

CHILDREN OF THE RUIN

By

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SUPER ON BLACK:

"We found ourselves upon new land. On new shores we built a new city, and birthed a new identity: Raek-Koshai, Children of the Ruin, waiting, alone and without direction, for a leader to guide us." - Minaka, *The Nature of the Emperor*

FADE OUT ALL BUT 'CHILDREN OF THE RUIN'

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Millions of faintly colored stars fade in and out of the night sky. The wind howls around the snow covered peaks of mountains rising high above a bay. Far in the distance the multi-colored lights of a city fight against the darkness of night.

EXT. OBSERVATORY - NIGHT

Near the top of a mountain, built into the stone itself, is an observatory. Figures, wrapped in fur-lined cloaks stand on a balcony, peering into rudimentary telescopes. They are not human, with their purplish skin tone and three fingered hands. They are Raek-Koshai.

INT. OBSERVATORY - NIGHT

Inside the observatory is a single circular chamber, the walls covered in bookshelves containing scrolls and leather-bound books. Tables are situated around the room in no particular design, and many are not occupied. Astronomers stand around those that are, many leafing through books, some studying faded star charts printed on large sheets of vellum, and at least one is asleep.

ASTRONOMER ONE rushes into the room from the balcony, eyes darting between the bookshelves. No one pays much attention to him. He finds what he is looking for and rushes towards a shelf on the far side of the room.

He grabs a large blue book, very old but kept in pristine condition. The cover reads "The Nature of the Emperor". He places the book down on an empty table and holds a monocle up to his eye. He begins flipping the pages, rapidly and with purpose, but taking care to be gentle. Noting the book

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he has taken out, other astronomers start to look over at him.

Eventually he stops on a page, tracing his finger along an image. He smiles and picks up the book. He heads for the balcony, walking quickly. The other astronomers share confused glances, and follow him.

EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT

Astronomer One rushes towards the edge of the balcony, and places the book down on the stone ledge. He stares up into the sky, tracing with his finger. He looks back down at the book and smiles again. He laughs.

A crowd has gathered around him. ASTRONOMER TWO pushes to the front of the crowd.

ASTRONOMER TWO  
What's going on?

Astronomer One chuckles and backs away from the book.

ASTRONOMER ONE  
(gesturing to the book)  
Look.

Astronomer Two steps forward looking down at the book. On the page is an old illustration, of a serpent bursting forth from a mountain into the sky.

ASTRONOMER ONE  
"And the serpent shall break from  
the peaks of the firmament, and you  
will know the Ascension is nigh."

All the astronomers look up to the sky, eyes settling on a single area. A sinuous line of stars erupts from a jagged area of stars arranged like mountains. Many astronomers look down at the book and then back up at the sky, and hushed conversation begins to erupt throughout the crowd.

ASTRONOMER TWO  
It is time, then.

ASTRONOMER ONE  
(laughing)  
Aye, it is time.

Many astronomers start to cheer and embrace each other. Astronomer One puts his hand on Astronomer Two's shoulder, and they both look up into the sky.

## EXT. KOSHAI - EVENING

The stars are beginning to appear above the city of Koshai, lit at this hour by the prismatic crystal lights on the street corners. Raek-Koshai, almost all dressed in fur-lined clothes, meander through the streets.

Floes of ice slowly glide along the city's many canals, and figures in ragged clothing stand along the banks of the canals, pulling sodden furniture and other wares out of the water.

Overlooking the canal is a wooden building, with light spilling out the windows. Sounds of laughter and music carry over the water.

## INT. KOSHAI - TAVERN - EVENING

The tavern is filled with people, most dressed in plain wool clothing. In the corner sit a group of soldiers, dressed in the midnight blue livery of the imperial guard. Servers in white aprons wander throughout the room, carrying trays of food and mugs of drink. One walks over to table occupied by a single person and sets it down.

ALTINAK looks over the food on the plate, some sort of fish and a mashed variety of something else. The mug is filled with a white liquid. Altinak cuts a piece of the fish and places it in his mouth. He washes it down with a drink, and a distinct look of dissatisfaction crosses his face. Nevertheless, he continues to eat.

He looks around the tavern, watching the various groups: the soldiers in the corner, drinking more than eating, swapping stories all met with bouts of laughter - the group of old men huddled close together near the door, hands wrapped tightly around their mugs, all of which have steam rising out of them - a group of women in another corner, playing some game involving dice.

Altinak continues to eat, unsatisfied with his meal and with his company. His eyes dart back to his table when the chair across from his is pulled out. A portly man, BOSCA, stands next to it.

BOSCA

Can I join you?

Altinak leans back in his chair and continues to chew his food. With his hand he gestures his acceptance, and Bosca sits down, relief in his eyes. He takes off the yellow cloth cap on his head and sets it down on the table. His eyes begin to dart around the tavern, taking it all in.

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BOSCA  
Is it always this crowded?

Altinak shrugs as he begins to twirl the knife between his fingers. Bosca looks back at Altinak, and his eyes widen at the knife twirling.

BOSCA  
Don't hurt yourself.

He chuckles as he speaks, though there is clear concern in his voice. Altinak takes his eyes off the knife and looks over at Bosca, the knife not stopping for a moment.

ALTINAK  
It is blunted. I have no fear of a dull edge.

BOSCA  
(grunting)  
I've found the blunt edge is often the one you need to watch out for.

ALTINAK  
Then you are a fool.

Bosca seems taken aback by Altinak's admonishment, and his eyes look around the tavern, glancing at everything but Altinak. Eventually he finds a SERVER, and gestures for her to come over.

BOSCA  
(pointing to Altinak's food)  
I'll have what he had.

The Server cranes her neck to look at Altinak's food and drink, and then nods, backing away from the table.

Bosca scratches at his beard and looks back over at Altinak, who is not looking at him and is still twirling the knife.

BOSCA  
You don't talk much do you?

ALTINAK  
(staring off)  
Not to people I do not know.

BOSCA  
(chuckling)  
That is easily remedied.

He reaches a hand across the table.

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BOSCA(CONT)

Bosca Troyen, grandest merchant of  
the grandest city of Boreal.

Altinak stops spinning the knife and stares at Bosca. After  
a moment he takes his hand.

ALTINAK

Altinak.

BOSCA

Just Altinak?

ALTINAK

My formal name is far too  
convoluted for your ears, I would  
not burden you with its complexity.  
Besides, to most these days, I am  
just Altinak.

Bosca stands still for a moment, considering something, and  
then shakes Altinak's hand with vigor. Altinak leans back in  
his chair.

ALTINAK

Why are you in Koshai, Bosca  
Troyen?

BOSCA

The grandest merchant of the  
grandest city must travel to all  
potential partners.

Altinak's brows narrow in confusion.

BOSCA(CONT)

Else he will no longer be the  
grandest merchant.

Altinak slowly nods.

ALTINAK

I shall take your word in this,  
Bosca Troyen. I am decidedly  
ignorant of mercantile matters.

Bosca crosses his arms and furrows his brow.

BOSCA

Yet you Raek-Koshai have a trade  
network unmatched in this world.  
You the only inhabitants of this  
damned continent to make it to the  
west...

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK

Do you suggest we are all governed  
by coin, Bosca Troyen? Is it such  
in your 'grandest city of Boreal'  
that all deal in goods as you do?

BOSCA

(uncomfortable)

I suppose not.

ALTINAK

Just so, it is the same in Koshai.

The Server arrives at the table, carrying Bosca's food and  
drink. Bosca excitedly grabs the mug, taking a large drink.  
A look of disgust comes across his eyes, and he looks into  
the mug before setting it down.

BOSCA

I thought this was wine!

ALTINAK

(smiling)

Do you see any vineyards in this  
valley?

Bosca shakes his head, but there is a smile on his face.  
Cautiously, he takes another sip, then leans back in his  
chair.

BOSCA

Thank the Auroris I'm not here for  
very long. I won't have to go too  
long with eating real food.

ALTINAK

Is this Auroris your god?

Bosca barks a single laugh.

BOSCA

Some would say so; I myself put  
little in the idea of gods.

He takes another drink.

BOSCA(CONT)

He is our leader, possessed of  
divine mandate, or so the Octanes  
say. He has power, that is for  
certain, but what I have seen of it  
has been profoundly corporeal.

Altiank nods and thinks for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK

Perhaps one day I shall visit your  
land, Bosca Troyen, and meet your  
Auroris.

Bosca gives a hearty laugh.

BOSCA

Perhaps you shall, Altinak  
with-the-unpronounceable-last-name.

Altinak smiles and rises from the table. Bosca takes a bite  
of the food.

ALTINAK

I must be going. Farewell, Bosca  
Troyen.

Bosca takes a quick drink to wash down his food, but the  
look on his face suggests that he does not find the  
combination pleasing.

Altinak takes a black pouch from his belt and withdraws two  
pieces of iron. He places them on the table, and nods to  
Bosca before departing.

EXT. KOSHAI - TAVERN - NIGHT

Rain and sleet pound the wooden awning of the tavern.  
Altinak pulls the hood of his black cloak over his head and  
wrinkles his nose. At the far end of the awning, an  
altogether funereal looking group sits around a small fire,  
passing a pipe in a circle. Bracing himself for the weather,  
Altinak steps out into the street.

EXT. KOSHAI - UNDER A BRIDGE - NIGHT

A group of figures, all dressed in black tunics embroidered  
with a silver shield stand around a body. Some write down  
notes in small leather bound books with thin sticks of  
charcoal. The figures huddle close together to get out of  
the weather, but the bridge is not big enough to cover them  
all. Two men, WATCHMAN ONE and WATCHMAN TWO stand near the  
back of the group, clearly uninterested in what is going on.

WATCHMAN ONE

Look I'm not trying to be  
insensitive, I'm just asking why  
the bastard had to go and get  
murdered when it's hailing out.

(CONTINUED)



WATCHMAN TWO  
(clearly agitated)  
I don't know, why don't you go ask  
him?

WATCHMAN ONE  
(shaking his head)  
I would, but there are too many  
people in the way.

Watchman Two shakes his head and looks away, hunched over, wrapping his arms around himself to keep warm. He straightens when he notices a group of midnight blue clad figures walking towards them.

At the head is a tall woman dressed in a midnight blue tabard over chainmail. Her light purple hair is pulled back in a ponytail.

WATCHMAN TWO  
Is that Captain Kalla?

Watchman One peers around Watchman Two and narrows his eyes.

WATCHMAN ONE  
Don't know, but it's definitely the  
Imperial Guard.

WATCHMAN TWO  
Why would the Imperial Guard be  
here?

WATCHMAN ONE  
Why are they here anyway? We don't  
even have an Emperor.

Watchman Two turns towards Watchman One, dumbfounded by his comment.

WATCHMAN TWO  
Have you not heard?

WATCHMAN ONE  
Heard what?

WATCHMAN TWO  
The serpent has broken free of the  
mountains. The days of the  
Emperor are upon us.

Watchman One opens his mouth to respond, but is interrupted by CAPTAIN KALLA.

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KALLA  
Who's in charge here?

An older, bearded man, the WATCH LEADER, steps out of the crowd.

WATCH LEADER  
I am.

Captain Kalla gestures for him to come over to her.

WATCH LEADER(CONT)  
Why are you here, Captain?

