

Agarhoth: The Reawakening of Blood Horde

Before his eyes opened the chill of the morning was all over him. As he opened his eyes the first thing he saw was his own misty breath jetting out of a green wrinkled nose. Then the reality of his situation settled back in. Weeks ago he had been accepted into this tribe of orcs that made their home in a large cavern on the edge of the Mirkwood forest. It had taken almost a year for them to accept him into their ranks and they still hadn't given him a real name. He went by Moruk, the only name he could remember having. Now his situation was completely different. It was dire. That old orcish shaman had looked upon him with utter disgust from day one. There was nothing he could do about it then and there certainly was nothing he could do about it now. Not in this cage.

Three days ago he was dragged out of his bedroll by four large orcish warriors while the chieftain and the shaman stood watch. They threw him in a makeshift cage of tree branches as the shaman cast a spell over the wood. Now these branches might as well be iron bars. Since then the little orcish children had taken to poking him with sticks. The females started calling him Tater, which was the only word in Common tongue that they knew. Oddly enough they were all convinced the word meant meat. At this moment though, he felt a deeper sense of dread wash over him. He caught the all too familiar scent of the shaman and at that moment he felt the dull blow of the shaman's staff on the back of his head. He spun around quickly inside his cage and let out a furious roar at the shaman who had sneaked up behind him. The shaman smiled a toothy grin exposing massive lower canines and barely muffling a deep gravelly chuckle.

"Tater, do you know why they call you that?"

Other than a low growl that started from deep inside of him, he sat in silence.

"It's because humans are food, meat, and that's what you are Tater, you are meat. I don't know how you've pulled it off human. You've had them all fooled for a year but not me. I'm too smart for you and I've found you out. It's some sort of spell. Whether you've had it put on you or you put it on yourself I don't know. You look like an orc. You sound like an orc. You even smell like an orc. But my shaman eyes are not deceived. Tonight we will feast upon your flesh and take your power. We will need that power. Something is coming. These fools know nothing of it, but it comes for them nonetheless."

"Human, I'm as orc as you are you ancient green sack of shit! The only thing coming for these orcs is a serious case of indigestion."

The old shaman was right on both accounts. Moruk was human but he didn't know it and would never come to fully accept the fact. Also, something was coming, a tide, a tide not

seen in this world for a very long time.

That tide, oddly enough, would begin with the tiniest of creatures, a butterfly. Tater was the only one to see it just as it landed on his nose. He thought he could hear it say “Shh” right before he fell into a peaceful slumber.

As he made his way into the great walled city the people seemed to always look twice at him. He soon made his way into the heart of the city as people parted like a stream around a rock. He was used to it by now. It was like this nearly everywhere he went. He had long ago, longer than he could remember, given up trying to conceal himself. People had always seemed to recognize him. He was like *déjà vu* in their minds. He was someone they all recognized but could not figure out where from. This familiar stranger made his way to the square and there it was, just as he had expected.

In the center of the square was a large block of wood with the faces and names of brave souls who had lost their lives in the last Great War. As always there was a name with every face and a story behind every name except for one, that face, a familiar looking one, but not quite right. It was his face but not exactly his at the same time. It could have been his son or his father or any other distant relative for that matter. It looked like him but it was not him. Everyone who lived in that city had looked upon this face a thousand times as they passed through the square and now it was there in the flesh or at least to them it was. It was too close to be dismissed with a single glance, but as usual, reason took over after the second glance. He slowly read the names and their stories of heroism, struggling to remember something that simply was not there. Finally he came to that face. Underneath it read “Unknown, bravely led the final charge that routed the enemy out of the city”.

His concentration was broken as a large shadow passed over him. He looked up into the sky, struggling to see as he tried to blot out the sun with his hand. As his eyes made contact with the great bird he felt a sense of familiarity wash over him. By now the rest of the people in the square had also seen it. A stir worked through the crowd. Some people murmured to themselves while others spoke openly asking questions or making assumptions as to its species. An old woman could be heard speaking of the significance of such things and how this was somehow a bad sign. The bird itself was massive. It was black and glistened in the noonday sun. Its beak was a yellow-orange color. A deep swoosh could be heard as it banked left and pushed its massive wings toward the earth as it ascended higher into the sky and flew east.

The word Tengu slipped through his lips in a whisper so faint that only he could hear it, but that word screamed through his mind. Tengu, what was that word and why had he said it? That bird reminded him of something he had never known. It was a feeling that had never been

stirred in him before. It was unfamiliar. It felt untamed and warm. It felt safe. He had been in his mind for a brief moment just before he surveyed the crowd of husbands and mothers and children. It was only then that it occurred to him. It hit him like a blacksmith's hammer and another word slipped through his lips, "family".

This had all been very disconcerting and he decided he needed a drink so he made his way to one of the many inns within the walled city. As he bellied up to the bar he caught the attention of the barmaid and ordered a plate and a rum. The barmaid sat down a small glass and began to pour the bottle.

"Leave it," he said, half under his breath.

"Leave what?"

Making eye contact to get the sincerity of his statement across, "The bottle", he said.

"Barely past noon and already in yer cups, shameful," she scowled as she sat the bottle down and walked away.

The tension in the large room was thick and the conversation couldn't be heard over the clanking of cup and utensils. These people looked worried, anxious for some reason. Perhaps it was the two cloaked figures in the far corner of the room. Those two were shady looking and he'd be sure to keep an eye on them and a hand on his purse. One of them had looked up when he walked in and he could see long red tattoos under his eyes like fangs. He couldn't see the others face but he could see his hands. They were cold black. He must be a Drow. His skin was so black that when he first saw him he thought he was wearing riding gloves. Oddly though, he had no real fear of either of them. There was something there. Something...

His concentration was broken as the barmaid sat a plate of bread and some kind of meat in front of him. She said nothing as she sat it down and walked away. He had been so deep in his thoughts about the two in the corner that he had not even noticed the large man in buckskins and fur who had just walked in and was now at the end of the bar talking with the barkeep.

"Deal," said the barkeep. "But it'd better be a goodun. Alright listen up folks," he said in a much louder voice. "This feller here says his name's Wojtek. He's a claimin' to be a renowned story teller. Giv'm a listen. If he's good enough, he gets his lunch and a pint.

The large man turned to sit backwards on a bar stool. His limp was obvious now. Unknown wondered what had happened to him to cause such a limp. He was a big man with a great beard and looked somewhat unkempt with long dark hair streaked with silver, but when he began to speak, his skill as an orator was evident.

“Good people, I am Wojtek. Hear my tale, a cautionary one. One some of you may have heard before but only in pieces and surely not accurately. I heard this story sitting around my very own camp fire. It was late and so dark out you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face. A young, extremely rotund gentleman happened upon my camp. He offered a trade much like the trade I have offered you fine folks here today. I accepted his offer. I gave him half of my supper and a full wine skin. He reached into his sack, produced a loaf of bread, and promptly made a sandwich. This is the story as he told it to me. This is the story of Ginsu Hac Tao.”

To truly understand a tale that is woven with secrecy and shadow into other tales is a difficult thing indeed. To separate fact from fantasy and ignorance is perhaps near impossible. I suppose it would be wise to begin with a name, though it is not one many would recognize. In the Elvish tongue he was once mistakenly known as Rauko Dae Men which translates to Demon Shadow Path in the Common language. Liken to stories, names are often misspoken through ignorance and ale. The name given to him after his birthing has long since been forgotten. In the beginning he bore his father’s surname, a name that if now uttered in his presence means death. Instead he bears the surname of his mother’s father, Ginsu, along with the name given to him by his father’s people as a young child, Hac Tao. Hac Tao in the old Eastern tongue has two meanings. One is Dark Path and the other is Dark Sword. In those days if one were referred to as Dark Path it meant that one was thought to be evil. It was meant as a slight against the person. So now you know the true name of the creature, Ginsu Hac Tao, the Khan of Blood Horde.

The tale begins many years before his birth. It was some forty years after all of the great leaders and warriors of the East and many other parts of the world had simply walked away. The dragon Gods had been reborn and there were many young warlords vying for power and dominance. One of these warlords, whose name dare not be spoken, happened upon an old scroll that foretold of the creation of the Blood Horde. One of the names on that scroll stuck out. It was the name of the old ruler of the far northern land in the East. It is believed that he, Ginsu Jiang Lo, was the very man that freed the Crimson Shadow Dragon from her Mithril prison. Immediately the young warlord devised a plot. He sent scouts to look for Blood Horde throughout the East and even into Mirkwood, the lands of the Elves. After many years and false leads, the scouring of Middle Earth bore fruit.

It was discovered that the old ruler was now the Khan of Blood Horde and that he and his Queen had conceived a daughter. Many attempts were made by the young warlord to steal away the child but none were successful. Even the women and children of Blood Horde had proven to be more than a match for the warlord’s best warriors and assassins. Distraught and on the verge of giving up his quest, the warlord decided to seek the aid of an old witch that lived on the smallest island in a string of islands to the southeast of his territories. The young warlord pleaded, threatened and bribed the old woman until at last she named her price. She would help him but in exchange she wanted his soul. The warlord was more than happy to pay this price since he didn’t put much stock into that sort of thing anyway. After a short ritual that seemed very silly to the young warlord, the old woman produced a dagger.

“This is a very special dagger. It does more than just kill or cut. If you hand the dagger to another

person and speak the magic words, that person will be under your complete control.”

With that the warlord left the island in search of Blood Horde. After many days travel he met up with his spies and informants and found that Blood Horde had made an encampment just inside the borders of the Mirkwood forests. On the second day after having arrived, the warlord found a young maiden wandering far from the camp. He approached her with much caution as she bore the mark of Blood Horde.

“Hail to you young maiden. I wish to speak with you.” She looked at the young man, bowed, and then went upon her task of gathering wild blackberries. He closed the distance by half between himself and the young girl and began to speak again, but stopped himself once he realized the girl was no longer standing near the blackberries. As a matter of fact he couldn’t see her anywhere. Just as he was about to turn around he felt a tug on the hair on the back of his head and felt the cold steel of a blade at his throat.

