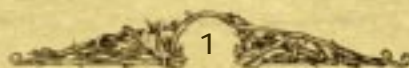


The Prophecy

Pre-story to Divine Divinity



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Chapter 1



he attack came at the breaking of the dawn, the sky was turning from a pitch black shroud into a shimmering canopy of red and orange, the clouds were just hinting at the night's final death knell. The howling, screaming and ravaging hordes of demons broke upon the sheltered farmstead like a black rushing river. Claws and teeth savaging the inhabitants as they tried vainly to defend themselves - blood was let in such ferocity that neither children nor mothers were spared. It was a terrible cull; for they saw them as such vermin, to be butchered as they slept, with none to spare.

These creatures were not born of nature's soft hand, but of the darker powers and arts known to wizards - these mostly exiled spell casters had waited so long for their revenge it was a palpable taste in their mouths. Like the blood that their demon hordes had spilled uncontrollably earlier - but they did not care, they did not wish to lift a finger, for in the past; around thirty years ago to be exact they saw the death of their grand leader at the hands of the man known as Duke Hark Ferol. They had plotted, planned and waited for such a time that they could unleash their vengeance upon the Kingdom and those who held life dear.

But the destruction of the farmlands and the outlying villages only served to give those children of the Duke time to prepare their forces in Rivertown. As the wizards and their demonic allies had been delayed by several turns of night into day and day into night. The allies were not expecting to face such magical power or monsters as those on an open plain, so they trusted their skills to a much more daring plan - a battle in the very town itself. Of course they also had to worry about the Lord of Chaos, a terrible a destructive force that could tear through most armies like kindling being consumed by a raging bonfire - some said that it was a Phantom, but none really knew for sure.





The sky now was as dark as sackcloth and pinpricks of light shone through as the stars burned brightly in the heavens above. It was the longest day of the year and seemed to be the most ominous; fear began to burn in the hearts of those who waited in Rivertown...fear and apprehension. It began as a soft rumble and then a wicked clamour as the army of darkness arrived at the gate of the town, the posts shaking with the force of amassed wickedness, demons, wizards and the Chaos Lord all arrayed in eager anticipation of a vicious battle. But all was silent, as the demonic hordes sniffed the air for their prey...nothing stirred, cautiously they advanced. But caution is so rare in war and soon they began to feel as though no one remained to oppose them, so caution was replaced by frank arrogance and in they marched as though they had conquered it already.



They were not aware that high above them, on roof and gable sat the noble defenders - the rooftops giving them a scant but needed advantage over the army. A cry went up at the same time as the defenders drove pots of oil on fire from the high places above them, many were caught and set on fire and then came the rain of arrows, flying like angry wasps and hissing like snakes from the bows of dozens of archers - each arrow was tipped with a virulent poison. The battle began anew and the army of demons and mages responded with a wave of spells and fire bolts that drove the archers back into the safety of the shadows; man, demon and wizard fell in the first assault. But the actions of these brave souls were naught to the power of this army and they were forced to flee, to regroup.

But war does not happen over night, nor does it happen in just one moment's heart beat of blood and thunder, it's a living breathing entity that draws the very life and soul out of those who dare to practise the art. So it was that the mages dark army harried and hunted the brave souls that chose to stand against them, so it was that they were forced to respond with terror tactics against a much more superior foe. Over these next four months a deadly game of cat and mouse commenced as the wizards blasted homes and houses into nothing in search of their enemies, and the valiant defenders were forced to band into small packs to avoid the stalking demons that hunted them like game animals.



These packs learned quickly the value of knowing your enemies' weaknesses, demon and wizard alike, and they used this knowledge to even the odds. For every single victory they gained, the wizards armies were made to pay in blood and pain; as the allies slit their throats in the deep veil of night, or drove the shafts of arrows through their twisted and black hearts. The wizards began to be known as the Damned by the allies and the packs grew into bands that would skirmish through the ruins, as fast as they were removed from one area - they would simply return to another. The armies of darkness were losing their patience and slowly the Damned were being whittled down since they could not receive any further help or reinforcements. It was time to act, and so the Lord of Chaos in all his spectral glory stalked the battlefields and drove the allies before him, they could not kill this being directly, nor by stealth - it began to soon seem hopeless. Little by little and inch by tentative inch he directed the course of the battle as he saw fit, the allies were soon driven into his ambushes and they were in danger of being beaten...

The fourth month of the war saw a drastic turn of events and the allies were driven from Rivertown, beaten and bedraggled, fleeing heavily wounded and broken to the relative safety of another bastion of hope - The mothers and their children (those that remained) had fled much earlier and were surviving in the surrounding forests. While the allies turned towards the cold stone of the castle known as Stormfist, the fear in their hearts was that they were finished, they had lost - but they knew that as long as they stood; their families had time to escape into the safety of their allies lands...it was all they could do to protect them now. They knew as they arrayed in the courtyard of the castle that they had one hope to hold it, the gatehouse, if that fell then the armies of the wizards and the Chaos Lord would swarm in like flies around a corpse





and it would all end there. They had enough supplies to withstand a long siege but morale was low; many muttered about dying and many waited for death to come claim them at last.