Kalla turns her head, gesturing for her soldiers to go investigate the body.

KALLA  
Who was it that died?

WATCH LEADER  
We're not sure, Captain. A merchant of some sort, by his clothes, but he had no papers, no identification of any kind.

The Imperial Guardsmen kneel down by the body, looking over it. SERGEANT YENNAT peers down at his face, then gets up.

YENNAT  
It's him, Captain.

WATCH LEADER  
It's who?

KALLA  
Not a merchant, Watch Leader. A banker, and until recently the richest man in the city.

WATCHMAN ONE  
What made him lose his money?

Everyone looks over at Watchman One, who innocently looks between them all. There is silence for a moment.

WATCHMAN TWO  
He died.

WATCHMAN ONE  
Oh... right.

Watch Leader turns back to Kalla, and the others go back to investigating.

(CONTINUED)

WATCH LEADER  
So you're telling me it's Onrik  
Fidelli? That still doesn't explain  
why you are here.

Kalla turns and looks down the canal into the city. Watch  
Leader stands at her side.

KALLA  
No doubt you've heard that the  
Ascension is almost upon us.

Watch Leader nods.

KALLA(CONT)  
We can't be sure who will rise to  
be Emperor, but Fidelli's was one  
of the names thrown about most  
often.

Kalla looks up into the sky and sighs.

KALLA(CONT)  
And as leader of the Imperial  
Guard, it is my responsibility to  
protect any who would rise to the  
Crystal Throne. Onrik Fidelli's  
death is my fault.

WATCH LEADER  
That's not fair, Captain. There is  
no way you could have known that  
this would happen.

Kalla grins, though it is almost without mirth.

KALLA  
No one living has ever done so  
during the reign of an Emperor.  
None of us knows what is going to  
happen.

Kalla glances back at the body.

KALLA(CONT)  
But I'll be damned if I let another  
candidate be killed. And that  
starts with finding out who killed  
Onrik Fidelli.

Watch Leader gives Kalla a satisfied nod, and the two of  
them head towards the body.

EXT. HIGH PASS - NIGHT

A military camp is spread out along a valley high in the mountains. Tents are ordered in neat rows. Groups of Raek-Koshai soldiers stand sit around campfires, many with drinks in hand. Large pigs roast over some of the fires.

ODHAN, a tall, broad-shouldered man sporting a black beard and Mohawk, stands before a group of young soldiers, waving his arms about wildly. He has a mug in one hand.

ODHAN

Thrice did the Jessian dogs smash  
into our flanks, and thrice did  
mighty Odhan throw them back!

Someone, LYETT, shouts from the next fire over.

LYETT

Thrice did they throw you on your  
back you mean!

The other campfire erupts in laughter, and Odhan joins them.

ODHAN

Listen there to fair Lyett,  
faithful companion to glorious  
Odhan. What would he know of great  
Odhan's back, for his own saw more  
of the Jessians than his face!

The campfire erupts in cheers and laughter. Odhan looks into the mug in his hand. He looks up startled.

ODHAN

(to the women)

Magnificent Odhan must be off for a  
moment, but fear not, for he shall  
return.

He stands up.

ODHAN(CONT)

(to the other fire)

Ardent companions, heroic Odhan's  
mug has run dry. Come, to the kegs!

Cheering, the soldiers around the other fire all stand and follow Odhan. Two figures stand next to a tent and watch them go, AVAUNT AND MARETZ.

Maretz, short, wrapped in a white fur cloak, runs a hand through her hair as she smiles at her soldiers.

(CONTINUED)

AVAUNT

The men grow reckless, Commander.  
I'm worried they might break  
something.

MARETZ

Oh, Commander? I like to think we  
know each other better than that.  
But if you insist. They just won a  
great victory, Lieutenant. Let them  
have their fun while their outside  
the city, where it doesn't matter  
if they break things.

Avaunt smiles, a little sheepishly.

AVAUNT

Sorry, sir. You're right, as usual.

Avaunt wraps his arms around himself. Maretz turns around  
and puts a hand on his shoulder.

MARETZ

Come on.

AVAUNT

Where to?

MARETZ

To get you warm.

They walk through a row of tents, eventually arriving at one  
that his much bigger than the rest. Two guards, in full  
armor, holding spears in hand with crossbows at their back  
stand outside the entrance. They nod at Maretz as the they  
walk into the tent. She nods back.

INT. MARETZ'S TENT - NIGHT

A large brazier sits at the center of the tent, surrounded  
by a circle of large, multicolored pillows. The floor is  
covered in various blankets and rugs.

Maretz takes off her fur cloak and drops it on top of a  
chest. She grabs a small, wrapped stick of something from a  
container next to a pillow and sits down. Avaunt sits a few  
feet away from her.

She gestures towards Avaunt with the stick, as if to ask if  
he wants it. He shakes his head, to which she nods. Leaning  
forward, she sticks on end into the fire, and inhales from  
the other. A wisp of faint blue smoke rushes out off her  
mouth. She sighs.

(CONTINUED)

MARETZ

How long have you been my personal guard? Two years?

AVAUNT

Almost exactly.

MARETZ

And I just now realize I know nothing of your family. You know all about mine, it's history is writ all along the bloody path I walked to get here. But as far as I know, you just appeared at the barracks one day, without coming from anywhere.

Avaunt laughs.

AVAUNT

I assure you, I came from somewhere.

MARETZ

Tell me about them, your parents.

AVAUNT

(after a moment)

Dead. Both of them.

MARETZ

Oh. I'm sorry for asking.

AVAUNT

No, it's fine. It's been long enough for it to heal. My mother I hardly remember now, she died when I was young, giving birth to my two youngest brothers.

MARETZ

And your father?

AVAUNT

Technically is most likely still alive, unless something has changed since we last left Koshai. But as far as I care he's been dead for five years.

Maretz lets out another stream of smoke.

(CONTINUED)

MARETZ  
What happened?

AVAUNT  
He came home alone.

MARETZ  
I don't follow.

AVAUNT  
He was a merchant, or as he put it  
an 'adventurer'. That meant he  
wasn't around much as it was. But  
five years ago he went south to  
trade with the Gralt Narak. And he  
took my two youngest brothers with  
him.

Avaunt pauses, taking a deep breath. Maretz moves closer to him.

AVAUNT(CONT)  
And when he returned he was alone.  
He claimed they'd wanted to stay,  
as guests in the court of the  
Narakhan.

Avaunt chuckles darkly. Maretz moves closer.

AVAUNT(CONT)  
If you ask me they were probably  
cremated on a pyre of their own  
bones.

Maretz arrives next to Avaunt. Without looking he puts his arm around her shoulders.

MARETZ  
I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked.

AVAUNT  
It's fine, really.

Avaunt wipes away a tear.

AVAUNT(CONT)  
We're soldiers. We're supposed to  
be able to deal with this stuff.

Maretz throws the end of her stick into the fire and puts her head on his shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

MARETZ

So that's it then? Your whole family?

AVAUNT

No, I have another brother, who is still very much alive. We don't talk much, but that's mostly due to his nature.

MARETZ

What's he do?

AVAUNT

(chuckling)

I'm not even sure he knows.

MARETZ

What's his name?

AVAUNT

Altinak.

MARETZ

Altinak... I'd like to meet him someday.

AVAUNT

You might not enjoy it. He doesn't talk very much.

MARETZ

Even so.

They both stare into the fire. Avaunt smiles.

AVAUNT

Even so.

EXT. KOSHAI - THE MASTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Altinak turns down an alleyway lit only by a deep purple gas lamp that has run dangerously low. He hunches his shoulders and pulls his hood tighter around his head as the rain and sleet begins to fall harder. Up ahead are a group of four figures standing outside a solid wooden door with an iron lock. All are dressed in black cloaks like Altinak's.

BARRUS, taller and wider than the others, leans against a wall, battling against the weather to light a pipe. He has a dagger and a small axe strapped to his belt. He favors his right leg. As Altinak approaches he glances towards him, and then goes back to his pipe.

(CONTINUED)



OLOVON squats a few feet away, drawing symbols in the dirt with his dagger. He is not very imposing, physically, but his eyes are always wide and he fidgets every now and then. In a instant his dagger flicks from the symbol he is drawing and stabs a beetle. He brings it up to his face for a moment, studies it intently, then plucks it off. After studying it some more he flicks it down the alley and resumes drawing. He seems oblivious to Altinak's arrival.

NANETE sits on top of a barrel oiling the blade of her sword. Her hood is down, her shaved, tattooed head being pelted by rain and sleet, but she doesn't seem to care. She nods at Altinak when he walks up.

The fourth, VIERIN, leans against a wall, arms crossed, her back turned towards Altinak. She turns as Altinak walks by, brushing against her arm.

BARRUS

Now we just have to wait for the door.

They all look between each other, except for Olovon, who continues drawing, and is now humming to himself.

Further down the alley another door opens, a six figures in blue hats and capes walk out. One BLUE HAT waves to Altinak and the rest. None of them wave back. Olovon jumps up into the air and throws his dagger towards the Blue Hat. It clatters a few feet short of him, and the Blue Hats simply laugh and walk away.

Just then, the door opens. ATTENDANT, short, fat, and bald, stands in the doorway with hands clasped behind is back.

ATTENDANT

The Master will see you now.

Barrus pushes away from the wall and is the first one into through the door. Nanete sheathes her sword on her back and follows after him. Olovon follows, his eyes darting down the alley before he enters. Altinak stands still, waiting for Vierin to go first. Before she does, she turns to him.

VIERIN

Where were you?

ALTINAK

(shrugging)

Around. Eating, drinking, talking.  
You know how it is.

(CONTINUED)

VIERIN

Why do you always do that?

ALTINAK

Do what?

VIERIN

Avoid answering me when I ask where you were? It makes me think you've got something to hide.

ALTINAK

I'm perfectly willing to tell you all about it, but not now. Not with everyone around.

She shakes her head, but she has a grin on her face. She turns around and heads into the building. Altinak follows.

INT. KOSHAI - THE MASTER'S HOUSE - ANTECHAMBER - NIGHT

Inside the door is a circular chamber, with a floor of black marble and four pillars to match. Torches illuminate the room, reflecting off a stream of water that flows around the outside of the room amidst marble statues of various creatures in horrific poses.

Across from the entrance is another door much like the one to the outside, and the Attendant stands by it. Barrus, Olovon, and Nanete stand by the door, waiting for Vierin and Altinak to catch up.

ATTENDANT

This way please.

He pulls down on one of the torches and a section of the far wall moves, repositioning the door. When it settles he goes and pulls it open. He gestures for them to go in. They do.

INT. KOSHAI - THE MASTER'S HOUSE - MAIN CHAMBER - NIGHT

The side walls are lined with bookshelves and the far wall has a large map of the city. There are more torches, making it better lit than the other room.

At the center of the room is a large wooden desk, five empty chairs on one side, one of the other, which is occupied. THE MASTER's skin is a pale grey, as is his hair. He wears a purple robe and holds a silver goblet in his hand. On his desk is an hourglass, still mostly full on top. Olovon looks at it intently.

(CONTINUED)

## THE MASTER

A gift from a friend among the  
Gralt Narak. They say that when all  
the sand reaches the bottom  
something will occur. Something  
terrible.

