

Enoch took each step carefully across the scaffolding of the ruins, his cloak rested loosely on his shoulders and his fringed garb was swept into a frenzy by the prevailing wind yet despite being buffeted by such a fearsome wind he did not waver. Steadfast he continued along the stone archways that remained of the once wondrous temple. The halls once lit with the soft glow of fire and scented with the pungent but gentle odour of burning incense was hollow and barren, stripped of all grace and dignity.

As Enoch came to a cross section of the temple's scaffolding he sat down with his legs crossed and dove his hand into the sack he had slung over his shoulder and pulled from it a single loaf of mottled bread and began to run his thumbs over the flaky crust. For a moment he appeared entranced by the pattern of the bread, his eyes squinting at the shades of orange and brown as they faded into one another forming patches of gold. Swiftly he bent his thumbs inward and tore the loaf in half spreading his arms wide and then clasp his hands back together with a resounding impact that echoed throughout the canyon and as he stood he continued to mould and pull apart the bread making sure to encapsulate the pieces in his fists lest he should further desecrate the temple.

He approached the longest standing structure of the temple, a single stone tower sculpted from a deep grey granite whose rough surface stood out amongst the fine masonry that the rest of the temple portrayed, many of which depicting various patterns and symbols of the life-giver; simply marvelling at their graceful image would make one's faith as strong as the stone into which it was carved.

Between the thud of his boots, the clap of his hands and the churning of the bread in his fists the tower reverberated with a rhythm that it had heard many times before during the apprentices' training. He had to duck to enter through what had once been one of the largest and most imposing windows in the temple filled with a stained-glass pane that had always stunned him, depicting the first apostle and his gift from the life-giver: A candle lit with a magnificently blanced flame. As he traced the edges of the frame with his fingers his composure became confounded. In the years since the temple was abandoned bandits must have prised the treasure from its frame, trading it for coin amongst the dealers of the kingdoms no doubt oblivious to the spiritual significance it had held. Enoch's brow relaxed as he freed himself from the anger and accepted that his faith amounted to more than the awesomeness of the art it inspired.

Unlike the tower the stairwell was built entirely from stone and had thus crumbled in places forcing Enoch to leap from steps in order to ascend the tower. When he reached the better formed part of the steps he saw the carvings at the centre of the spiral that had survived, depicting various apostles and masters that had lived through the history of the temple. Once he had hoped that he would one day be carved into this supporting pillar.

When Enoch reached the opening that led to the roof of the tower he saw that the sky was now overcast with thick clouds of pale grey. The faint glow of the moon that had begun to rise illuminated the wall of the tower to his right as if to bid him further and draw him in like a moth. Doubtless he advanced his hands clenched with the breadcrumbs held tightly in his palms.

As Enoch reached the summit he was met by the bestial figure of a Lycan, an Anakim so feral that even the wildlife dared not approach it, looming over Enoch like a large wolf standing on its hind legs with its skin stretched close against its ribcage so that each breath lifted its shoulders and pressed its lungs outwards against its chest.

Enoch advanced on the horror before him as he did the Anak's gaze tracked him, a disturbing menace lay in the golden and jade fragments that filled its eyes like a kaleidoscope —the hues perpetually folding in and out onto themselves. The Anak too started to approach and even at a distance he could feel the savage miasma that it exuded.

Any other man would have fled in the face of such horror but Enoch knew such Anakim as he knew the wrinkles in his own palms —which burst open with a flourish of his fingers as though they were the blossoming buds of a lotus flower and crumbs of bread poured from them like the fine grains of sand in a timer and became cinders that burst into a white flame that roared to encompass his hands. Still the Anak lumbered along as though it were merely an apparition or an illusion conjured by some form of witchcraft but nay this creature was real just as the flames that blossomed in Enoch's hands were.

Without hesitation Enoch brought up his hands like claws to which the Anak lunged at him and attempted to swing its right arm, a spindly appendage that ended in an array of navy and purple bone like claws. The Anak attempted to catch Enoch's feet and knock him prone only Enoch effortlessly hopped, using the Anak's forearm as a boost, the Anak stumbled forward its right shoulder connected with Enoch's right palm and a fierce hiss filled the air as its fur and flesh were scorched by the peculiar flame that Enoch had summoned. The Anak let out a screech but Enoch's face showed no sign of triumph, all that could be seen in the white glow was his intense expression, he fastened his fingers around its shoulder keeping it in a firm vice as the flame spread up its neck and down its torso ensnaring the horrific amalgamation. The Anak began to gasp and writhe in agony so Enoch withdrew his flames letting only the moonlight illuminate the Anak's decrepit body as it hurled a dark golden liquid from its lungs that gilded the contours of what stone paving remained then slipped through the cracks like a stringy golden wax as though some mythic spider had laden the tower with threads of golden cobwebs.