“Who are you? You are not Blood Horde. You are not an Elf. You are not Caravan or I would have sensed it about you. What do you want?” whispered the maiden softly in his ear.

“I am here only to pay tribute to your great Khan and give him a fine gift. You see, I wish the countenance of Blood Horde and wish to be part of the Caravan.”

“You smell of treachery and lies. It wafts off of you like the steam from horse manure on a cold morning.”

“I assure you fine maiden I mean no treachery. Perhaps it is desperation you hear in my voice. If you would only let me show you,” he said as he produced a dagger from his belt and held it out high above his head. The maiden looked up at the dagger and saw that it was the finest she had ever seen. It looked to be made entirely of Mithril with gold and jeweled inlays. It had a faint glow about it. Surely it was of Elven manufacture.

“Ha! You have been sent to trick me, to play some prank for the amusement of Emperor Shatterhaze. Where would a man get such a fine dagger? Only from the ruler of the Elves I think.”

This the warlord thought very odd for to him the dagger looked quite plain. Either way this was a fortunate turn of events. She was playing right into his hands. “You’ve found me out my dear. This dagger was to be given as a prize to the one who proved to have the cunning to wield it. Though I’m sure Shatterhaze will not be pleased that the trick was figured out so quickly. You are quite a clever girl. You must truly be Blood Horde.”

With this new revelation the young maiden released the grip on his hair and slid her hand up the back of his arm and took the dagger from his hand. Immediately the warlord spoke the words the old witch had told him. He spun around to meet her in his gaze. She smiled in quite a coy fashion and bowed deeply. “Ginsu Khan! I didn’t see you come up. I was just gathering blackberries for the wine. Is something wrong?”

Now under the guise of the Khan the warlord spoke, "Yes, there is a large encampment of orcs many yards to the west. Tonight I want you to slip into their encampment and slay them in their sleep. They have kidnapped my daughter. I want you to get her and bring her to me. Just after you slay the orcs in the main camp the rest of us will run in and cut those in the outer camp down. You will be quite the hero. The Elves will sing songs about you around their fires. Are you up for this task?"

The maiden's heart swelled with pride as she spoke, "Yes my Khan of course! The Crimson Dragon will guide my blade and the Shadow Dragon will still my mind."

That night the maiden crept back into the Blood Horde camp. She was completely silent and darted through the camp like a dragonfly. First she took out the perimeter guards and then she crept into each yurt and wagon slaying all in their sleep save one, the princess. She grabbed the child of some twelve years up in her arms and covered her mouth with her hand. She ran straight out of the camp and into the waiting arms of her beloved Khan. The warlord took the girl from her and with a smug grin said, "Now child, go back into the encampment and see the carnage you have wrought upon those creatures and know that this battle could not have been won without you."

Behind the warlord she could see many riders with lances and axes. They past her as she turned to head back into the village. The ground shook around her and for a moment time seemed to slow to a crawl. She saw the riders envelop the Caravan like wolves on a fawn. She watched in horror as those she had sworn to protect were cut down in their sleep and their wagons burned. By the time her head cleared she realized she was now running towards the encampment. It seemed so very far away and she thought she would never get there. Part of her didn't want to get there. Part of her knew what she had done. Then a thought occurred to her and she stopped. Like a child waiting for a monster to jump up behind her, she closed her eyes tightly and turned around. Not wanting to, she opened her eyes and saw that very far off into the distance a rider carried the princess off having thrown her across his horse. Then the real horror set in. She suddenly became aware that the rider was not Ginsu Khan as she had once thought. It was the young man she had come across while in the forest picking blackberries.

The girl worked through the night and far into the next day. She freed all of the horses and piled the Caravan folk up like many sticks of cord wood. She piled all that was left of their wagons and tents about them, doused the lot of it in lamp oil, and set it ablaze. Some fifty yards away she piled the bodies of Blood Horde into their many wagons and one by one set them all ablaze until she came to the wagon of Ginsu Khan and his Queen. She doused the entire wagon in lamp oil, climbed up into the wagon and sat next to her Khan and wept. Drawing the last bit of will and courage she had left in her little body she lit the wagon on fire ending herself along with the rest of her family.

Many days later a simple old woman passed along the mass grave. With the fire still smoldering she sifted through the ashes of the Khan's wagon until she found what she was looking for. She stooped down and picked up a rusty looking dagger with a broken handle.

"Now on to Bifrost," she said with a quiet smile as she tucked the dagger into her belt.

Many years later the warlord wed the princess and proclaimed himself ruler and rightful heir to

the throne. He waged war on the surrounding territories and became very powerful as he expanded his empire. All the while he made advances towards the princess. Many times he overpowered her. Other times he received a new scar for his troubles, courtesy of the princess. The new king's desire for an heir was rivaled only by the hate the princess bore for her husband.

Having annexed by force or treat all of the surrounding provinces, the king set his sights on the string of islands he had visited many years ago. The king had heard that no army had ever successfully invaded the islands. The king, having obtained nearly everything he had ever set out to attain, saw this as a great challenge and accepted it with fervor. The king sent word to his coastal province and ordered many warships to be constructed. As he marched with his army towards the coast the ships were prepared. On the day that the army arrived the king looked out into the harbor where hundreds of ships lay in wait. He was sure victory would be swift and even wagered with some of his generals how many days it would actually take to acquire the little island nation.

Now the old emperor of the island nation was more clever than most. He was also a very spiritual man as were his people. The old emperor had for years kept spies in the king's lands so that as soon as the construction of the warships began he knew of it immediately. The emperor knew his forces could not match those that would arrive on the ships so the emperor devised a plan. He set out with six of his best soldiers to a monastery high in the mountains. By the time the emperor reached the summit of the mountains he had lost all of his men to sickness or freak accidents. It was for this reason that the emperor entered into the monastery on his knees like a peasant instead of bursting through the doors demanding assistance as was his original intention.

"Rise humble servant of the Holy Shadows. Come sup with us. There is much to discuss and I believe you will find this conversation to your liking as we have similar worries." The emperor rose and much to his surprise he found this Magi to be young and built like a warrior. He had assumed the Magi would all be feeble old men much like himself. "You have come here with haste and grief in your heart, but also in your heart I detect goodness," said the Magi. "It was wrong of you to bring soldiers up the mountain to try to force us into helping you. The blood of those men is on your hands."

The doors to a great chamber opened and inside sat many Magi with each having a plate of food and a glass of wine sitting directly in front of them. Also there was a placement for the emperor as well. After the meal was taken the oldest Magi began to speak. "We know why you are here. The troubles of this nation do not exclude this mountain and we too have spies abroad."

"As well as within I dare say," retorted the emperor.

"Indeed knowledge is power. If not I suspect you wouldn't have scaled this mountain."

"Fair to say."

"We have already made preparations to solve the problem but we need some assurances from you. You must promise not to retaliate. This land has need of a good emperor such as you. It would be a

shame if you should see an advantage in your enemy and capitalize on it. Lastly, and most importantly, this mountain is forbidden to be tread upon by armed soldiers."

"I accept your terms, but how have you solved our dilemma?"

"The answer lies within the problem. The king of the enemy seeks an heir. We will give him one."

"I don't understand how that solves the problem," puzzled the emperor.

"Of course you don't. How could you? You will just have to trust us. Fates you cannot possibly hope to understand have already been set in motion. There are things much older than you, older than this mountain, which would have things set right. The will of the Dragons will not be undone! Now watch from the western window and see the doom of your enemy. When the battle is done you must wait one day and then leave this place never to return. As for us, the Magi of this temple, we must pay a price in blood. As the Holy Shadows command we will slay ourselves and rise again when the time is right. Our destiny lies with another people and another Lord."

The ships had crossed the ocean and were within rowing distance of the island. As the men prepared to launch the boats that would be used to assault the beach a chill wind blew in the air. An uneasy feeling ran through the crews of the ships like chain lightning. Each soldier, stricken with fear, worked even harder to drop the boats into the ocean, but just as the first of them settled into the water, great waves began to crash against the ships pushing them towards the rocky shore. Lightning shot out of the sky striking many of the ships and setting them ablaze. The burning ships were pushed into other ships. With the entire fleet now blazing or dashed upon the rocks, the king ordered the remaining rowboats to head back to the main land. He dared not approach the island a second time. By the time the small boats reached the mainland two thirds of the king's men were dead having been taken by the fire, or the ocean, or had been overcome with sickness on the long trip back. A rumor had stirred through the men. Some of them had reported seeing a large red creature darting in and out of the clouds throwing lightning bolts at the boats. The king forbade the men to speak of it any further declaring a man must believe in his mettle, not superstitious nonsense.

When the battle on the sea had ended, the old emperor found that he was alone. Save for the sound of a steady light pat, the monastery was completely silent. The emperor followed the sound and as he did it became louder and more akin to a drip of water slapping stone. After searching for some time the emperor came upon a great hall. Within the hall was the body of each Magi laid upon a marble table. The Magi had willfully laid down upon each slab and cut his own throat. The blood ran through a hole in the slab, down a channel, pooled in the center, and had begun to drip upwards onto the ceiling over what looked to be a great skull mosaic. The emperor walked closer to the pool so that he may peer into it to see the source of the anomaly causing the blood to defy gravity. As he peered into the pool it became as a great abyss to his eyes. Then suddenly the head of a great black dragon appeared in the pool. As it did it made a deafening roar and in a booming voice proclaimed, "This pool, this abyss is not for your eyes! Take your sight from it less it takes your sight from you!" The old emperor jumped back

startled and stumbled over his own feet and fell crashing to the floor. Not even taking the time to get up, the emperor rolled over and slid out of the room on his belly. For the rest of that day and on through the night the emperor sat beside the door to the monastery but did not sleep. As soon as dawn broke over the mountain monastery the emperor left through the doors and sped down the mountainside never to return again.