Olovon looks up at him. With a nonchalant nudge The Master  
knocks the hourglass off the table. It smashes on the  
ground. Olovon jumps back.

## THE MASTER(CONT)

Superstitious nonsense of course,  
but what can you expect from the  
Gralt Narak? I'm not even sure  
where they got such a thing.

Olovon looks around the room before sitting in the chair on  
the far left. Nanete sits next to him, Barrus next to her in  
the middle. Vierin takes the next, and Altinak the last,  
scooting it back just a bit, looking uncomfortably at the  
broken hourglass.

## THE MASTER

(without looking at him)

Do I frighten you, Altinak?

The others turn towards Altinak, who looks back at them, one  
by one. The Master chuckles before taking a sip from his  
goblet.

## THE MASTER(CONT)

No matter, we're not here to  
discuss apprehensions or  
hourglasses, are we? No, you're all  
here because I have a job for you.

He takes another drink.

## THE MASTER(CONT)

For convenience sake, you may call  
me The Master.

Barrus leans back in his chair and crosses his arms.

## BARRUS

Customary price is five hundred  
silver, half--

## THE MASTER

Half now, and half when the job is  
done, I know, I know. You see, I  
have no silver.

(CONTINUED)

NANETE

What?! What about that goblet?

THE MASTER

This goblet is very valuable. An artifact from a bygone age, and worth more than every contract you have ever taken.

He reaches down beneath the desk.

THE MASTER(CONT)

The point is that I don't have silver to pay you, but I do have these.

He places a leather pouch on the desk and gestures for one of them to open it. Nanete moves forward and dumps the contents onto the table. Dozens of prismatic gems fall into a pile.

BARRUS

These look like the gems we use to light the city.

THE MASTER

Which made them that much easier to get into the city. Had the City Watch any idea their real value, why, I doubt they'd have been able to keep their hands off.

BARRUS

So we take these to a jeweler and we get our silver?

THE MASTER

In Koshai?

He scoffs.

THE MASTER(CONT)

I wouldn't dare try. It takes a discerning mind to see their worth, and I have yet to meet a jeweler in this city who possess such a mind.

He takes another drink.

THE MASTER(CONT)

No, take them away from here, if possible to the human kingdoms to the west. You'll get a fair price there.

(CONTINUED)

BARRUS

And just how much are they worth?

THE MASTER

To my eye, priceless. To the most discerning jeweler, five thousand gold pieces.

The five of them share a look of shock. It is a moment before Olovon responds.

OLOVON

(fidgeting)

Five thousand gold pieces. Mister Master must want someone important killed.

The Master swirls his goblet and takes another drink, all with a small grin on his face.

THE MASTER

Indeed.

Nanete sits forward, slamming her fist onto the handle of her chair.

NANETE

Get on with it, or maybe I'll take your tongue. That ought to cover the customary fee.

The Master is unfazed by her outburst.

THE MASTER

The portents and the priests say that the days of the Emperor are almost upon us. They say it is the dawning of a new age of prosperity, a return to the glory of the days before the ruin.

He intertwines his fingers.

THE MASTER(CONT)

There are those who believe that we do not need an Emperor. We have existed on our own for millennia now, why must we put our faith in a foolishly mythologized figure, is what they say.

Altinak and Vierin share a look of confusion.

(CONTINUED)

THE MASTER(CONT)

As you may imagine, that is a rather unpopular viewpoint these days, and many who hold it do so in secret. There is a good deal of money behind these people, enough to make a difference. And with that money they come to me, and I come to you. For your unique talents.

ALTINAK

(muttering)

Not so unique.

THE MASTER

Maybe so, but not everyone can do it in the manner that you do.

NANETE

Get to the point!

THE MASTER

For the benefit of our impatient friend, I'll say it plain. There are those who do not wish the ascension of the Emperor to happen, and they have payed a great deal of money to make it so. As one of the most well established and successful guilds of your kind in the city, I'm offering you a contract to kill an Imperial candidate.

All five sigh in unison, sharing a look of concern.

VIERIN

That's no easy task, especially now that the Imperial Guard has been reformed.

THE MASTER

Which is why I'm offering the contract to professionals and not cutpurses and the other dregs who wander the city at night.

BARRUS

No, we can't do this. It's too much.

( CONTINUED )

NANETE

But we need the gems. We're almost out of funds as it is.

Barrus gives her a sharp look.

BARRUS

Maybe so, but what little we have left isn't any use to us if we're dead. The stories say the Imperial Guard is ruthless.

THE MASTER

If I may interject, the Imperial Guard won't pose too much of a threat to you.

BARRUS

And why is that?

THE MASTER

Well, because your target is not in the city.

Barrus looks confused.

BARRUS

Who is it?

The Master reaches for a rolled up scroll and hands it across the table to Barrus. With a glance at the other assassins, he unrolls it.

His eyes scan the words quickly, reading in silence until he gets to the end. Then he erupts in laughter.

BARRUS

(throwing the scroll onto the desk)

You're out of your fucking mind.

VIERIN

What? Who is it?

She goes to grab the scroll.

BARRUS

(still laughing)

Sure, we might not have to do deal with the Imperial Guard. We just have to get through the entire army.

(CONTINUED)

NANETE

What?!

VIERIN

Oh gods. Oh gods. You can't really expect us to kill her, can you?

THE MASTER

If you are not up to the task, I have plenty of other organizations in mind that are.

ALTINAK

No! No, we'll do it.

BARRUS

You don't even know who it is.

ALTINAK

There's only one person it could be, given all the evidence.

NANETE

Who?!

OLOVON

(not fidgeting)  
Commander Maretz.

BARRUS

Leader of the entire fucking military.

Whatever Nanete was going to say dies in her throat. She looks at all of the them in turn, settling on Altinak. Finally they all look at The Master, who gestures towards the pile of gems.

INT. KOSHAI - BARRUS' HOUSE - UPPER ROOM - NIGHT

The bag of gems sits in the middle of a wooden table. Olovon sits in a chair fiddling with a few of the gems. Barrus looks out the window over the city. Nanete paces about the small room. Altinak and Vierin sit on top of the bed. Vierin is holding his hand, but he doesn't look like he cares very much.

NANETE

This is ridiculous. How are we supposed to kill Commander Maretz?

(CONTINUED)



OLOVON

The army won't be back for a week at the least. We've plenty of time to prepare.

BARRUS

No, that's not good enough. We want to do it before they get back. If she's in the city, we'll have to deal with the Imperial Guard.

Olovon sighs and then nods, going back to tinkering with the gems.

BARRUS(CONT)

We have to send people to the military camp. New recruits or something.

Nanete and Vierin nod. Altinak doesn't do anything and Olovon acts as if he didn't hear.

VIERIN

But who should go?

NANETE

What about you and Altinak? They say lovers have a higher chance of success than simple friends.

ALTINAK

No.

Nanete stops pacing and Barrus turns from the window. Vierin looks down at the ground. Even Olovon looks over.

NANETE

And why not?

ALTINAK

My brother is her personal guard. I'd be recognized instantly.

BARRUS

He's right. That won't work. I'm too old, and this leg isn't making anything easy. I guess that leaves you and Olovon.

NANETE

(not happy)

What about Vierin? She won't be recognized.

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK

No. She stays here.

NANETE

That's not up to you.

BARRUS

Nanete, stop. You'll go with Olovon. Now we just have to figure out who you are that would land you in the army on their way back.

Nanete throws up her arms and walks towards the far wall. Olovon watches her as he goes, all while chewing on one of the gems.

INT. KOSHAI - KALLA'S OFFICE - DAY

Captain Kalla sits behind her desk, rummaging through papers and, occasionally dipping a feather pen into an inkwell to sign something.

Near the ceiling is a small window, the only source of light in the room. It is raining lightly outside, but many pairs of feet shuffle past the window.

There is a knock at the door.

KALLA

(without looking up)

Come in.

The door opens and Sergeant Yennat walks in, carrying a large leather-bound book in her arms.

KALLA(CON'T)

What is it, sergeant?

YENNAT

I went down to the hall of records like you asked, but they told me I couldn't take out the pages referring to Imperial candidates.

She holds up the book.

YENNAT(CONT)

So I took the whole thing.

Kalla looks up at Yennat and raises her eyebrows. After a moment, she gestures for her to put it on the table.

(CONTINUED)

YENNAT(CONT)  
(putting it down)  
Page three forty, sir.

Kalla nods and opens the book, first in large chunks, then smaller as she gets closer to her destination. Upon arriving, she begins scanning the page, running a finger along the words.

KALLA  
Gotta hand it to the record  
keepers, they understand  
expedience.

She chuckles at an entry.

KALLA(CONT)  
Ha! Seems fifteen people want me to  
be Emperor.

YENNAT  
Very good, sir.

KALLA  
Then there's my sister, with seven  
thousand. Probably compensating for  
being younger.

YENNAT  
The Commander has made many allies  
along her meteoric rise.

KALLA  
It would seem so.

She continues scanning the top names.

KALLA(CONT)  
Onrik Fidelli, four thousand...

She pauses at one.

KALLA(CONT)  
Five thousand for Predicant Jennet?

YENNAT  
The priest has many followers.

KALLA  
Which makes him noteworthy, which  
makes him a target. He's got the  
second most after Maretz, and she's  
not in the city.

(CONTINUED)

Kalla closes the book and rises from the desk.

KALLA

I think we should pay him a visit.

Yennat nods and opens the door. Kalla pulls a thick wool cloak over her shoulders and heads out the door. Yennat follows.

INT. KOSHAI - TEMPLE - DAY

The inside of the temple is a large round room, with a floor of white marble. Four white pillars extend to the lofty ceiling, with long windows between. A fountain sits in the middle of the room, spilling out into a ring circling the chamber. There are marble statues of figures in merriment around the room.

A collection of haggard looking BEGGARS surround one pillar, eating from small wooden bowls. PREDICANT JENNET walks between them, placing white blankets around their shoulders. His head is shaved and he has a short greying purple beard. His white robes are dirtied around the bottom.

Kalla and Yennat enter the temple. Yennat goes off to light a gem in prayer. Kalla heads straight for JenNET.

KALLA

Grubbing up votes?

JENNET

(without looking)

If that were the case, Captain, I would think you should be the one doing it.

KALLA

I have no aspirations of being  
Imperator, priest.

JENNET

(without looking)

Nor do I. I simply wish to help.  
They need food, warmth. These  
things through me the gods can  
provide.

KALLA

If you say so.

He looks up at her.

(CONTINUED)

JENNET

You can hate my motives, Captain,  
but do not hate my methods.

Yennat walks over with a glowing gem around her neck.

JENNET

May the gods grant your wish,  
child.

YENNAT

Thank you, Father.

Jennet places the last blanket and stands up. He rubs his  
coarse hands together and turns toward Kalla and Yennat.

JENNET

I assume you have a reason for  
coming here beyond debating ethics,  
Captain.

KALLA

Indeed. You may not want to be  
Imperator, Jennet, but five  
thousand people want you to be.

JENNET

That means nothing as long as your  
sister is around.

KALLA

Even so, Onrik Fidelli was murdered  
a few days ago. He too was a  
forerunner in the ascension. I have  
reason to believe that your life is  
in danger.

