

The Rise of the Phoenix (alt)
By Gareth Lydell

Prologue

It has been almost thirteen thousand years since the Gods have walked the earth there were seven gods five brothers and two sisters they were Valin god of the earth and lord of the mountains, Saleth goddess of water and master of the oceans, Dragull god of the air and ruler of the skies, Dimtûr god of order and bringer of justice, Eisha Goddess of life and protector of the forests, Gayahir god of fire and Carhirion god of death and master of the afterlife.

All seven gods and goddess lived in a peaceful harmony and each one was a member of the council. Whenever a decision needed to be made or an argument settled all seven gods and goddess's would meet at the Island of Thaliur. This island was in the very center of the world. At the very heart of Thaliur was a huge mountain known as Menethon at the peak of this mountain is a huge stone archway upon this is engraved the very history of our world. This archway is known as heaven's gate and leads to the Ether realm it is from here that the Gods draw their power. Around the archway stand seven stone pillars in front of each of these was a golden throne upon which the gods would sit when they met.

One of the god's discussed often was the creation of followers all except Carhirion agreed that the creation of followers was a good idea yet they could not agree on what the followers should be like. It was Eisha who finally settled this argument, each god was to create a race in their own image and they alone would be responsible for protecting and teaching them.

So it passed that the first races were born, Valin brought into being the Dwarves a proud and physically strong people who lived deep in the mountains. Eisha created the Elves a proud and valiant people who lived in and protected the forests. Gayahir breathed life into the desert dwelling Tal'Enréd. Dragull brought to the life the Draconis. These appeared to be elven in nature yet in their blood was that of a dragon meaning at will they could change themselves into a form of hybrid dragon. Saleth gave life to the Kalliss these are a tall lizard like race that lived deep in the ocean. Dimtûr brought into being the ambitious and enduring race of men. Carhirion never created a race deep down he created and reigned over the realms of the afterlife.

All six races lived in a peaceful harmony until a division arouse in the race of elves some wished to leave the forests in which they were born and explore the world others wished to stay. The goddess Eisha decreed that the race of elves two the Tárasir and Val'shir elves yet that although both of them would be ruled separately a council would be formed of ten Tárasir elves and ten Val'shir elves. To settle disputes the high priestess of Eisha would have the deciding vote. The council of elves would be convened to decide on all issues affecting both races for centuries the elves lived in unrivalled splendour and knew nothing but peace.

Deep down in the depths of the world Carhirion secretly created the demons by twisting the form of the other races using foul magic, torture and mutation the greatest of these demons Carhirion created he named Carfacion. Carfacion was made from Carhirion's own flesh and blood and was fed the blood of the other races. Carhirion had grown jealous of his brothers and sisters and sought to steal the world of the living from them. Carfacion was created for one purpose to lead Carhirion's army of demons yet Carfacion grew too strong for Carhirion to control and after a mighty battle Carfacion defeated his former master and took his form.

In the lands of the Tárasis elves the phoenix lord Lólindir Firréion had two sons Rúmíl and Dûriach. Lólindir had ruled as phoenix lord for nigh on three centuries and as he grew tired of the world chose Rúmíl to be his successor this enraged Dûriach who was the eldest son. Carfacion spoke to Dûriach in his dreams he preyed on the prince's hate and jealousy of his brother. Carfacion offered Dûriach power and wealth beyond his dreams as well as the thing Dûriach wanted most revenge upon his brother in exchange Dûriach would have to renounce Eisha and embrace and worship him instead. Dûriach resisted the dark gods offer for many years yet as he saw his brother become more powerful and popular his envy and hate grew until eventually he accepted Carfacion's offer.

Dûriach then convinced other like minded elves to renounce Eisha and worship the god of blood as Carfacion had become known, these followers in turn convinced others and it was thus that the numbers of Carfacion's followers grew numerous. Then on the eve of The Awakening the most sacred and holy day to the elven people Dûriach and his followers stormed into the court of the Phoenix lord and slew Lólindir and his advisors.

So began the sundering of the elven nation where brother fought against brother and father against son. After nearly two centuries of fighting the Tárasis elves led by Rúmíl Firréion managed to push the followers of Dûriach or the Lhunur elves as they became known back towards the ocean by the. Dûriach himself was grievously wounded in battle by Rúmíl and he fled with his followers with the aid of his dark sorcerers to the far north into black lands of Mithhithion. Dûriach lay dying from his wounds on the ground when Carfacion appeared to him and offered to save him from his fate. Dûriach hastily accepted the dark gods offer Carfacion then sealed Dûriach in a suit of black armour and said that as long as he drank the warm blood of the living every night he would live and be strong.

The other gods were enraged by Carfacion's actions and Dragull, Valin, Gayahir and Dimtûr fought their way into the black citadel in the underworld and once there Dimtûr challenged Carfacion to single combat. After a battle that lasted three days and nights Carfacion was eventually defeated yet while he lay wounded he swore he would return. Valin, Dragull, Gayahir and Dimtûr combined their strength to send Carfacion into the Abyss. The Abyss was a hell dimension created by all of the gods as a place to send the souls of the damned. Dragull, Valin, Gayahir and Dimtûr ventured back to Thaliur here they met with Eisha and Saleth the six of them then discussed at length the treachery of Carhirion and how best to deal with the threat of Carfacion. Eventually after much discussion the gods decided to leave the world and return to the ether realm.

To deal with Carfacion before they left they entrusted to each of their races a piece of a potent talisman along with the prophecy of the Luindall. The prophecy of the Luindall stated that when the god of blood should arise a warrior would rise from the dead bearing the mark of the gods he was the chosen of the gods, he was to be known as the Luindall and he shall defeat the god of blood and bring about the Reckoning. In order for him to do this the chosen one must acquire all the pieces of the talisman the gods left behind and pray at the shrine of each of the gods before travelling to Thaliur to receive the power of the gods.

Chapter 1: Bloodhounds

It was a cloudless and dry night, Inside Tanhilion's black raven inn though the air was thick with smoke and full of the shouts, cheers and laughter of its patrons tonight was a particularly busy night. One particular patron looked particularly out of place in such a gathering. A tall crimson armoured stranger who sat alone at a table by the back wall. Two things marked this patron as being odd for one he wasn't drinking and the second was that he was an elf. The elf's gaze were fixed on the door when through them stepped a shadowy figure covered almost head to toe in an emerald green cloak that seemed to shimmer and change in colour.

The figure strode elegantly towards the elf as he reaches him he pulls up a free chair and sits down merely stating in a resonating voice "Have you been waiting long?" A cold unfeeling voice came from the elf "Long enough are you the one called Elerosse of Dorathion?" The resonating voice of the cloaked figure issued forth once more "That's a name I haven't heard in a long time I am Elerosse Shadowblade now, but that was once my name" at this time the cloaked figure removed his hood to reveal his face, He had long blonde hair down to his shoulders, delicately pale skin and pointed ears all of which marked him as being elven.

The crimson armoured elf cleared his throat then he spoke again "I am, Cirdan Celebrindal and I have a job for you bounty hunter" when speaking of Elerosse's profession he gave him a look of disgust Elerosse ignored this he merely replied "What, and how much are you willing to pay?" Cirdan regained his composure "My lord, Findecano Elendil requests that you locate and rescue his daughter Larien Elendil for this task he willing to pay ten thousand ducats. He is also willing to pay a further seven thousand ducats for the man responsible for her kidnapping" The cold resonating tone of Elerosse issued his reply "Who has her?" Cirdan's voice was full of anger as he stated "A foul bandit by the name of Krieger Eisengaurd of the Blood hounds" This last statement sparked a memory in Elerosse he could not hide, He had past encounters with the Bloodhounds they were a vile bunch of ruffians even for bandits.