Those who did not suffer from apathy and fear were praying to the Seven Good Gods, with great fervour. They placed barrels of oil around the castle in strategic places; the Damned would win naught but the broken husk of a once proud fortress, when they had finished defiling it. Ochre skies once more heralded their arrival and once more they appeared like the conquerors they were, but at their lead was the mighty Lord of Chaos, he tore down the gatehouse like rotted wood and the demons and Damned followed in his wake, like lapdogs...all the while the Chaos being laughed a terrible and unsettling laugh, it drove shivers down the spines of those who heard it. It seemed like nothing could deter his advances or initially slow his dark fury...they were doomed, until at that moment as they moved



to defend; closing ranks - he stopped as if frozen and snarled ferally. Whipping back around eyes blazing like hell fires, for there were the Dwarven people, their armies were chewing through his spawn as they bellowed battle cry after battle cry. In falling anger, their axes and hammers were dispatching foe after foe, demon and Damned alike.

The sky turned into a black cloud, an abyssal morass as the Chaos Lord became enraged, but for all his bile and anger he could not stop the Stone-hackers in their advances, now the tide of battle had turned in their favour the doomed allies flew together with the Dwarves; it was a bloody and victorious rout as Dwarf and man drove the bestial foe from the castle, those that were not cut down by the veteran soldiers of the Dwarves, those who could handle hell spawn in their sleep...were set to flight by the Chaos Lord to save them from the fate that should have befallen their foul selves. The allies defeated most of the Damned, the mages panicked and fled to the skies with the aid again of their Lord - those that could not be brought down by arrows were able to escape, perhaps to return once more? A great cheer was heard as the armies finally put the last of the demons to the sword, and they warmly greeted the Dwarves with much elation and pride...under the clearing skies it started to rain, washing the blood into rivers of pale crimson.

Now time had turned and now time had come full circle. A new battle was being fought...many years after the old. And as the moon climbed into the sky above the camp of Ruben Ferol he sat back and read through an account of the last battle, he shifted his hand to his chin and sighed, turning his thoughts inwards - The heavy linen of his tent ruffled in the night's heady breeze and he cricked his neck closing his eyes, he'd read book after book and account after account of battles long since won or lost. But they gave him no real indication of how



he could fight this new war...the old manuscripts seemed to hint that the allies had triumphed by luck and hit and run tactics, this was not helpful to the Warmage and descendant of Hark Ferol the man who began the war with the Damned.

He reached forwards and took a heavy swig of his tankard, for his sources had informed him that a drawn out, face-to-face fight with the Lord of Chaos and his minions would be an impossible task, a futile endeavour and one that would see more death than he could handle. The Damned, they were back and he and the League would face them in the morning - he could find no solace or succour in the thoughts or readings of others...it all seemed to be as black as pitch.



The Chaos Lord was another problem that weighed on his soul; it drove him to take another drink from that tankard. His spies, and scouts had informed him that the dark army was much stronger this time and the Chaos Lord had more magelings and demons than before - it seemed to the Warmage that this fight would not go well. The Damned must have captured many slave women to have bred such a force in that time, curse the mountains for offering such a hiding place and retreat...curse them to the pit. Those slain Damned were found to have a



much younger appearance than the League expected...could this be a stone-hard fact that the Dark One granted eternal youth to those who were depraved enough to follow his treacherous ways.

One last drink from his tankard served to cause him to cough slightly; he narrowed his eyes and shivered in the cold from the tent. His lids flickering as he blinked, there was another problem that presented itself that needed careful consideration; the Damned now had a leader; an arch magus known as Ulthring. And if that did not hammer a nail into the coffin that might soon be his, the Lord of Chaos - that formless spectral being from the last war, largely powerless but still to be feared, was now fully physical and stalked the ruins of Rivellon in the form of a being, twice as tall as any man and as strong as a dozen or more of their hardest warriors. He sighed deeply; he was going to need some kind of miracle. His tankard was set down and it caught the edges of a tray...

If they were to win this war at all they were going to have to find a way to defeat a being who seemed to be a deity incarnate, it was something he was not relishing the thought of...his food lay uneaten, partially nibbled and cold on the plate. He had till the end of the day to find a chink in the immortals armour, if they failed in this; enslavement or worse was their fate - a cold sweat broke out on his forehead and he took a direct swig from a crystal wine-jug off to one side on the table. Then he made to rise, and obediently behind him his apprentice, Ralph followed suit and draped his master's war cloak around his shoulders - the young man fastened the garment around his neck and Ferol walked out of the tent, the flaps parting as he passed. Leaving his sleeping tent, bodyguards at either side, their boots crunching the grass beneath their steel-shod tread. They headed towards the larger and more dominant marquee that served as the council meeting place for the League. His eyes lifted to the sky above, from the waning stars and the



coming change in the air he noted that he had barely enough time; it was a few hours before the dawn.