Jennet doesn't look concerned.

JENNET

The gods will protect me.

KALLA

Well, in the event of their  
failure, I'd like to offer you my  
protection.

JENNET

I don't want it.

KALLA

I don't like this either. But I've  
already lost one candidate, and  
I'll not lose another.

(CONTINUED)

JENNET

If the gods deem it my time, than I shall gladly await it, no matter the cause.

Kalla raises a hand to her forehead. Yennat has gone to speak with some of the beggars.

KALLA

Damnit, priest. Maybe I should let you die. You know, I didn't spend years in the pass fighting Jessian heretics so I could let you lead this civilization into damnation.

JENNET

And I have no wish to do so. I wish only to bring the light of the gods to as many as possible, and damning a civilization would prevent me from doing that.

KALLA

(muttering)

I see no difference between the two.

JENNET

Never mind what you see, Captain. You don't see me aggressively berating your beliefs do you?

KALLA

Will you accept my protection or not?

JENNET

Since I believe you will not leave until I do, I accept. On the condition that I may remain in the temple and continue about my duties.

Kalla sighs and thinks for a moment.

KALLA

Fine. Yennat, go get the rest of the guard. We'll find someplace around here to use as a base.

JENNET

There is an abandoned warehouse across the the street. I use it

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JENNET (cont'd)  
sometimes for large sermons, but I  
can manage without it for a time.

KALLA  
Thank you, that should do.

She heads for the door.

JENNET  
Oh, and Captain...

KALLA  
(without turning around)  
What?

JENNET  
Know that the gods watch over you  
in your endeavor.

Kalla opens the door and walks out at the word 'gods'.  
Jennet chuckles and leans down to take an empty bowl from  
one of the beggars.

EXT. HIGH PASS - MORNING

The military camp looks much the same as it did before. A  
light snow falls over the tents. There is a gathering of  
soldiers near one of the fields.

SUPER: A FEW DAYS LATER

EXT. ARCHERY RANGE - ONLOOKERS - MORNING

Soldiers line up behind a rope, most carrying bows with  
quivers strapped to their waists. A crowd of onlookers  
watches from along the side. At the far end of the field are  
a row of targets.

Avaunt stands with the onlookers, though somewhat apart from  
them. He holds a book, and writes down the names of the  
soldiers as they take turns shooting. Cheers and jeers from  
the onlookers accompany the shots.

MARETZ(O.S)  
Have I missed anything?

Avaunt jumps and almost drops the book.

(CONTINUED)

AVAUNT

Uh, no sir, uh Commander. No,  
nothing at all.

Maretz chuckles and brushes snow out of her hair.

AVAUNT(CONT)

If I may, Commander, where have you  
been? The sun is almost halfway  
through the sky.

MARETZ

The same place I was when you left.  
Asleep.

AVAUNT

I've never known you to be a heavy  
sleeper. You always woke before me  
on the campaign.

MARETZ

And it so pained me every time, but  
when the war was on, it was  
necessary. But now we're going  
home, and I can sleep for as long  
as I please.

A loud cheer erupts from the crowd, and Odhan's voice can be  
heard over it.

ODHAN(O.S)

Witness great Odhan's prowess in  
all things. Not once, but twice did  
marvelous Odhan split his own arrow  
with another!

EXT. ARCHERY RANGE - SOLDIERS - MORNING

Nanette and Olovon stand in line, bows in hand. They stand  
somewhat apart from the other soldiers who have gone to  
congratulate Odhan.

NANETE

Who is that guy?

OLOVON

I believe that is the great and  
marvelous Odhan, or so I recall  
being told.

(CONTINUED)



NANETE

Well, he looks and sounds  
ridiculous.

OLOVON

You better get ready, it's almost  
your turn.

The celebration has died down, and the next ARCHER fires.  
His arrow hits the edge of the target. He walks away  
somewhat dejected.

Nanete walks up and nocks an arrow. She takes aim and fires.  
The arrow lands well short of the target. The onlookers  
erupt in laughter. Nanete looks like she wants to fight them  
all, but Olovon pulls her back.

OLOVON

I must say, now I know why Altinak  
is the archer of the group.

Now Nanete looks like she want to kill only him. He quickly  
scurries away towards the line, where he gets ready to shoot  
his own arrow. He lines up to shoot at the furthest right  
target. At the last moment he pushes his bow a little to the  
right.

EXT. ARCHERY RANGE - ONLOOKERS - MORNING

The arrow lands a few feet to the left of Maretz. She does  
not look particularly concerned about it. Avaunt runs up to  
the line and squints down at the archers.

AVAUNT

Who was that?! They should be beat,  
or, or imprisoned or something.

MARETZ

(putting a hand on his  
shoulder)

I doubt they meant to aim for us.  
Probably just a gust of wind.

AVAUNT

I didn't feel any wind.

MARETZ

Even so, you're overreacting.

AVAUNT

It's my job.

(CONTINUED)

MARETZ

Then you're relieved of that duty.  
I'll just have to count on you  
guarding me out of the goodness of  
your heart.

Avaunt turns around, looking confused and hurt.

AVAUNT

What? Really?

MARETZ

Whatever it takes for you to stop  
being so serious all the time.

She leans up and kisses him.

MARETZ (CONT)

Now, I think it's time for  
breakfast.

AVAUNT

It's midday.

MARETZ

Lunch then!

She grabs his hand and leads him off into the camp.

EXT. MILITARY CAMP - AFTERNOON

Nanete wanders through the tents, intensely looking for  
something. Her hands are clenched into fists.

NANETE

Damnit, Olovon, where are you?

Nanete rounds a corner and find Olovon sitting on top of a  
crate, peering over the top at the cookfire in the clearing.  
Nanete watches as Maretz hungrily attacks a turkey leg.  
Avaunt goes about his much more slowly.

NANETE

There you are. Are you an idiot?  
You could have gotten us both  
killed.

OLOVON

I had to see the nature of the  
Commander.

(CONTINUED)

NANETE

What? So that was all a test?

OLOVON

Indeed.

NANETE

Well what did you learn?

OLOVON

Well, I'm not sure. She was unfazed by the arrow, suggesting a fair amount of resolve, which I suppose is to be expected.

NANETE

Seems pretty straightforward to me.

OLOVON

But look at her now. She seems so carefree, entirely unlike what I was expecting.

NANETE

She's only twenty two, she can't be expected to bear all her responsibilities with dignity.

OLOVON

Maybe so, but it makes her unpredictable. And that makes our job harder.

Nanete sits down next to him, watching Maretz eat lunch.

NANETE

There has to be something that she does predictably.

OLOVON

Of course, and I think it lies with her guard.

NANETE

Altinak's brother, right?

She leans closer.

NANETE (CONT)

I suppose I can see a resemblance. What about him?

(CONTINUED)

OLOVON

Well it seems that there is more to them than guard and guarded.

NANETE

So if we can get to him, we can get to her.

OLOVON

Something like that.

NANETE

Right...How are we gonna do that?

OLOVON

No idea.

NANETE

Great.

EXT. KOSHAI - CITY SQUARE - DAY

Altinak, Vierin, and Barrus stand on the edge of a large city square. At the far end is a large gate, the main entrance through the city's walls. There are stalls set up in a circle near the center of the square, and a large mass of CUSTOMERS mingle with the SHOPKEEPERS. HAWKERS move about through the crowd, attempting to sell their wares as well.

Barrus leans forward, holding a hand along his brow to block the sun as he scans the square. Vierin looks about the rooftops. Altinak, arms crossed, leans against the wall of a shop.

ALTINAK

This is pointless. The whole idea was to kill her before she got back to the city.

BARRUS

(still scanning the crowd)  
Will you stop whining? We have to prepare for everything.

VIERIN

There seem to be a lot of openings on the rooftops where we could set up, but that also presents a problem.

(CONTINUED)

BARRUS  
And what's that?

Vierin goes to respond, but Altinak gets there first.

ALTINAK  
Clear line of sight to Maretz means  
she's got the same to us. I can get  
the shot off easily, but it would  
take a miracle for me to get out  
alive.

BARRUS  
Alright, so no rooftops.

He continues to look around the square. Vierin glances at Altinak, who is not looking at her. He leans forward, walking up to the street corner. He points at a building.

ALTINAK  
What about the clocktower?

VIERIN  
Too far away. You can't make that  
shot.

ALTINAK  
I can.

Vierin looks at Altinak, eyebrows raised. Barrus looks between the two of them, and then turns to the clocktower.

BARRUS  
It's worth checking out.

The three of them depart from the street and head towards the clocktower.

EXT. CLOCKTOWER - DAY

The top of the clocktower is open to the air, with a balcony running along the entire perimeter. Inside, and visible from the balcony, is a mess of gears and metal, rising and falling, twisting and turning. Some parts let out steam. Down below WORKERS tend to parts that have been taken down, turning nozzles and bolts with simple wrenches.

Altinak, Vierin, and Barrus stand on the balcony, looking down onto the square. The wall of mountains protecting the city from the south rises up. The day is clear, and far off peaks can be seen dominating the horizon.

(CONTINUED)

Wind whips over the tower, blowing hair and clothes around.  
Altinak points down into the square, close to the gate.

ALTINAK  
See, not far at all.

VIERIN  
You aren't accounting for the wind.

She wraps her arms tighter around her body as the wind blows harder.

VIERIN(CON'T)  
Even if you could do it from the distance, there's no way you'd be able to compensate for the gusts. The bolt would be lost somewhere over there.

She gestures briefly in the direction of the mass of houses to the right of the square.

BARRUS  
I'm inclined to agree with her, Altinak.

He turns to look at Altinak.

BARRUS(CON'T)  
I have the utmost faith in your abilities, but this is impossible.

Altinak moves away from them and stands next to the railing. He looks out into the mountains.

ALTINAK  
Do you think I've forgotten about the wind? I know how to shoot a crossbow, and I'm telling you, I can do this.

He turns back towards them.

ALTINAK(CON'T)  
But it won't come to that. Assuming Nanete and Olovon do their job.

BARRUS  
Like I said in the square, we have to be prepared for everything. If you're so sure you can do this than so be it, I trust you.

(CONTINUED)

VIERIN

I don't. If you're so sure, then  
why don't you show us?

ALTINAK

What, here? Now? Vi, there are  
hundreds of people down there. And  
I don't have my bow.

VIERIN

Obviously not here. We'll go down  
to the docks. You can get your bow  
on the way there.

ALTINAK

I don't...I still don't think this  
is a very good idea.

BARRUS

I'll leave this between you two.

He hobbles off towards the stairs leading out of the  
clocktower.

VIERIN

Come on.

ALTINAK

I just...

VIERIN

Altinak, stop. Let's go.

ALTINAK

Fine.

They head after Barrus.

EXT. KOSHAI - DOCKS - AFTERNOON

Altinak and Vierin meander through the docks. Altinak is  
carrying a large black case. Shirtless DOCKHANDS walk  
around, carrying cargo to and from ships, tying and untying  
ropes mooring ships to the port. At the other end of the  
dock are much bigger ships, and figures in brightly colored  
clothes walk about.

Altinak and Vierin walk down to the end of the dock, where  
no ships are moored. Out in the water is a buoy, about the  
size of a person, bouncing back a forth in the waves.