Cirdan spoke again smiling slightly "I see you know of whom I speak" Elerosse regained his composure "We have unfinished business, tell your lord I accept his offer I shall return with his daughter and the head of that scum at no extra charge" The two shook hands and as Elerosse turned to walk away Cirdan spoke once more "You are to bring both to the Phoenix Lord's court in Celebdúlin" When Elerosse turned to reply he found Cirdan had vanished he cursed himself for being so rash but it was too late now he had agreed. Elerosse strode out of the black raven inn and into the night he thought to his self "This is not going to be easy"

Elerosse walked swiftly and gracefully from the inn through the long moist grass towards the stable. Once there he handed the stable boy his pay and walked up to an elegant looking black stallion. Patting the horse on the neck and whispered something in elvish to the stallion before leading him outside and mounting the horse. Elerosse whispered to the stallion "Looks like we have a hard job this time Ryn, Looks like we

will be going home after all". At the last words Ryn's ears pricked up and he nodded as a sign of understanding. With that Elerosse set off along the winding forest paths.

It took three days for Elerosse to find the place he was seeking after travelling through the thick woodland. Elerosse noticed a clearing ahead and some smoke rising into the otherwise clear night sky. Elerosse dismounted from Ryn and moved silently forward to investigate as he reached the edge of the clearing he saw that this was the place he was seeking. In the centre of the clearing was a run down looking two story building which had once had been the seven star inn before it had been turned into the permanent home of the bloodhounds. The authorities didn't bother the bloodhounds as long as they got a share of the loot. Elerosse was one of the few people who knew the location of the bloodhound's hideout as he had been a quest there and was lucky to leave alive. Elerosse scanned the perimeter he was glad to find that there were only two sentries, knowing the bloodhound's as Elerosse did he knew most of them were probably out pillaging or drunk in some tavern or other.

After carefully double checking Elerosse removed his longbow and quiver from Ryn's saddle. Elerosse returned to the edge of the clearing notched his bow and fired his first arrow it went straight through the neck of the first sentry blood bubbled from the dead man's lips as he tried to call out as he collapsed, Before his comrade could raise the alarm he had two arrows embedded in his chest. Elerosse swiftly and silently approached the decaying building as he did he was overcome with the smell of rot and decay. Elerosse climbed silently and swiftly up a trestle to the second floor and entered through an open window.

Elerosse found himself in an empty storage room Elerosse moved swiftly and silently through the room being careful on the decaying floorboards. As Elerosse stepped through the door he saw two sentries standing guard at a room down the hall before either man could draw a weapon, Elerosse had fired his bow three times in quick succession one landing in a guard's eye and the other two in the other guard's leg and chest both men fell silently to the floor. Elerosse swiftly crossed the hall and picked the lock on the now unguarded door.

As Elerosse entered he found himself in a dimly lit room and he was not alone, standing in the middle of the room was a huge giant of a man covered almost completely in scars Elerosse recognised this man at once it was Krieger Eisengard leader of the bloodhounds, On his back Krieger carried a huge two handed sword which had been aptly called "Orcslayer" by its previous owner a templar of the black panthers call Alric Gorefist. Also present in the room were Krieger's lieutenants Siri Krak a huge man from the frozen north stood nothing but fur leggings and carrying a huge two handed hammer. The other man was a slender old man who was almost as scarred as Krieger this man was called Valkirn all Elerosse knew about this man was he was a Tanhilean and he was very good with the crossbow he was carrying. Krieger bellowed an earthshaking laugh then in a deep booming voice said "Well, well if it isn't Elerosse thought you were dead come to visit have you". At the back of the room there was a fourth person tied to a wooden chair sat an unmistakably elven lady bound and gagged.

Elerosse surveyed his situation then dropped his longbow realising it wouldn't help him now. Elerosse then threw off his cloak to reveal for the first time his armour; He

was wearing a silvery suit of chainmail and plate armour with a golden phoenix emblazoned on the breastplate, the armour shimmered revealing its magical origin. At Elerosse's side he carried a longsword, across his back he carried a two handed called "Phoenix claw" this blade had a golden dragon for a hilt into which green gems had been place to form the eyes. Across Elerosse's chest he had a bandolier which housed a dozen throwing knives each with a dragon head at the hilt, tied in a holster to Elerosse's left leg was a curved dagger.

Krieger's lieutenants stared in disbelief at Elerosse and his armament, Krieger merely snarled like a wild wolf. In the blink of an eye Elerosse had thrown two of his daggers at Valkirn one of which landed in the mans face the other hit the man in the chest Valkirn screamed in agony as he hit the floor with a thud. At the sight of his comrades death Siri charged at Elerosse emitting a blood curdling war cry as he swung his hammer in a deadly arc at Elerosse's head, Elerosse dodged the mans swing and swiftly drew his longsword and there was a sound of crunching bone as the blade was brought into the mans back severing the Siri's spine. Krieger bellowed in rage and swung his two handed sword at Elerosse,

Elerosse parried the blow and sparks flew as the blades met, With surprising strength Elerosse pushed back Krieger as the giant man stumbled backwards Elerosse run his longsword through Krieger's chest as blood ran from the mans lips, Elerosse severed krieger's head with his curved dagger before kicking the dead man from his sword. Elerosse retrieved his throwing knives, bagged Krieger's head in a sack, cleaned his weapons with a piece of the sash worn by Krieger and put back on his cloak and shouldered his longbow and quiver.

Elerosse then turned his attention to the bound prisoner he moved swiftly and gracefully to her. She had an elegant beauty; she had long golden blonde hair and wore a long pale blue dress. Elerosse hastened to her removing her blindfold to reveal her beautiful deep emerald green eyes. He then removed her gag and started to gently untie her all the while avoiding her gaze. Elerosse finally found the words he wished to speak his voice was no longer as resonant or cold as it had been it was warm reassuring and a little hesitant, "Are you Larien Elendil?" The elven maiden replied in a sweet delicate voice that seemed to speak directly to Elerosse's soul "Yes I am, May I know the name of my rescuer?" Elerosse replied in a resonant but warm voice "I am Elerosse Shadowblade and I am at your service my lady" Elerosse bowed in elvish fashion and kissed Larien's hand. Elerosse led Larien swiftly and silently out of the bloodhound hideout and to where Ryn was waiting for them.

Once they reached Ryn Elerosse patted the horse whispering "That wasn't too bad" Elerosse then helped Larien to mount Ryn then mounted in front of her he then told her "we have a long journey we I am to take you to Celebdúlin" Larien nodded and with that they set off heading back to Veritas.

Chapter 2: Woodland encounter

Elerosse and Larien were travelling through the woodland towards Veritas. The sweet voice of Larien whispered into Elerosse sending shivers down the spine of the experienced bounty hunter, "Elerosse please may we rest?" Elerosse replied in a war yet resonating voice "we shall rest in an hour or so my lady" at this Larien nodded wearily.

An hour later Elerosse found the place he was looking for. They rode into a small clearing with a small fresh water pool; the ground was strewn with flowers of all kinds in all different colours, Elerosse dismounted and helped Larien down. Elerosse laid out a couple of sleeping mats and made a small fire he looked at Larien she looked upset, Elerosse spoke softly to Larien "I'm sorry, I know it isn't much" Larien looked at Elerosse smiling slightly "It is not your fault I just miss Celebdúlin so much don't you?" Elerosse removed his cloak and looked into Larien's deep emerald eyes he smiled "I doubt I will be very welcome in Celebdúlin". Larien looked at Elerosse with a confused look on her face "Why wouldn't you be welcome in Celebdúlin?"