Utterly broken, the king's would be navy stayed on the coast for a month. After having gained adequate rest and supplies they headed back for the capital far into the north. It had taken nearly four months to reach the coast, but the return trip would be swifter because their numbers were fewer. It took three months to make the return trip. Upon reaching the borders of the capital province the king was met by messengers from the capital. The message he received read only, "The Queen is with child and dreadfully ill. Make haste."

The king immediately sent the messengers back and bade them to send word to have twenty one fresh horses fed and ready to run at designated locations. That night the king slept fitfully but arose at dawn. He selected twenty men and made great haste for the capital. He and his twenty riders stopped only long enough to change mounts, riding through the nights without sleep. On the third day the party arrived at the palace. Still dirty from the road and smelling of horse, the king ran into the palace only to be met with hoarse screams echoing through the halls. Upon entering the room set aside for the birthing, the king found his queen surrounded by handmaids and a midwife. Pushing his way through them he looked upon the queen in horror. Her face was barely recognizable. She stopped in mid hoarse scream as he looked upon her. As their eyes met her face changed. She now bore a slight grin and a fel look washed over her eyes and she squinted tightly as if trying to see something far off. A muffled whisper came from the bottom of her throat. As the king leaned closer she said, "My prayers have been answered."

"As have mine my love."

"So it would seem so," she said, still with a smug look on her face. "On the night you left I had a dream. In this dream a demon spoke to me. It was an Oni likened to the ones feared in the islands you had set to waylay. The demon took my hand and told me that I had broken the pact and for that I must die, but I should not die without justice being served as I was not entirely at fault. Nonetheless I have still made a home in this palace and in this home I have overstayed. No Blood Horde shall make a permanent dwelling. After all, my king, I am Blood Horde. I am bound by a pact that was forcibly broken by you. One that remained broken out of fear of you. So as I depart this world, I bequeath to you a son whose coming prophecies your doom. Though without a doubt you will dismiss my words and will look upon it as a twofold gift. You shall be rid of me and gain an heir in one fell swoop. Your ignorance comforts me."

A moment later the queen let loose her last hoarse cry of pain. As the baby was delivered the queen passed into the next life. That moment was off times spoken of by her handmaids for after having been deathly ill for nearly nine months and having gone through four days of hard labor the queen now looked as if she were smiling that same smug grin she had worn for the last nine months. She looked more than at peace. She looked as if she had just heard someone tell a tale to a vast audience and in its telling had gotten the story entirely wrong, but only she knew the truth of it. Sometimes the knowing of a

thing is quite enough. This knowing, this tale, takes on form and shape and becomes likened to a rare coin you keep in your pocket and some coins are not for spending.

Upon receiving the baby into her hands the midwife shrieked and nearly dropped it. A look of horror came across her face and she looked up to the king to gauge his response. If it had not been a prince in her hands she would have immediately bashed the child's head against the door frame as was customary action when dealing with deformed or fel looking infants. But she got no such nod from the king. On the contrary the king looked upon the baby with pride and satisfaction. "He favors me greatly does he not?" He said proudly to all who were present. The handmaids looked stunned for to them the baby looked like some kind of demon. The midwife however, being very on in years, saw something else entirely. She remembered paintings of the queen's father. This child favored him more than its mother even. Still there were its other features. It had pinkish skin and horn buds upon its tiny head. There was something about this child though. She suddenly felt the need to protect it as she looked into its yellow eyes. Then a look washed across her face as if she'd had some sort of an epiphany. "Please my lord, allow me to care for this child in the queen's stead."

The king thought for a moment and agreed. In the coming years the old woman doted on the child as if it were her own. The king garbed him in the finest clothes money could buy and brought in the greatest thinkers and warriors in the land to instruct him. Still, people were ever uneasy around him for they saw him as the old woman saw him and as he grew he looked more and more every day as some foul beast. His skin reddened and his horns grew. His eyes became as pitch and his teeth grew long and pointed. When he walked the streets of the city with his father and his father's entourage, the people diverted their eyes and whispered foul things in the air. Rumors stirred and many questions went unanswered. Why does the king not see the beast as all others do? Why is it that the prince never gets sick or injured?

"Father," said the prince. "Why have you forbidden all those around me from speaking of the Western lands beyond our borders?"

"And why is it that you think I have forbidden this?"

"I received a book on the Western lands but it seemed all together incomplete. When I asked my tutors about the subject they looked fearful and evaded the question."

"From whom did you receive such a book?"

"The woman who has cared for me bore it to me on my last birthday."

"Did she now?"

"Indeed she did and I am grateful for it, but I have not been able to get any more information on the subject."

"I fear, my son, that that book may be all there is in the telling of the Western lands. It is a desolate place devoid of trees. It is filled with wicked men and wicked creatures too foul to live near

men.”

“Really? That’s not how it was described in the book.”

“You would have me to believe that you would take the words of a book from some unknown author over the words of your own father. For all you know it was written by a charlatan and a drunkard. I want to hear nothing else about it other than having you tell me it has been cast into a fire.”

“Yes sir, as you wish.”

The next day, when the prince arose, he was surprised to see a strange woman bringing his breakfast. “Where is the old woman? Is she ill?” inquired the prince.

“I cannot say milord,” replied the girl with her head turned.

“Look at me when you speak. What do you mean you cannot say? Can you not say because you do not know or is it that you fear to say?” said the prince already knowing the answer. Detecting a lie was something the prince developed at an early age. Just as he knew his father was lying to him yesterday, he knew this woman was lying to him now.

“I dare not,” she replied.

“Then be gone!” He snapped back. At least in this he had obtained the truth. She dare not say because she had been ordered not to. A small tingling of anger began to grow in the prince as he dressed himself. When at last he put on his boots he snagged his foot on something inside his right boot. Sitting on his bed with one boot on and one boot off and his belt yet to be tied he retrieved a scroll from his boot. Within the scroll was another piece of parchment, a letter from the old woman who he had in secret called grandmother.

I have waited as long as possible to show you this. I have kept it hidden though the king has searched for it frantically believing he had lost it. I knew the moment your infant eyes met mine. I knew what you were. I knew who you were. In that moment I became aware and the whole world changed. Seek the truth at all costs for I have provided you with the truth at a cost of my life. If you are reading this my suspicions are true and the king seeks my death. Though I do not believe anything owed to me by you, I would ask one favor. Pray the Gods seek my soul and gift it back to you when you need me, for I wish to rise again and wander.

The prince folded up the little note and slid it into the sleeve of his overcoat. Then he looked upon the scroll. It was the very scroll the king had read that prophesied the coming of Blood Horde. As he read, each word seemed to awaken something within him, something dark and terrible and beautiful. The prince rose from his bed dropping the scroll and made for the library. Upon entering the library his very presence could be felt. The rage emanating from him was now palpable and was surely felt by his history tutor as he walked into the room.

Looking at his tutor he repeated a request made earlier. "I wish to know of the Western lands and now I also wish to know of the circumstances surrounding the meeting of my mother and the king."

"I dare not milord," said the tutor, his face going bleach white.

"You dare not!" yelled the prince. The tutor was so shaken by this that he fell back against the bookshelf as if having been thrust back by words alone. Then calm came over the prince and he spoke again with a different tone. "I wish to know of the Western lands and of the circumstances surrounding the meeting of my mother and the king." His voice was soft and comforting. The tutor now felt as if he was enveloped in a warm downy blanket. In that moment there was nothing but he and his prince as the question echoed in whispers inside his mind. He knew nothing of his learning or his past experiences other than that which would answer the prince's questions. He was compelled to listen and as equally compelled to answer. To him it was as if his whole life had been lived to come to this moment and to bestow his knowledge upon the prince. And bestow he did. For the next four hours the prince stood there and listened as the tutor told of all the history he knew of the Western lands, Blood Horde, and his mother. When he finished the prince smiled at him and said, "Now look upon me for I am Ginsu Hac Tao, Khan of Blood Horde. I bid you to take your leave of this city and this province lest you be swallowed by it."

With a warm smile on his face the tutor's only reply was, "Of course."

Ginsu suddenly became aware of a commotion outside the castle. He made his way down the stairs and through the corridors until he came to the king's throne room. He immediately became aware of a body lying in the floor. It was that of the old woman whom he had known as grandmother all of his life. A foot away from the king laid a bloody dagger. Seated on his throne wiping blood from his hand with fine cloth the king slowly began to speak. "My men have caught your friend the tutor and his body now hangs from a tree. As for this old bitch here, well, you can see for yourself how I deal with insubordination. Now you know what you know about the Western lands and your mother. You stand to inherit a vast kingdom with a great army of craftsmen and warriors. Don't throw it away for the sake of your mother and this old woman."

Ginsu bowed his head as a look of defeat crossed his face. Just then a group of individuals entered the throne room. Their clothes were bloody from battle and they reeked of horse and ale. Immediately the king's guards sprang on them, much to the chagrin of a rather rotund man, a large black wolf met the first guard. The animal went straight for his throat, piercing his steel gorge and his flesh killing him instantly. The rest were met in similar fashion but by men and women alike.

When the melee came to a halt, the large man looked at Ginsu and said, "Hey boss. Sorry about the wolf. He gets antsy." Ginsu looked at the man with a raised eyebrow suddenly feeling as if they had met before. As a matter of fact he felt as if he knew all of these people but he couldn't remember their names.

"How dare you enter here and how dare you speak to my son in such a manner. He is a prince and will one day be a hero to his people!" proclaimed the king.

“Can’t say as I’m glad to meet you bub, but so long as we’re here my name’s Ender Vilt. This guy was a hero to his people long before you were born. Hey uh, speaking of hero, now that we have met and all, do you know where a wizard could get a sandwich in this dump?” With that the king flew into a fit of rage. He drew a sword from within his throne and came at Ender, but before he could reach him the wolf jumped and held the king on the floor by the throat without piercing his skin.