He decided to spend these last few hours of his life, informally, so when he entered the tent the first thing he did was sink into the large 'grand chair' and put his booted feet up on the council table. Soon the others arrived with their entourages and their own bodyguards. First to enter was his cousin, several times removed – Duke Dylan Ferol, the leader of the human realm in Rivellon. After him followed Jemthorn of the elven people and Ulf Twohuts for the dwarves, though their people rarely saw eye to eye, these pair were almost inseparable and stout allies – not to mention great friends. Grondtha of the Lizard people and Zakx of the imps were the next to make their presence known; finally Go-Dar of the orcs joined them, entering with his usual proud and confident stride. He was clad in his war cloak, multi-hued and feathered...one by one they took their places, settled and all eyes turned onto Ruben Ferol.

He waited a moment, as the eyes searched him, reflecting on who he was – why he was here. He was one of the wizards of Rivellon who had taken a stand against the terrible Lord of Chaos. They were not an actual race, but a group of powerful individuals who were drawn from the other races...they were given a seat at the council and given the same respect and rights as any member of the League. But more than this Ferol had always been looked upon as a high advisor when matters turned to those of a military nature. He was human, he was a battle mage of unsurpassed power and skill, and humans had always been looked upon as the most creative when it came to strategy, thought and planning. It really gave him no heartening comfort to know that his own kind made up most of the Damned, since humans had a reputation of being easily corrupted and capable of almost anything – now here he was, standing before the assembled and the centre of their attention. A cold shiver ran down his spine for a moment, it was nothing new – so he endured it with a sardonic half-smile.



He flirted with the idea of a rousing speech, the kind that should lift men's hearts and gird their souls for battle, but when he saw the people before him – the idea evaporated like new morning mist. They had been embroiled in this battle for the last six months and they were tired, so was he, the savage



fighting had burnt all thoughts of romantic heroism from their hearts...Go-Dar of the orcs, once renowned for his comic poetry (Ferol had always found him too saccharine for his tastes) was sullen and sat there with a dark cloud over his heart. He found himself thinking that the warnings of the Damned's savagery in the last war had come at too late this time; they had perhaps underestimated their demonic foes a little. For rather than a small army, the darkness now numbered in the thousands and



was supported by many hundreds of demons. The cost to this end had been high, and bloody...not a single member of the Council had escaped personal tragedy over the last half-year, as the Damned had ravaged the lands, freed of any scruples they might have had. He would be a fool to offer his allies such false hope, so he began in his usual speaking voice, edged with tiredness and a desire to see this over.

"Friends and allies." He sighed softly. "I have found nothing in the histories that can give us an edge, the foe seems to have no chink in their armour." His hands now fell to the table and for a moment all was silent. "We have never faced such a terrible, unstoppable foe before – I fear that our fight will be futile and that we cannot win against such as this."

"Bah! You're too grim Ferol." Grumbled the leader of the dwarves. His eyes alight with the passion for battle his people shared, he placed his own hand on the table. "You speak as though we're already finished." He looked to them all. "Why banded together we field at least six thousand more fighters than the Damned!"

"And we lose three dead, for everyone one of theirs in a straight fight!" Came a disgruntled reply.

"So we are truly finished then?" Go-Dar said sadly, and collectively their eyes fell for a moment.

Another voice rose alongside Go-Dar's own and proclaimed frankly. "We might have a chance if it were just the Lord of Chaos leading the Damned, but now they have that thrice cursed Archmage Ulthring with them, armed with the foul blade the Chaos Lord forged for him...he's as powerful as that stinking Lord himself!"



"All well and good, but I see it as no reason to let that spoil our morning." As Ferol had let this entire debate sink in, he'd watched the others and his own eyes now shone with a wicked intent. They all turned once more to look at him, some mouths agape and jaws slack.

"You have thought of a plan have you not, you old fox?" Jemthorn broke the silence with his own question and a matching smile, to Ferol's now growing one. His voice, light and soft was tinged with the beginnings of laughter.

"Not quite mine." Said the War-mage with a half-smile. "Let me explain." He began to pace a little, turning to regard his allies with a generous look. "Three night's ago, I had a dream...almost as if the Gods themselves had spoken to me, but as with all divine gifts – I know there is a price."

Again he was fixed with those searching eyes, he turned for a moment, crossed from one side of the marquee to the other and then returned to the table – seating himself and propping his chin with his hands, both thumbs supporting just under – while his fingers steepled under his nose. After a few short moments, he leant back in his chair and began once more.

"I beheld the hordes of the Damned breaking and routed from our army...we pursued them on the hunt as they hunted our ancestors." His eyes clouded for a heart beat as he recalled his dream clearly. "My dream showed the defeat of Chaos and Ulthring, panic spreading like wild fire through the ranks of their hellish army...I saw how it was accomplished and I beheld the price of that Victory."

