The sun was fading in an orange red glow behind the trees. Their blackened spears shot into the blood sky, impaling it mercilessly. The celestial body, as if responding to the assault radiated mercilessly, as if attempting to, in its last hours, even seconds of existence, drown the trees for their affront in a hazy putrid heat.

Not a blade of grass nor animal could escape the orb's radiance, and it was as if in disappearing below the horizon, the body were crushing the earth with its decline rather than passing it by. The weight was palpable. No creature stirred. They knew to wait out the long struggle and that behind its oppressive throes was the sweet embrace of the death night, for only then, when the final bout has ceased, and the pines had tasted their kill would the cool winds come back to the land.

Yet amid this sweltering existence, there was movement. The creatures of the place seemed to know better than to move in the heat, but that intelligence seemed to be lost upon the human inhabitants. For their own reasons they dared to move in the death of the sun, and paid the price for it. Sweat ran rivulets down lacquered armor, padding soaked with a days worth of work.

And one in particular defied the heat, his dark form moving furtively from tree to tree. No sound came from his footsteps, nor did he even so much as breath heavily. He was as the shadows and the dark, and like the trees, all that stood in the way of blessed death was the sun.

The figure looked upwards. Before him lay the walls of the outer courtyard, all manned even in the heat. They had not seen him yet. And they never would.

Training, temple doctrine and even common sense dictated that a proper attack on the walls should wait for dark. But the figure was not motivated training, and he had not been sent on this mission by his temple. And any common sense that he once exhibited was so far buried under another emotion, that it might not have even existed at all.

A hand tightened around a knife, and clutched it till the blackened veins in his arm ran in crazed patterns, the white of the fingers at contrast with the darkness in the figure.

In his other hand he held a small blackened hook attached to a silken rope, carefully braided by his own hand.

From behind the tree his arm flashed, and the small hook at once was airborne, a speck of dark against the sun. It arced high, impossibly high into the air, mocking the oppressive heat with its weightlessness, before coming to a rest on the tall walls.

The figure in the trees waited for the guards to notice the sound of the impact against the background silence of the forest, but after a moment of quiet, he became convinced that they had not seen nor heard it.

Emboldened, and having executed the most important and riskiest part of his plan, his mind allowed itself to sink deeper into the hollow recesses which had forced its body here in the first place, namely, hatred.

A person seeing upon seeings the man's face at this very moment would no doubt, in his own heart feel a sudden and almost animalistic fear, for the eyes and facial expression of the figure were gruesome and evil. Lines ran in poisonous creases out from his eyes and mouth forming a grotesque mask full of torment and rage.

In the moment before the figure cut down this unfortunate hypothetical observer, the observer would note, as his life blood ran before him, that in fact the face of the figure was not of a man at all, and it would then, with ease, have explained how the figure had cut his path through the desert beyond the mountain, through the forgotten back passes of the mountain and through the forest with nothing but a hook, a knife and a small empty jar attached to his waist. For although such a feat, without water, without food and in the murderous heat of the dying sun was clearly impossible, such an observer would see at once how suddenly, and clearly, all the above tasks were not only possible but trivial for the figure. The face of the man was not of a man, but of a demon.

A shadow demon. A creature of the blackest night, a thing which should not, could not, exist in the light.

Yet here it was.

The figure pulled the rope taut and felt the small hook find purchase against the edge of the wall.

Half of the figure's face betrayed its inner form and twitched as hideously strong arms clenched the rope. The twitch ran across the twisted face, perverting it even further. The figure let out a small growl through blood stained teeth as enormous pain spiked through his body, even as he climbed the rope, feet walking slowly up the wall.

The twitch on the face took hold, and would not let go, and after a moment, after the figure had all but submitted the edge of the wall, it froze horribly into a half formed grin.

Atop the wall, the figure slithered slowly. It extended one foot furtively towards the nearest guard, ready, at any second to contort its body in the desired pose to send the razor sharp and poisoned knife into the guards throat.

But the heat of the afternoon had taken its toll on even the normally admirable discipline of the guards, for as the figure stalked towards its unknowing opponent, the guard let out a small sound.

The figure had to clutch his mouth, for the grotesque smile threatened to spread, trembling, like a cancer across its visage.

The guard was asleep.

Where had this demon sprung forth? The hatred in the man was an all engulfing torrent, an unstoppable force which smashed its way through the years of culture and training that the man had accrued.