Ginsu made his way over to the king and looked down upon him lying in the floor. As Ginsu spoke his true form was revealed to the king. “You are wrong dear king. I do not stand to inherit a vast kingdom with a great army of craftsmen and warriors. I already have!” As Ginsu spoke the last words his voice turned into a roar.

Ender smiled at this and handed Ginsu a fine sword. It was the finest he had ever seen. “You’re going to need this in a minute.”

Ginsu stepped around the wolf and the king and made his way for the door behind his new companions, but as soon as the wolf let go of the king and turned away, the king rose again and came for Ginsu. In a flash Ginsu severed the king’s weapon hand and sheathed the sword. The king dropped to his knees clutching the stump. “I have a great desire to kill you, but I will not do dishonor to this great sword. I will not take a life without having named it first.”

“Hey boss. The sword’s name is Lucille. It is a gift from the Elves and was named after your mother.”

“That wasn’t my mother’s name,” said Ginsu.

“Yes it was. This dick made her change her name.”

“Oh.”

Still Ginsu did not kill the king. “You are to limit your kingdom to within this province. You will not make war on your neighbors. You will be a good and just king to your people. You will name an heir from amongst your people.”

“Why? Why should I do this?”

“Because we will be watching you and if you don’t do as I have asked we will be back. We are Blood Horde! We have no borders and we are immortal!” shouted Ginsu as he turned to walk away. Then smiling to himself he turned back again to gaze upon the broken king and whispered, “We are everywhere.”

“Boss I was serious about that sandwich. How come you’re only wearing one boot?”

The barkeep, hoping the storyteller would calm the nerves of his patrons, now surveyed the crowd to find them even more ill at ease. He glared at Wojtek as he sat down a plate of food and a mug of ale in front of him. Wojtek could not contain the smug grin on his face as he ate his

food and drank his ale. He could feel the eyes upon him as he turned to the disgruntled patrons and yelled, "BOO!" The two figures in the corner stood up as the crowd turned into a mob. One old man clasped his chest and fell to the floor. As the two figures stood up their hoods fell back. Both men, now fully revealed, looked at each other with a touch of remorse, not unlike the look one gets when suddenly coming to an uncomfortable realization.

Unknown sat quietly through the entire story. He could see it in his mind. At one point, near the end, he realized he was no longer listening to the story. He was remembering it. He realized at some point in the story telling he made eye contact with Wojtek. As Wojtek told the story it seemed like he was talking only to him. Wojtek had managed a slight grin in his direction while telling the story. Before he knew it, the room was in a full on brawl. Unknown seemed content to sit and drink from his now half empty bottle of rum until he felt the full force of a body slam into him from behind, knocking the bottle out of his hand sending it crashing to the floor.

The journey from Bifrost had been long and hard on the Caravan. There was always plenty to eat but these people weren't used to being in such inhospitable conditions. It was very rare that they traveled that far north, but the trip had obviously been worth it. The numbers of living Horde members seemed to swell every day. The number of Caravan swelled as well. This was not an all together unfortunate side affect. It was just a fact. This fact brought more work upon Horde. It also meant more hunting and longer patrols at night. Horde never seemed to mind though. They never complained and they always shared what they could. Occasionally there was an issue with someone in the caravan not pulling their weight. They would either step up or they would have to leave. Some left. Some were removed forcibly. Some just simply couldn't keep up or were too unnerved by the mere presence of Horde. Those people generally left in the dead of night. They had traveled to Bifrost to find Lothar Helgisson and an individual they called Heathen Farmer. Lothar was a large frightful man with an odd manner of speaking but was great in a fight and always had a never ending supply of fire wood. The Caravan quickly learned that Bifrost drinks are positively dreadful. Lothar was always moving between camps offering drinks to people. It didn't take long for them to respectfully decline. One time a Bifrost drink with a very strange name was accidentally spilled on someone. They jumped up and ran out of camp like they were on fire. That person was never seen again. Heathen was great in a fight too and had an uncanny ability to grow vegetables out of nothing. He would till the earth at night and the next morning there would be a fully grown vegetable garden that anyone could pick from.

There was also a strange little woman oddly named Stryfe. She was always going to and fro documenting things in a very old looking book. She kept a tally of all the people in Caravan,

all the people in Horde, and all of the supplies. Never far behind her was a woman named Ki. She had some strange infatuation with bugs that nobody in Caravan could seem to understand. The children would often fetch her to identify bugs for them. She could tell the children all about them.

They were moving at night now which is something they always did when they were close to a Horde member who was about to become aware of his or her true self. When they moved like this there was never a trail left behind or a sound made. It was as if the entirety of Caravan and Horde were moving within a vacuum. When they traveled this way they moved unnaturally fast and covered long distances in a short amount of time. About every third or fourth night the whole caravan would come to a full stop and set up camp. There would be bonfires lit and there would be dancing and drumming. A great feast would be thrown with much drinking and eating. Huge tents would be constructed. It was often at these events that a Caravan member would suddenly awaken to his or her True self and before anyone knew it they were Horde themselves. This fact both excited and terrified many people in the Caravan.

It had been many days since they left Bifrost. They stopped outside the walled city and set up in the middle of the night. This encampment was unlike one many in Caravan had ever seen. They had their normal encampment but off to the side they had set up some sort of show. One member called it a Blood Carnival. In reality it was some cross between a carnival and some dark side show. The next morning the gates to the city were closed and soldiers lined its ramparts.

Ender had conjured the place on a whim. The weather was dreadful. It had been storming for days. Caravan was spending as much time chasing down horses as it was trying to keep tents together. The Horde draft horses never seemed to spook and their tents never seemed to come apart. It could be said that he had no intention of Horde ever staying there. It was a tragic turn of events that led to the Great Understanding. Looking back on it now, it had to be. His sacrifice will be remembered for all time. His name shall forever remain in the book of souls.

The monstrosity of a palace appeared out of thin air. The courtyard itself was two acres and covered by a vaulted ceiling held aloft by huge granite pillars. It didn't provide complete protection but it was much better than the storm. At minimum it was a place to rest and get the animals and equipment inside. Horde was not a small group back then, but it was not what it is at this time either. They had just reawakened and were still in the process of putting Agarhoth back together. Back then they didn't even know it was called Agarhoth. That name they would later adopt from the elves. In the Elvish tongue it means Blood Horde and as they

had allied themselves more closely with the Elves they adopted the name as the name of their nomadic kingdom.

As the Caravan got settled in Ginsu decided it would be prudent to inspect the palace. He liked this place. It was grand and fortified. It was easy to defend. In hind sight he should have known better. The Caravan would enter the courtyard but would not enter the palace. Something about it made them uneasy. Ender dismissed their fear of the palace as simply a fear of his magic. A fear of something they could not possibly understand. Ginsu led a team of ten Blood Horde into the palace. As soon as the tenth person was through the palace doors they slammed shut and locked behind them. Outside the door the remaining Blood Horde flew into a fit of rage, instantly shifting into war form. Dagon, one of their quickest, hurled himself at the door just as it was closing, pounding his fur covered fists against the door. Grey shifted into a dire wolf leaping at the door only to shift again in mid air into werewolf. He pounded and clawed at the door relentlessly but no mark was made. Frost Orcaller flew into a fit of rage swinging his mighty mace at the door over and over again until finally the mace itself shattered against the door under his strength. Still the door did not budge. Grokrin, another mighty orc, ran headlong into the door and knocked himself out cold. Maeveen stepped over Grokrin shaking her head as Laeldra knelt down to tend to the orc now lying prone on the floor. Maeveen placed her hand upon the door and as she did her skin became as white as chalk. The transformation started with her fingertips and moved over her body. She stood there for a second and then turned to the rest of the group and said, "It's magically sealed," in a wispy shrill voice.

Those on the other side of the door weren't fairing much better. Thankfully no one decided to ram the door head on. Ginsu immediately transformed into war form. The demon lifted his giant mace to strike at the door but before he could Ender stepped in the way. "It's no use boss. This thing ain't opening any time soon. It's got a magic lock on it the likes of which I have never seen."

Over Ginsu's shoulder a line of torches began to ignite. They ran down the hall and down into what appeared to be a hole in the floor. Drawing a long breath, "I guess the only way out is through," said Ginsu somewhat muffled through a row of jagged teeth. After no small amount of argument from Ender, Ginsu took the point position and led the nine of them down the hallway until they came to a hole in the floor which contained a spiral staircase. Zyphyr pulled one of the torches from its place along the wall and dropped it through the center of the staircase. It fell until it could no longer be seen and was never heard to hit the bottom.

The group traveled until they could travel no longer. They made a makeshift camp on the staircase and slept in shifts. After they had all awakened Ender tried to conjure some breakfast but soon realized his ability to use magic was gone. In that moment it also became

apparent that everyone was without any real power. They all felt half empty and utterly mortal. They could feel their bodies dying around them for the first time ever. Devoid of magic and devoid immortality, the group, together and alone descended the spiral staircase. Their muscles ached and their heads pounded but on they went. With their mouths dry and their stomachs empty they moved on for what seemed like weeks. When Allura's body gave out and it seemed as though she would pass on to the next life Zyphyr carried her. It was like that on the staircase. They all took turns carrying each other. Even Ginsu, the mighty Khan, had to be carried by Wargei for a time. Just when they could move no further the staircase opened into a large room.

In the damp dark corners of the room shadowy figures could be seen. They darted from one patch of darkness to the other but never into the light. They took many forms, some humanoid and some not. Some were without any discernible form at all. All of them spoke in a grating wispy growl that beckoned the group to them. The beasts yearned for them and all there thought they would be devoured. Then out of the darkness a raspy old voice floated across the room and the shadows fell silent, resting into the corners of the room.