The League sat for a while, some of them stunned, some of them plain disbelieving – but still Ferol spoke on, for they were riveted by his urgent voice and almost prophetic tone.



"I heard a voice from the heavens, and one can only presume it to be some kind of angel – it chanted a prophecy that might hint to some future battle against the Damned..." He then fixed them all with a clear gaze and in a final speech said. "In my heart I am afraid, but in my dreams I do not fear – so I know that on this day, we shall win." He stood and slammed his hands onto the table with a sound like a thunderclap. "For if we lose, how can our few enslaved descendants battle Chaos for a third time?"

Their eyes never left his and as the sun rose, they all knew what must be done – so it was with hearts as heavy as their armour, they left the marquee and prepared to meet their fate.

The sun climbed into the sky as the two armies positioned

themselves for a final confrontation, climbing slowly over the course of three hours – until at last they were ready...poised on the brink of battle. The Damned were formed before their demonic allies, ready to fling spell after spell at their enemies, but as soon as fighting turned into hand to hand, they would retreat behind their demon foot soldiers. The glowing glimmers of the orb's rays glanced off sword and shield, armour and



warrior as it lit the way for the carnage to come. Ulthring stood to the side of the Lord of Chaos; they both presented a frightening image to the army of the League...the mage dressed in full armour, stained as crimson as blood. In his hand rested the Sword of Lies, that blade which Chaos had gifted him with...the madman's eyes gleamed as he waited for the signal. Then there was the ebony hued figure of the Lord of Chaos; he stood over twelve feet tall and seemed to be made out of the shadows...appearing as a naked, hairless human – unarmed but terrifying to look upon, even from the other side of the battlefield.

Against this oppressive horde of terror stood the League of Seven, patiently waiting for the order to advance...their armour gleamed in the light, their weapons were ready – they would win or they would die trying. No quarter would be asked and none would be given. The humans, orcs and dwarves were a block of heavy infantry in the centre – the imps, elves and lizards were the faster light infantry on either flank. Battlemages interspersed the ranks, ready to throw warspells and support their comrades – Archers of all the races formed the back row of the infantry block, ready to fall back and send hails of arrows into the foe. Then there was the League cavalry, composed of every race once again, they were before the infantry and held the banners – horses stamping their hooves, snorting the air and showing signs of impatience.

Ruben Ferol and the other League leaders were mounted to the side of the main force, a little way off – they had their own small force of two hundred elite horsemen, formed into a neat wedge. They could all hear the derisive voice of the Chaos Lord as he urged them to flee the battle, to run before it was too late...how they would all fall, fail and die trying. But these were not recruits, they were well trained fighting men who sat on their mounts, unmoved by the sound of that dark voice...while their horses' ears flickered nervously, the men



calmed their beasts and began to chant a low droning chant – that even the men in the rank behind could not hear, it was spoken in unison.

Ralph, the young apprentice of Ferol's gave the order to advance, which was signalled by the trumpeter who blew a loud and clear wailing note into the air. The League cavalry broke from the group and thundered towards the dark army – behind them quick marched the infantry; their shields were raised to fend off any long range enchantments that were flung towards them. As spells flew, the Damned had great difficulty in targeting their magics against the galloping horsemen, but even so, enough magic found its mark to break the cavalry's charge and down a third of their horsemen before they could even get close to the wizards.



The League infantry opened their ranks to allow the now fleeing cavalry through and to the rear, rushing onwards so fast that the Damned mages did not pause to loose another deadly barrage, they turned and melted quickly behind the ranks of their demon allies flanks. Not wanting to wait that long, the Chaos Lord bellowed and the demon soldiers charged forwards to meet the League with a howling, screaming yell. The two armies clashed on foot and while they battled furiously



Battlemages and Damned cast spell after spell, arrows were volleyed from both sides over the heads of their comrades and sank with bloody finality into the bodies of their foes. Fighters of both sides fell in scores; blood slicked the field and mixed with the ichors of the foul and their allies...it was obvious from this battle that the League were being cut down like wheat while the Damned suffered minor losses.

The dwarven, orc and human warriors in the very middle were slowly falling or being pushed back by the onslaught of mad Ulthring and the Lord of Chaos, they left a mound of the dead or dying in their wake, as the two pressed on their advantage a League trumpet blew a forlorn note in the battle and the middle section of the heavy infantry turned as one, and fled at full speed. Sensing he had already won the mad Ulthring followed the Chaos Lord's charge as they pursued the fleeing warriors like cats hunting mice. At this moment, the carefully timed trap was closed with a grim smile from those who had played the game till this point...they had lost much, but hope soared as they beheld their elite warriors from either flank suddenly close in behind the two leaders and block their demonic allies and wizards from following their masters.

Suddenly it seemed that the fleeing troops were making a carefully choreographed and orderly withdrawal and not a bloody, scared rout at all. This was further clarified by the action of opening their formation to let the League leaders and their galloping, thundering horses through, supporting the wedge of two hundred which bore right towards the Damned's leaders at a great pace. The Chaos Lord simply roared in delight, he knew in his foul heart that this was no match for he and the wizard at his side – so he let them come knowing that they would be crushed under his ebony feet. Then his demons would tear the thin line between him and it would be all over in a second. His eyes burned ferally...



