

From way down here, looking up at it, there's a tiny white speck at the very top of the mountain. They say that that's where our Man in a Chair sits and deliberates how to go about doing nothing each day. The mountain is very tall and quite steep, so he receives reports of his chairdom's affairs through a series of messengers that each climb their assigned section of the mountain, passing the message on to the next who climbs their bit to meet the next messenger and so on, until the final messenger, breathlessly, is kneeling at the feet of the Chair. The Man in the Chair has never said a word. Each time the first messenger on the mountain arrives to town to relay the Man's response, the story is same: the Man in a Chair sat and stared in silence upon hearing the news.

Today, a general from a garrison on the outskirts rode into town. The townsfolk heard the crippled galloping long before he arrived and could see from a distance the tattered livery of the rider whose affect was more stoic than gallant. They had gathered around the town square to witness the arrival and, just so, in the clearing of onlookers, the horse's knees buckled and his heavy frame skidded to a halt. The general slowly rose from the cloud of dust that had already begun to cling to his open wounds still dripping with blood and sweat. The first messenger was already there, kneeling before him, awaiting the news.

When the final messenger reached the top, he was in a panicked frenzy. What shall we do? He pointed frantically to the spot on the distant horizon where the neighbouring chairdom had invaded. And so the Man in the Chair stared straight ahead, unmoved, that constant stern expression that seemed to the messenger so determined to do absolutely nothing in the face of catastrophe. He appeared a coldly apathetic monarch. But what the messenger nor the townspeople could never know, never understand about him was that he really did care a great deal about his subjects. He cared too much, perhaps, and that was what paralyzed him. Behind that confident gaze overlooking the dusk panorama, the sun setting on this beautiful painting, so serene and peaceful yet whose minute details, little glimmering specks scattered across, hurried commotion played in slow motion before him, bore the suffering of thousands of people whose every single imperceptibly distant cries for help latched into his mind and tore it apart, behind that confident gaze his eyes were wide with horror and his whole body quivered.

He imagined himself rising from his Chair, pointing a heavy finger to where those farthest specks clashed. He would go himself, in shining armour, where the demoralized remnants of his massacred army would be waiting for him. And his own thunderous voice will strike a chord in the hundred still beating hearts who follow his charge, ever forwards, ploughing through the enemy ranks so momentarily unstoppable. Until the clamour of war strikes climax, and then it slowly descends. The adrenal trance subsides, himself suddenly so self-aware of his thumping heart and heaving breath. And in his mind there's a crowd of cheering compatriots, witnesses of his valour, but in this mind there's nothing. In this mind, there's the wind that whistles a careless tune as he turns around and sees what's left of the hundred men, a thousand enemies, reduced to limp forms sprouting arrows and blades. The blood of eleven-hundred good men drips off his chin and fingertips. It weighs him down heavier than his armour that feels now a sad manifestation of his vanity, and so too his fraudulence, that such a coward even thought for a moment he was brave, that there was anything honourable about convincing a hundred men to kill themselves and a thousand more. Only a true coward would let himself believe such a thing, if even for a moment, and even prefer it over his own head on a pike, only his own blood streaming down the pole and his final terrified expression held high for all the townspeople he loved so dearly to see and curse, the traitor, the coward who had not even the courage to lead his men into battle, who surrendered himself and his subjects to the invading forces without even putting up a fight. And so desperately pleads the messenger to answer him: What shall you do?