Forever drawn west, the line of wagons journeyed on fighting off Gypsy raids and bandits of every shape and size. Miach and Baine were both exhausted and had been wounded extensively in the previous fights. Kiana had seen to their wounds and hers as well using the old Gypsy magic that her grandmother had taught her. All in all they felt that they had done well so far considering they had to fight eastern hordes to the border into the west. Miach had always been told not to cross the border upon pain of death. Evidently the yellow warriors from the northeast had believed that curse and dared not follow even after their commander had ordered them to. They had picked up numerous wagons along the way. Some of the people they had felt a kinship with and others they had not, but still they came. People seemed drawn to them and wanted to travel with them. Along the way Talaya and her family had joined the caravan. She and Baine were immediately smitten with one another. Love and dust and blood linked this caravan together. That and a common purpose drove them west, exactly where in the west they were unsure.

It had been a mistake for Miach to try to take Kiana into the northeast. They had to fight their way back out and had to go right back through the Gypsy lands they had just escaped from. Kiana's family wanted her back or dead. It did not matter at this point. Their shame drove them to take extreme measures to separate her and Miach, but they could not be undone. They were bound together in this life, their destinies intertwined, and now even more so for Kiana was with child.

This caravan had an inner circle and obvious leadership. The rest of the caravan were outsiders but the inner circle felt obligated to protect them so long as they were willing to pitch in and help in camp as well as fight off the raiders. There was much talk of a giant following the caravan. It always stayed in the woods. It stopped when they stopped. It moved when they moved but was always just out of sight. The inner circle of the caravan didn't seem to pay it much attention. They felt no threat from the beast. The rest of the caravan did not share in their perceived apathy towards the beast. Rumors and fear swept through the caravan. Occasionally a pig or a chicken would come up missing after a night and the caravan always blamed the giant. One night some of the caravan set a trap for the beast. The next morning Kiana was awoken by cheers and a howl.

"Miach," she said in a whisper as she sat up in bed, "Miach my love," but Miach did not stir. Again she said in a bit louder voice, "Miach, Miach my love," and again he did not stir. "Miach" the young Gypsy howled while placing the point of her elbow sharply into his ribs. The jeers of the crowd and the howling of the beast only grew louder and with each howl Kiana become more agitated. With this Miach rolled over onto his back and began to snore. This was the last straw. Kiana threw one leg over Miach and mounted him like pony. She sat there for a bit listening to him snore as each inhale rose her up and each exhale lowered her down. She squinted her eyes as a sinister grin crossed her tight lipped face. She reached down with both hands and grabbed his ears turning his head left to right and back as she shouted, "Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!" Miach opened both eyes and a shocked expression washed across his face. As soon as he woke she stopped and was silent. Just then the mob cheered and another howl echoed through the camp as Miach's expression changed from shocked to bewilderment to irritation.

Miach rolled Kiana off of him into a pile of furs and ran to the door of their vardo. "Miach," Kiana said with a satisfied look on her face. Miach realized what he was about to do just after she spoke his name. He looked down and realized he was completely naked. Looking back at her, seeing the smug grin on her face, he shot the same smug grin back at her as he grabbed his sword and shield off the wall and went out the door anyway.

Miach dashed towards the noise, soon joined by Aodi and his brother Notagin. The three of them sprinted the length of three vardos before the brothers stopped and looked at each other with a mix of disgust and astonishment. Then they looked back at Miach, both of them blinking in disbelief as they began to run towards the noise again. The cheers and the howls got louder and louder as they approached until finally the three of them came to the outer ring of a large crowd. Seeing the three warriors, the crowd parted with many of them diverting their eyes for obvious reasons. Just as they got to the inner circle a small man was about to thrust a spear into the beast. Feeling a strange kinship towards it, Miach sliced down

hard with his sword and cut the spear in two. Notagin bashed the man with his shield and sent him flying, skidding to a stop in the dirt. As that happened another, younger man, pulled a dagger from his belt and went for Miach but was met with a similar blow from Aodi's shield. The blow sent him hurling back into the crowd knocking four onlookers to the ground as well.

"What the hell is going on here," yelled Miach as his head slowly turned towards the beast. But it wasn't a beast at all. It was an orc. At least he thought it was an orc, but it wasn't like any orc he'd ever seen. It was tall and lanky with a little pot belly. It looked like an orc but it wasn't built like an orc. The beast groaned and clenched its leg which was caught in a bear trap.

"Please help me," said the beast in the common tongue. "I just want to go west with you. I have to get there. Something is pulling me in that direction and I can no longer fight it. I felt drawn to your camp and have been following alongside of you for weeks now."

Aodi and Notagin knelt down and each grabbed one side of the trap pulling it apart. "Where did you learn to speak common so well," asked Aodi. It was true. The beast spoke perfect common and he spoke it well. He had no discernible accent and was very articulate. This only added to their confusion.

"I learned it from my parents. My mother was a forest troll who was enslaved by humans to turn a miller's wheel and my father was an orc who slaved in the fields of men. I am the product of that union. Their keepers intended to make the perfect slave warrior. My name is Silas," he said as a look of horror crossed his face. "Why is that man naked?"

One by one the little multicolored butterfly made her way unseen through the orc village. One by one the infirmed and the young fell fast asleep. She passed by completely unnoticed by orcish warriors both large and small. They went about their daily routine of eating, napping, and picking fights with one another. The old war chief sat in his big chair deep in the cave completely oblivious to what was going on outside and around him. He and the old shaman were having a talk. Really the shaman was having a talk and the war chief just wished he would go away and leave him alone, but he would not dare say that to him. The shaman carried a lot of weight amongst the various orc tribes and walked freely among them.

The old shaman was going on about how the tribes needed to be united under one banner, but that wasn't his only concern at this time. He was also going on about how the warriors needed to be more vigilant and that they needed to be ready for an attack. When he wasn't looking the war chief had fallen into a deep sleep. He had not even noticed until the

brute began to snore loudly. He then began to wonder how long he had been talking merely to himself. The thought enraged him.

“Wake up you fool,” shouted the shaman as he smartly slapped the war chief across his burly face, but he did not stir. The shaman looked down at his hand as he turned his palm up. Seeing that it was covered in nasal drainage and saliva he shook it vigorously and the liquids sprayed in all directions. Thoroughly disgusted with the war chief, the Orc turned and walked away but stopped after a few lumbering steps. Then a look crept across his face and his head sunk a little deeper into his chest. He returned to the old chief and repeated his previous action. Only this time he cuffed him much harder and got a good bit of his ear in the process. Had he been awake his ear would be singing like a cricket. The look on his face changed now. He was no longer enraged. This feeling, this emotion, was one he had not felt since his youth. This was fear. His senses were now on high alert as he spun around and began to run for the mouth of the cave, but it was too late. The plan had already been set in motion and nothing could stop it now.

If the old shaman had ever envisioned hell, this was much more than he ever could have imagined. This was the destroyer of villages. From infancy orcs are taught the sigil of Blood Horde. They are taught to never attack its caravans and to remove themselves from the roads in which they traveled. Some raiding parties heeded that warning while others did not. The result was always the same, certain death. He had heard rumors that Blood Horde sometimes traded with orc villages and that some orcs even traveled along with them, but he himself had never seen the mighty nomadic kingdom of Agarhoth. Somehow he knew that was about to change. Finally he had figured out how and why this Tater had been human yet an orc at the same time. He must have had the shade soul of the True Orc within him. The fool was a Blood Horde and didn't even know it. Still worse, to the shaman's behest, they had engaged the beast and his people were coming for him.

If the shock of his realization didn't rattle him at the core, the sight he saw upon exiting the cave surely did. Nothing seemed out of order. The village was carrying on as it had before he entered the cave. Orcs were squabbling over petty things while others were simply napping. Some of them were talking amongst themselves while another was stirring the large cauldron in which Tater was to be cooked. He made such a racket coming out of the cave that he caught the attention of all and for a moment the village fell silent. He surveyed the village as the other orcs looked upon him and then he saw it. Hovering over the cage was a little multicolored butterfly. Slowly it transformed into a beautiful multicolored fairy. She was faint for a moment, nearly translucent, before she finally came into her full shape. She hovered for a moment and waved at him only using four little fingers before she darted off into the trees leaving a fine mist of multicolored glittery dust in the air and on everything around her.

The forest grew silent as a large shadow blotted out the sun. A giant raven circled overhead. A blur passed through the village accompanied by the rapid clacks of hooves on hard dirt which fell silent revealing a satyr. An enormous brown bear lumbered out of the forest. A man sized monkey swung from the tree tops with a huge sword strapped to his back. A fox-like creature stealthily stepped from behind a tree. Then, from the sky, with a clap of thunder, a red faced demon clad in tiger skins crashed to the ground shaking the earth beneath the shaman's feet. As if these sights weren't enough, two orcs, both clad in armor with the Blood Horde sigil on their chests, stepped into the village. One of them a thin gangly looking orc and the other, he knew the other. This orc was Frost. He knew this orc. This was Frost Orcaller. Of all the things he saw, this thing he reviled the most. This thing must die!

"Kill all who do not sleep," yelled Frost as he glared at the shaman

Frost's one red eye seemed to stare right through him. The rage and fear grew within the shaman until he could no longer stand it. His mind raced as he ran towards "one eye". He had secretly searched every orcish village he knew of. Tirelessly he had traveled his entire adult life searching for the owner of that eye. He must have it! With it he would have the power to unite the tribes under one banner, his banner. The old shaman moved with supernatural vigor towards "one eye", but it was not to be. He had been so blinded by his desire for the power that the eye would give him he did not see the large dragon scale clad northman chewing on a stick looking rather ambivalent to the whole situation. Moreover and much more to his chagrin, he did not see the little pouch goblin hiding behind the northman who stuck out her foot as he ran past. As he was falling he heard the little pouch goblin giggle maniacally. Just before his chest hit the earth he could see one eye pull a small dirk from his belt. His great haste caused him to slide, coming to rest at Frost's feet, who promptly stomped him on the back of the head knocking him unconscious.