Ralph, Ferol's apprentice, chose that moment to break the powerful invisibility magic that had kept him hidden for the time and took aim with his longbow at the wizard Ulthring...the arrow shot from the bow and time seemed to condense down into a single brief moment, the arrow pierced the wizard's left eye and the shot was so fierce that it split the eyeball and ploughed right through the back of the mage's helmet – appearing in a gore soaked tide of red. Chaos had no time to react to the attack on his now screaming unnatural ally...for the leaders of the League were almost upon him, and as the two hundred cavalry rode past to close ranks against the demons behind him Go-Dar and Ulf Twohuts drove lances into the dark creatures body, he gave them a bellow of contempt and reached out with his powerful hands, snapping the lances like rotten wood – then he closed those same hands about their necks, plucking them off their mounts like cherries...there was the sickening sound of cracking bone and both were tossed to the floor...lifeless.

Jemthorn of the elves slammed his waraxe into Chaos' skull and it connected with a bone-jarring crunch, without seeming to be harmed the black shape tore the elf's arm clean out of his socket in a spray of gouting blood. Carnage was the master of this battle as Zakx fell to the Chaos Lord's black finger, driven into his skull like a twisted dagger...he staggered backwards and fell to the ground. Duke Dylan Ferol leapt from his horse and tried to wrestle with Chaos, who grabbed the man held both his arms, tilted his own head to the side then slammed him into the ground – breaking his back, rolling him over and crushing his chest like he was treading on a pair of well used bellows...he died spitting blood.

As she saw this, Grondtha of the lizard folk tried to come to the Duke's aid but she perished as Chaos raked her with a terrible kick as he turned around. Her hands went to her gut and she tried to staunch the flow of blood and bile as she fell



next to the pale, bloodless corpse of Jemthorn of the elves. In dying, the leaders of the League had not given Chaos the satisfaction of one single scream of pain.

As he watched this Ruben Ferol shook his head sadly and gritted his teeth, he saw the demon king rip Jemthorn's axe from his head and take up a defensive posture. Ferol rode towards him and at the last moment, he simply dropped his guard and swung down off his horse, which skittered slightly in the presence of this being. As he strode towards the Chaos Lord the mage began to laugh, it was a hollow, derisive laugh...he stood before the demon and raised his eyes defiantly. Needing no time to react the Chaos Lord spread his fingers and drove his black hand deep into Ferol's chest, the man bucked and gritted his teeth as he felt his body shake and his eyes dim slowly...his blood rushed past him onto the gore soaked ground, but all he gave the demon king was a grim smile – then he died.

As Chaos withdrew his hand and the body slumped to the ground, the blood that had been shed intermingled together and a great ball of white light burst forth, scorching his eyes and obliterating the demons that had broken free to protect their master. Black shapes were torn into the air and thrown backwards violently by this magical blast...the spell that the leaders of the League had all cast now shone forth like a beacon of hope across this violent confrontation, picking Chaos into the air, the power of their lives wrought into a sacrificial magic that now twisted the demon king through all four dimensions...and in a screaming rage of pain and torment – he was thrown back to hell with a cloud of dark smoke and falling ash; he vanished with the sound of a thunderclap.

A little way off, Ralph, battle-weary and bloody now stood over the form of mad Ulthring, the mage was still alive, and the apprentice could scarce believe his eyes. So he reached down to seize the closest weapon to him – the Sword of Lies. The



mad wizard screamed and writhed, then he was still as the apprentice drove the point of the sword down and through his throat...the scream trailed off into a gurgle as small rivers of crimson ran down the sides of his neck and onto the floor...his one good eye closed forever. As he ripped the sword from Ulthring's throat he held it aloft, blood still slicking the blade and the demon army routed and broke at the sight of both of their leaders gone. The races of the League of Seven closed about them and cut them down like so much chaff. It was not long before the only moving things upon the battlefield were the carrion come to feast on the dead...as pennants idly flapped, torn and blood soaked – an ominous stillness lingered briefly. In the League's camp the mood was that of elation and joy as those that remained grabbed what weapons they could, determined not to let a single demon or mage leave the field of battle alive and flee into the unknown. Yet the wind idly toyed with the tent flap of Ruben Ferol's tent, flickering the corners of a parchment that lay on his wooden table...not the last will and testament of a doomed man, but a prophetic warning...words of a dream – three days before he sacrificed his own life to save many.

Three elements are required to become the true Divine One: Summoning, Blessing and Sacrifice.

The Divine One will have a Protector who will guide him.

The Divine One will walk upon the paths of the Dead.

The Divine One will see visions sent from the Land of Death.

The Divine One has the Power to save or destroy the world.



