

The Inquisitor

Event I

When I look back upon the age of magic, my hand can scarcely hold the quill steady.

My ears are filled with the roar of the funeral pyres, and in my mind I hear the cries of the souls of the masters.

I sense the heavy smoke of incense and its numbing effect, just as in the old days when we were still able to draw our strength from the runes.

Yet now, grown weary and broken by the fate of my guild, I wish to set down the tale of the end of the masters, the downfall of the runes, and of the man who summoned the ancient powers for the final time.

The Inquisitor

Event II

The overwhelming aura of power sprang neither from his painfully dazzling cross, which hung like a symbol of evil around his neck, nor from his retinue.

The Inquisitor appeared invincible, and his gaze burned into my memory like the secret of his strength.

Event III

The henchmen of the Inquisitor spread across the land like a plague. The masters foresaw darkness in the days to come, and the runes spoke of the end of magic.

I too saw our future sinking into shadow, as ever more the hunters of dusk uncovered the secret places of the rune-keepers and the magic circles of the masters, desecrated them, and burned the members of our guild.

Event IV

The rabble cried out in joy, the unlearned folk celebrated the Inquisitor, and with their aid his henchmen once again uncovered a magic circle.

Tears of despair ran down my face, which I sought to hide beneath my robe.

I saw the prophesied blackness descending, and as I stood amid the crowd, without the faintest hope that fate might yet turn, the victory speech of the Inquisitor washed over me.

No one – not even the highest guildmaster – had been able to stand against him.

Now he had succeeded in subjugating the magic circle of the great master beneath the power of his cross.

He had not yet overcome me, and so, though lacking courage, I followed him to uncover the secret of his power.

Event V

The heavy footsteps of his guards echoed across the circle of the great master until the Inquisitor halted before the mighty steps leading downward.

Though unversed in the greater arts, I knew the verse that must be spoken to remain unseen by the eyes of the guards.

Thus I watched as the Inquisitor, accompanied by only two of his closest men, descended the stairs, and knowing that none but the highest

guildmaster possessed the magic of the vault, I resolved not to lose sight of him.

Event VI

He tore the heavy chains from the great iron-clad gate, flung the vast doors open with a crash, and disappeared into the murky light of the hall beyond, leaving his companions behind.

Adorned with magic signs and runes, filled with gleaming cauldrons and wondrous apparatus, the hall exerted such a hypnotic power over me that I nearly forgot my purpose.

Event VII

Still entirely entranced by my surroundings, I was startled by the sound of another door opening.

I regained my senses and cautiously crossed the vault, and upon reaching the far side I fell to my knees within the frame of the portal at the sight before me.

There it was – the book written in runes, containing the entire knowledge of our guild, whose final secrets had until then revealed themselves only to the great master.

Now the Inquisitor stood at the center of the semi-circular hall hewn from the rock, reading its pages.

Event VIII

With every line the Inquisitor read, he was further transformed. His eyes glowed red like burning coals; his robe swelled and lost its form, dissolving into swirling mists.

His fingers, painfully contorted, gripped a staff that now resembled the twisted branch of an ancient oak, supporting the bent figure of the Inquisitor.

Nearly driven mad by the roar of the enraged elements, I understood how he had been so successful in his struggle against our guild.

The Inquisitor – himself a magician – gained power with every blow struck against us, and with the runes of the great master in his possession he would hold the weapons of destruction in his hands, wield them against the guild, and thus become the sole and final master of rune power.

Event IX

As though turned to stone, I listened as the Inquisitor spoke in the unearthly voice of the rune-keepers, finally sinking into the monotonous chant with which the magical verses are recited.

At his commanding gestures, fluorescent mists arose within the hall, spiraling upward, collapsing into themselves, and circling once more toward the center of the dome.

Event X

I was so enthralled by the Inquisitor's incantations that the sudden silence struck me like physical pain.

Only the surging vapors and the burning eyes of the magician remained, and I knew this was merely the calm before the final storm.

A growl that chilled me to the marrow confirmed my fear – it came from the throat of a grotesque creature that had slithered from the mists to the Inquisitor's feet, its thunderous tread shaking the underground caverns.

This dragon was clearly destined to complete the Inquisitor's work: to destroy all circles and all magic.

But the magician had been too clever.

The raging beast, intent on annihilating all that was magical, tore him apart with its mighty jaws, and thus he became the first victim of his own sorcery, buried beneath the rubble of the dome the dragon destroyed in its fury.

Event XI

The creature was free – unleashed upon my guild and upon my kin, who had not yet lost their faith in magic.

Like a whirlwind it hissed across the land, murderous and merciless, devastating everything in its path according to its command of death and annihilation.

In a short time the land lay ravaged, and the hearts of the people were filled with sorrow, despair, and hopelessness.

Event XII

Yet even the dragon – the creature of damnation, condemned to kill and itself, without the magician, stripped of all hope of release – felt profound sorrow.

A being of magic, created to drive all magic into the depths, it would soon be forced to wait eternally for its own end, an end that would likely never come, for the weapons of mortals had slipped from their grasp.

Again and again it reared up in fury – against its creator, against its task, and against itself – without purpose and without hope.

Event XIII

The gateway from which I had witnessed the dreadful events and the terrible birth of the dragon saved my life when the rocky dome collapsed beneath the creature's rage, burying the Inquisitor and the runic book of the great master forever.

It took me many hours to free myself from the ruins, yet what kind of freedom was this?

The village that had housed the circle of our great master lay in ashes. Nothing remained of the small huts or of the people who had lived there and who, not long before, had cheered the Inquisitor.

Cold rain ran down my neck, softened the earth, and soon the last traces of peace sank into the mire.

I had not been able to stop the Inquisitor. Worse still, I had been forced to witness the creation of the beast meant to slaughter us all. Only chance had allowed me to survive – but how long would it be before the dragon found and executed me as well?

Bereft of hope, I sank into the mud, lowered my gaze, and waited for the end, listening to the rain fall like tears from the heavens.

Exhausted, I thought of my old master, who had so little time to pass his secrets on to me. Yet surely he had begun my instruction with what mattered most, to prepare me for life. Still, only little of his wisdom had he shared with me...

Wisdom – I already knew this verse...

encounter discouragement with courage

encounter disbelief with belief

counter faithlessness with faithfulness

confront ignorance with wisdom
overcome hopelessness with hope

...Hope – yes, with hope, which reaches every human heart, we could succeed in vanquishing the monstrosity of evil.

With this hope, which swept across the land like the dragon itself and renewed the people so that they could face it with resolve, it came to pass that with a mighty blow they sent the beast to the underworld, to follow the diseased soul of the Inquisitor, so that Wothan's ravens might once again find peace in our land.