(CONTINUED)

VIERIN  
(looking out at the buoy)  
That looks to be about the  
distance.

She points at the buoy.

VIERIN(CON'T)  
Shoot it.

Altinak looks around him, making sure that they are alone. They are, the only people nearby being a group of DOCKHANDS walking away from them. With a sigh he sets down the case on a crate and opens it.

He pulls out the body of his crossbow, more sophisticated than would be expected of this technology level. It has a slender metal body, and rather than arching out to the sides the bow itself is upright, string pulling back to a locking mechanism somewhere within the metal.

He fastens a rudimentary scope to the back and looks through it. He wipes off the lenses with the wrist of his shirt. Finally he attaches a small propeller to the side of the body. As the wind blows past them, the propeller begins to spin faster.

He moves towards the edge of the dock and loads a bolt into the front of the crossbow. The string is pulled back as the bolt is pushed in, making a soft click when it locks. He pulls out two legs from the front of the body and sets the bow on the ground. He lies down next to it, pulling his eye up to the scope. He adjusts the bows angle. He peers back and looks at the propeller, and adjusts the bow again, this time more drastically.

He looks back through the scope and makes a small adjustment. He slows his breathing and steadies his hand. He fires. The bolt strikes the base of the buoy. He looks up, squinting at the buoy. Then he turns around, a smile on his face.

ALTINAK  
See, I told you.

VIERIN  
You almost missed.

ALTINAK  
I almost missed breakfast this morning, but that didn't stop me from eating it anyway.

(CONTINUED)



Vierin gives him a 'that didn't make any sense look' and shakes her head. She looks away from him.

ALTINAK(CON'T)

Look I'm not saying it's easy. And  
is there a chance I'll miss,  
absolutely.

He moves forward, putting a hand on her shoulder.

ALTINAK(CON'T)

But I've gotta try.

VIERIN

This isn't something you can just  
brush off if it doesn't work! This  
isn't some minor aristocrat your  
killing, it's probably the most  
powerful Raek-Koshai in the whole  
world. If you mess up, there's no  
going back.

ALTINAK

It's just a job, Vi. Same as any  
other.

VIERIN

Is it? Whether you succeed or fail  
could very well determine the fate  
of this city, of us as a  
civilization. It's not a simple  
'off someone, get paid, and go  
home' deal this time.

She looks over at him.

VIERIN(CON'T)

Well maybe for you it is.  
Everything is, isn't it?

ALTINAK

What are you saying?

VIERIN

I just...Whether it works or not,  
people are going to be after you.  
If you do it, who knows what kind  
of place this city will become. If  
you fail, you'll have the entire  
imperial guard after you. I'm just  
worried about you.

She turns towards him and wraps her arms around him.

(CONTINUED)

VIERIN(CON'T)  
Just please don't leave me alone in  
this new world, which ever way it  
turns out.

Altinak returns the embrace.

ALTINAK  
Well none of this matters as long  
as Nanete and Olovon do their job.

VIERIN  
I know, just be careful.

INT. KOSHAI - WAREHOUSE ACROSS FROM TEMPLE - DAY

Kalla looks out a window. It is raining, but still Jennet  
walks through a ragged crowd gathered on the stairs of the  
temple, touching foreheads and giving out blessings.

Yennat walks up beside Kalla and peers out the window.

YENNAT  
He's not making this easy is he?

Kalla shakes her head.

KALLA  
Sometimes I think he's doing it on  
purpose just to spite me.

Jennet looks up from the stairs at stares straight at Kalla.  
He waves and goes back to what he was doing.

Yennat goes towards the door.

KALLA(CON'T)  
Where are you going?

YENNAT  
Any one of those people could be  
trying to kill him. Someone needs  
to tell him, and I think he'd  
rather it not be you.

KALLA  
True enough.

Yennat opens the door and walks out. Kalla turns away from  
the window and heads for a table a few feet away. On it is a  
large map of the interior of the temple. Access points are  
marked in red.

(CONTINUED)

Imperial Guards wander throughout the warehouse, carrying papers and talking amongst themselves. Many wait around the edges, honing weapons or cleaning armor.

Kalla looks down at the map, running her fingers along the marked access points. Her finger stops at one point and she leans closer to the map.

KALLA

Damnit!

She turns back towards the Imperial Guards, many of whom are watching her now.

KALLA(CON'T)

You two, with me. Looks like  
someone forgot about some windows.

The two GUARDSMAN nod and strap their swords to their sides. Kalla exits the warehouse, and they follow.

EXT. KOSHAI - STREET - DAY

Kalla and the Guards walk towards the temple. Jennet gives them a nod as they pass. Kalla ignores them. As she opens the door, Yennat walks up behind her.

YENNAT

Captain, what is it?

KALLA

Someone forgot about some new  
windows at the back of the temple.  
I'm going to make sure it's secure.

YENNAT

Damnit. Alright, I'll stay here and  
make sure the Predicant is safe.

Kalla nods and enters the temple.

INT. KOSHAI - TEMPLE - DAY

Priests walk about the temple, while others kneel and pray throughout. Groups of Imperial Guards stand around the entrances and windows. Kalla and the guards walk towards the back of the temple. As they get close the sound of wind is heard.

(CONTINUED)

The windows are high up, but there is a ladder running along some scaffolding leading up to a platform just under the windows. There is a small pool of water at the base of the ladder.

Kalla steps in the pool and looks up at the window. Rain falls in to the temple trough the opening. She climbs the ladder.

She looks out the windows, not seeing anything suspicious. The guards walk around the scaffolding, searching for clues.

KALLA  
See anything?

GUARD ONE  
Nothing, Captain.

Kalla nods.

KALLA  
All clear up here, too. You two  
stay here, and make sure it stays  
that way.

She moves away from the window and heads towards the ladder. Just before descending she notices a wet footprint on the wood. She leans closer to examine it. Stopping for a moment, she takes off her boot and compares the print. It's not hers.

KALLA(CON'T)  
Shit.

GUARD ONE  
What?

KALLA  
Someone came through here not too  
long ago.

She climbs down the ladder. A scream echoes throughout the hall, and a cloud of blue smoke is forming near the main entrance.

KALLA  
Damnit! You two, gather the others  
and meet me at the gate.

GUARD ONE  
Aye, Captain.

(CONTINUED)

Kalla draws her sword and rushes towards the main entrance. The body of a priest lies against the wall, his neck slit, blood running down his white robe. The sounds of struggle fill the hall. An ASSASSIN in a blue cloak bursts through the smoke and rushes towards Kalla, shortsword raised. Without much thought she arcs down her longsword and stops his movement. For good.

She pushes through the smoke, coughing. She raises her free hand and covers her mouth and nose.

The main gate is open, and she bursts outside as she leaves the smoke.

EXT. KOSHAI - STREET - DAY

The ragged crowd has dispersed, though two have been left behind, writhing on the steps. Jennet stands over them, seeing to their wounds. Three blue-cloaked assassins lay dead on the steps as well. Yennat sits away from everything else, her face resting in her hand. More Imperial Guardsman are rushing out of the warehouse, making a perimeter around Jennet.

Kalla rushes over to him.

KALLA  
Are you alright?!

JENNET  
I'm unharmed, your sergeant saw to that.

Kalla looks over at Yennat, who is still staring at the ground through her hand. She turns towards the assembled GUARDS.

KALLA  
Maintain a perimeter around the Predicant. You, you, and you, go into the temple and make sure none of the bastards are left.

The three she pointed to nod and head out, the others filling the gaps in the perimeter. Kalla goes over to Yennat. The sergeant looks up, and begins to stand. Kalla puts a hand on her shoulder.

KALLA  
Stay.

Yennat leans back, and looks back up at Kalla, who sits down next to her. Kalla looks up into the rain.

(CONTINUED)

KALLA  
What happened?

YENNAT  
I was...I was seeing to some of the  
beggars, helping Jennet with his  
work.

She looks over at one of the dead beggars.

YENNAT(CON'T)  
And then he just went still, and I  
saw a quarrel sprouting from his  
neck, and he just fell over. And  
it's not the blood, or any of that  
that gets me. But look at him.

Kalla turns to follow her gaze.

YENNAT(CON'T)  
He'd been so happy moments before,  
when I gave him a bowl of soup. And  
he died with that smile on his  
face.

KALLA  
Well, at least he died happy then.

YENNAT  
But that's not how it's supposed to  
happen, captain. You don't just die  
after getting hope like that.

Kalla looks away from the body. She grips Yennat's hand.  
Kalla stands up. The sergeant looks up at her.

KALLA  
Come on, you need a drink.

YENNAT  
What, now? I don't think this is  
the best time, captain.

KALLA  
It's fine, they won't try again so  
soon. And besides...

She gestures to the perimeter of guards.

KALLA(CON'T)  
He's got all of them to protect  
him.

Yennat stares up at Kalla, and then stands as well.

(CONTINUED)

YENNAT

If you say so.

They walk away from the temple, through the perimeter, heading deeper into the city, still holding hands as they do so.

INT. MARETZ'S TENT - DAY

Maretz and Avaunt sit at a table eating stew. They both appear to be wearing what they slept in.

AVAUNT

Well, you see, the thing about Minaka is that he lost his money twelve times over his career. He understood it's value. So when he says 'and the streets will be lined with gold and all the wealth will come to the household' he means it literally. The Emperor will bring wealth to all.

MARETZ

Well sure, but it's so much more poetic to speak of the wealth of the households as less tangible things.

AVAUNT

Right, and next you're going to tell me that Ubeck wasn't talking about death in "The Rising of the Sea."

MARETZ

Of course not.

AVAUNT

What was he talking about then?

MARETZ

Fishing.

Avaunt shakes his head, but he has a smile on his face. A SOLDIER rushes into the tent.

SOLDIER

Commander. Sir. Sorry to interrupt, but the Jessians are almost upon us.

(CONTINUED)

Maretz looks at the soldier, cleaning her teeth with her tongue as she does. Avaunt slams down a hand.

AVAUNT

What?! But he defeated them,  
utterly!

SOLDIER

So we did. And yet they come.

AVAUNT

How many?

SOLDIER

Four, five thousand.

AVAUNT

Damnit!

Maretz stands up from the table.

MARETZ

Thank you, soldier. Inform the army  
to marshal.

SOLDIER

Aye, sir.

AVAUNT

(pacing back and forth)

We aren't ready, not at all. We've  
been sitting on our laurels,  
drinking and feasting the nights  
away.

MARETZ

Avaunt.

AVAUNT

They know this that's why they're  
attacking. Oh gods, we're doomed.

MARETZ

Avaunt!

He looks at her, startled.

AVAUNT

Wha..what?

MARETZ

Stop. Get ready, and get the  
horses.

( CONTINUED )



AVAUNT

But we've less men than they do,  
and we've been gorging ourselves  
for the last week.

MARETZ

Avaunt, calm down.

She walks over to him and kisses him.

MARETZ (CONT)

You forget what we have.

AVAUNT

What's that?

MARETZ

(smiling)

Me!

EXT. HIGH PASS - DAY

The Raek-Koshai army is lined up, and the Jessians advance across the field. Maretz and Avaunt, in full armor, sit their horses at the back of the army. Maretz waves a hand forward and the army starts to advance.