Elerosse's smile vanished in an instant he sat on the grass next to the boulder, Larien sat down next to him. Elerosse spoke softly and almost hesitantly, "It was a long time ago, my friend Imbelote always practiced our sword fighting skills in the white tower of Masire, One day we were practicing as usual then it happened" Elerosse paused for a second to clear his throat and wipe away a tear from his eye then he continued, "It happened all of a sudden I swung a furious blow he parried but his sword was cleaved in two in his hand. He had received a grievous wound across his chest, I fled Celebdúlin and never looked back later I found out he died from that wound"

Larien placed her arm round the despondent Elerosse and spoke to him in a calming soothing tone of voice "It was an accident it was not your fault". Larien and Elerosse looked deeply into each other's eyes, they moved closer together then their lips met in a gentle kiss a split second later Elerosse pulled away jumped to he's feet and rushed over to Ryn. Larien stood up and moved towards Elerosse she spoke to him quietly "I'm sorry I shouldn't have please forgive me" Elerosse turned back to Larien he whispered to her "It's not that we are not alone" at this Elerosse drew the phoenix claw from its sheath the blade was warm to the touch suggesting the taint of chaos was nearby. The sword shimmered like an ethereal flame.

Larien took up Elerosse's bow and quiver she stared at the blade in Elerosse's hands she spoke her voice faltering slightly "I know that sword it's the phoenix claw but that means you're the Prince of Dorathion but he has been missing for well over a century." The realisation finally dawned on Larien this man was the Prince of Dorathion son to the Phoenix Lord himself. She had no further time to consider this there was a bestial cry from the woods directly in front of them soon followed by a dozen more.

Suddenly a dozen beastmen erupted from the woods from where the beast cry had issued from Larien didn't think for a second she drew Elerosse's bow, picked her target and fired a second later a beastman fell to the earth clutching an arrow in his throat, the beast let out a defiant roar before being trampled by his comrades. Elerosse

charged into the fray bellowing a deafening war cry while swinging the phoenix claw in deadly arcs beheading the first beastman he reached the beast's head flew into the woods to Elerosse's right and blood sprayed from his neck like a fountain of blood. A beastman to Elerosse's right tried to take advantage of Elerosse's exposed flank swinging his crude blade at Elerosse's back. Elerosse dodged the clumsy strike with ease and countered by severing the beastman's arm at the elbow, the beastman cried out in rage and swung his fist at Elerosse only to receive an arrow in the face in return.

Elerosse soon found himself surrounded by five beastmen he was forced to block, dodge and parry countless blows looking for an opening in his enemies defence, then as one of the beastmen swung his axe in a wide arc Elerosse saw his chance he dodged the blow and in one swift movement he ran the phoenix claw through the beastman's gut and leapt over the dead beast ripping the phoenix claw through the beast cutting him in two.

Elerosse heard a scream behind him he turned to see a beastman advancing a Larien who had dropped her bow and her empty quiver, without thinking of the beastmen behind him or the danger he was putting himself into Elerosse threw three knives at the beast who cried out in agony as he fell blood foaming at his lips. Larien paused and then stared helplessly at Elerosse he moved so swiftly, so elegantly he dodged the clumsy strikes of the beastmen he fought in a frenzy striking at any beast that was unfortunate or stupid enough to come within his reach.

Elerosse kicked the last dead beastman from the phoenix claw only to hear a blood curdling cry from his left. Out of the trees to Elerosse's left charged a huge snarling Minotaur. The beast was huge even for a Minotaur it was heavily scarred it carried a huge two handed axe the constantly dripped with blood, upon the beast's head was burned the mark of Carfacion. The Minotaur roared again this time however Elerosse leapt onto the boulder to his left and roared a defiant war cry that stunned the Minotaur, the Minotaur's paralysis was only temporary the beast quickly recovered and swung its axe downwards at Elerosse.

Elerosse swiftly stepped aside at the last second as the axe embedded itself in the boulder on which Elerosse had been standing. Elerosse's counter was swift bringing the phoenix claw across the back of the Minotaur's leg severing the calf muscle, spraying the grass with the beast's vile black blood. The Minotaur roared a tumultuous cry of pain and then wrenched free its axe from the boulder and swung it at Elerosse in a vicious arc. Elerosse blocked the beast's strike bright sparks flew as the two magic weapons connected.

Elerosse was thrown back by the sheer strength of the brute Elerosse staggered backwards stunned by the force of the blow, the Minotaur swung his blade at Elerosse again but the bounty hunter was too quick for the beast he leapt backwards the axe barely missing his face. The Minotaur bellowed again as Elerosse threw a throwing knife at the foul creature the beast merely pulled the blade from its chest and threw it to the ground.

Again the Minotaur swung its axe at Elerosse, which the elf promptly dodged the clumsy blow then countered by running phoenix claw through the beasts chest twisting the blade as it sunk into the vile monsters flesh. The Minotaur roared in agony its vile black blood dripping from the beast's lips. Elerosse drew his knife and slashed open the Minotaur's throat to make sure the beast was truly dead, Elerosse kicked the dead Minotaur from his blade spitting on the foul being.

Elerosse rushed to where Larien was standing "Are you alright, are you hurt?" he asked his voice full of concern and hesitant. "I will be alright thanks to you" she replied her voice shaky and hesitant she forced a weak smile.

Elerosse quickly gathered their belongings and retrieved as many arrows and knives as he could he then turned to Larien "We should move on quickly before more of them arrive we are close to our first destination we should hurry." Larien nodded in approval of Elerosse's suggestion and the two of them mounted and set off at a hurried pace to continue their journey.

Chapter 3: Veritas

The rest of Elerosse and Larien's journey to the lands of Tanhilion was uneventful. As they crossed the rolling countryside crossing countless streams, riding over hilly and occasionally rocky terrain towards the town of Veritas the only town in the whole of Tanhilion, Elerosse was content that they were in a relatively safe due to the constant Tilean border patrols they crossed paths with but he remained alert for the first sign of danger.

Elerosse and Larien rode almost all day in the beautiful summer sunshine till they reached the high white stone walls of Veritas, the walls of Veritas were made over two centuries ago with the assistance of the dwarves of the now abandoned Karak-Vern the gates of Veritas were huge made of wood and braced with steel and in the centre was a huge silver shield with the crest of Veritas a raven clutching a lightning bolt. Outside the gates was a small guard tower around which Elerosse could see two dozen soldiers stood in the in the red and black uniforms there steel armour and halberds shinning in the sunlight.

The largest of these soldiers approached Elerosse and Larien judging by the crest on the man's helmet his long scarlet and gold cloak Elerosse could tell this was an officer. The officer spoke directly at Elerosse in a stern yet friendly tone "Good evening Sir, and where might you be heading and on what business?" Elerosse replied in his usual resonant tone "We wish to go to enter Veritas; we are on a long journey and wish to stay at the inn." The officer nodded and said "Enjoy your stay in Veritas but do not cause any trouble stranger it might get you hurt." At this one of the soldiers went into the guardhouse a few seconds later there were the sounds of machinery churning and cogs turning and slowly the enormous gates of Veritas opened.

Elerosse nodded courteously to the officer and rode into the town and to the stables just inside the gate. After leaving Ryn in the care of the stable hands, Elerosse and Larien strode into the White stag inn Elerosse kept Larien close to him holding her hand the second they entered they were struck by the strong smell of smoke and alcohol. The inn was quiet with only a few patrons drinking at the bar and a few more sitting at the tables around them.