Chapter 2

In the wake of his master's death, Adept Ralph had been thrust into several new roles that brought with them their own pitfalls and problems. He was now the chief Battlemage in Rai'alor and the designated spokesperson for the wizards of Rivellon – he was also slowly going out of his mind. He had played his allotted part in the battle against the Damned; it was he who had shot the yew arrow through the eye of that accursed magus, Ulthring and then ended the bastard's foul life with his own sword...and that had proven to be his undoing. As his soul had called to him in triumph he had felt his psyche slammed by a powerful and dominant mental attack, undermined almost. Ralph was gifted certainly and accountably one of the most accomplished Battlemages in the land, which required great mental reserves and physical hand to eye coordination. The sword whispered to him in dark laments and he could feel the pressure against his mental defences, probing them, crushing them – crumbling them like a flaking old stone wall assaulted by years of wind and rain.

He had taken it out of foolish impulse and a need to sate the burning desire of revenge, when he saw his master sacrifice his life to save them all, a flame ignited deep within his breast and he had driven the sword deep into the throat of the wizard - hatred burning in his eyes. And as he felt the release from this deed, joy was turned to black terror as the sword's foul presence reached out and tried to take control of him. And from that moment on Ralph had been effectively struck in twain by this dark power; he was the grim young man who was the last survivor of that terrible battle...he was also the dark entity that tried to oust his soul, to own him, to possess him completely. As long as he remained in contact with that sword he could feel the other presence growing in power and strength, at first it had offered him a subtle deal – a merger between both their bodies...unimaginable power at his fingertips. The Adept had refused and this angered the sword's spirit greatly,



now it was bent to the task of annihilating Ralph utterly and completely. The Adept knew that such a bargain was impossible to make with demons or their ilk; they would simply enslave your soul while they used your body for their own terrible ends. While he was not bound to keep the sword, by compulsion or spell – he knew that a lesser mind would be broken instantly and the force inside the Sword of Lies would be free once more, with a living a mortal body to control. He could not take that chance, so he kept the weapon with him where ere he went, so that he could keep a closer eye on it.

He tried to force his eyes to remain open, weary and haggard, he rubbed his forehead – he had not slept for three whole days now, constantly he battled the fragmented soul of the Chaos Lord and it was driving him mad. Those around him had noticed the change in the Adept, they knew something was going wrong but it had remained largely unsaid since the army's triumphant return to Rivertown. He was a Battlemage (A dark and grim calling) and also he had witnessed the fall of his master before his very eyes...they knew this would leave some scars for a long time. They realised that he would be prone to dark moods and taciturn behaviour, but his servants noticed that he was not sleeping nor was he eating as much as he should – each meal that came around, he ate less and less. He was also growing pale of skin and visibly thinning – almost like a living skeleton they thought. They sent a petition to the newly crowned ruler of Rivellon's human lands, Duke Morreck Ferol, asking that he might come see the young Adept. The Duke, thinking light of this particular request took a day to find the time to visit, it was this slight delay that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

As the Duke entered he beheld his friend, sitting cross-legged upon the floor of his chamber in Stormfist Castle...a position that he had been in now for nearly one day and a night. Ralph held in his hands a drawn sword, and although his



posture was non-threatening...the other man was repulsed and reviled by the blade. The so-called Sword of Lies might have killed its evil master but it had also done wretched things in the hands of Ulthring before Ralph had slain him. Morreck had known his friend since they were but small boys, learning the arts of magic together. But as the man he held in his eyes before him slowly turned his head to face him, a cold shiver shot down his spine, for before him was a thin, pale and almost prematurely aged youth with madness in his eyes. Deep in those eyes something struggled to comprehend but was lost behind the glaze of a crazed stare – like the eyes of a maddened dog.

Still the Duke lowered his voice and spoke respectfully to the seated wizard, as respectfully as one addresses two of the leaders of the seven greater races of Rivellon. He received no reply, so he half-in-anger and half-in-frustration called Ralph by his old childhood nickname of 'Blunderfoot' – this sparked something from the other man and a weak smile came to his lips.

"I don't have much time." He said in a voice that was hoarse with pain and struggle. "Lord Chaos, he was not..." He coughed a little. "Fully banished...He left part of his soul in...in." His eyes went to the dark blade held there. "He left part of his soul in Ulthring's sword, and now that self same blade...tries to steal my body...if it succeeds then Chaos will walk the lands again." He looked at his old friend and sighed heavily, before he clenched his jaw in pain. "Take me to the secret place that your father said that we were to never go again, Bucktooth, please...as quick as I may be old friend...I cannot hold on much longer."

Morreck blinked a little, mostly in surprise but the agonised tone in Ralph's voice urged him into action and he nodded swiftly. He did not call for his servant's aid; he moved to the Adept's side and helped him to his feet sadly. Then he took a



look around the room and helped his friend into the corridor...now followed by a few bewildered servants and bodyguards the pair made their way quickly through the cold stone of the castle. Heading to a small spiral staircase and down into the very bowels and the torchlit darkness beyond, the Sword of Lies scraping the flagstones all the way there, held by Ralph's limp arm – dragging sparks from the stone. At what must have been the deepest level of the castle's dungeon the stairs ended in one of the round storage rooms used to keep meats and wine cold during the sweltering summer months. Now it was empty of course, and heedless of his watching entourage and liegemen the Duke stepped forwards, placing his hands on the cool stone he felt for the slightly curved brick that his fingers knew so well.