ODHAN'S MEN

Odhan stands at the front of a group of thirty SOLDIERS, Lyett behind him.

ODHAN

Come friends, and mark the back of  
steadfast Odhan. For stay with  
resolute Odhan, and nary a Jessian  
shall break the line. To arms!

His men follow him forward.

OLOVON AND NANETE

Olovon and Nanete march side-by-side within Odhan's group of soldiers.

OLOVON

Ooo, a battle, how exciting!

(CONTINUED)

NANETE

Shut up!

OLOVON

It's a perfect opportunity!

NANETE

For what?

Olovon smiles and licks his lips, twirling his dagger with both hands. Nanete follows his gaze to Maretz.

NANETE(CON'T)

How's that gonna work?

OLOVON

It's a battle, people go missing all the time.

NANETE

Sure, but--

Her statement is cut off as a wave of arrows crashes into the group. Olovon falls to the ground, grabbing at an arrow sticking out of his side. Everyone else keeps moving forward. Nanete keeps her head turned back, watching Olovon. After a moment he goes still.

NANETE

Damnit!

She draws her sword and continues marching.

MARETZ AND AVAUNT

The battle rages, the Jessians making a crescent line facing towards the Koshai. Slowly the Koshai are being pushed back.

AVAUNT

Commander, we're losing ground.

MARETZ

So we are.

ODHAN'S MEN

Odhan and his men are locked in fierce combat with the Jessians. Neither side seems to have a particular advantage. Odhan waves his axes around precisely, knocking swords to the side and cleaving armor down to flesh.

Nanete fights wildly with her sword, her armor covered in blood.

MARETZ AND AVAUNT

Avaunt squirms on his horse. Maretz looks calm.

AVAUNT  
We can't hold like this for much longer.

MARETZ  
Probably not.

AVAUNT  
Well should we do something?

Maretz looks at him and smiles. She waves her hand forward. Horns sound from the Koshai army.

Olovon, now alone, looks around and tosses the arrow aside. It never hit him at all. Avoiding being seen, he quickly walks towards the hill where Maretz and Avaunt are. His dagger is out and ready. He stops and looks out over the battle.

The Koshai have spread out their lines, wrapping around the sides and behind the Jessians. Caught between the two sides of the attack, the Jessian army scrambles, and quickly routes.

Olovon blinks shock away from his eyes, and looks up at Maretz. Realizing how exposed he is, he slowly backs off into the camp.

Avaunt watches the battle end in disbelief. He looks over at Maretz, who just smiles and shrugs.

INT. KOSHAI - TAVERN - EVENING

Altinak sits alone at the same table he sat at in the beginning. His food and drink are mostly untouched, and he stares down at the table.

The tavern is crowded around him with all manner of people: soldiers drinking in the corner, merchants making deals a few tables over, staff carrying drinks and food around. Altinak pays attention to none of them.

Someone pulls out the chair across from him and sits down. He glances up to see who it is. The Master looks around the

(CONTINUED)

tavern as he adjusts his seat. In the back corner, voices raise, and a SOLDIER is pinned against the wall by another SOLDIER. After a few tense seconds of silence, both start laughing and sit back down, taking long drinks from their mugs.

THE MASTER  
Charming place.

Altinak shrugs, twirling the end of his knife through the coagulated grey mess on his plate.

THE MASTER(CONT)  
Somewhat different from what I'm  
used to, but I'll consider it a  
learning experience.

A SERVER comes to the table and gestures towards The Master to order. He waves her off. She gives him a hard look.

SERVER  
You have to get something if you  
want to sit here.

The Master looks away from her and sighs, all while reaching into the pocket of his robe. Without looking he tosses her a small black pouch, the sound of coins clinking together echoing from inside. The server unties the pouch and looks shocked. She looks around, puts the pouch in her pocket, and quickly walks away.

The Master rests his hands on the table and looks at Altinak, who looks around the tavern.

THE MASTER(CONT)  
Do I frighten you, Altinak?

Altinak looks across at him.

ALTINAK  
Why are you here?

The Master looks satisfied and grins.

THE MASTER  
I find myself in a precarious  
position, Altinak. One of my  
knights has been taken on a foolish  
miscalculation, leaving a path back  
to the king, if an obscure one.

Altinak raises in a eyebrow.

(CONTINUED)

THE MASTER(CON'T)  
I have another job for you.

ALTINAK  
Talk to Barrus, he handles the contracts.

THE MASTER  
Time is a sensitive variable in this, Altinak. Approaching you was the most expedient option.

ALTINAK  
What is it?

THE MASTER  
You may be pleased to know that some of your competitors have recently gone out of business. But, and more immediately, their insolvency has left me with a dilemma.

The Master leans forward.

THE MASTER(CONT)  
They were unable to finish their job.

Altinak twirls his knife through his food again. After a silent moment, he responds.

ALTINAK  
Who is it?

THE MASTER  
Predicant Jennet.

ALTINAK  
(softly chuckling)  
Rumor has it he's under constant watch from the Imperial Guard.

THE MASTER  
Rumor also has that their commander is currently indisposed in a tavern somewhere, and that the guard is disorganized in the chaos of the Blue Capes failure. It is an opportunity that will not come again.

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK  
How much time do we have?

THE MASTER  
It must be tonight.

ALTINAK  
Impossible.

THE MASTER  
I wouldn't ask it if that were true.

Altinak looks across the table at him.

ALTINAK  
How much?

THE MASTER  
That can be arranged after it is completed. But given the circumstances, I shall be generous.

ALTINAK  
(rising from the table)  
I'll bring it to the others.

He places payment on top of the barely eaten food. The coins sink into the goop.

THE MASTER  
Call on me at my home when it is finished.

Altinak nods as he walks out of the tavern.

INT. KOSHAI - BARRUS'S HOUSE - UPPER ROOM - NIGHT

Altinak, Vierin, and Barrus sit around the table. Each has a mug in front of them, and a map of the city covers the middle. Barrus is resting his head on his left hand, and his eyes are closed. He sighs before speaking.

BARRUS  
I told you we shouldn't have gotten involved in this.

ALTINAK  
Well, we are, so there's no point in lamenting.

Altinak sighs and looks over at Vierin. She smiles weakly. He looks back at Barrus.

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK(CON'T)

So how are we going to do it?

VIERIN

There's only three of us...I don't see how we can.

BARRUS

I'm with her.

ALTINAK

We have to try.

After a moment Barrus leans back and takes a drink from his mug. He puts it back on the table and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

BARRUS

So what do we know.

ALTINAK

Well, the Imperial Guard is going to be all over the temple, so a full on assault is impossible.

BARRUS

We don't have the numbers nor the tools for that, either.

ALTINAK

So we go in quietly. The Master said that the Guard would be in disarray after what happened, and especially now with their commander away for a time.

All three stand up and find the temple on the map. Altinak leans in.

ALTINAK

The Guard will likely be guarding the front door.

VIERIN

But that's also where Jennet probably will be.

BARRUS

Why do you say that?

VIERIN

That's where he always is, tending to the sick, the needy, the...

(CONTINUED)

She trails off, and looks into the distance. She gets up from the table.

VIERIN(CON'T)

I have an idea. Let's get to the temple.

Altinak and Barrus exchange a confused look, but after a moment both get up from the table.

EXT. KOSHAI - OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE - NIGHT

Even at night the square outside the temple is crowded with people. Small groups of Imperial Guards stand around, scanning the square and talking amongst themselves.

On the steps of the temple Jennet is moving between BEGGARS, speaking to them and giving them pieces of bread. A few gem lamps stand around the square, painting it prismatic, although it is still mostly in darkness.

Altinak and Barrus stand in the shadows next to a building watching Jennet move through the crowd of beggars.

ALTINAK

I don't like this.

BARRUS

Well it's too late now.

He points towards the crowd.

EXT. KOSHAI - TEMPLE STEPS - NIGHT

Jennet walks between beggars, a white cloth bag filled with bread in his hand. Vierin, dressed in raggedy clothes stands at the fringe of the group of beggars leaning against a marble pillar, waiting for Jennet to come over to her.

Jennet hands a piece of bread to a BEGGAR and places his hand on their head.

JENNET

May the gods watch over you, my child.

BEGGAR

Thank you, father.

He leans back and walks over towards Vierin.

(CONTINUED)



JENNET  
Gods bless and protect you.

VIERIN  
(quietly)  
Thank you, father. I--

She breaks off into a bout of coughing.

VIERIN(CON'T)  
I'd like--

She starts coughing again. Jennet moves forward.

JENNET  
What was that, child?

VIERIN  
I'd like--

Jennet leans closer again, right up next to Vierin. Almost instantaneously, her right hand flashes across Jennet's neck. It settles at her side, revealing a small knife blade protruding from between her fingers.

Jennet staggers back, grabbing at his neck, a gargling coming from his throat as blood begins to pour down his neck and out his mouth. He falls back, smashing his head on the temple steps, but he's already dead, his eyes staring wide at nothing.

An explosion goes off at the other end of the square drawing everyone's attention, and Vierin walks backwards into the shadows of the temple. Imperial Guards run past her towards the explosion without noticing her. She turns and slips down an alley without looking back.

EXT. KOSHAI - ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Vierin leans up against the wall of a building, gaze quickly darting down both directions of the alley. Shouts and the sounds of armored figures running come from the square outside the temple.

A hand appears on Vierin's shoulder, and she wheels around, knife outstretched. Altinak pulls back, raising his hands above his head,

ALTINAK  
Woah, Vi, stop, it's me.

Vierin lowers the knife and looks down at the ground, collecting herself.

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK

Did it work?

Vierin nods.

VIERIN

Where's Barrus?

ALTINAK

I don't know. I think some guardsmen saw him placing the explosives and started chasing him. Last I saw he was running away from the temple as fast as he could.

VIERIN

He can't have gotten very far with his leg like that.

ALTINAK

Which is why I think we need to leave.

Vierin looks back towards the temple. After a moment she nods and follows Altinak into the darkness.

EXT. KOSHAI - VIERIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Altinak and Vierin arrive outside Vierin's house. She goes to open the door.

ALTINAK

You go in. I've got something I need to do.

VIERIN

You sure you don't want me to come with you?

ALTINAK

Yes. You've done enough tonight.

She leans towards him and kisses him, and then enters her house. Altinak pulls his hood up over his head and heads out into the city.

## EXT. KOSHAI - THE MASTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The alleyway outside The Master's house is empty, save for a pile of clothes laying outside the exit. Altinak narrows his eyes at the pile of clothes, mostly blue, but stops by the entrance. He knocks three times.

The door immediately opens, the attendant standing behind it.

ATTENDANT

The Master has been expecting you.

Without looking at him, Altinak moves into the house.

## INT. KOSHAI - THE MASTER'S HOUSE - ANTECHAMBER - NIGHT

Something sounding between crying and screaming echoes through the chamber. Most of the room is in darkness, but a single torch illuminates a section at the far end. The Master's hourglass sits on a pedestal in the center of the room. Sand slowly falls down. At the back of the room five figures stand, each covered with a cloth.

THE MASTER

(without turning around)

Ah, Altinak, how wonderful to see you.

The screaming continues as Altinak walks up towards the hourglass. The attendant leans up against one of the pillars. The Master appears from the darkness standing on the other side of the hourglass.

THE MASTER

Sorry for the noise.