Elerosse walked swiftly to the bar and spoke to a huge bear like man in a dusty apron who was clearly the innkeeper "We require a room for the nigh do you have any available?" The innkeeper nodded and grunted in a low husky voice "That'll be twenty ducats" Elerosse handed the man his money in exchange for a room key.

The room in which Elerosse and Larien were to be staying in was small but pleasantly furnished room with two beds, a south facing window, a large wooden table and four chairs. Elerosse removed his cloak and placed his weapons close to one of the beds. Larien sat on the other bed deep in thought, Elerosse turned to Larien saying in a warm resonant voice "Larien, we will eat and rest here tonight and tomorrow we will book passage on the first vessel to Iberic and from there we will travel to Celebdúlin." Larien turned to Elerosse smiled and said "So you are Elerosse Prince of Dorathion?" Elerosse replied by simply nodding.

The next morning Larien arose to find Elerosse already awake and sitting at the table studying a piece of parchment. Elerosse was so intensely studying his maps he hadn't noticed that Larien had arisen or heard her move closer to him. The first sign he received was when he felt her hand on his shoulder and heard her sweet voice in his ear "You're up early my prince, couldn't you sleep?" Elerosse turned around to face Larien he stared into her deep emerald eyes without thinking he spoke to her softly "Not really, you look more radiant and beautiful than ever." At this Larien smiled, Elerosse leaned forward and they kissed each other gently then gradually deeper Elerosse caressed Larien as they kissed deeper still.

When Elerosse and Larien left their room several hours later they walked through the crowded bustling crowds, past street entertainers and stall holders selling their wares Elerosse was holding Larien close till they parted. While Larien was buying some food for their journey Elerosse went to the docks district to get them passage on the next vessel bound for Ilberic.

Elerosse entered the docks district, this district was the most run down of all the districts that made up the town of Veritas. It was full of taverns and brothels each competing for the business provided by the sailors and merchants arriving and leaving Veritas. Elerosse walked swiftly and cautiously through the crowded streets and into the huge white stone building that was the shipping guild.

The shipping guild was the most modern and luxurious building in the docks district by far. Elerosse walked through the crowded hall slipping virtually unseen past elegantly dressed merchants, richly clothed nobles and the common folk of Veritas to the desk at the end of the hall behind which sat an overweight merchant wearing dark blue robes, a large brown hat with two long scarlet feathers and around his neck the merchant wore a solid gold medallion with the symbol of a wagon and the letter G emblazoned upon it, All of which marked him as a prominent member of the merchants guild.

The merchant looked up from his papers at Elerosse and spoke to him his voice sounding bored, drawling and monotonous "I presume you're here to book passage?" At this Elerosse merely nodded. The merchant then continued "How many and where do you want to go?" Elerosse responded to the merchant's question in his usual resonant tone "Two passengers heading to Ilberic." At this the merchant laughed "We have no vessels going there for the next six months"

Elerosse stormed out of the guild enraged by the merchant's attitude. Elerosse was heading back to the White Stag to meet Larien when a gravelly voice spoke behind him. "I hear you are looking for passage to Ilberic, Is this true?" Elerosse turned around to find himself face to face with a dwarf. The dwarf like the rest of his kind was short, stocky, powerfully built; he was wearing a suit of chainmail armour on top of which he had Gromril plates the dwarf also had a long grey beard which was tucked into a thick leather belt with a gold buckle. There were two things that were different about this dwarf, firstly instead of carrying an axe or hammer like most dwarves he had a multi-barrelled handgun strapped to his back this marked the dwarf as being an engineer. The other odd thing about the dwarf was not so easy to explain

was that he was speaking to him in almost friendly tone this was odd for a dwarf to talk to an elf without cursing and swearing.

Elerosse spoke to the dwarf in his usual resonating voice “Yes, myself and my companion are seeking passage, do you know of a vessel heading there?” The dwarf laughed heartily then replied “Aye, I know a vessel heading to Ilberic, mine.” Elerosse smiled “May I book passage on your vessel?” Again the dwarf laughed “I will let u travel with me for free if you assist me in a little quest first.” Elerosse’s smile vanished in an instant “This quest what will it involve?” The dwarf smiled revealing he was missing most of his teeth he replied in a whisper “I shall explain do you know anywhere we can discuss this matter privately?” Elerosse was intrigued he nodded and led the dwarf through the crowded streets back to his room in the white stag.

Once back in his room Elerosse invited the dwarf to sit at the table which he did so after seeing it was laden with food and drink. Elerosse heard Larien approach and before she could reach the door steppes through it and pulled her down the hallway. She smiled and whispered “you are eager to be close to me again my dear prince.” Elerosse smiled and explained about the dwarf and his proposition. Elerosse expected Larien to be surprised or shocked but she simply smiled and said “We better find out more about this quest” Elerosse nodded and the two of them entered the room to find the dwarf savagely and ravenously devouring all the food within reach.

Elerosse walked in front of the dwarf bowed and said to the dwarf “My name is Elerosse Shadowblade I believe you have a proposal for me.” The dwarf stood and bowed “I am Uli Stonefist and I have heard of you. You have quite a reputation, yes I have a proposal for you it is simple you shall accompany myself and my expedition into the ancient stronghold of Karak-Vitern it is not far west of here and in exchange for this you and your companion may have passage to Ilberic how’s that do we have an agreement?” Elerosse looked at Uli Stonefist carefully before asking “Why would you require our aid?” Uli smiled “A good question, well the only route to Karak-Vitern lies in what is now in woodland area now under the protection of a tribe of wood elves” Elerosse nodded seeing the sense in the dwarf’s argument he then offered the dwarf his hand “we have an agreement” Uli Stonefist shook Elerosse’s outstretched hand muttering “that we do, that we do”. After Uli left Larien and Elerosse embraced each other deeply. Elerosse the said to Larien” I have a couple of things for you, my love” with that he handed her an ornate pale wood bow and quiver then he handed her a gold necklace with the elvish symbol of eternity and on the back was an inscription that read:

“Larien my love for u is
eternal,
I am yours for all of time

I love you Elerosse”

Which when translated says:

“Larien, my love for you is eternal,
I am yours for all of time
I love you
Elerosse”

Larien read the inscription cried a single tear smiled and embraced Elerosse whispering in his ear “It’s beautiful, I love you and I am yours for all eternity, my love”. Elerosse smiled looked into Larien’s deep emerald eyes and whispered softly too her “I love you too and my heart is yours for all eternity”.

The next morning Elerosse, Larien and Uli met at the main gate of Veritas ready to set off on there new quest Elerosse had to get Ryn from the stables and he walked by the side while Larien rode upon the horse. The three of them headed west for a few hours till they saw the rest of the expedition Uli had mentioned. This expedition was made up of some thirty dwarf warriors; twenty dwarf handgunners and a human mage of the order fire who called himself Prometheus, the mage wore long scarlet robes, had long black unkempt hair and carried a long wooden staff. The rest of the expedition was made up of our wagons two of which were empty a multi barrelled cannon which was pulled by one of the wagons Uli called a slayer gun and about half a dozen engineers. The expedition headed for Karak-Vitern to the west completely unaware of the ancient evil that had now made that place its home.