Enoch examined the Anak's corpse as it lay there motionless its once colourful and entrancing gaze had turned a dull black that glistened like opal spheres empty and emotionless, no rage no sadness and no joy, As he rolled the corpse onto its back a single piece of parchment flew from beneath it and was swept momentarily in the gentle breeze before Enoch caught it above his head, then pinning it between his fingers he brought it in front of his eyes struggling to read the dark ink that curled its way across the page calligraphically. It was written in a contemporary language though clearly by an author of a higher class evident from the elegance of the writing and the aroma of the rich ink however the message was cryptic nonetheless, "To all who read this, her majesty decrees: find the fruits and return them unto me."

Enoch left the ruins of the life-giver's temple and scaled the edge of the canyon effortlessly with the aid of his magic. Waiting for him diligently at the camp he had set up was his mount, Noah a grey shire horse who Enoch had liberated from the hands of an unsavoury merchant.

Noah had been abused and overworked since he was a colt. After Enoch relinquished him of his master he and Noah began to develop the unspeakable bond that most riders craved, both man and horse could understand each other perfectly without uttering so much as a word.

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed the Merchant striking the young horse sharply with his whip, causing it to buckle under the pressure of its load and collapse on to its hind legs.

Stepping down from his perch the Merchant hobbled over to the horse turning his back to the brush in which Enoch, only fourteen years of age himself, was hidden peering into the affairs of this dutiful servant and his tyrannical master. The Merchant bent over planting one knee on the ground in front of the horse's face and began speaking fiercely into its ear. Enoch produced a length of copper from a leather pouch he had tied around the waist of his robes and fed it through a hole in the ground, in doing so there was a faint glow of light as the wire grew like the fine branches of bracken and weaved its way through the ground just below the surface. The bright amber glow then traced its way along the wire, finishing at the edge of the Merchant's feet.

He cupped his hands around his ear and pressed it against the ground. Enoch began to hear the snarls and growls of the Merchant, "I've to get goods to some of the richest people in Qumran and 'fore I get there my milk 'll be butter and my fruit fermenting If you keep up this pace." He paused wiping his brow and ordered the horse one more time, "now you're gonna get up and start movin' or 'll put you outta yer soddin' misery right now." Whether the horse understood what its master had told it or had become fearful of the tempered intonation in its master's voice it let out a croaky whine as it attempted to lift itself up.

Before the Merchant could turn around Enoch who had crept quietly from the brush behind him stood up on his tip toes and placed his hands around the Merchant's ears marvelling at the site of wispy clouds of smoke flooding from this merchant's ears and then slowly solidifying into balls of cotton. Once the cotton had filled the Merchant's ears he heard little more than the muffled footsteps circling him, hurriedly the Merchant reached for the dagger in his belt but found the decorated silver-gilt scabbard empty and then felt nothing at all. A cold numbing sensation spread from the Merchant's back and then all over his body until he couldn't even feel the fine creases of fabric touching his skin or his heels touching the smooth leather soles of his sandals.

Enoch slipped behind the panicking merchant and freed the colt from its reins, his hands still soaked from the freezing water he'd used to numb the Merchant's senses, still this poor animal struggled to rise and for a moment Enoch became distracted. He was drawn into the lonely eyes of the horse, a kind of spectral darkness of dark violet pupils and a pale burnished hazelnut retina that faded through the glistening sclera. Without a moment's thought more Enoch pulled a mottled bun from his robes and tore it to crumbs, his heart began beating violently; what if it didn't work? After all he'd only read in scriptures how the apostles had summoned the blanching flame but never before had he

done it. He blinked for a second and loosened his tightened fists the cinders falling from his palms and enveloping them in flame he pressed his ignited palms into the horse's hind legs and with a shock its pupils dilated, not from pain —for the life-giver's flame would not harm the living— but resolve and so resolve rose the horse to its full height proud of its majesty and filled with an invigorating sense of purpose.

Enoch leapt onto the horse's back just seconds before it galloped away though unsure where the track would take it the horse travelled with the might of a soldier's mare as its hooves thundered against the ground.

At the sight of his companion a grin grew across Enoch's face and he approached Noah stroking his mane gently and feeling the coarse threads of hair as he ran his fingers through them. Then from the saddlebags he drew a clump of hay that he fed Noah fervently to which his ally replied with a braying of gratitude, as he chewed the warm golden blades of hay. Enoch undid the strings of his cloak that kept it fastened around his neck and folded it carefully like a sheet and stuffed it into one of Noah's saddle bags buried beneath all his components and rations. Then with one hand on Noah's reins and a foot in the stirrups on Noah's right he swung the rest of his body over the horse and gently pressed his knees into Noah's sides signalling him to begin moving. Noah started trotting and then sped up into a gallop only when Enoch had snapped the reins to giddy him up.