The remaining orcs in the village gave out a roar. Some of them fled into the woods while others were felled upon by Blood Horde. The man sized devil monkey, known as Dagon, darted through the village felling many orcs with his huge blade. The fox-like creature, a Kitsune known as Kokoro fired arrows in rapid succession, never missing her mark. Wojtek, the large brown bear, swatted an orc severing its head from its body. Toxic caught an orc by the throat and the sword arm. The orc's eyes bulged as did his veins. He raised the orc off of the ground and dropped him. The orc landed on his back with a thud, foaming at the mouth as if he had been poisoned. It went on and on through the village, death wholesale.

Some of those, whom had run into the woods, fared even worse. A large faceless man dressed as a monk stepped from behind a tree bashing one orc in an upward motion sending him high into the air. Before he could fall, the faceless man, who had now transformed into a great white northern beast, called Yeti, caught him in mid air and tore him limb from limb. A

Jinni named Miwok appeared out of nowhere in front of two Orcs and magically hoisted them into the air. Higher and higher they rose until their heads were ripped off by the great raven-beast Tengu who promptly deposited their heads into the cauldron reserved for Tater.

Back in the village, the red Oni Ginsu made his way to the cage where Tater slept peacefully. Straining, the red ogre began to pull the cage apart as the magical energy crackled through the branches and seeped into Ginsu's body. With one final blast of energy the cage exploded with sound sending splinters in every direction. Still Tater slept like a child in its mother's bosom.

"Awaken to your new life." Ginsu's voice resonated in the air and echoed in faint whispers. Tater's right eye secreted one lone red tear drop that did not fall, but stained his face high on his cheek. He awoke and rose to his feet immediately aware of his true nature as his past, present, and future rushed through his mind. Tater's eyes were wild. He was an orc, a True Orc, and he was ready for battle.

Much later the old shaman woke and was suddenly aware of his own existence. They had spared him. The village was silent but for a few moving about the village pilfering goods from the pouches of dead orcs. Then he realized the crushing pain in the back of his head. What was this in his hand? He opened his orcish paw to reveal an eye. Struggling to see he squinted tightly and a shot of intense pain ran through the right side of his face. The eye in his hand was his own.

The sun crashed into the earth making an explosion of color behind the walled city. Soldiers along the walls rushed around to light lamps as did the denizens of the city. It is said that the only person happy to see Agarhoth make an encampment outside of a city was the candle makers. Every home was shuttered and every shutter was back lit with the warm glow of candles. The city's bell rang seven times as the sun sank lower into the earth. It was the same in almost every city they visited. The people were anxious and scared. Blood Horde struck fear in regular folk. Their ignorance only fueled their fear. Ignorance and rumors of kidnappings and disappearances spread from city to city. The reality of what was happening to people from the cities and the countryside was far stranger than any fiction parents could fabricate to keep their children away from the caravans of Blood Horde.

While the city prepared for the night, campfires were lit all around the caravan. In the center of the main camp Blood Horde sat around a fire enjoying hookah and liquid refreshments. The crowd laughed and told stories, they sang songs, and ate food. As the city's bell struck eleven, Ginsu rose and motioned for Grey to follow him.

“I have a mission for you,” said Ginsu, placing his hand on Grey’s shoulder.

“I know.”

“It has to be this way. Don’t worry, you won’t miss the fight. Take Stryfe with you, but you must be quick. Timing is vital. You must make it back in time.”

Suddenly, the once prim and proper looking Grey, had a look of elation on his face. “I shall summon Morgana as well! Traveling through Moxanadu will be the fastest way.”

“Good thinking Magi. Get Stryfe and the necessary materials to summon Morgana, but make sure she is your guide. Time is deceptive in Moxanadu.”

Ginsu and Grey made their way back into the main camp where Stryfe stood waiting with a smile on her face and a sack in her hand. Ginsu made his way back to his seat around the fire as Stryfe and Grey headed out into the darkness. As Ginsu sat back down Lothar handed him the hookah hose. Ginsu drew deeply from it as he surveyed the people around the fire. His eyes stopped when they got to Frost. Frost sat staring into the fire along with Tater and Grokrin, each of them fixated on the flames, deep in thought.

“Soon green skins,” Ginsu said, his voice mutated from the hookah.

Off in the distance Grey and Stryfe laid out a rainbow tapestry, pulling the corners taught. Stryfe reached into her sack and placed a four leaf clover in the center. On it they placed a wine glass and filled it with sweet wine. The two of them poured a glass each for themselves and then finished the bottle. Lastly Stryfe reached into the bag and pulled out a handful of fairy dust. Fairy dust was easily acquired. Sparkles left it everywhere. Together they sprinkled the dust around the glass of wine. Now all they had to do was say the words, make the sacrifice, and wait.

As they both chanted the magic words Stryfe pulled the final ingredient out of the bag. He placed a small hand carved llama on the ground and Grey set it ablaze. The guards in the city must have been completely in awe. The night sky opened up and grew bright. A shaft of multicolored light shot forth from a cloud and struck the ground off in the distance. “Yay!” shouted Morgana as she stepped out of the light. “I haven’t seen you crazy peeps in forever!”

“Mo!” exclaimed Grey and Stryfe in complete unison as each of them tried to hug her while she picked up the wine glass.

The three of them stood there for a moment sipping wine and exchanging niceties until Stryfe’s voice and demeanor changed. “We need your help Mo. We need to get to the northeast and we need to get there fast.”

“Of course my good people, shall we be off then?” she asked with an outstretched hand. Grey and Stryfe took her hand and with a flash of color they were walking through Moxanadu. Now what exactly is in Moxanadu cannot be told. It’s not because it’s a secret. It literally cannot be spoken of. When one tries to explain it, the words don’t come. Mo says it’s because what happens in Moxanadu cannot be explained. It must be experienced. It has off times been said that what happens in Moxanadu, stays in Moxanadu.

Kiana and Holo, shield edge to shield edge, were cutting through the wildmen who had come out of the hills to attack the caravan. Three wagons were already ablaze and many of the caravan had already lost their lives. The battle had raged on since early that morning. It was now midday and the sun was high in the sky. The inner circle of the caravan was exhausted from fighting. Miach was hoarse from yelling commands to the caravaners and inner circle alike. Silas and Zerker, the great man-bear who had joined them days ago, had partnered up and were fighting back to back. Everywhere the caravan was surrounded. The wildmen kept coming. Their numbers seemed inexhaustible. To make matters worse a gypsy raiding party, some two hundred of them, joined the fight flanking from the south, as cavalry archers. Things looked grim.

The cavalry paused and drew back their bows not seeming to care that the wildmen were also in their sights. They let loose their first volley and the sky darkened. Their arrows fell on wildmen and caravan alike. Many wildmen fell along with caravan. Silas and Holo both took arrows to the knee but fought on. The gypsy archers knocked another arrow and pulled their bows taught, preparing to release another volley. Just then, behind them, a multi hued beam of light bolted out of the sky and crashed to the ground. The archers released their volley, completely oblivious to the fact that they themselves had been outflanked.

“Oh my,” said Morgana, waving her hand in a sweeping motion. In an instant the arrows were transformed into bees. Thousands of bees now banked hard left and swarmed the archers. Their horses reared up as the riders slapped furiously at the bees, dropping their bows and falling from their mounts. Some of the wildmen had broken off from the fight against the caravan and were now making their way to the gypsies. Being completely caught off guard, the wildmen fell upon the gypsies. At the same time, behind them, Stryfe had taken on her war form. Her face went white as chalk as she produced two fine swords. In a flash she was in the fray. Her swords slashed in a flurry at her enemies as she vanished and appeared behind or to the side of each one at blinding speed. She paused only to sink her fangs into the exposed neck of the occasional gypsy, ripping his head nearly off, and tasting his blood.

Mo waded her way through the battle as if unseen by the enemy, placing her fingertips on her lips to stifle a small chuckle. Grey simply stepped out of the shaft of light and could now be seen by the wildmen and gypsies who still yet lived. Upon setting their eyes on him the men

suddenly became stricken with fear.

“A dragon!” yelled one.

“By the gods they have a giant cave bear!” yelled another.

They all saw something different as they made for the forest in terror. One saw a large black knight, while another saw a werewolf, still another saw a frost giant. One man even claimed to see the wailing spirit of his dead mother-in-law. As they all ran for the forest Stryfe fell upon the ones too slow to get out of her reach. Their hopes of escape were dashed though as a man stepped out of the forest effectively cutting them off. He produced two swords and set upon them. With each stroke his skin darkened and his veins bulged red-orange throughout his body. By the time his work was done his hair was as strings of molten rock dripping on the ground setting small fires here and there.

The man surveyed the dead enemy all around him. He let out a roar, “I am Cynder!” he yelled as the ground shook around him and opened up to reveal a pool of lava. The lava stretched out tendrils and grabbed the men. Some were slain and some were wounded, but it nevertheless pulled them into the pool. As the pool closed up Cynder’s form reverted back to what it was before engaging the enemy. He took two steps before passing out and falling to the ground.

Meanwhile Morgana was walking through the fray. She would occasionally stop in front of a group of wildmen and offer them a drink from her bottle. The men would look puzzlingly at her but could not refuse her offer. Upon taking even a sip of her wine the men lost all desire to fight. Most of them wandered off chatting amongst themselves. Some even sat down right in the middle of the raging battle to make a fire and eat rations. They were totally oblivious to the goings on around them.

Grey and Stryfe were making their way through the fray as well. He walked with a stoic look and his face as Stryfe looked to and fro with a furious look on her face. Completely blood soaked, she jumped up and down in front of Grey, brandishing swords, with a frenzied pleading look on her face.

“Go. Have fun,” said Grey in a dismissive tone as Stryfe darted out from one enemy to the other.

