew all around it.

Making his way cautiously across the wooden bridge, Oril made sure the clop of his horse's hooves could be heard over the cacophonous river. He did not want to startle the woman who lived inside. Once across, he dismounted and let his horse go and a small woman came out to greet him.

“Oril Ahern,” she said with a smile. “I had a feeling someone was going to stop in today but I sure didn't expect you. With the appointed day so close and all. Even though you no doubt bring trouble, it is good to see

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you.”

Oril walked up to the steps but deliberately stayed on the ground leaving her higher than him. “It is good to see you again, Valira Sherin,” he said bowing his head.

She took a step down to where she could look Oril in the eyes. “You are the regent of this land and you bow your head to me?”

“I do bring trouble, Valira,” Oril said looking into her soft green eyes. Her long blonde hair was blowing in the cool breeze that came from the river, revealing her long pointed ears.

“Come inside where its quieter,” she said and Oril followed her into the house.

A low smouldering fire was in the hearth. It gave off heat but no smoke rose up the chimney. Natural pine wainscoting surrounded the inside of the small cottage and shelves, full of books, lined the walls. A table sat in the opposite corner of the fireplace, with various ingredients scattered around. A door stood open directly across from him which led to a small dark room.

Valira took Oril's cloak and hung it on the back of the door while directing Oril to sit in a chair by the fire place. And she bluntly asked, “So, why are you here, Oril?”

“Othion Tacur,” was his only response, knowing she would understand.

She nodded and sat in the chair next to him. “I was there when your father appointed him as adviser and before he banished all Elves from Tasmorea.” She sat lost in memories for a moment until she looked up. “I knew something was wrong with him back then but I was only a servant of the king's doctor and a half-elf- even worse than a full Elf.”

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“I'm sorry that happened.” Oril said hopeless in the matter.

“That's past and the present is now. You've been a good man, Oril. Its too bad you can't be king.” Valira said with all earnestness.

“I'm here to make sure my nephew becomes a good king,” he said pleading his case. “And for that to happen, I have to stop Othion. No one knows where he comes from and no one knows who he is. He just appears one day on the record, back in my father's reign. You're my last hope. There's some sort of magical shield around him that I haven't been able to penetrate and I'm hoping you can.”

“I may have just the thing,” Valira said as she got up and moved a small table in front of Oril.

Oril watched her as she went into the other room. She came out with a plain rectangular wooden box. Holding it by a handle, Valira set it down on the table. She removed the top by unlocking four latches on each side. The inside was full of padded green silk. Valira removed an oval mirror but it was dark and no reflection was cast upon it. The concaved glass was held within a boarder of polished bone, smooth and tarnished from age. The pedestal and holder were also made of bone. Lapidary inscriptions of the mystical language of magic were neatly engraved. It was a beautiful piece of art and Oril could feel the magic it bore.

Valira grabbed a quill and ink to translate the symbols onto a piece of parchment. “It doesn't matter the words spoken,” she explained. “What matters is the understanding of the words written.” She passed the rendition to Oril.

He adjusted the mirror so it faced him directly and began to read the

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words. “Through space and time, take my faster than light can travel.” The symbols began to glow an eerie green incandescent. “Show me who I desire to see. In silence let me spy the person I seek.” The black within the mirror began to swirl becoming grey and grew into a vortex. “Through space and time take me faster than light can travel to Othion Tacur.” The vortex lengthened and Oril could see things rushing past with in the mirror.

Suddenly, the image cleared and hovered, like some ethereal being, above a moving caravan. In the periphery of the image he could see soldiers in front and in back, with three large trailers in the middle. Oril knew it was Coel's procession moving westward. He also saw a large creature walking beside the lead one, it looked to be made of stone and metal. The image slowly moved toward a destination. It passed a boy watching something and it seemed to Oril that he was looking right at him. The image blurred into the wall of the second carriage. The image stabilized toward the roof and swung around. Oril looked down at a creature he was not expecting. Its body was human, except his head was like that of a tiger. A Quelin tiger, from the jungles of Quelin, way in the south.

Oril sat back and looked at Valira, “What is that? I thought I was going to see Othion.”

“That is Othion,” Valira said, her eyes opening wide. “He's a Rakshasa.”