ALTINAK

(gesturing at the hourglass)

I thought this broke.

The Master chuckles. The screams continue.

THE MASTER

Man has a great propensity for breaking things, Altinak. But time, well, time cannot be broken.

The screams crescendo into a cacophony of guttural exclamations. The attendant reaches up to scratch his nose. The Master sighs and claps his hands twice. All is still.

(CONTINUED)

Altinak looks about the room. The attendant's hand is frozen over his nose. The Master leans down examining the hourglass. Sand is suspended in mid air. With a satisfied nod he straitens.

THE MASTER  
Walk with me, Altinak.

Hesitantly, Altinak follows The Master to the perimeter of the room. As they walk past torches, they seemingly light on their own, revealing the details of the grotesque figures situated throughout the room.

Humanoid figures of all kinds make up the display, although they all have disgustingly exaggerated features and limbs. Some have arms that are too long or too short, others legs that bend where they shouldn't. Many have extra limbs where they should not.

They are all united in two things: all are naked, and all have a look of absolute horror on their faces.

THE MASTER  
You have done as I asked, I take it.

ALTINAK  
(distracted by the figures)  
Yeah. Yeah, it's done.

THE MASTER  
Good.

ALTINAK  
What are all these?

THE MASTER  
In another time I trained as an artist. And this is my masterpiece.

He gestures to the figure.

THE MASTER(CON'T)  
I have captured fear in a way no one has done before.

ALTINAK  
Some of these look ancient.

THE MASTER  
It takes a while to grow the perfect garden.

(CONTINUED)

They walk past more figures. More torches light on their own.

THE MASTER

But enough about that. You must be rewarded for your successes.

ALTINAK

You know the customary price.

THE MASTER

Yes, but I like to think we've moved beyond customary in our relationship, Altinak.

He reaches into the inside of his robe.

THE MASTER(CON'T)

Besides, there is no monetary sum I can offer you more valuable than the gems I have already given. But I do have this.

He pulls out a crossbow bolt. It looks old, and has runes inscribed in it.

ALTINAK

I have plenty of those.

THE MASTER

But none like this. This may be the most important weapon that ever existed.

ALTINAK

Why's that?

THE MASTER

It is the bolt that killed Halvarg the Unifier.

ALTINAK

Who?

THE MASTER

A human. A visionary, a conqueror, and a friend. He forged an empire the likes of which we can only imagine, emperor or otherwise. And yet, this single bolt killed him. The runes still hold strong, and say that it will always hit the desired target.

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK

Who decides the desired target?

THE MASTER

The shooter, presumably. I'm no mage, I have no mind for controlling the runes.

ALTINAK

Then what are you? You obviously have some power if you were able to do...whatever it is you did when you clapped your hands back there.

The Master chuckles.

THE MASTER

Merely a curious soul with too much time on his hands and too much coin in his purse.

He holds the bolt out, and after a moment of contemplation Altinak takes it. They continue walking, arriving at the part of the room where The Master was when Altinak entered the room.

One of the figures here does not look like the others. Where they are black stone, he looks like a normal Raek-Koshai, although his arms are stretched to extreme lengths and his ears are elongated and twisted. His face is frozen in an exultation of unimaginable pain.

THE MASTER

My newest addition.

Lying on a stool next to the figure is a chisel and a hammer. The Master picks them up and stands before the figure. With a two quick hits of the hammer, he drives the chisel into the figures forehead. It passes in as if nothing is there. The Master quickly pulls it out.

THE MASTER

Time for the finishing touch.

He claps his hands twice. Ambient noises fill the room again. The attendant continues to scratch his nose. The sand falls through the hourglass as it should.

A spurt of blood shoots out of the figures forehead, and his eyes roll back. Starting at the hole The Master made in his forehead his body begins to turn into black stone.

(CONTINUED)

Altinak stumbles back, leaning against the pillar. He pushes himself off and walks quickly towards the door. The Master looks over the ever-hardening figure, hand resting under his chin, nodding slowly.

Altinak runs out the door without looking back.

EXT. MILITARY CAMP - AFTERNOON

Soldiers sit around a series of large fires all grouped together. They pass food between them, and everyone has a mug of ale. Many have more than one.

ODHAN

Revel, good friends of wondrous  
Odhan, in the spoils of our  
victory. Eat, drink, and love, for  
once we are back home, even  
enthraling Odhan cannot save you  
from the trappings of the city. To  
victory!

Cheers sound from the soldiers, many echoing his final words.

Avaunt and Maretz sit next to each other among the soldiers. Avaunt has one mug next to him, half full. Maretz has three, mostly empty.

MARETZ

I tell you, Avaunt, this is the  
life. Eating, fighting, and  
drinking--

She pauses to hold up a mug in a salute.

MARETZ (CON'T)

Drinking, out here in the  
wilderness. I'll never be able to  
survive in the city again.

AVAUNT

Sure you will. You're a hero, the  
people love you, even more after  
this campaign.

MARETZ

If you say so. You'll still be with  
me, right, when we're back in the  
city?

(CONTINUED)

AVAUNT  
Why wouldn't I?

MARETZ  
Good. I need you to advise me, but  
first I need more ale.

AVAUNT  
I don't think you do.

MARETZ  
(cheerfully)  
Don't tell me what to do!

At the next fire over, after hearing Maretz's call for more drink, Olovon and Nanete stand up.

NANETE  
Now's our chance.

Olovon smiles and claps giddily, but stops before someone might notice. They walk over to a table with a bunch of kegs on it. Olovon takes a small flask of green liquid out of his pocket, and after Nanete pours a mug of ale, Olovon puts the liquid into the mug.

Nanete shakes the mug, mixing the concoction together. It looks greener than usual.

NANETE  
Damn it, she'll notice that.

Olovon looks over at Maretz, who is waving her arms about wildly saying something inaudible.

OLOVON  
No, I don't think she will.  
Besides, it's our only chance.

NANETE  
If you say so.

They walk over towards Maretz with the mug.

MARETZ  
Avaunt, why haven't you gotten me  
more ale?

AVAUNT  
I really don't think that's a good  
idea.

(CONTINUED)



MARETZ

Come now, you're supposed to be protecting me.

AVAUNT

I am!

Nanete walks infront of them, holding the mug out towards Maretz.

NANETE

Here you go, sir.

Maretz pushes herself forward with vigor and grabs the mug.

MARETZ

Thank you, reasonable soldier whose name I don't know.

NANETE

Nanete, sir.

MARETZ

Nanete, maybe I shall promote you.  
I shall sleep on it.

Avaunt looks at Nanete with displeasure, and then glances into the mug. He reaches out a hand and grabs Maretz's arm.

AVAUNT

Wait! That doesn't look right.

Nanete's eyes go wide, and she begins to step back. Olovon turns around and starts to walk away.

MARETZ

(slurred "It's ale, it's fine.")

What? Iss'ale, iss'fine.

Avaunt grabs the mug and brings it up to his nose. He smells the ale, and recoils at the scent.

AVAUNT

Ruena. Where did you get this, soldier?

NANETE

I, uh, I...

AVAUNT

Search her!

(CONTINUED)

Two SOLDIERS stand up and begin to look through Nanete's pockets. They find nothing.

SOLDIER  
Nothing, sir.

Odhan walks up to the commotion, carrying a squirming Olovon under his arm.

ODHAN  
Watchful Odhan did see this small  
little man attempting to steal a  
horse and flee the camp.

AVAUNT  
Search him too!

The soldiers do so, and find the empty flask. One of them hands it to Avaunt. He smells it.

AVAUNT  
Ruena, again.

He drops the flask and smashes it.

AVAUNT  
Arrest that man!

OLOVON  
Wait, no, no it was her idea.

He gestures wildly at Nanete.

NANETE  
You little snake. I should have  
poisoned you!

AVAUNT  
Arrest them both.

Soldiers get up and do as he says. Maretz still sits, looking at the commotion. Another soldier sits to her right.

MARETZ  
(leaning towards the soldier)  
I have no idea what's going on.

The soldier looks at Maretz with mild disbelief.

INT. KOSHAI - WAREHOUSE ACROSS FROM TEMPLE - DAY

Barrus sits strapped into a chair in the center of a room. Kalla stands in front of him, arms crossed. Yennat leans against the door, and two other guards stand flanking Kalla, each holding long pieces of metal. There is a brazier lit between Kalla and Barrus.

KALLA

I'll ask again. Who are you?

BARRUS

I'm Barrus.

KALLA

Who do you work for?

BARRUS

Myself, usually.

KALLA

Why did you set off that explosion at the temple?

BARRUS

I'm sure I didn't do that.

KALLA

Do you know who killed Predicant Jennet?

BARRUS

No.

KALLA

(turning to the guards)

Again!

They move forward and stick their metal into the brazier. When they pull them out, they are red hot.

They walk forward, laying the hot ends against Barrus's cheeks. He grimaces, sweat pouring down his face. He lets out a low cry. The guards back away.

KALLA

Did you kill Predicant Jennet?

BARRUS

No.

(CONTINUED)

KALLA  
Do you know who did?

BARRUS  
No.

Kalla sighs and looks down at the ground. She gestures for the guards to come forward again. This time they take out smaller pieces of metal, and after heating them, proceed to stick them underneath Barrus's fingernails. He howls in pain.

After a moment, the guards withdraw. Barrus, now crying, makes his best attempt at curling up.

KALLA  
Do you know who killed Predicant  
Jennet?

BARRUS  
It doesn't matter.

KALLA  
Do you?

BARRUS  
Sure, but it's too late. They've  
already moved on to the next  
target.

KALLA  
Next target? Who?!

BARRUS  
I don't know.

Kalla grabs her knife from her belt and heats it up. She forcefully drives it up against Barrus's neck, digging in just enough to draw blood. He clenches his hands and screams.

KALLA  
Who is next?!

BARRUS  
Com...Commander...Mar...

He passes out, but Kalla has her answer.

YENNAT  
What did he say?

(CONTINUED)

KALLA

It's as we feared. My sister is the next target. Prepare everything for the arrival tomorrow.

YENNAT

Yes, sir.

She salutes.

YENNAT

(pointing at Barrus)

What about him?

Kalla glances back at Barrus. A soft red line runs along his neck. After twirling the knife in her hands for a moment, Kalla walks forward and stabs Barrus in the heart. She leaves the blade in and exits the room.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - EVENING

The army marches through a mountain pass, Avaunt and Maretz at the head. Along the side of the road is a tree. Nanete and Olovon hang from the tree, their bodies swinging gently in the breeze as the army marches by. Some soldiers look up at them, but most ignore them.

EXT. KOSHAI - CITY SQUARE - MORNING

The sun peaks over the top of the walls, illuminating the square. Near the gate the Imperial Guard is marshaled, standing at attention. At the other end, shopkeepers are setting up stalls for the day's trading.

Kalla paces back and forth in front of the guard, occasionally glancing at the main gate. Soldiers at the ends of the columns watch the rooftops through rudimentary binoculars.

Yennat walks a few feet behind Kalla, following her pacing.

YENNAT

Kalla, stop. You're only making the worrying worse. We've got the whole square covered. If any body tries anything, we'll know.

KALLA

Damnit, that's not good enough. We need to know before.

She gestures to a troop of GUARDS.

