

# // - God-King

When Morlicht opens his eyes, he is instantly met by the unfriendly-looking priest. He is not sure whether the man was waiting by his side until he wakes up or if he was the reason for his awakening. Frankly, it does not matter to him as the visitor clearly has important manners to speak to him about.

He takes a quick look around the room. There doesn't seem to be anyone else in there.

"I see you are awake, one who calls himself Morlicht." the priest with barely concealed contempt in his voice.

Morlicht looks him in the eyes, the cold, sky blue piercing the priest like an icicle. But he barely wavers, even a god's gaze is not enough to break his calm.

"Your escapade has caused quite the havoc in the palace." he says bluntly.

"I had important matters to attend to."

"Will you also have important matters when you are God-King?" the priest sits down "I won't lie, the council cannot wait to crown a new one. As we are speaking, they are probably finishing the paperwork necessary to prove your legitimacy." there is notable disgust in his tone but it seems to be directed more towards the members of the council rather than his interlocutor.

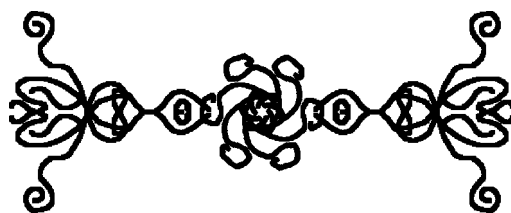
"I assume you didn't come here to congratulate me." Morlicht says, scratching his beard.

"Let me be blunt. They think that crowning another God-King is a solution to all the problems that we have. Those short-sighted fools would gladly give the crown to Kriesbrin if he were to waltz into the palace." he takes a short pause "And I need to know whether you came here to act in the best interest of Assir."

Morlicht takes a minute to process these words. While he does not intend to abuse his position, it would be a lie to say that he came here to bring prosperity to the country.

"I do not intend to cause any harm to the citizens of Assir." he answers.

"So I see you have some goals of your own. You can work towards them as long as they do not clash with your duties." he gets up from the chair "But if you try anything big, you will realize that the authority of a God-King is not what it used to be." the priest leaves the room, not locking the door.



A few hours later, a group of priests visits Morlicht's room. They tell him that they found no objections to his candidacy and that the coronation is to take place a week from now. This is almost exactly what he expected. The guests leave shortly in a hurry, which does not come as a surprise to him either as with the nearing crowning of the first God-King in twenty years there has to be a lot of administrative work that needs to be done. The country has been pretty much running a different political system for the past twenty years.

The one thing that surprises him though is the fact that none of the priests were bold enough to mention his escapade earlier. But then again, the unfriendly priest seems to just be a powerful and influential minority.

Morlicht gets up on the bed. He hasn't put a lot of thought into his plans yet. He did not come here to become God-King. At least not instantly. No, what he was aiming for was overthrowing one. But this is a bit of a relief for him as he hasn't been trained for espionage and ruling is more in line with what he has been prepared for.

But this is only temporary relief as, in reality, this turn of events is worse than what he expected. If that man is not God-King, then what is he doing? This question plagues Morlicht. At the very least, he hopes that he will show himself when he catches wind of the coronation.

Morlicht grabs his bag, gets up, and leaves the cell. He is not in arrest anymore so it should be completely fine for him to leave. He walks for approximately thirty seconds before turning around and going back to the door. After a few seconds of reflection, he pokes the bronze door with the tip of his cane. Swelling appears around on the metal in the area around where the wooden stick touched the metal. The deformation forms a pattern, a message. "I'm leaving to take care of my own matters. I will be back shortly. Morlicht."

He then leaves, believing that this should be enough to make the priests not worry too much about their future God-King disappearing unexpectedly.

This time Morlicht doesn't actually have anything in particular that he wants or needs to do. There is no need to acquire food as he is not hungry as he was given a nutritious breakfast by the priests earlier. Besides, he is not actually sure whether or not he needs to eat whatsoever. When he crossed the desert to reach Sahvestar, he wasn't hungry despite barely eating anything. There are still things about being a god that he doesn't entirely understand.

Outside, he admires the numerous exquisite feats of architecture surrounding the palace. He remembers that Zahreen learned about them and that knowledge is also Morlicht's as a result. They are the reason why the palace itself is not as impressive as it seems like it should be.

To his right, there are two tall, thick, conjoined towers. They have a bluish hue and tower over the surrounding buildings. They have served as a library for a long time now but they had used to be where the God-King Weishim ruled from for over a hundred years.

It makes Morlicht wonder how long his rule will be.

As he walks, he sees many other elaborate buildings that God-Kings had commissioned or even built entirely by themselves in the past. A giant marble block by Steiwan, the metal palace resembling a tree by Stahwurz... Each and every single one is a masterpiece. Morlicht wonders if he will be able to live up to them.