“What? What's a Rakshasa?” he asked in disbelief.

“They are one of the ancient Twisted Things, far older than hobgoblins and far smarter. Very strong in magic. Only in history books have I read about them. I thought they only lived in Quelin and very few of them. Look

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at the glow around him- it seems he does have an illusion about him."

"That's probably why he looks human," Oril said more to himself. A mirror that looked similar to Valira's sat on a table in front of Othion. He recognized images of Daloseos but they were erratic, as if Othion could not find what he was searching for. It visualized on an old house on the edge of a river and then surged in. Oril jumped when he suddenly saw himself reflected within Othion's mirror. The image swooped down upon the table and the mirror on it. Othion grinned a sinister smile within his own reflection, showing his feline teeth.

With one swift move, Valira stood up, covered the mirror and said a single word. Eight candles instantly ignited. "Damn it," Valira cursed. "I should have taken precautions." Oril was back in his chair, feeling his heart beat in his chest.

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Chapter 6

Oril Ahern- Regent of the king and keeper of the Emerald throne of Tasmorea was a solitary figure standing in the middle of the road like a boulder. He would not move- that much he was certain. In the last fifteen years he had quelled rebellion and turned back hobgoblin raids. Signed piece treaties and opened up trade agreements with distant nations but none of it seemed to matter. It all came down to this moment. Oril Ahern knew what he had to do.

The Winter-acre river echoed through the ravine. The late afternoon sun had long ago retreated, leaving the air cool and damp, with little light. Oril shivered as he began to see the first contingent of Radah guard come

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out of the trees. Two were on horses holding the banner of the Ahern family- a soaring hawk on a royal blue background. The same one Oril had etched into his leather vest. They marched four abreast and seven deep. Growing tighter ranks they crossed the old stone bridge and formed an impenetrable wall of blue as they reached the other side. The first trailer came to a stop far back from the bridge, the driver pulling back on the rains of the horses and just sat there. Its cloak wrapped tight around him and his hood pulled over his head. More soldiers came out the forest to surround it. Oril quickly counted sixty men at arms from what he could see. Although these men had been marching for two nights and two days without stopping- they showed no sign of stress. Oril was surprised at himself for feeling a sense of pride at seeing the parade. If things were different, he would be riding at the head of the Radah guard. He was glad he was not, the personal army of the Ahern family were known to do so horrendous things in their service of the king. Helmets, shaped to copy a head of a hawk, obscured their faces. He stood in the middle of the road feeling very lonely and very small.

"I would like to speak to Prince Coel Ahern, heir to the Emerald throne of Tasmorea," Oril had to yell to be heard over the rush of the river.

Oril had not seen his nephew for nine years now, the time went by so quickly. He had no idea of what kind of man his nephew had become. He had to admit, there was concern. Even back when Coel was a child there was a darkness that could be seen in him. Oril thought of the puppies that were hurt when Coel was ten. The whole litter had their legs broken. Even though he was found with them, Coel pleaded innocent. It was then Oril

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saw the stone creature. A great lumbering beast. It was the ugliest thing he had ever seen. Oril could not image what possessed the thing. The roar of the river became an all obtrusive sound at that moment.

A door on the trailer opened and Othion stepped out, his hair pulled back and his long beard flying in the wind. He caught Oril's stare. Coel followed him out and as he adjusted his fur lined cloak began to walk towards his uncle. He was a handsome boy, long brown hair, cut to shape his face. Tall and thin, very much like Oril when he was that age. He looked like an Ahern and very much like the prince he was. A large medallion hung around his neck, swaying as he walked.

Coel made his way across the bridge and the soldiers parted to allow him through. The creature followed close behind. Othion continued to meet Oril's stare.

“Hello Coel,” Oril said earnestly greeting his nephew.

“Uncle, do you come to me as regent or as my uncle?” Coel asked.

“As your uncle of course,” Oril said.

“Good, then come Uncle, lets get out of the cold. We can talk as we travel. I assume we're both going the same direction.” Coel said with a broad grim.

“I would like to talk to you alone Coel,” Oril said nodding to Othion.

“Of course Uncle, what ever you wish,” Coel nodded to Othion, who bowed and hurried back to his own trailer.