The wall slid back with a slow grinding of stone, and dust fell from the mechanism as a new passage opened up, bringing with it a slight brush of wind as the air pressure changed. As old torches ignited as they passed within, the light caught off the many treasures arrayed within – casting a golden and flickering glow across the faces of the those that trod these secret paths. The torches burned in response to some ancient spell or enchantment placed a long time ago. Servants and bodyguards alike knew better than to touch the treasures within not just because they were convinced they would be protected but also because they were loyal to the land and their protectors. They came to the heart of the underground complex and beheld there the chamber that had won both the Duke and his childhood friend their first hide tanning and a ringing scolding of the ears. They beheld the face that had intrigued them so many years ago; the horrible almost living face was part of the magical door that now stood before them. The whole chamber was a ghastly homage to the minds of the original creators. It was as though some twisted and tormented creature was walled into the very stone. Morreck beheld this place with a kind of fascinated, sick revulsion – but here was



hope for them all. The door was made in ancient times, leading into the magical chamber – they said it was constructed to withstand an army of Trolls or worse...once the portal was locked there would be no escape.

Now that self same thing stared at them all with accusing eyes, bones sprouted from the sides of the wall and into the arch that formed the door. Around the left and the right side of the face, curved white formed a sickening kind of crest – as one bone pierced the top of the head, and two more curved around and forwards over the eyebrows (One eyebrow bisected by an angry scar, running from the forehead down to the beginning of the nose.) The whole thing seemed to pulse as if alive, red viscera filling the back wall of the arch, where the visitors could see the mouth agape and leading into the chamber beyond, it would be like walking down the throat of a demon of Chaos.



Morreck's father, Duke Dylan Ferol had beaten both boys soundly when he had found them playing in the lower catacombs close to where the chamber was, both children were standing and staring at the face and mouth – rapt in their attentions. He had gone into a protective, but angry rage at their actions and had told both boys that they were lucky as the devil, for the room was not meant to be a play-room nor was it any kind of place to be. For the door to that chamber once closed would lock automatically and the walls were such, that no one would hear their screams to be let out. The door was strong enough they would not have been able to batter it down or to break it.

They would have starved to death he counseled, eyes full of pain and anger...those eyes mirrored in Morreck's own now as he saw Ralph push away from his arm and stride weakly towards and into the chamber, the mouth still invitingly open as it had been all those years ago. His friend gestured him back with the point of that evilly glimmering sword, the blade seemed to be growing in presence and power as time leaked on.

"Goodbye Bucktooth." Ralph said through tear and pain filled eyes. "The beast in the sword almost has me, I can feel his mind pulling my own down into that blade." His eyes began to glaze. "You will know...you...will...know what to...do." At this moment he was dead in all but body, and his head fell forwards onto his chest.

Before Morreck could move, the Adept's head raised once more and a voice rolled forth like a hissing swamp, bubbling in chaotic chords.

"I...am...free!" As the last word was spoken the Duke beheld his friends eyes once more open, and his heart went cold in his breast, for those eyes were now devoid of life and shone like black spaces between the stars. He knew that voice,



he had heard it before and the fear of what was to happen caused him to jolt into action...with the memories of that evil cadence rattling in his ears from the battle scarcely a week before – he spoke a single word, one he had been entrusted with as a young man – by his father. Closing his eyes against the howl and bellow of inhuman madness that broke from within as the mouth slammed shut with a wicked crack, Ralph's friend could hear the frenzied sounds of the Chaos Lord's blade as it struck futile strokes against the inner walls of the chamber.

The castle shook as a terrible roar erupted from the chamber, rattling the fixtures and causing dust to fall from the ceiling above their heads.

Morreck smiled a grim smile and walked angrily away. "Squeal all ye like demon king, hellspawn...ye'll not live long with that body...it can't live on only air." He laughed a sardonic and grief-stricken laugh. "And after that, ye can lurk in that damned blade as long as ye like! Till the stars fall and the land breaks asunder!"

As he paced away from the door, lost in his own thoughts, the Duke offered one last statement to the air.

"Farewell..." He turned to look at the door. "Blunderfoot...I might have known it would be you who saved the world single-handedly, before you were done...Farewell old friend, we owe you more than we can ever say in simple words." A tear slipped down his face and he wiped it away with a dusty finger. And with that last act, he led his servants and bodyguards away from that chamber, which held the power of a god imprisoned behind that twisted portal, for eternity.



Chapter 3



from the pen of Zenfar Blutsporn, Chief Archivist of the Black Circle and last living member of the Legion of the Damned.