Ancient magic wafted through the air like waves of electricity. The inner circle of the caravan suddenly became aware of their true nature. In a flash, their past, present, and future was revealed to them. Each could be seen to shed a single blood tear out of their right eye which came to a stop high on their cheek. Stryfe, Grey, and Morgana could feel it as well. A

sudden sense of kinship flowed through them all as the newly found feeling of interconnectedness flowed through them. Their wounds closed and sore aching muscles were refreshed. The tide of the battle turned as the newly aware Blood Horde laid into the enemy with a renewed fervor.

The room lit up, pushing the shadows further back into the room, packing them tightly into the corners and behind pillars. Now revealed, the vastness of the room was obvious. The newly mortal adventurers huddled tightly together in the center of the room. The raspy voice, again incomprehensible floated across the room and seemed to silence the whispers and shrieks of the shadows. Now the rattling thud of a stick could be heard to hit the stone floor. The sound echoed throughout the room. From around a corner and out into the light stepped an elderly man. He looked familiar to all of them but none could place him.

“You are not supposed to be here,” said the man in a raspy voice, shaking his head. “It’s too soon. You’re not ready. Well I guess it doesn’t matter now does it? Of course it doesn’t because you’re here and if you’re here you must be ready. If you’re here and you’re ready then the timing is right, but you aren’t ready because you aren’t supposed to be here. This is all Ginsu’s fault, all Ginsu’s fault.”

“This isn’t Ginsu’s fault. It’s nobody fault so just let us out of here,” said Ender with consternation in his voice.

“Ginsu cannot let you out of here. Ginsu did not bring you here. Only she can set you free now,” pronounced the old man.

“I never said it was Ginsu’s fault and I never said Ginsu brought us here you crazy old coot. Do you even know what you’re talking about?”

At this point the group looked at Ginsu, but the look on his face revealed that he was as confused as the rest of them. His confusion soon turned to anger and as his anger grew he instinctively expected to assume his war form. This did not happen. Instead, the flesh on the old man’s face slid off onto the floor and his head became ablaze with red flame. The torches about the room dimmed and the shadows again grew restless. They began to dart around the room and shriek and wail.

“Enough of this!” growled the old man in a booming voice. The shadows retreated and the group of Blood Horde was obviously shaken. “You are here. You must face the past. You must face the present. You must again learn to remember what you know and forget what no longer matters.” The flames which had sprouted from the old man’s head retreated. As they

did, only his skull remained for a brief moment until the blood, muscles, and skin returned to the appropriate place. Again the old man looked quite unobtrusive as he stepped toward Ginsu.

Still confused and visibly shaken Ginsu summoned the nerve to step towards him. As he did, the rest of Blood Horde became restless. Ginsu raised a hand gesturing them to be still as he and the old man headed off out of the room and down the corridor from whence he had originally come from. The two of them walked in silence. Ginsu's mind raced as he became more concerned for the ones he left back in the room.

"Still your mind, the Shades will not harm them," said the old man in a much softer voice than before. "In there," said the old man, pointing into a room with his walking stick. "The fate of your people is intertwined in this moment. You either come out of this or they will all perish for an age. The people, whom you've sworn to protect, who even now weather the raging storm outside these walls will perish as well."

Ginsu stepped into the room. A large puddle of blood lay on the floor with the occasional drip falling up from the floor to the ceiling. A sense of foreboding filled his mind, but the sense of familiarity followed along with it. Ginsu stepped into the puddle to get a closer look at the drip but when he did he discovered that it was no puddle at all. His foot went straight through the puddle and Ginsu tumbled into it falling deeper and deeper into a great red abyssal sea of blood. He struggled to swim back to the surface, kicking his feet and failing his arms, but the opening only grew smaller as he fell further and further into the abyss. His muscles ached and his chest burned. In the last moments he cleared his mind and gave himself to the abyss.

Ginsu awoke deep in a forest. The sounds of birds and insects filled his ears. The smell of earth and decaying wood filled his nose. Slowly he became aware that he was lying on his back. He opened his eyes to see a beautiful fairy lying next to him. She was beautiful he thought to himself. Her dark hair lay across pale white cheeks. Her hazel eyes seemed to stare deep into his very soul and for a moment he forgot who he was. All of his troubles seemed to fade away.

"I have, again, been sent to show you the way, to deliver a message," she said softly, her voice echoing through his ears.

"Again?" he asked, wrinkling his brow in confusion.

"Yes, again," she said smiling. "It is me. It has always been me."

"Always?"

"Always."

“Why?”

“Because sometimes you fall, sometimes you falter, sometimes even the mighty Khan needs a hand up. Though I have waited so long, you are early this time and I am grateful for it.”

She rose and stretched out her hand to help him up. He took her hand and rose quickly to meet her face to face then towering over her. Their eyes met again for the first time as she made a slight grin on her face. At once she spun around, her hair washing over him as she did, and skipped away through the forest. She danced through the forest for some ways before stopping to turn and look at him. He was just standing there with a big dumb look on his face.

“Come on silly. Let us get this over with,” she said as she turned back around and began skipping and dancing through the forest again.

Finally he caught up with her and they began to walk, each keeping pace with the other. As they came upon a path in the forest she began to speak, “My name is Sparkles by the way.” She paused for a moment. “This land is not the land you know. While it looks very similar, the people themselves are very different. This is a world ravaged by war. Men fight against men. Elves fight against elves. Dwarves fight against dwarves and so on. Even the immortals fight each other. The battles rage on with one side besting the other only to be bested by yet another faction. It is a land in chaos.”

As they came to a clearing Sparkles grabbed Ginsu’s hand and they both vanished. The forest opened up to a large encampment at the base of a mountain. She led him to the base of the mountain where a wide well traveled path began. A man, looking much like Ginsu, passed by them along with an entourage of soldiers and sorcerers. They followed the group up the path. Without moving her lips, Sparkles spoke to Ginsu once again, “That is a very distant relative of yours. He has been searching for a way to end the conflicts of this land. He desires neither territory nor riches. He just wants his people safe.”

“His father was a tyrant and a very evil man. Somehow he harnessed the power of the Shades and used it to imprison the soul of this world. Since then only darkness has followed. Now the son seeks to release it.”

Suddenly Ginsu became aware that he was walking, no, leading the entourage of soldiers and sorcerers. He followed the path until he came upon a dead end where workers were toiling away at the wall. As the workers removed large chunks of the mountain it was hauled away in carts. Ginsu just stood there, not really knowing what to do for a moment, until a voice inside his head said, “In your pocket.” He reached his hand into his pocket and removed a key. At first he thought it was a dagger. It was smooth on one side and serrated on the other. It had runes all over it. It looked like a huge tooth. The key was as white as snow and

unnaturally cold. It was so cold in fact that he could no longer hold onto it and dropped it on the floor of the passage. Just as the key hit the ground the last bit of rock fell away from the wall revealing a huge thrill door. Ginsu bent over and scooped the key up, never taking his eyes from that door. "Open it! Set me free!" a voice screamed in his head. The color drained out of his face and his nose began to bleed.

He wiped his nose with the same hand that held the key. Not even bothering to wipe it off, he plunged the key into the hole and the whole door moved like a mound of writhing silver snakes. The door opened into a small room lined in thrill Ancient runes covered every square inch and in the center of the room stood a human woman. She was breathtaking and wild looking. Her hair was flickering fire and her eyes were deep blue. She stood there for a moment, naked, perfect and then began to walk towards him. The same voice that once sent him reeling was now soft. Her words flowed like honey.

"You have freed me from my prison but your work is not done. If you look at the palm of your right hand you will see a map that leads to this place. If you look at your left hand you will see another map, follow it. Take your armies and go to this place. At the end of the passage you will find a large obsidian basin. Empty the contents of your pocket into that basin." As she said her final words she approached him and he found that he could not move. She pressed herself against him as she wrapped he arms around him. He wasn't sure how long he stood there with his eyes closed but when he opened them was alone in the room.

Ginsu set off with his soldiers. He traveled through hostile lands fighting every step of the way. Even when the odds seemed insurmountable his armies were always victorious. Often evil looking men set upon them in the night but every time they repelled the invaders. His horses and his men never seemed to tire. Their travels went on for days and the days turned to weeks. After many months of travel they came to the base of a mountain far into the north, into the lands of giants and ice covered hills. Ginsu went alone up the mountainside until he came to the mouth of a cave. Removing his left glove, Ginsu studied the map once again. He wasn't sure why. He had studied that map every day since leaving the thrill prison. He replaced his left glove and took off his right one. He stuck his hand into his pocket and felt the warm vial within. Taking a deep breath, he took his first step into the cave.

He walked for some distance on the rocky floor of the cave until at one point the cave floor turned to polished obsidian. He continued to walk until he came to a large basin nestled in the floor. The basin itself was large enough to contain a draft horse. He removed his gloves and dropped them to the floor. He reached his hand into his pocket and produced a small vial filled with a red liquid. The vial was glowing now and was very hot to the touch. He could barely hold onto the vial as he spun the cap off of it and emptied its contents into the basin. There couldn't have been much more than a dram in that vial but the puddle in the center of the basin rapidly

swelled to a pool and that pool eventually filled the basin to the brim. The center of the pool had a small vortex in it like it was draining, but the level never changed. Suddenly he remembered being back in that room so long ago and his thoughts came to the people he left with that insane old man. Steadying himself on the rim of the basin, Ginsu looked down into it and was for a moment mesmerized by the swirling vortex. Suddenly, without warning, a large black clawed hand reached through the pool and grabbed Ginsu as a child might grab a small doll. The hand pulled him through the pool and into a vast room.