Coel commanded the creature to stay outside the mobile before he entered and Oril noticed the pendant begin to emit a silvery light. Once inside Coel removed his leather boots, revealing bare feet.

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“Come in Uncle, be welcomed,” he said ushering Oril to remove his boots and smirked. “Grander than any palace isn't it!” he indicated his temporary home.

“Yes, it is,” Oril had to agree. It was a large room, with plenty of space to stand straight. The wooden walls were all carved in delicate carvings, bordered with gold and silver. Finely crafted bowls and serving sets, were put neatly on shelves. Carpet, with delicate embroidery though out and beautiful furnishings. Everything was polished cleaned. In the middle of the trailer, colourful tapestries hung down, dividing the room in half. There was a peculiar musty smell, which made him a little sick. Coel sat him on a couch low to the ground and Oril sank into a very uncomfortable position.

“It was made specifically for this trip to my coronation.” Coel said as he sat across the room at a finely crafted chair. Two wolves growling, were carved into the arms.

“I wasn't expecting to meet you out here Uncle.” Coel continued. “What's so important the Regent had to leave the preparations for the arrival of his king? Eh?” There was a jerk as the trailer began to move again.

“I came to warn you, Nephew,” Oril tried to sit up but struggled. “Othion Tacur isn't what he seems.”

Coel leaned forward in his chair, “What ever do you mean, Uncle?” he said insincerely.

Oril stumbled at the tone in Coel's voice. “He's a Rakshasa.”

“A Rakshasa?” Coel said not being able to contain his smile. “What's that?”

Oril sat back on the uncomfortable couch and stared at his nephew.

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Coel burst out laughing.

“I know he's a Rakshasa. Rakshasa come from the jungles down south- very powerful in magic,” Coel stopped joking now and looked his uncle in the eye. “I have always known who and what he is, Uncle.”

“But keep it a secret, OK,” Coel said reaching for a gold and silver embossed tea pot and poured some into two matching cups. He passed one to his uncle. Oril hesitated until Coel drank first, then he drank as well. “No one knows he's a Rakshasa and he wants to keep it that way. Only us and now you- thanks to that little mirror trip you took last night. Oh and that cute little half-elf you were with. I have someone out looking for her right now. I suspect she'll be with us shortly.”

“But Coel- listen to me,” Oril said pleading his case. “He killed your mother and father, your grandfather.”

“I know that too, Uncle.” Coel said sitting back in his chair.

“Othion has been a father to me, he's taught me incredible things. Yes, he does have many different motives but most coincide with mine. The rest are his business.” Coel stared at his uncle. “He did it so I could be king because I am meant to be king. And my rule will be greater than any of our grandfather's were.”

“Yes, you are meant to be king, Coel.” Oril pleaded. “But as a king is meant to rule- with justice and fear of the people, the way Daloseos ruled.” Oril started to become sluggish as he began to slur is words. He looked down at his hands, they felt like heavy balloons. He tried to stand but his knees gave out and he fell back onto the couch.

“Good tea, Eh?” Coel said taking another drink. “Once you build up an

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immunity, you can get pretty high off the stuff."

Coel smirked at that. "Let me show you what it means to be king, Uncle."

Coel took four steps and pulled back the dividing tapestries. Oril lifted his head to look around. The room was rather stark compared to the front half, plain panelled walls, a large bed in the right corner and something in the back where the light did not penetrate. Coel lit another candle and the whole horrific scene played out in Oril's mind. A young woman sat naked in a large plain high back chair. Her eyes were wide open, reflecting her last moments within them. The chair was sitting on a plush carpet that was soaked in cold blood. It was plain to see that she bled out through the back of her legs. Cuts ran down her body in symmetrical designs that were clean and partially healed.

"This is what it means to be king, Uncle." Coel walked over and stood beside the girl, his feet splashing in the blood. "It means to have control of life and death over your subjects. For my pleasure and my ambition. Their whole existence is mine, to do with as I will. This girl served no other purpose in life." He took her by the shoulder and laid her down on the carpet. He began to roll her up. "And there is no higher calling than me."