Chapter 4: Journey to Tarineth

The expedition travelled westward, Elerosse and Larien were at the head of the expedition beside Uli and Promethius Elerosse spoke to Uli in a resonating tone “Why exactly are we heading to Karak-Vitern and why you feel it is necessary to bring a small army with you?” At this Uli laughed and said “Not thinking of backing out now are we?” Elerosse cursed under his breath for being so foolish to accept this dwarf’s agreement without finding out everything first, Elerosse then shook his head stating in a low voice “I just wish to know what I am risking my life for and that of my companion for.” Uli laughed again before saying “You should have thought of that before you agreed.” Elerosse cursed under his breath yet again and was going to draw the phoenix claw and cleave this arrogant dwarf in two when he found Larien’s hand on his stopping him, He looked to her she shook her head as if reading his thoughts. It was then that a soft yet commanding voice came from Elerosse’s right he looked to see it was Promethius voice he had heard it was the first time he had heard the wizard speak since they had first met, “We are to retrieve a powerful magical item,” the wizard said smiling slightly. At this Elerosse merely nodded to show he understood the wizard.

The expedition travelled all day through the rolling hillside of Tanhilion. Stopping only at nightfall at which time they erected a series of tents one of which was given to Elerosse and Larien to share. They also constructed a number of small campfires and ten of the dwarves were given sentry duty. Elerosse and Larien steeped inside their tent it was more spacious then it seemed from the outside. Once inside Larien moved swiftly into Elerosse’s arms she sighed and said in a soft whisper “Elerosse I love u more then I can ever say” Elerosse replied in a soft whisper “I love you too Larien and I always shall” the two of them embraced and caressed each other till they fell into sleep in each others arms.

Elerosse was awoken hearing the cry of alarm ringing throughout the encampment. Elerosse hastily put on his armour and grabbed his weapons and rushed outside to find Larien on his heels wearing a suit of studded leather armour carrying her longbow and had her quiver strapped to her back. Once outside they headed silently to the north of the encampment towards the signs of disturbance seeing dwarves leaving their tents hastily heading northwards too.

As they reached the edge of the encampment they found the Handgunners formed into two ranks of ten facing northwards preparing their weapons. They also found the dwarven warriors ranked up surveying the woods before them amongst them was Uli who was carrying a massive two handed hammer instead of his rifle. The ground between the dwarves and the woods to the north was littered with scrawny green skinned bodies no bigger then that of a human child. Elerosse recognised these bodies instantly as being goblins. Seeing the look of disgust on Elerosse’s face Uli spoke his voice was stern and grim “Vile creatures attacked without warning killed three of the sentries before the alarm was raised.” Elerosse wondered if there were more of the foul creatures around. As if in reply to Elerosse’s thoughts a high pitched cackling war cry issued from the woods quickly followed by hundreds of high pitched cries.

Within seconds hundreds of green skinned goblins issued from the dark woods to the north. Larien drew her bow and fired her first arrow it hit the closest of the goblins in the chest the foul creature screamed a high pitched wail as it died Larien didn't falter for a second drawing another arrow and firing this time hitting a goblin in the face it screamed in agony as it died.

Elerosse heard a loud rumbling to his right he looked in the direction of this new disturbance to see the dwarven organ gun being rolled forward by three particularly strong dwarves. Elerosse drew the phoenix claw and was relieved to find it was cool at least the taint of chaos was not near he then stood by Uli with the dwarven warriors. Uli looked at Elerosse's blade and laughed "That's a nice blade for elf, magic I presume." Elerosse merely nodded Larien stood too his right he couldn't help but notice she looked even more beautiful in the glistening moonlight to her right stood Promethius. Elerosse saw a strange glow emitting from the wizard as though his skin held back the light of a star trapped within him, the wizard was muttering some form of incantation under his breath his eyes firmly shut yet there was an eerie light glowing behind the mans eyelids.

Still the goblins charged forwards they were a hundred yards from the dwarves crying out in their vile language various taunts and insults, when there was a thundering roar from Elerosse's right as the slayer gun fired seven small cannonballs were blasted forth from its barrels killing at least twenty of the charging goblins. Then to Elerosse's left there was another crackling rumble as the handgunners fired at the charging mob another twelve or so goblins fell to this volley screaming in agony as the steel pellets ripped through their armour and flesh as if it was butter. At the same time there was a blinding flash from Elerosse's right as a jet of flame spewed forth from Promethius's outstretched hand a further twenty or so goblins were engulfed in the flame screaming as they were burnt alive till they fell to the ground. The sight of this carnage was too much for the remaining goblins and they turned and fled back to the safety of the woods, the dwarven warriors let out a cry of triumph banging their shields and taunting the fleeing goblins while the handgunners fired at the fleeing goblins killing a few more.

There was a bellowing roar from the woods into which the goblins had fled. Suddenly the goblins charged again this time they were accompanied by about a dozen orcs. These brutish creatures were about a head taller than a tall man and twice as broad, these orcs were heavily armoured but Elerosse knew that even the heaviest or strongest armour would count for nothing when hit by the tremendous power of the dwarf black powder weapons. Elerosse smiled he almost felt sorry for the vile beasts then in an instant his smile vanished he heard another war cry to his far left.

As Elerosse looked in the direction of the new war cry he spotted a dozen goblin wolf riders heading straight for the exposed right flank of the handgunners and cursed loudly Uli looked at him and smiled "Well look like things are gonna get interesting doesn't it my elven friend." Without waiting for Elerosse's response Uli shouted to the handgunners "Handgunners, left turn pick your targets and engage." At this the dwarf handgunners turned in unison to face their new enemy. The goblin wolf rider's are particularly tough goblins yet lightly armoured yet the wolves were larger and more vicious than the average wolf, the wolves' eyes were bloodshot and showed

their lust for blood and they were slaving beasts with fangs at least 7 inches in length they were fearful beasts yet the handgunners showed a grim determination not one showed any sign of fear.

The front handgunners knelt and the handgunners in the rear rank leaned over them. The front handgunners took aim and fired at the oncoming wolf riders three of the riders fell from their mounts to be eaten by the wolves the once were riding and a fourth was trapped screaming in agony under the dead body of his steed. Then the rear rank of the handgunners fired killing another two goblin riders one of whom had head blown clean off spraying his mount in his blood, a third rider was seriously wounded as the bullet almost severed his arm the vile creature dropped its weapon turned and fled to whence it came. The handgunners dropped their handguns and drew their axes and hammers ready to meet the oncoming riders.

Meanwhile, the slayer gun fired again and once more cannonballs were hurled at the oncoming green skin mob this time killing three of the orcs pulverising one of them and removed the leg of another also to fall were two goblins were flattened. Larien fired again this time hitting one of the orcs hitting the vile beast in the neck but it ripped the arrow from its neck as though it were no more than a splinter and roared defiantly.

There was an ethereal glow behind Promethius's eyes yet again as Elerosse looked at the wizard he saw flames forming in the man's hands as he chanted another invocation under his breath. A moment later a huge flaming lash was in the wizard outstretched hand and in the other he carried a glowing longsword which Elerosse had no doubt that it was enchanted. Elerosse and Uli looked at each other shrugged and let loose a mighty combined war cry, soon followed by a rousing cry from the dwarves behind them. Just at that moment the morning sun was rising in the east its gentle rays glinted off of the steel armour of the dwarves.

The goblin riders charged into the handgunners one of whom was impaled on a goblin spear but his death was quickly avenged, when one of his comrades put his axe into the head of the offending goblin's mount with a resounding crack the beast whimpered as it fell throwing its rider forward, before he could rise his feet another dwarf smashed its skull with his hammer causing a sickening crunch. Another dwarf was bitten by a wolf but even while being crushed in the beast's jaws he wouldn't give up swinging his axe into the beast's side as another dwarf cleaved the beast's head.