Ginsu suddenly found himself in the claws of an enormous black dragon. The dragon was wispy, almost translucent, but had form and substance. As the beast pulled Ginsu close it began to grow until Ginsu was tiny in its claw. It pulled him up close to its eye to have a look at him. The beast's eye was the size of a large yurt and when it blinked Ginsu could feel the breeze created from its massive eye lid. The dragon's eye lids crashed thunderously together and opened again. The beast let out a roar, "What have you done," as he hurled Ginsu through the vast cavern. Ginsu soared through the air but suddenly became aware that he was no longer falling. He had just stopped, suspended in mid air by some unseen force. Immediately he felt as if his skin was being torn away. He felt as if his entire body was engulfed in flame and his eyes closed tight trying to fight back the urge to scream aloud. As quickly as it had began the pain went away and he opened his eyes. He was deep in the woman's embrace just as he was when he'd last seen her. She lowered them both to the floor and smiled a sinister little smile at him. She let him go before turning towards the black shadowy dragon.

She moved across the floor in three great bounds. With the last bound she sprung high into the air transforming herself into a massive red dragon. She fell upon the black dragon with the kind of fury that only a female can know. "Where is it," she yelled as she pummeled the beast and showered him with fire. "Where is it?" The battle raged for less than fifteen minutes until it looked like the old black dragon would have his life ended, but eventually he conceded to her, shrinking down to a much smaller size and then eventually changing into a humanoid form. His skin was black like obsidian and his hair was like shadowy flame that moved on its own. He reached inside of himself and produced a small egg no bigger than that of a song bird. He placed the egg on the floor and stepped away from it. Immediately, the still massive red dragon swiped at him with the back of her claw and sent him flying across the room thudding against a wall. She then looked down upon the egg and let out a torrent of fire. As the egg heated up it began to glow red and then fade to black again. As it faded back to black it grew much larger in size until it was the size of a fully grown man.

The red dragon now assumed her previous form and walked towards the shadowy man. "We both know what you did and why you did it. All you have done is set chaos loose on the world in the form of your shades. They cannot be controlled on their own. They are too wild

and too powerful. You imprisoned me and in the process imprisoned yourself.”

“You would have me keep my creations in the shadows,” he said, picking himself up off the floor. “Would you still have them suffer eternity in darkness even after all this time?”

“You created them much too powerful and immortal to boot. I have created this world for mortals. I created this world for us and you have set chaos upon it. It will take generations before this world knows any semblance of peace,” she said pleadingly.

The shadowy man lowered his head. “It doesn’t have to. There is another option.”

“Give it to the Shades? Never!” She said with that same wild look in her eyes.

“Not exactly, remove the best of your mortals from the fighting. Clear their memory of all that has happened. In those mortals we will allow a Shade soul to fuse with a mortal soul.”

“Impossible, they would be far too powerful. You propose I allow the best of the mortals to have the power of a Shade and immortality too? They would rule the world in a week’s time. Besides that the Shade soul would overtake them immediately. They would not have a will of their own.”

“Bestow upon them a double edged gift. Give them each just a drop of your blood to control the Shade then curse them to wander. The Shades would be able to experience your creation without having the ability to destroy it. These select few mortals would have great power without the ability to enslave the world.”

Before he had any chance to react, Ginsu found himself before two Gods. “You have shown great bravery, honor, and fortitude. For that, I bestow leadership upon you. It will take a great leader to assemble this horde. As we speak, the leaders, greatest warriors, and the finest craftsmen are walking away from the wars of this world. When we are finished here you too will walk away. You will not remember anything of the great wars. You will have no desire to lead mortal men or to make war with them. I, Red Dragon, Goddess of Fire and the Light of Creation, bestow upon you and this horde and the gift of my blood to control the Shade within you. With this blood you will gain incredible skill in battle, strength, and fortitude. I ask you not to use this power unless it is absolutely necessary. You will side with neither good nor evil, but will always seek to maintain the balance between the two. Also, I curse you and all of your kind to wander. You may never make a permanent home. You may not claim a land as your own or occupy a land for more than one half cycle of the moon.”

“I, Shadow Dragon, God of the shadow realm and source of all magic, gift you with the Shades. A Shade soul is no small thing. With it you will gain magic, insight, and immortality. You will grow old much slower but you will eventually die to be born again. It is the fate of your

Shade soul to rise again over and over, you will only truly die from the treachery of your own kind. Find your Horde and keep them close”

With one of her nails the Red Dragon pierced her left thumb causing it to bleed. With this thumb she placed a small drop on Ginsu’s right cheek. The blood did not flow but instead stained his cheek like a tattoo. “You’re people shall be known as Blood Horde. May they remember this gift by that name. May the common blood that runs through the veins of all of you bind you together and serve as a beacon to those who are lost.”

Ginsu suddenly realized he was standing back in the palace created by Ender. He walked back out into the hallway and made his way back into the room where the rest of Blood Horde awaited his return. As soon as he walked back into the room the Shades began howl and swirl. They darted throughout the room and plunged into the warriors and as they did the warriors transformed into their war forms. This happened with everyone except Ender. Ender slowly began to dim. He became increasingly transparent. The old man bowed his head before he spoke. “Someone must pay the price for violating the curse. In his mind Ender has volunteered to pay the price himself. He will meet you at Ragnarok.”

“Don’t worry about me boss. I’ll have the mead ready. I’ll see you when you get there.” Ender continued to dim eventually fading away. After that day a red-winged blackbird could be seen following every Agarhoth caravan and foraging outside of every Agarhoth camp.

As the sun broke over the hillside three large phalanx of soldiers could be seen in the distance. The wind blew and carried with it the smell of orc and wildmen through the camps and into the walled city. In the main camp many Blood Horde were sitting around what was once the night’s fire. The people of the caravan were obviously shaken by the sight and smell of the army that was preparing to descend upon them. The orcs of Blood Horde rose and began to prepare themselves for battle. Knowing the orcs can smell a brewing battle, the rest of Agarhoth began to stir and make preparations for war. The camp came down quickly except for a few tents which would serve as medical units. Lothar ordered all within the caravan who would not or could not fight into the city. From the distance orcs and wildmen began to beat their weapons against their shields creating a cacophony of metallic thunder.

People crowded at the gate of the walled city but it did not open. The soldiers shouted from the ramparts and through arrow slits for them to go away. As the frightened people beat on the door and pleaded the soldiers to open it, a commotion began to stir on the other side. The great roar of a beast could be heard on the other side along with the clamoring of armor

and the clashing of weapons. From the hillside a familiar voice could be heard ordering the armies forward. Frost immediately recognized the voice as that of the orc shaman he'd left half blinded years ago. The old shaman couldn't pull all of the tribes together so he'd filled the gaps with wildmen. Methodically the enemy marched towards the city.

Blood Horde, at nearly half strength, gathered on the battlefield with warriors from the caravan along with a few brave soldiers who managed to slip out of the city. Two of the phalanxes came to a stop as the third advanced forward. The two forces fell on one another with the third phalanx outnumbering the Blood Horde led army nearly three to one. When the phalanx, composed primarily of wildmen, fell upon the Horde army, many of them immediately deserted out of fear and ran back towards the second phalanx. That group, which was all orcs, cut them down and feasted on their flesh as they waited for the order to advance. This seemed to be enough motivation for the remaining wildmen to stand and face the Horde led army. Many caravan warriors fell along with some of the guards who had left the city to fight. Many more wildmen lay wounded or dead. Once half of the wildmen phalanx had been cut down, the orc shaman gave the order for the second phalanx to advance.

The second phalanx advanced from the left flank. Behind the Horde army the city gates opened up and the people who were pleading to be let in went into the city. Once safely inside, the man known as Unknown stepped through the gates and yelled, "Shore up the right flank!" as he ran in that direction. Behind him flowed a garrison of soldiers, a contingent of volunteers, and the dark elf Dravin. On the back of a great grizzly bear stood the man with the fang tattoos, Havyn Tao. The bear waded into the orc flank swatting at them as Havyn cut them to pieces dual wielding blades. Seeing this, the orc shaman ordered the remaining phalanx to advance as he himself advanced behind them. He allowed them to get some distance ahead of him before he stopped and raised his staff into the air and began to weave a spell. The sky darkened and a chill ran through the air. The orcs seemed to become revitalized and fought with newly found strength and vitality. For the first time in this fight, the Horde led army had begun to get pushed back towards the city wall. If they got caught between the orcs and the wall it would be their doom.

The old shaman stood some two hundred yards from the actual battle field. He was concentrating heavily to maintain his spell over the orcs and the weather. Suddenly his concentration was broken.

"Excuse me Mr. orc shaman sir, but you're in the way." He heard as he opened his eyes and looked down towards the voice.

"I will beat you and then give you to my orcs as a plaything tiny human!" Growled the shaman.

Just as the last word left his mouth the girl reached up and grabbed the orc between his legs. As she did her whole body became white and cold. The cold of a hundred Bifrost winters erupted from the palm of her hand. The orc doubled over, at first in pain, but in seconds the pain went away and he simply was not able to stand. With the orc doubled over and looking down Maeveen was able to look up and look him straight in the eye. "I'm not human." She said as she just barely touched the end of his nose with her fingertip, which froze instantly like the last part of him she touched.

The old orc fell over and passed out. When he did, Maeveen could now see that behind him stood a vast army of Blood Horde, caravan, and even a contingent of Mirkwoodian elves and allies. The new army fell upon the orcs from behind. Seeing this revitalized the Horde army and they pushed ever harder against the orcs until all that remained were Blood Horde and their allies.

Frost and Tater stepped out of the mass of people and headed towards the old shaman who lay at the base of the hillside. Both of them, covered in blood and filth from battle, drew their weapons for one final kill this day. Before they could reach their prey, a dark mist materialized next to the shaman and out of it stepped an old dark witch. She knelt beside the shaman and whispered something in his ear. As the shaman rose the dark mist enveloped them both, then dissipated, and they were gone. The two orcs stood there enraged as their quarry got away. When they turned around they saw that the entirety of Agarhoth was behind them with Ginsu out in front. He grabbed them each by the shoulder and said, "Forget this for now. Their day will come, but today is not that day. Today, we head for Ragnarok. Ender is waiting."