Walking over to the table, Coel grabbed a short sceptre and loudly rapped on the ceiling. Oril looked up as he heard movement coming from the roof, then down the side. The door opened and a young man came in. He was not as tall as Coel but older and he was well dressed in plain woven material. Keeping his head down the whole time, he only looked up for an instant to meet Oril's eyes. They were green and full of pain, yet

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intelligence was plain to be seen in them. Oril began to feel sympathy for the young man.

“Uncle, you remember Mack. I had him at my Heir Apparent celebration.” Coal pushed him toward the rolled up carpet. “You can remove that.”

Mack stood there a moment, then looked back at his master. “No,” he pleaded as clearly as he could without a tongue.

Coel hit Mack across the head with his fist. “Remove it now,” he screamed. “Then go tell Othion we're ready,” Coel commanded.

Picking himself up and holding his head, Mack went to the back of the trailer. Opening a door that was well hidden in the interior woodwork- he grabbed the carpet carefully. Struggling with it he managed to gently pull it outside with the fast moving trailer. The door quickly closed behind him. Empathy immediately rose inside Oril.

“Now, Mack knows his purpose in life,” Coel said to his uncle. “He knows, I decide over his life and death. Just as you now know that I decide over your life ... and death.” He smirked, “And I have already decided over your life and death, Uncle.”

There was a knock at the door and Coel commanded them to enter. Othion roughly pushed a woman in ahead of him. Oril's eyes grew wide in fear for his friend. “Valira,” he said trying to gain consciousness but oblivion was taking him quickly.

“Oril, they’re Hobgoblins everywhere,” she said through the dark bruise that was forming on the right side of face. Othion drove his fist into the back of her head.

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“Your name is Valira,” Othion said. “Valira Sherin, I knew I remembered you. You served in medicine back when Lendic was king.” Othion picked her up and placed her in the chair that the other woman was in. “You were one of a handful that escaped. You've hidden yourself well, haven't you.”

“Uncle Oril, I believe you already know Othion Tacur, Chief Adviser to the King of Tasmorea.”

“Regent, its good to see again.” Othion said, "But where are our manners you've had a hard day, so sleep now. We'll need you fresh tomorrow when we meet the army.”

Oril finally succumbed to the narcotic. The last thing he saw before he past out was Valira struggling against Coel, her screams muffled through a gag. Othion bowed to Coel and left.

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Chapter 7

Oril jerked awake when he felt someone kick his legs and he heard his nephew yelling, for him to wake up. Awareness rose and the actualization of his predicament become apparent. He was on the same couch- although he was lying down now. His head hurt and he could not think straight. He managed to sit up although his body was still hard to move. The curtains in the room were open and Oril could see that the sky was just becoming light. A candle in the corner was almost complete burnt down.

“Come Uncle, today is a most important day.” Coel said as he smiled down at his Uncle.

Apprehension rose in Oril as he saw Mack strapping armour onto his

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nephew. Oril watched Coel closely. He was wearing soft souled leather boots with iron shods. His legs were covered with greaves over top black leather pants and his shoulders were cover with iron plates. He also wore a coat of plates- thick scales of iron woven within brown padded leather. It had the Soaring Hawk of the Ahern family elegantly embroidered into it, all boarded in blue. He looked like his father about to ride into battle. Oril shook his head having to distinguish between father and son. Coel pushed Mack aside as he grabbed the candle pulled the tapestries wide and walked into the rear of the trailer. As Oril look toward the bed the realization of the son became all too clear.

Valira lied in the bed- a look of pain upon her face. The covers were pulled down to her waist and her exposed breasts had swirling patterns etched into the skin. The cuts were deep but clean and partially healed. Oril fell to his knees and grieved. “Why Coel? Why did you do it?” Oril pleaded of his nephew.

Coel grabbed his cloak from the back of a chair and through it on to his shoulders. “I told you last night Uncle. She was mine to do with as I pleased. And I decided her death.”

Picking up his uncle, Coel placed him on the chair. It still had Valira's dried blood on it. “But today- dear Uncle, I'm giving you a choice. I will let you decide the fate of a kingdom.”

Coel strapped on a finely crafted sword, jewelled pommel and crosspiece, brown leather on the hilt. “We have reached Fallwood Hedge and what are we greeted with?- an army encamped on the road.” Coel grabbed Oril's hands and put shackles on them.