(CONTINUED)

KALLA(CON'T)

You, check the buildings and scour the rooftops. If anyone gives you trouble invoke the Imperial edict.

GUARD

Aye, Captain.

The guards move off in the direction of the first building on the square. A horn sounds from the gate. Kalla and Yennat turn to look. A WATCHMAN shouts down from the gate tower.

WATCHMAN THREE

They've been sighted.

Kalla looks around the square again and surveys the Imperial Guard. She nods.

WATCHMAN THREE

Open the gate!

The gate starts to open.

EXT. KOSHAI - ALLEYWAY - MORNING

Altinak hurries through an empty alleyway, his crossbow case slung over his shoulder. Vierin follows behind him.

VIERIN

Altinak, stop.

He ignores her and keeps walking.

VIERIN(CON'T)

Altinak, this is insane!

ALTINAK

(stopping)

Vi, I have to. You don't know what I saw when I went back to his house. If I fail in this he'll kill us.

VIERIN

Then we leave, right now, and never come back.

ALTINAK

He'll find us, I know he will. He has eyes and ears everywhere. I've seen what he's capable of, and I'm terrified.

(CONTINUED)

VIERIN  
More terrified than of the wrath of  
the Imperial Guard?

ALTINAK  
(without hesitation)  
Yes.

She goes to respond, but can't find the words. Altinak walks towards her and kisses her.

ALTINAK(CON'T)  
Go home, I'll get you when it's  
done.

VIERIN  
What? No, I want to be with you.

ALTINAK  
If I fail, I want to know that at  
least you'll be safe.

VIERIN  
I--

ALTINAK  
Vi, stop.

She closes her mouth. After a moment she nods.

VIERIN  
Good luck.

Altinak grins and jogs off towards the square.

EXT. KOSHAI - CLOCKTOWER - MORNING

Altinak arrives at the top of the clocktower. The machinery works unattended. The wind howls across the balcony.

Altinak reaches the railing and observes the square below. The Imperial Guard faces the gate, which is almost fully opened.

Altinak takes a small sheet of paper out from his pocket, and scrawls something brief onto it. He sets it down onto the ground next to him.

He begins to set up his crossbow.

EXT. KOSHAI - CITY SQUARE - MORNING

The gates stop moving, and the army begins marching through, Maretz at the head. Kalla moves forward, gesturing for the guard to follow her.

MARETZ

Dear sister, how nice of you to greet me.

KALLA

We haven't the time for pleasantries, Maretz. Someone is trying to kill you.

MARETZ

I'm a soldier, Kalla, someone is always trying to kill me.

KALLA

It's more than that. I know there are assassins after you.

MARETZ

They tried three days ago in camp, and thanks to dear Avaunt here they failed.

Kalla glances over at Avaunt, who smiles, but looks awkwardly at the ground.

KALLA

Still, I won't be happy until you've gotten to the palace.

Maretz looks confused.

MARETZ

The palace?

KALLA

You're the only one left. The whole city has rallied around you as Emperor.

Maretz does not respond at first, and then turns to Avaunt and gives him a "well would you look at that" kind of look.

MARETZ

Let's go then.



EXT. CLOCKTOWER - MORNING

Altinak's crossbow is set up, and he is adjusting dials on top of the scope. He backs away and studies the wind gauge, and makes more adjustments.

He looks through the scope, and sees a group of guards searching rooftops across the square from him.

He loads the crossbow with the bolt The Master gave him.

ALTINAK

Let's hope this works.

He stares down the scope, subtly following Maretz's movement as she walks across the square with Kalla and Avaunt.

ALTINAK

(softly)

Hello brother.

He breathes in deeply, then steadies his breathing.

He fires.

EXT. KOSHAI - CITY SQUARE - MORNING

Kalla walks with Maretz and Avaunt, both of whom marvel at the city. Their fingers are intertwined, although it doesn't appear to be intentional. Kalla notices.

KALLA

So, you two...

MARETZ

What? Oh, yes...

There is a soft thud, followed by a much louder crash. Kalla turns to look. Avaunt lies on the ground, a quarrel sticking out from his neck. Maretz kneels next to him, trying to stop the bleeding.

KALLA

Damnit!

She gestures towards the entire Imperial Guard.

KALLA(CON'T)

Make a perimeter! Gods-damnit, make a perimeter.

The Imperial Guard creates a circle around Avaunt, raising their shields to block any more shots.

EXT. KOSHAI - CLOCKTOWER - MORNING

Altinak peers back from the crossbow, horror in his eyes.

EXT. KOSHAI - CITY SQUARE - MORNING

Kalla kneels down next to Maretz.

KALLA

Take it out!

MARETZ

That will just make it worse!

She presses a ripped piece of cloth over the wound, trying her hardest not to nudge the quarrel too much. Avaunt convulses in pain. He coughs, and blood pours out of his mouth.

MARETZ

Avaunt! Avaunt, stay with me!

He tries to respond, but all that comes out are gargles. He grabs her hand with his hand. She squeezes tightly, tears welling in her eyes.

MARETZ

(softly)

Avaunt, please...

Tears fall down onto his body.

MARETZ (CONT)

I need you...

Kalla stands up.

KALLA

I need a medic!

A hole is formed in the circle as a MEDIC is rushed in. He wears an army uniform with a white coat over it. He kneels down on the other side of Avaunt.

Maretz is fully crying now, and Avaunt's convulsions have slowed. She tosses the bloodied cloth to the side and takes his hand in both of hers.

His eyes go wide, and his body stops moving. The medic leans back, running a hand through his hair. Maretz continues to cry, holding his hand against her chest. Kalla looks around helplessly.

EXT. KOSHAI - CLOCKTOWER - MORNING

The tail-end of Altinak's coat disappears down the stairs, and his crossbow lies propped up against the railing, and the note he wrote is still sitting on the ground.

EXT. KOSHAI - VIERIN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Altinak arrives outside Vierin's house. He fiercely knocks on the door. After a moment she opens it. He speaks before she has the opportunity.

ALTINAK  
We have to go.

VIERIN  
What?

ALTINAK  
Now.

VIERIN  
It didn't work?

Altinak looks around the alley, visibly attempting to keep back tears.

ALTINAK  
I...I killed him, Vi.

VIERIN  
Him? Who 'him'?

ALTINAK  
Av...Avaunt.

Her eyes go wide and she pulls him into a hug.

VIERIN  
Oh gods, Altinak.

He breaks away from the hug.

ALTINAK  
Not now, we have to go. Bring the  
gems.

VIERIN  
What gems?

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK

The ones The Master gave us.

She nods and disappears into the house.

EXT. KOSHAI - DOCKS - MORNING

Altinak and Vierin quickly walk along the docks. Altinak holds the bag of gems in one hand, Vierin's hand in the other. At the end of one of the piers he spots Bosca. He rushes up to him. Bosca turns as he approaches.

BOSCA

Ah, if it isn't  
Altinak-with-the-unpronounceable-last-name.  
And you brought a friend!

ALTINAK

I do not have time for  
pleasantries, Bosca Troyen.

Bosca chuckles.

BOSCA

Nor I, really. We're about to set  
sail.

ALTINAK

Take us with you. I would like to  
see your 'grandest city of Boreal'.

Bosca looks at him suspiciously.

BOSCA

I'm not normally in the business of  
harboring people.

Altinak hands him the bag. Bosca opens it and looks inside.

BOSCA

Gems? How much are these worth?

ALTINAK

Five thousand gold pieces. If you  
let us on without questions it can  
all be yours.

Bosca looks stunned at the price and stares at Altinak.

BOSCA

Five thou...How did you get these?

(CONTINUED)

ALTINAK

No questions, Bosca Troyen. We haven't much time.

Bosca looks between Altinak, the gems, and his ship. After a moment he ties it to his belt.

BOSCA

We sail within the hour. Get below deck with the storage. I'll get you when we're away from the city.

ALTINAK

Thank you, Bosca Troyen.

Altinak leads Vierin towards the railing leading onto the ship. Bosca considers for a moment and then turns and follows him.

INT. KOSHAI - IMPERATOR'S PALACE - AFTERNOON

SUPER: A FEW HOURS LATER.

Maretz sits on a exquisitely carved crystal throne, her head resting in her hand. A small silver crown rests upon her head. Her scabbarded sword rests next to the throne. Kalla enters and crosses towards her sister.

KALLA

One of the guards found a note with an address on it. I've sent guards there to investigate.

Maretz doesn't give any response.

KALLA

We also found the assassin's crossbow. I've never seen anything like it. Won't be too to find out who made it and who it belonged to.

Maretz slowly nods, but doesn't look at Kalla. Kalla moves closer to the throne.

KALLA(CON'T)

And when we do find him, we'll show him what the Imperial Guard does to assassins.

MARETZ

No.

(CONTINUED)

Kalla looks confused. Maretz turns to her sister and continues to speak. Her voice his ice.

MARETZ

Bring him to me, and I'll show him myself.

Kalla nods, and looks equal parts scared and satisfied. She looks back towards the doors, and then turns back to Maretz.

KALLA

The people are waiting to see you.

Maretz looks off into the distance. She rises and grabs her sword from next to the throne. She ties it around her waist. She walks towards the large doors.

EXT. KOSHAI - IMPERATOR'S PALACE - AFTERNOON

Maretz steps out onto an ornate marble balcony, the sun reflecting off the stone. Thousands of citizens gather below, and they all cheer as she steps forward, looking out over them.

EXT. SHIP'S DECK - EVENING

DECKHANDS stand on the deck of the ship, some cleaning, others lounging around or playing dice games. Bosca leans against the wall of the upper deck, running the gems through his fingers.

Altinak and Vierin stand at the side of the ship looking out over the ocean.

THE MASTER(V.O)

You think you have done well,  
Altinak...

EXT. KOSHAI - THE MASTER'S HOUSE - EVENING

A large group of Imperial Guards stand outside the door to the house. At the behest of an officer, they smash in the door and enter, swords drawn.

INT. KOSHAI - THE MASTER'S HOUSE - ANTECHAMBER - EVENING

All the torches are lit, and all the figures are gone.

THE MASTER(V.O)  
Even now the Imperial Guard  
searches my house, and finds what  
they are looking for...

A guard opens the door to the main chamber.

INT. KOSHAI - THE MASTER'S HOUSE - MAIN CHAMBER - EVENING

The room is completely empty, save for the five figures that were previously covered up in the other room. They are perfect recreations of Altinak, Vierin, Barrus, Nanete, and Olovon.

THE MASTER(V.O)  
But it was by my designs you  
succeeded, and by my designs you  
failed...

INT. THE MASTER'S HOUSE - ANTECHAMBER - EVENING

At the center of the chamber the hourglass still sits on the pedestal, and all the sand has fallen to the bottom.

THE MASTER(V.O)  
You may run, as I'm sure you have,  
but make no mistake, I am known in  
many lands by many names...

EXT. SHIP'S DECK - EVENING

Altinak and Vierin still look over the ocean, holding hands. Far in the distance, the snow-capped peaks of the Koshai mountains are receding into fog and darkness as the sun sets behind them.

THE MASTER(V.O.)  
And you well know what happens to  
those who fail me...

The ship sails into the sunset.

FADE TO BLACK.

The End

(CONTINUED)