Beside one of the buildings, he sees a middle-aged woman sitting on the ground and begging for money. Her left arm has a large blemish, its color somewhere between purple and brown. He walks up to her.

"What happened to your arm?" he asks empathically but doesn't need the answer. Gangrene. Whatever happened to that woman's arm, it doesn't matter anymore as there is nothing that can be done aside from cutting it off.

"It's all from a small cut, please, spare me some money for a doctor."

"Can I inspect it?" he asks. The woman looks at him incredulously.

"Are you a doctor?"

"I know something about injuries."

"Go ahead." she sticks out her arm "You can't possibly make it worse."

Morlicht takes a closer look at the rotten part of the arm. Because of Zahreen's knowledge, he is aware that the arm can't be saved. But there is a chance that amputation can still save the woman. The problem is that, even if she decides to lose her arm, she is just as likely to die if the procedure is done in an amateur manner as she would have been without anything about it.

He delicately touches the arm, concentrating his thoughts on wishing to cure the woman. Nothing happens.

"I don't think I can help you." he says, looking for money in his pocket. There seems to be nothing inside but as he pulls his hand out something cold and metallic grazes it. A coin that wasn't there before. When he pulls it out, he notices that it's made of gold and does not resemble any currency that he has ever seen before. It's a miracle.

He gives it to the woman who cannot believe her eyes. Yet, she doesn't try to humbly decline the gift. It does not surprise Morlicht as her life is on the line. She thanks him a lot though, saying that she is will be eternally grateful to him but he doesn't feel right about this. He quickly excuses himself and walks away.

The situation frustrates him. Why was he able to create an expensive golden coin but curing the poor woman's arm was out of the question? The vision of her going to a doctor and realizing that her arm has to be cut off saddens Morlicht. But there is nothing he can do. He tried miraculously healing her and failed.

He continues walking through the alley of God-Kings but he cannot admire the architecture anymore as he keeps thinking about the poor woman he couldn't help. He tells himself that even a god cannot save everyone but in this case it feels like nothing more than an excuse.

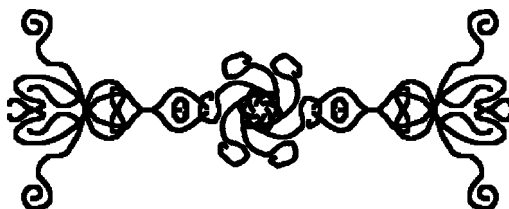
He passes a small, spiky palace – left behind by a God-King whose name he recall of the top of his head but knows that he was assassinated after very short rule. Next to it is a colorful but blocky multi-leveled building. This one belonged to God-Queen Somblendun and currently houses a school.

Finally, he reaches a building that is not like the others. And it doesn't just stand out among the fancy God-King residences but it also differs from all the regular houses and shops.

It is a ruin.

The once beautiful and fearsome small fortress has been deliberately ruined. Most of the upper part has collapsed and only parts left of it are crumbling and sticking like the horns of an oddly shaped crown. The ground floor has not been spared either – the walls are riddled with cracks and holes and all the windows are broken. In front of the building stands a large, stone tablet with text inscribed on it.

"In the memory of the victims of Kriesbrin. May their souls be free." it reads.



*Kriesbrin ruled when Zahreen was still too young to understand what's going on in the world. He did not hear about him back then but was later filled in on the brutal reign of the infamous God-King. There is one story that stuck with him the most.*

*During Kriesbrin's rule, Assir was at war with almost all of it's neighbors. Originally, society was mostly excited for conquest. Swayed by the ideas of getting access to better land where you don't need a river to grow food was something that surprisingly many were ready to fight for. Especially when aided by a powerful god.*

*Kriesbrin's miracles made his army a force to be reckoned with. Spears that could pierce through any armor. Featherweight armor that no spear could pierce. War horns that instilled fear in enemies. Those were only some of the powerful magical objects that the God-King bestowed upon his greatest soldiers. But those weren't the only miracles performed by Kriesbrin. He had the habit of leaving Sahvestar to sometimes join his armies on the front lines. Reports say that Assirian soldiers were unable to fear anything when the God-King joined them on the battlefield. This wasn't all though. When Kriesbrin fought, he decimated the enemy armies himself.*

*There are many stories of what miracles he performed while fighting. But it's difficult to tell exactly as the strong, emotional aura surrounding him in battle affected both his allies and his foes, making it very difficult to pinpoint what he really did. Some of the things that are consistent across reports of witnesses are rains of arrows and manipulation of the weapons other soldiers, both allied and enemy.*

*Eventually, the neighboring nations realized that none of them were a match against Assir and the God-King's miracles. As a result of that, an alliance was formed with the sole goal of defeating Kriesbrin. Instead of fighting a defensive war against him, they joined their forces to try and take the Assirian capital.*

*The united armies managed to break through the front lines and march all the way to Sahvestar. This was the turning point as it was no longer the story of the brave soldiers defeating*

overwhelming forces in foreign lands. It was the time when people finally felt the danger themselves.