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“Not much of a surprise really,” Coel continued. “I'm thinking their waiting for your order.” Coel took a step back and stared at his uncle. “So, here's where you decide the fate of the kingdom, Uncle.” Coel grabbed Oril's shackles and roughly pulled him out the door. Oril stumbled and fell on his wobbly legs.

Coel had everything ready outside. The sun had not yet come up but it was starting to get light. Othion was on a small dappled horse of grey and brown. He passed Coel the reins of a large black horse, with a long main and flowing white hair below the knees. As he mounted the horse it reared up, eager to go but Coel calmed it down. Oril was shackled to a long chain behind his nephew.

Close to Coel's left was that creature, forever at his side. It truly was the ugliest thing he had ever seen. Once again, Oril noticed that as Coel was giving the creature commands, the medallion around his neck gave off a silver hue. It was a Curious thing.

Along the road were cultivated fields, that were surrounded by forests and rolling hills. The Tasmorean army was directly in the path of the caravan heading west. Men, dressed in chain mail and carrying sharp pikes with plain shields, spread out over the road into the fields. They out numbered the Radah guard by two to one but the Radah guard stood as an impenetrable wall as it parted like a wave for its king.

“I am Prince Coel Ahern- heir of the Emerald throne of Tasmorea and I am going to claim my inheritance.” Coel let his voice echo for a second in the dim morning light and then let silence settle over the field. “Who dares to stand in my way,” the prince bellowed.

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Two horses began to ride out to meet them. As they approached, Coel told them to stop and demanded who they where

“I am Vaundr Iowerth- head of the Council of Lords, Your Majesty,” and looking over he said, “and this is Meogin Kamill- General of the armies of Tasmorea.”

“General of my armies, Eh?” Coel smiled at Meogin. “Where do your loyalties lie General?”

“My loyalties are with the people, My Prince. As it always has been with the army.” Meogin proudly stated.

Coel looked right at Meogin, “Wrong answer, Meogin.” He got darker than the shadowed trees not far off. “Get out of my way.” Coel said with full authority and the Radah guard took a step forward.

Time froze for an instant with everybody turning to Oril. “This is it Uncle. Your choice.” Coel said pulling Oril forward.

Oril struggling to stay on his feet and looking at Vaundr and Meogin he said, “Stop him- don't let him become king.”

Meogin instantly pulled out his sword and Coel's shield guardian took a few steps and backhanded Meogin, sending him flying off his horse. The medallion glowed once again. Meogin landed hard and did not move, his head twisted in an awkward position.

“Go- Now,” Oril shouted to Vaundr. “Stop him.” Vaundr turned his horse and raced back to the Tasmorean army.

“Good choice, Uncle.” Coel said laughing. “Every king must come to his throne with a battle.”

They hurried back through the Radah guard, toward the trailers. The

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shield Guardian was on Coel's left, while Oril was on the right. 'I have to do something,' Oril thought, his mind scanning everything around him. The Shield Guardian did not leave him many options though. 'If only some good can come of this,' a plan began to form in his mind.

As they approached the trailers, Oril heard Coel call for Mack. Mack was at the right front corner and ran over when he heard his Master call. Oril seized the moment. He grabbed Coel by his right leg and roughly heaved him to ground. In the fight that ensued, Oril manage to tare the medallion off Coel's neck and feigning escape, threw the medallion at Mack. Mack caught it but almost dropped it.

“Run,” Oril said to Mack. “Run.”

Mack stood for a second in hesitation. And then he turned and ran. He ran for all of his life. He never ran so fast.

In the chaos, Coel did not realize he lost his pendent, and ordered the Shield Guardian after Mack. It seemingly obeyed. Oril was roughly forced to the ground and subdued, chained to the front of the trailer.

Coel instantly got back on his horse and rode off toward the army, “Attack,” he began to yell.

The Radah Guard began its march, quickly forming a wedge within the ranks. The two leading horses made the point. They began to run and the Tasmorean army braced for impact, pikes with shields held tight. A crash echoed through the trees as the guard hit the army. The point wedged its way down the centre, slicing deep within the army. Men began to fall, little by little the guard hacked its way parting the army in two. The ground became soaked in blood. Once the army was successfully divided the guard

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pushed hard, forcing each side back toward the treeline. But the Radah Guard seemingly overwhelmed by a superior force, retreated slightly, momentarily giving the offence to the army, regrouping in the middle.