My children: I am dying. The blessing laid upon me by the Lord of Chaos is finally coming to an end, those comrades of mine who had survived the war with the foul and treacherous League of Seven, have already fallen and I know I am now the last. This does not embitter me, I know that at the last battle we failed our master and let him be banished by wicked and deceitful magic. I know that I have lived fully six hundred years since that shameful day and that is indeed, terrible proof of our dark lord's continuing and benevolent power – even though he now resides in Hell.

I believe that my continued survival is due to the fact that I have more than one demonic ancestor and that our master is still in need of me. Or so I hope. But I feel that it is my place to speak some sense to you as my life draws to a close, like a final curtain. I am the last of the Damned, and although the League gave us that hated name – I am proud to be called such. But you...you are a bunch of back biting,



bickering and foolish silk wearing whelps! This new so-called generation, those that call themselves the Black Ring. You may have created many fine ceremonies to glorify your insignificant doings, but none of you has felt, as I have the pure glory of standing shoulder to shoulder with your demonic allies and facing down a phalanx of battle-ready dwarves, all howling like rabid wolves and chanting the name of their goddess, Duna. None of you has cast warspells at the foe in bloody battles or slaved over a hot branding iron, marking prisoners for brutal sacrifice to our black-hearted master.

I have seen all of this, and I have done all of this, and much respect it has earned me from you young fools! In the heyday of our greatness, we lived for one pure goal only, one reason: To avenge the wrongdoings done to our mighty order by those mortal fleas...they murdered our Archwizard and drove us like cattle from our home in Stormfist castle. They dared to question our research, our ways and us...so in the name of survival and vengeance we made a terrible pact with the legions of Hell. The Seven races then had the gall to call us the Damned! Because our only allies were demons, they too are fools and all should be crushed. But do you know whom I despise more than those festering fools, that loose rabble of semi-intelligent drooling subspecies in Rivellon. Yes, you, you meekly lair in the mountains dabbling in minor hate magics and petty, pathetic storm gathering...how great you are...you young whelps do not know that you are alive!

Where is your fire, your spirit, where's the cold ruthless hate that we of the Damned were renowned for? You don't know how to kill; most of you have only committed a tiny amount of the killings that we once revelled in, during most of your whimpering lives added together! And what were these killings? They were the results of all the petty in fighting in your precious Black Ring. That is what they were! Heed these



words that I write now, it is your duty, your purpose and right to butcher, enslave and murder those mewling pathetic fools in Rivellon...torture the Seven races of Rivellon – for what they did to us in the past, show them your heart and then tear theirs from their still living breast! But now comes the time for you young bastards to take note of my words, listen and mark these with your lives...do not ignore what I am about to share with you...unless you wish to live in those pretty mountains of yours and play at being wizards? The great Archmage once forged a sword into which was placed a wicked secret, yes the life force, a fragment of the Lord of Chaos – into that blade he placed part of himself...it was a second chance for our master. With Chaos banished from the mortal plane, it remained as a subtle link to him, a tenuous but permanent link to our beloved master. But Ulthring was slain at the last battle, his Sword of Lies was taken and used against him by that bastard of a young Battlemage...Ralph, curse his name and his line! Why the sword did not take the young fools soul I do not know, he must have had a mind that was as strong as dwarven or elven steel. The human then took the sword back to Stormfist castle...and neither he nor the Sword of Lies ever left those cold stone halls again. I do not know what transpired within that place, perhaps Duke Ferol murdered the apprentice for the blade, perhaps it was stolen...perhaps it still lies within those walls!

But as I write this, I can feel my spirit failing me, my spies have informed me that the present servants and castle staff do not know of the artefacts presence nor of its power. So the secret of its location may be held deep within the Ferol family alone. I will take my own life at Brokentoath Crag, since I have always enjoyed the view from up there...I will not simply die and fade like a whisper on the wind. So with my last breath this I command of ye all...let old hatreds be unshackled, begin the quest once more for revenge and sow discord amongst the races of Rivellon – with the races in



upheaval there might be enough disorder to bring the Chaos Lord back to us, then revenge can be ours for the taking...even though I shall be long dead. Murder and maim, cause hatred and suffering, bring the lands to a destructive brink. Remember my children that the Seven races think that the Lord of Chaos safely locked away and the Damned truly dead and gone. With my death the latter part shall be true, but I leave with you a legacy of hatred and revenge...they are ignorant of your presence, they may not even know that you exist so you can swiftly move against them. But be subtle, use their own ignorance and prides against them – infiltrate their petty lives and bend your every will to finding and recovering that Sword, for the Sword of Lies is the key to Hell itself. Now go forth my hateful children, rob, steal, murder and undermine...spy and torture...commit every evil act that you can think of – retake the Sword of Lies, open the gateway to Hell and I will be there to greet you, I and the rest of the Legions of the Damned and together with the aid of the Lord of Chaos – we shall return and turn what remains of the lands into a charnel house.

*Yours in eternal darkness and hate,
Zenfar Blutsporn.*