As a result, when the armies neared the city, most were ready to surrender and begged the God-King to do so. But it was no use. Kriesbrin was proud and would not accept defeat. He performed his greatest miracle yet, giving the protesters the will to fight. Or at least that was what people believed at that time. They quickly armed themselves and went out to meet the armies closing in on the city. The invaders still had an overwhelming advantage but the new soldiers fought well.

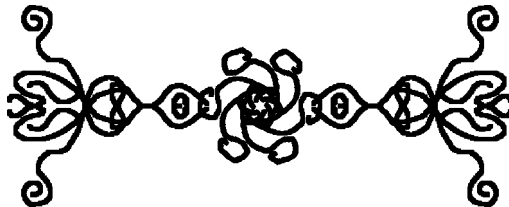
Too well.

When the battle dust settled, with a decisive victory for Kriesbrin, the price paid for the victory became apparent. What God-King did to those people wasn't just giving them courage and the will to fight. He turned them into soldiers. When they came back from the battlefield, a large group remained where they were meant to part ways. That was because they were no longer the people they used to be. The memories of their past lives and their personalities had been completely erased by the God-King. From then on, they were just soldiers.

It was no use when the families of the converted tried to make them remember anything. Not only did they not recognize their own homes but they were also unable to relearn the skills they once possessed. Like hollow shells with no desires, they existed only to serve as the forces of the God-King.

Later, when Kriesbrin was assassinated by rebels assisted by outside forces, the converted did not return to who they were before. Nor did they go seeking revenge for their leader. Instead, they simply lost any self-preservation they had. Forgetting to eat and pacing around aimlessly, most of them died of starvation and dehydration. Even those whose families what they could to keep them alive could not be helped. Some of them died from unexplained causes while others simply took their own life.

This is the story that Zahreen was told and it was the one that stuck with him for a long time.



When Morlicht comes back, someone is standing in next to the door. A young girl, probably around nineteen years old. She has short dark hair, wearing a creased palace servant outfit. Boredom seems to be emanating from her as she leans against the wall.

"Not here." she says nonchalantly, symbolically blocking the door with her left hand. Morlicht looks at her, puzzled.

"You have one of the royal rooms ready for you on the upper floor." she explains "I was also supposed to say that it was the courtesy of a certain priest but I forgot his name... well, tough luck for him." she shrugs.

Her attitude intrigues Morlicht. He knows that young people tend to be rebellious but to speak like that towards a man that's going to become God-King? That takes some courage. Yet, she doesn't seem to be trying to insult him or do things specifically to show how little she cares about authority. What a strange girl.

"Thank you." he says and turns back to go and check out his new room.

Morlicht doesn't struggle with finding the way. He knows the rough layout of the palace and when he finally gets to the upper floor, a clerk tells him which door he has to enter. For a few seconds he wonders whether everyone in the palace staff was given his description. The thought of a very serious official describing a homeless-looking wanderer and saying that he is soon to be God-King amuses him immensely.

When he opens the door, he sees a room more lavish than anything that he has seen before. This might be due to his limited experiences but it doesn't take away from the impressiveness of the place.

The octagonal room is large enough to comfortably host many people at the same time. In fact, its area is larger than that of an ordinary house that a family of four would live in. And yet, it is furnished specifically for just one person to live inside. The floors are carpeted and most of the walls are covered with beautiful tapestry. There are multiple lamps lighting the entire room. Opposite from the entrance, there is a stack of pillows arranged in a way that allows a person to lie down in the most comfortable way possible. There is also a part of the room closed off with a very expensive, orange curtain with embroidered gold and black flowers. There is probably a bed behind it and, from the expected size of the closed-off segment, it is a pretty large one. But, aside from a small table, a mirror, and a few cupboards, those are the only pieces of furniture. There are no bookshelves and no furnace.

And then there are the servants. Two young men and three young women standing around and waiting for his orders. They must have stood there and waited for the entire time since the room was prepared.

"I do not require your assistance, you can go and rest." Morlicht says, making a dismissive gesture with his left hand. He does not wish to disrespect the hard work of the palace staff but having personal servants ready to act on his whims just rubs him the wrong way.

The five young people do not move, probably unsure what to do in such a situation. Morlicht sighs.

"I need solitude, please leave room." he says. This command seems to speak more to the servants as they quickly follow the instructions and leave the place, closing the door behind them.