Suddenly, out of the trees, came dozens of Hobgoblins on the backs of Winter wolves. The large animals raced on to the field of battle like an on coming storm. Their massive canine teeth snarling for blood. The Hobgoblins screaming and waving their curved blades. It was an amazing sight to Coel. They tore into the rear of the surprised Tasmorea army, and the Radah Guard intensified their attack again. The hobgoblins and wolves mutilated the men. Serrated blades, hacked off limbs and heads. Sharp teeth and claws eviscerated every living thing. The Radah guard hacked them down as they tried to escape. Not a single man of the Tasmorean army was left alive. After the carnage, the hobgoblins simple disappeared back into the woods, and The Radah Guard, who hardly lost a man, returned to their ranks in the middle of the road.

Coel marvelled at the scene before him. The butchery he just witnessed astonished him. Mangled and maimed bodies lay all around. The ground was thick with blood and gore. Coel marvelled in it and he pranced his horse through it before returning to his uncle. Oril was on his knees, shoulders slumped but still glaring back with eyes filled with defiance. Coel stared down at his uncle for a few moments before turning his horse and headed for Daloseos. The Radah guard surrounded him while the rest of the caravan followed. Othion rode beside his prince.

Coel rode proudly the rest of the afternoon, like a conquering king returning with his spoils of war. And the people received him as such. The

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closer they were to their destination, more people showed up along the road to cheer him on. Coel thrived on it. All through the day, with a warm sun shining on him, Coel continued. Hundred at first, then thousands came to greet their new king.

The trees gave way to farmland as the sun was beginning its descent toward the horizon in the west. The tall grand towers of Yagor Ar-mown began to rise in the south and they glistened as if they were stars in the distance. The Lake of Shanderan came into view, its dark waters stretching beyond the horizon into south. The harbour was teeming with ships and Coel could see banners from the other five nations that shared the lake's shores. The city rose on the hill before him. The people crowded together along the road welcoming their new king.

The rest of the Tasmorean army, thousands of men, stood in ranks on the fields before the looming wall. Huge granite blocks, settled together as hundreds of years wore down on them. He could see it rise, following the land as it surrounded the mountain. People hung from the stone, jubilant to see the new king. The gate was a grand arch with towers rising from it. Two giant wolves were carved out of the stone, guarding the entrance to the King's route.

“Open in the name of the King!” Coel yelled authoritatively.

A moment later the squeak of turning wheels could be heard from within. First the thick iron bars of the portcullis rose, then the heavy stone doors swung inward allowing entrance for their king. The Radah guard began to take control of all the gates and seal the city. The roar of the crowd was deafening. Coel could see the streams of people all along the rising

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road of the King's route. It was cut out of the rock as it made its way uphill toward the citadel. As Coel preceded, the wall loomed tall on his right and a cliff lined with people was on the left. Giant stone animals guarded the whole way.

At the summit was a park of old spruce trees. Coel could see stone figure enacting age old battle scenes scattered through out. The King's route broaden as they came upon the fortification wall that surrounded Yagor Ar-mown. The hard stone was tarnished with age and covered with vegetation. The road curved to the left following it. The park gave way to over look the whole of the city as it terraced down the gradual incline of the mountain. Coel stopped before the gates of Yagor Ar-mown and looked at the grandness of his capital city. From every roof top, street corner and possible view from the wall- people were every where cheering him on, their king had come. Coel looked out for a few moments, and he could see lights beginning to appear from the darker sections of Daloseos.

The moment gone he turned and entered the gates. The wooden doors, lavishly carved and polished stood open in expectation. The road led through flower gardens with green leaves just starting to grow and grass that was just beginning to turn green. Yagor Ar-mown stood before him like the sheer peeks of the Tasmorean mountains. The last light of the sun was shining through the crenellations of the wall and glistening off the rising towers as it began to set in the west. People packed the whole way.