The remaining goblins and orcs charged headlong into the waiting dwarf warrior's. Elerosse swiftly severed the heads of two goblins in one swing of the phoenix claw. Uli brought his mighty hammer down onto the head of one of the orcs crushing the vile monster's skull and sending blood and guts over any other green skin nearby at this Uli laughed. Promethius swung his whip and with a resounding crack sliced through two of the charging orcs. Elerosse moved swiftly blocking and parrying the blows of a huge orc standing before him then with a deafening war cry he countered slicing upwards through the orc's face black blood dripped from the creature's lips as it fell to the ground. Elerosse then leaped into the centre of a group of green skins slicing at them in a blinding fury.

At the sight of the heroism this elf was displaying the dwarves bellowed in a unified voice and fought with renewed vigour Uli fought his way forward to cover the back of Elerosse smashing several goblins out of the way chuckling manically as he did so. The battle was swift and brutal soon all the remaining green skins were dead or fleeing from the carnage wrought by the combined force the dwarves, Elerosse, Larien and Promethius had brought upon them. The dwarves unfortunately had losses to, they lost five of their warriors and six handgunners' there were countless wounded too but the combined efforts of Promethius and Larien ensured their survival.

Uli turned to Elerosse looking at him with a new found level of respect "you fight well are you sure you are not part dwarf?" at this Uli and several of the other warriors nearby laughed heartily even Elerosse laughed at this Larien then kissed him and said in a sweet whisper "you fight so valiantly I just wish you would be more careful I don't want to lose you, I love you" Elerosse smiled at Larien "I love you to and I never want to lose you, My love" with that they embraced yet again.

Within a couple of hours the encampment was abandoned the wagons yet again laden with the tents and other equipment, The dead dwarves were with honour while the green skins were put into a mound and burned the reek of their vile burning flesh made Elerosse feel ill. The expedition then set off yet again completely unaware that this was just the start of their troubles that a greater evil yet awaited them.

Chapter 5: Tarineth land of the wood elves

Elerossë and the rest of the expedition travelled westward for a further three days setting up camp each night without any further incidents. On the dawn of the fifth day since the expedition set off from Veritas, they reached the borders of Tarineth forest the home of the Val'shir wood elves.

As they approached the edge of the forest a general grumbling arose from the ranks of the dwarven members of the expedition and as they got closer the grumbling got louder and louder. Elerossë turned to Uli "Uli, maybe it would be best if I go in first speak to the wood elves." Upon hearing this Larien spoke "I'll go with you" Elerossë looked at Larien and replied "It is too dangerous I am not sure how they will react to our presence, I don't want you to get hurt, my love." Larien smiled and placed her hand on his shoulder "No matter what the danger I shall stand by you till the end of time, my love." As Elerossë went to reply Larien placed a finger on his lips smiled and said "I'm going with you whether you like it or not, and besides how are you going to see me safely to Ulthuan as you promised if you leave me here?" At this Elerossë resisted himself to merely nod and kiss Larien on the lips whispering to her "I love you; I will protect you I swear."

Elerossë then heard another voice to his left he turned sharply to see Promethius standing beside him leaning slightly on his staff, Elerossë had to fight hard to suppress his surprise that the old wizard had sneaked up on him unnoticed. Promethius didn't seem to notice Elerossë's surprise and said "I shall go with you too I have some experience in negotiating with elves." Before Elerossë could reply Uli laughed and said in a deep gravelly voice "I shall go to represent the dwarves and besides seeing how this is my expedition either I go on nobody goes."

With that agreed Elerossë, Larien, Promethius and Uli ventured forth into the deep forest before them. There was an eerie silence about the woodland there was not even a sound of a bird singing. The trees of Tarineth are tall and strong many centuries old their branches almost blocked out the sun completely. The party moved in total silence forward deeper into the forest. It was Uli who first broke the silence "Where are these elves huh, I was told they were here." Elerossë replied quietly "They are here they have been watching us since we first set foot in Tarineth." Uli cursed under his breath. A soft yet commanding voice spoke as if from thin air or the as if the trees had been given voice

Elerossë and the rest of the party halted immediately. Elerossë then spoke out loud in elvish, at this a green cloaked figure stepped out of the trees directly in front of them. At the same time seven almost identically clad also appeared surrounding the party completely surrounding the party, all of them were armed with white wooden bows decorated in elvish script. The cloaked figure before them lowered the hood of his cloak to reveal his face he had long black hair, pale skin and deep emerald green eyes the look on his face was one of grim defiance.

The cloaked figure spoke yet again "Elerossë you are welcome in Tarineth as always my friend, your companions who are they and what business do they have in

Tarineth?” Elerossë smiled “Talepador, it has been a long time my friend, as for my companions this is Larien Elendil, daughter of Findecano Elendil.” Larien took Elerossë’s hand and said to Talepador “It’s a pleasure to meet you Talepador.” Talepador smiled and bowed in elvish fashion “My lady you are welcome here in Tarineth the rumours of your beauty do not do you justice.” Larien smiled and held Elerossë closer.”

Elerossë cleared his throat then spoke once again “This is Promethius a wizard with the Order of Fire” at this Promethius steeped forward and bowed then said his greetings in elvish. This sent murmured whispers between the wood elves. Talepador smiled “It’s been a long time since a human has spoken to us in our native language you too are welcome here.” Elerossë then spoke again “and finally we have Uli Stonefist”. Talepador gave the dwarf a look of utter disgust seeing this Elerossë quickly added “Uli here saved my life,” Elerossë then recounted to Talepador the attack of the goblins and how Uli had come to his aid. Talepador’s look of disgust was replaced by one of apprehension “you too are welcome master dwarf, as for this news of goblins that will have to be reported to our lord Súrion, you will all of course be coming with us.” With that the elves led the party deeper into the forest.

The homes of the wood elves were situated high in the canopy of the trees. As they travelled deeper into the forest they passed several wood elves all wearing pale robes and all of whom gave furtive looks at the strangers in their land. One small elven girl in pale pink robes ran smiling and laughing up to the party. Elerossë dropped to his knees and picked up the small girl and hugged her she smiled and said in a sweet very soft voice “Uncle Elerossë I’ve missed you, you have been gone so long, are you staying this time?” Elerossë smiled “I have missed you too Tári, I shall not be staying long but I have good news when I return we shall be going home” Tári smiled back at Elerossë then saw Larien and whispered to Elerossë “Elerossë , who is that beautiful lady?” Elerossë whispered back “Her name is Larien, she will be coming with us.” Tári turned to Larien and said “Its nice too meet you my names Tári” Larien smiled and replied “You have such a beautiful name my names Larien and it’s a pleasure to meet you too.” Talepador turned round and smiled saying softly “Tári you should go play with the others Elerosse here has to meet Lord Súrion, I’m sure he will come to see you soon.” Elerosse put Tári down kissed her on her forehead and said “I will come to see you soon I promise” Tári smiled and ran off. Talepador led the party into the very heart of the forest to a small clearing in the centre of which stood a tall white walled tower with seemingly no entrance. Engraved onto the walls of the tower were numerous images that depicted the history of this particular race of elves. As they reached the walls Talepador whistled a delicate tune and silently a wooden carriage lowered itself down beside them. The party stepped inside, Talepador whistled again and the carriage slowly yet steadily made its way upward.

As the carriage came to a halt at the very peak of this tower the party found themselves in front of a huge shrine to the elven goddess Eisha. In front of the shrine was a high backed white throne upon which was seated an aged elf countless centuries old yet he had a regal magnificence that defied time, he wore a long pale blue robe and around his head he wore a crown of Merithis Leaves. Around the elf’s neck he wore as golden medallion upon which was a symbol of an eagle in mid flight holding a longbow and sword. On either side of him were another two high backed wooden chairs.