They travelled for roughly an hour or two before reaching a small settlement on the edge of Qumran, it was a modest location with wooden watchtowers dotted over each track from which the guardsmen could observe the townsfolk. In contrast to the rich mahogany of the watchtowers the houses were drab timber-framed abodes that paled under the hazy candlelit windows. Though the track was well trodden the village itself was eerily silent and maybe housed a hundred or so families, many worked in the rich and fertile fields nearby and certainly were it not for them the city would have never been afforded such protection in the first place.

Enoch trotted quietly through the streets in hope of finding an inn where he could stay and with luck he found such an establishment, a renovated barn that had a trough along the right side and horses tied to a plank of wood that stretched the side of the barn. Enoch led Noah towards the trough and tied a piece of rope around his saddle and then made his way to the Inn's entrance. When he got inside he was greeted with the thick scent of spirits and the jolly cheers of field workers celebrating their successful harvest. The keeper and bartender was a wiry figure whose skin was creased about his facial features and scattered with freckles and pimples. His clothes weren't poor, yet they weren't rich either. The cuffs of his garb were bunched and the bottom of the sleeves hung below his elbows as he thumbed a piece of parchment with a dried quill in his right hand.

"I've only one room left sir, my son 'll have it ready in a moment, until then feel free to sit an' drink with the others." said the Innkeeper as he gestured to a table on his left where there sat an old man pondering the pieces of some game in front of him. The board was handcrafted from wood and the tiles were dyed various shades of red brown and blue and at either side of the board there were a pile of stones each roughly the same shape but an assortment of grey and black hues. Alerted by the

creak of Enoch's stool as he sat down the old man glanced up to meet his curious gaze. The old man raised a bushy eyebrow, "game?" knowing that he required few words to convey his intent.

Enoch replied, exhaustion in his voice, "Don't gamble."

The old man chuckled for a moment with a wheezy quality to his voice, "I don't play for money," he settled his chuckle and donned a mysterious voice, "I play for stories." Eagerly the old man leaned in with his left elbow on the table and a hand lazily extended to Enoch, "Pleasure to meet you, name's Peter."

Enoch clasped his hand and briefly they shook, "Enoch."

"Well good sir shall we begin?" asked Peter leaning back and spinning the dice on his knuckles.

Enoch leaned in his hands held in front of his mouth, paused for a moment and answered, "Go for it."

Almost instantaneously Peter rolled his dice and moved a stone onto the board then passed the dice to Enoch all in less than a moment. Enoch gracefully lifted the dice and let them tumble to the table and made his move, and in quick succession Peter swept up the dice and rolled them scratching his brow for less than a second before making his own move. They were neck and neck, toe to toe at each other's heels; just as the game seemed to be in Enoch's favour Peter would throw him off with another crafty play and take the lead until through a perfectly calculated turn Peter moved his last piece to the end. Another wheezy chuckle followed this time putting out an energetic handshake, "Good game, sir, good game."

"Indeed," replied Enoch trying to mask his awe at the events that had unfolded before him, tracing back each move in an attempt to see where he had gone wrong.

"As we agreed, a story," Peter brought his stool closer to the table his interest piqued and invested in the tales Enoch had to tell.

"Alright then," Enoch leant sideways with his left elbow resting on the table, thoughtfully biting his thumb nail, "How about the story of the Last Apostle."

Peter ran his fingers through his hair and stared at the table as though deep in thought then slowly looked up at Enoch a maddening toothy grin across his face, "I knew you'd be an interesting one."

"It begins with a boy, young and naive and not least of all mischievous." Peter's arms relaxed and fell heavily in his lap as he listened in awe, "He was never originally one of the faithful, but he had grown up amongst those who believed, though their sentiments were lost he would read the scriptures and marvel at the epics that lived within them." A waitress came over and handed Peter a drink that he took without even breaking eye contact as he followed Enoch's gestures closely, "In secret he would practice their spells and unbeknownst to them —and even himself— he had already mastered techniques many of the apprentices struggled with, that is until one fateful day."

Though Peter had risen the cup to his lips it moved no further as he became very still as if the quietest sound could drown this tale for eternity, "He attempted a ritual that he did not yet fully understand, He summoned the white flame, when he returned to the temple that day they saw the power of the life-giver flowing through him." Enoch took a deep breath before he continued, "Many

of the apprentices tried to denounce him, a fluke they said, but it was clear that the life-giver had brought them an apostle —the one true wielder of the blanchèd flame, the essence of life and invigoration.”