Coel did not care if they were low born or high born, he did not care anything about them as he road his horse through to the immense entrance of the citadel and dismounted. He waited for his soldiers to situate

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themselves around him as two brought Oril quickly forward. He once again looked at the people all around- there was silence throughout the crowd as he stared at them. Coel stepped forward into one of the last rays of the sun.

“Your King has come,” he simple announced and Coel quickly entered into the citadel with Othion at his side. Two soldiers dragged Oril behind, while the rest of the Radah guard took defensive positions around him.

Entering the throne room, Coel hesitated. The grandeur of it was overwhelming. The roof peaked high above with stained glass art. Only a few pillars, made to mimic trees, rose up to meet the ceiling. Figures of different animals lined the walls and massive fireplaces were on both sides of the long rectangular room. The walls looked as if they were made of wood, with exquisite designs caved everywhere. A long carpet led to a dais and on the first landing was a large map of Tasmorea, carved within the stone. Six steps altogether led to the throne, which dominated the room.

The Throne was made from solid emerald, cut to fit together in the form of a large chair. The seat and back were well padded within a frame of stained wood. The White Wolf Mantle hung on its back. Coel climbed the steps and stood before it. People crowded the auditorium behind him, while Othion came and stood one step down from the top. The Radah guard filed in ranks around the entire room. Coel took the mantle and Othion came to placed it on his shoulders. The thick fur was comfortable around Coel's neck and a thick chain with buckles hung around his chest.

Coel turned to address the people before him. “I am High King Coel Ahern. The sixth Ahern to rule this land. And I would have you kneel!” he yelled at the top of his voice.

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The Radah guard drew their swords together and the sound rang through the room startling everyone. Stepping forward, the Radah guard forced everyone to their knees, physically or by just fear alone.

Oril was brought to the top of the dais and the guards roughly forced him to his knees facing the people. Coel took a position behind him and drew his sword. Raising it above the back of Oril's head, Coel looked out at his witnesses. “Be this a warning to anyone who threatens my rule.” He plunged the sword deep into the base of his uncle's skull, instantly severing his spinal cord. Twisting the sharp blade back and forth, Coel severed his Uncle's head. It went spinning down the steps. Planting his foot on Oril's back, forced his uncle's body sprawling down the steps. The blood drained down onto the map of Tasmorea. The people screamed and gasped drawing back in fear and Coel smiled as he sat on the throne.

“Get out now,” he commanded. Everybody hurriedly left the throne room. The Radah guard forcing them from behind, like a herd of cattle.

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Epilogue

That night the new king did as any new king would do, he consolidated his reign and terror ruled in the streets of Daloseos. Blood flowed, while the citizens huddled in their homes in fear that the Radah guard would come knocking on their door. Whole families were slaughtered and thrown into the streets. Every member of the Council of Ten Lords and their families were executed and their heads displayed on stakes outside Yagor Ar-mown's fortification wall for all to see. Their King had truly come.

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Othion looked out into the dark. The dominant moon Chádash was full and bright, casting its light upon the black water of Lake Shanderan. He was high in the south tower and from here he could see the land stretching before him like a tapestry. The place was exactly as he had left it all those years ago. Everything he had prepared was untouched, waiting for his designs to grow. He had performed great magic in this loft and he would again. Thinking about the next stage of his purpose, Othion looked out across the dark waters. His sight was set on the Elves in the west.

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Mack stopped briefly to catch his breath. He looked down the small rise and knew he was heading south. He had run for hours, never stopping. The creature kept following him but without it- he would have never made it this far. A few time he had crossed the path of hobgoblins, but the Shield Guardian just stepped out from behind Mack and pulverized the monsters. So, Mack kept running- running from his nightmares. He had truly escaped but he kept running. And a figure made from wood and stone, iron and bronze followed him. He kept running- afraid his Master would find him.

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High King Coel sat upon his throne throughout the night. Both moons shone their silvery light through the glass roof. It cast the whole room in a grey hue and gave everything an eery feeling. Only one thought would occur to him occasionally through the night- 'Where's Mack?' he would wonder. But the King never moved, he just kept staring. Staring at the blood and body of his Uncle. The head of Oril Ahern, lay in the middle of the map in a pool of gore, staring back at his nephew.

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The End

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Coming soon:

The Sword Cuts deep

The City that Fell

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