After a few minutes of inspecting the room, Morlicht catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror. He takes a better look but the person that he sees is unfamiliar. Then again, it's been long since he got to see his own face. With the outer layer of his clothes removed, his unkempt beard is fully visible. It almost reaches his shoulders. Something ought to be done about it. His hair is not looking great either – it is tied back for a good reason. It is not fit for a future God-King.

Having examined his appearance, he lies down on the stack of pillows. But he doesn't spend a long time on it as, although it is comfortable, he doesn't want to keep lying like that. The thought of the woman with a gangrene-ridden arm keeps pestering him.

Morlicht gets up and starts walking around the room in circles. He does not like being idle and is not tired enough to justify it. He opens the door. To his surprise, the five servants are still waiting right outside. But after giving it a few seconds of thought, it's only logical that they stayed. It's their job after all.

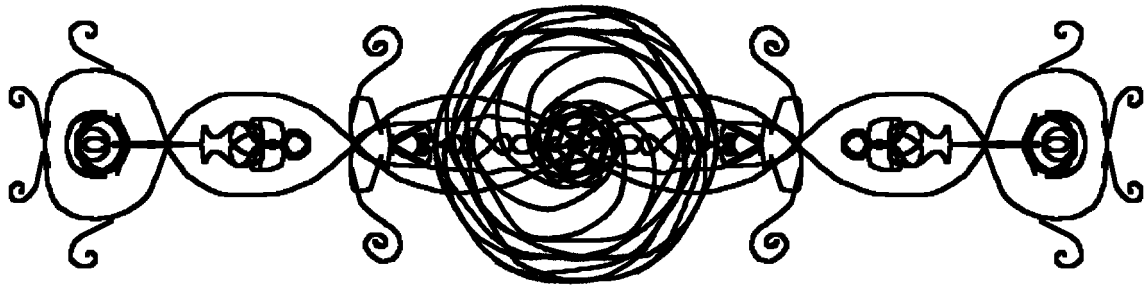
"Anything you need?" asks one of the servants.

"I'm going for a walk now. But I could use a razor." he says.

"And where are you going?"

"Do not worry about me, I will be fine." he looks the servant right in the eyes. The man seems nervous "There aren't many things that can endanger a god." he says with full confidence but it doesn't seem to relieve the young man.

Walking away, Morlicht scratches his beard. There is something that he doesn't like about that servant. He is suspicious but on a second thought it is completely reasonable for the unfriendly priest to have sent someone to watch him. If that's the case, then there is nothing to worry about. Either way, time will tell.



## *A few years ago*

*The man stands by the gravestone, his cloak fluttering slightly in the wind. Even though he is already nearing middle age, there is a spark of youthful anger in his eyes. He has been living in a bubble for almost his entire life, not knowing much about the world. And now, the bubble has burst, leaving him all alone to be the architect of his own fate. Almost.*

*Four masked men, dressed in black robes watch him from the shadows. He does see them, for he is not trained to deal with such situations. They stand there and wait.*

*Once he turns away from the gravestone, they also start moving. The four emerge from the forest to meet him. He looks at them and asks a question.*

*“Did you find the sword?”*

*“This shouldn’t be your main concern.” one of the dark figures answers, their voice muffled and distorted by the heavy mask covering the entirety of the face.*

*“She’s dead, I need to-” he starts.*

*“You need to begin search for an apprentice immediately. We are doing all that we can to recover the sacred blade but you must not waste your time with that.” one of the figures says. The man understands the logic but he feels it is not fair. Yet, he does not argue. There are forces that a simple man like him cannot argue with.*

*“Very well.” he says but he can’t put his heart into those words.*

*“That is all. Be well.” the black-dressed person says as they all turn around and head back into the forest.*

*After the four leave, he heads back to the cottage. His journey is not long but it is still a painful one. It’s only been a few days and the more serious wounds from his fall are yet to heal. Every deeper breath hurts, likely due to a broken rib. At least that’s the conclusion that he came to based on his master’s small collection of medical books and his basic knowledge.*

*Even though it’s been a few days, his grief has not gotten any lighter. Quite the contrary. After the initial shock of her death, he thought that he was already coping it with but he couldn’t have been further from the truth. As time passed, the implications of his master being gone began to show themselves, slowly making him realize what it really meant that she was gone.*

*He sits down on the couch and looks at the large bloodstain in the middle of the wooden floor. Something ought to be done about it but his current condition does not allow him to bend down to reach the floor. He clenches his right fist in frustration, causing pain in the whole arm. The thought of his master’s killers being out there while he is unable to do something as simple as cleaning up a bloodstain fills him with anger that he has never felt before.*

*He feels completely lost.*