Seated in the chair to the right was a beautiful elven maiden with long blonde hair. She wore white robes tied around her waist by an elegant green and silver belt bearing the icon of an open eye, this is the symbol of Eisha. To the left was seated a stern looking elf Elerossë had never seen before he had long dark hair tied back into a pony tail. He wore a dark emerald cloak over leather armour in his right hand he had a longsword and in his left he held a longbow.

It was Talepador who spoke first “My lord Súrion, I bring quests and grave tidings sire.” At this the elf in the centre spoke “Well one of your guests I know Elerosse welcome, now who are your companions?” Uli bowed and said “I am Uli Stonefist son of Snorri Stonefist” Elerossë saw a look of distrust on Lord Súrion’s face and quickly added “Uli here saved my life, I am in his debt” at this Súrion smiled and said “Master Stonefist you shall always be welcome in Tarineth for your act of heroism.”

Promethius then bowed to the elven lord and his councillors stating in his usual commanding tone “My lord, I am Promethius Vann Heron of the Order of Fire.” Súrion smiled “You are also welcome in Tarineth Master Vann Heron.” Larien went to speak yet she hesitated, Elerosse took her hand she to him and smiled then she then spoke to those gathered in a soft almost hesitant voice, “My lord, my name is Larien Elendil, daughter of Findecano Elendil” at this the elf to Súrion’s right said in an eerie yet strangely soothing voice “I am lady Aradalwen high priestess of Eisha here in Tarineth and you are all welcome here, are they not my lord.”

Before Súrion could answer the elf to his left spoke his voice was cold and commanding “My lord, we cannot allow this they have brought an army of dwarves to our borders.” Súrion then said “It is worrying that they have an army on our borders on that I agree with you, yet I’m sure they have a good reason yet first I believe you said you have some news for me Talepador.” Talepador then recounted to those gathered about the attack of the green skins. As Talepador spoke the smile vanished from Súrion’s face he turned to the elf to his left and said in elvish “Lamalas double the patrols.” Súrion then returned his attention to Elerossë and the others “This is grave tidings you bring, I am thankful none the less to you all for bringing it to my attention.”

Elerossë then bowed to Súrion “My lord, as for our quest myself and Larien are returning to Ulthuan in order to do so we have agreed to help Master Stonefist and his expedition into Karak-Vitern to retrieve an ancient item of theirs. I would also like to ask something of Lady Aradalwen, my niece Tári is in care of your temple I wish to take her with us.” Aradalwen replied “The girl will be most pleased to hear this I am sure but I must warn you I sense great evil from the place you are going to continue on this journey may cost you your lives.” Uli laughed “I’m going to complete my quest no matter what danger stands in my way.” Súrion spoke softly to Aradalwen in a whispered voice she nodded and left graciously. Súrion then returned his attention once more to Elerossë and the others “I can see it is pointless trying to dissuade you from your chosen course. You shall of course rest here before continuing your journey in which I wish you all well.” Súrion then spoke to Talepador “Talepador, Please show our guests where they are to stay.”

Talepador bowed as did Elerossë and the others with that Talepador led them out of the shrine down to the base of the tower and to a great white building in a neighbouring tree. Talepador then left them saying they were free to wander as they wished and that he had to go on patrol before he left he and Elerossë shook hands and agreed to meet before the party left Tarineth.

Once the others had fallen asleep, Larien and Elerossë left the guest house to be alone together. They wandered through the woods hand in hand till they found a small stream and sat on the bank holding each other close. Elerossë whispered softly in Larien's ear "I love you Larien will you marry me?" handing her a small golden ring made of two bands of gold woven together.

Larien smiled "I love you too and I shall." The two of them embraced deeply caressing each other. Larien pulled away crying "My love, I'm sorry we cannot be joined without the blessing of my family and that of Eisha." Elerossë wiped away her tears and whispered "Then I shall get both my love, for I shall do anything for you even go down to Val'Nazril and battle the demon king Maikahen that is if you will wait for me?" Larien smiled "I shall wait for you till the end of time, my love and heart are yours forever." The two of them embraced and held each other till sleep overcame them.

Chapter 6: Departing Tarineth

Elerossë awoke early the next morning on the embankment with Larien lying beside him. Elerossë roused himself and picked up his equipment and as he did so the soft voice of Larien whispered in his ear “You are up early, my love” Elerossë turned and embraced Larien, Elerosse smiled and replied “I need to go to the shrine and Visit Tári, you can come with me if u like?” Larien smiled back at him and replied “I think you two could do with some time alone together, I’m sure I can find something to do” Elerossë looked deeply into Larien’s eyes before replying “That is true I haven’t seen her for quite some time, She is the daughter of my brother I am the only family she has left now her father died in the war against the evil one Dûriach.” Elerossë could not hide his hate and loathing as spoke the name of the Lord of the Lhunur elves, Elerossë and Larien embraced again and Elerossë left for the shrine of Eisha.

Once he reached the base of the tower he whistled the same tune he had heard Talepador had whistled and soon found himself at the shrine to Eisha. In front of the shrine stood Lady Aradalwen stood there smiling “I have been expecting you” she said. Elerossë smiled in return and replied “Then you know why I am here” Aradalwen nodded and said “You wish to ask the goddess Eisha’s blessing.” Elerossë replied “Myself and Larien wish to be joined and would like to ask Eisha’s blessing.” Aradalwen “Then you shall have to ask” Aradalwen replied pointing to the white statue of Eisha to the left which Elerossë had never noticed before, It was a sculpture of a tall elven maiden who in one hand held a sword yet the other was outstretched. Elerossë nodded in acknowledgement to Lady Aradalwen’s words and walk forwards till he was in front of the statue and knelt in front of it.

At the base of the statue was a small plaque that said

Eisha, Protector of the innocent and blessed mother of all the elven people

When translated this plaque reads: “Eisha, Protector of the innocent and blessed mother of all the elven people.”

Elerossë closed his eyes and prayed under his breath in elvish. The room went cold and a breeze swept through the room when Elerossë opened his eyes in the open hand of the statue was a silver token attached to a thin silver chain. Written upon the token were the following words:

“Elerossë Firréion prince
of Dorathion, son of
Dimthulë Firréion and
Nunauriel Firréion and
Larien Elendil daughter of
Findecano Elendil and
Telyavëiel Elendil. Have
the blessing of Eisha if
they are joined.”

Which when translated to the language of men it says the following:

“Elerossë Firréion prince of Dorathion, son of Dimthulë Firréion and Nunauriel
Firréion and Larien Elendil daughter of Findecano Elendil and Telyávëiel Elendil.
Have the blessing of Eisha if they are joined”.

At the bottom of the token was the symbol of an open eye the mark of Eisha, Elerosse gave his thanks to the goddess and left the shrine. Elerossë walked through the tranquil woods of Tarineth smiling his heart full of joy. Elerossë walked for some time till he found the place he was looking for, in the canopy of a particularly large and wide tree was a large domed shaped building. In front of the tree was a large a large wooden sign post upon the sign was gold lettering clearly written in elvish was the following:

Welcome to Pherdacil
orphanage, Home and haven to
the young and the innocent

Founded in the year 503 yd by Enedthoniel high priestess of Eisha

When translated this says:

“Welcome to Pherdacil orphanage, Home and haven to the young and the innocent

Founded in the year 503 yd by Enedthoniel high priestess of Eisha”

Elerossë was about to climb the narrow staircase that spiralled around the outside of the tree when he heard a familiar voice behind him calling his name. Elerossë turned around to see Tári running towards him ahead of a group of other children and a couple of elven maidens in white robes. Tári ran straight to Elerossë who picked her up and kissed her on her forehead, Tári hugged him close she then started crying and between sobs said “Don’t go, Elerossë please don’t go, stay with me please.”

Elerossë wiped away her tears as one fell from his eyes and rolled slowly down his cheek he whispered to Tári “I have to go, I shall leave tomorrow before the sun has risen I have a promise to keep. I shall return to you as soon as I can and then me, you and Larien will head home to Ulthuan, I promise” Tári stopped crying, smiled and replied “I really like Larien she is so nice are you two going to be joined?” Elerossë laughed and replied “Cant put anything past you can I? When we return to Ulthuan maybe we will be joined.” Tári’s smile widened “I knew it, we’ll be one big happy family.” Elerossë laughed again and kissed her again “We shall see Tári, I hope you are right.”

Elerossë and Tári spent the whole day together laughing, playing and just talking. As the sun started to set Tári started to fall asleep and Elerossë carried her to the door of the orphanage where he gave her to the sisters who put her to bed after he had kissed her forehead and whispered goodbye to her. Elerossë wandered back to the guest house to find all but Uli asleep, the dwarf sat on a stool before the fire cleaning his handgun and drinking from a silver tankard, Elerossë said goodnight to Uli who merely grunted in reply. Elerossë went over to where Larien was sleeping, once there he kissed her on the lips before climbing into the bed next to her. Elerossë laid awake for a while thinking of the road ahead of them, he had heard tales of monsters lurking deep in Karak-Vitern he had paid these rumours no attention till he heard what Lady Aradalwen had said, soon Elerossë drifted into a restless sleep his dreams haunted by images of foul demons.

When Elerossë awoke he found he was the last to arise the others were sitting around the large wooden table situated in the center of the room. Elerossë sat in the only free chair between Larien and Prometheus, Elerossë looked at Larien she smiled at him and said “we were wondering when you would wake, we were about to wake you so we can set off.” Elerossë smiled weakly back at Larien and replied “I want you to stay

here” Larien opened his mouth to protest but Elerossë added “I don’t want you hurt and besides I would like you to look after Tári while I’m away this is hard for her, please I beg you.” Larien nodded and said “I will stay if you promise me you will take care and return to us” Elerossë kissed Larien and into her hand he placed the silver token of Eisha and said “I shall be careful and return to you both, I promise.”

Just at that moment an elven ranger entered the guest house “Who here is Elerossë Firréion of Dorathion” Elerossë stood and strode up to the ranger replying “That would be me” The ranger handed Elerossë a scroll of yellowing parchment tied with a green ribbon and bearing a silver seal with Lord Súrion’s personal seal. As soon as Elerossë took the scroll the ranger bowed and left. Elerossë opened the scroll and written in elvish was the following message:

P

Prince Elerossë,

I request that you come to the shrine of Eisha with Uli Stonefist, Larien Elendil and Promethius Vann Heron before you depart on your journey.

Lord Surion,
Regent of Tarineth and ally to
Ulthuan

When translated it said:

Prince Elerossë,

I request that you come to the shrine of Eisha with Uli Stonefist, Larien Elendil and Promethius Vann Heron before you depart on your journey.

Lord Súrion,
Regent of Tarineth and ally to Ilberic

Elerossë and the others travelled to the shrine and when they arrived they found Súrion standing before the tower of Eisha to his right stood Lady Aradalwen and to her right stood four elves in white robes. Súrion greeted the party as they approached. "Hail friends, I trust that you have slept well I just wanted to wish you luck on your journey and offer you a few little gifts to help you on your way."

At this the first elf walked up to Uli and handed him a belt of leather with silver studs all the way along it each bearing the symbol of Tarineth it was also engraved in elvish runes. Súrion smiled and said "A little something to remember us by master dwarf our mages have engraved upon it a spell that should add too your already considerable strength."

The second elf then walked up to Larien and handed to her a Val'shir whitewood bow inscribed with elvish runes and a quiver that was intricately patterned with leaves and vines. Súrion smiled and said "Again inscribed by our mages to give you greater accuracy and the arrows can punch through the thickest armour." Larien smiled and said "My Lord, there has been a change of plan I am to stay here and await the return others, I'm sorry I cannot accept your gift." Súrion replied "That is good news but all the same accept this gift." Larien bowed and accepted the bow and quiver from the elf, the elf then bowed and returned to stand with the others.

The third elf walked up to Promethius and handed a pair of red gloves bearing the mark of Eisha on the back Lady Aradalwen smiled and said "Master wizard, these will aid u in your spell casting and afford you some protection from enemy spells." Promethius bowed and accepted the gloves

The forth elf walked up to Elerossë and handed him a pair of silver gauntlets bearing the symbol of Dorathion upon them, A crimson phoenix rising from the flames. Súrion smiled and said "You have left these in our care long enough I hope they aid you in the many dangers you shall face." Elerossë bowed and accepted the gauntlets and he put them on.

All of a sudden the sky darkened, a cold breeze swept over the party and a strange glow came from Elerossë. His armour which had once been chainmail with a heavy breastplate now shimmered and changed. The breastplate appeared to melt coating his entire body in shimmering white armour that was as light as if he wore none and the icons on the gloves and armour seemed to come to life they screeched an eerie song then remained still. Elerossë and the rest of the party bowed to their hosts and then Lady Aradalwen offered up a prayer to Eisha for their success and safe return.

Elerossë, Uli and Promethius returned to the guest house to gather their belongings and followed a ranger sent by Talepador with his apologies for not being there in person to meet the rest of the dwarves. Larien and Tári were waiting for them just at the border to the lands of Tarineth. Larien and Elerossë embraced and Elerossë

whispered to her “I shall return to you, my love.” As they parted from each other’s arms Larien was smiling yet two silver tears fell from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks which she quickly wiped away whispering softly “I love you, I shall wait for you.” As she said this she clutched at the token of Eisha which she had round her neck.

Elerossë then turned and picked up Tári whispering to her “I want you to be good for Larien okay? I love you and shall come back for you.” Tári hugged Elerossë crying Elerossë wiped away her tears and put her down and kissed her on her forehead before leaving Tarineth with Uli, Prometheus and Talepador’s ranger.

They met up with the dwarves and the ranger led the expedition westwards through a different route through Tarineth forest. The expedition marched for three days with the ranger acting as a guide they travelled through the deep forests silently each night setting up camp without incident. On the dusk of the forth day since setting off the expedition found themselves at the edge of the forest. It was here that their guide bided them farewell and gave them a map of how to return written in elvish then he departed.

Elerossë surveyed the lands before them, a sweeping range of mountains stood before the expedition and their destination Karak-Vitern was situated in the depths of the tallest of these mountains. Little did Elerossë and the others realise that as they set up camp that their very presence had stirred the ancient evil in the depths of Karak-Vitern.

Chapter 7: The land of eternal night

Meanwhile deep in the heart of the black lands of Mithhithion. In the great hall of the black fortress of Dimaran, a shadowy baroque armoured figure moved silently over the black stoned floor his long black cloak flapping in the breeze at the warrior's side he carried two long curved, poisoned blades to his right he had holstered a crossbow with poisoned bolts he also carried a number of other knives.

The only sound was that of chains jingling in the breeze the source of this noise was hundred of chains hanging from the ceiling. Hanging from these chains were hundreds of corpses, some had rotted and decayed into skeletons while others were freshly flayed of their flesh, the dark warrior walked forward past a shrine the god of murder Carfacion it was a huge gold statue of an armoured evil elf holding a serrated knife in one hand and a chalice of blood in the other while smiling manically.

The dark warrior continued walking forward till he came to three steps here he halted and knelt. Before him stood two heavily armoured warriors with long dark red cloaks both the warriors carried long two handed obsidian swords engraved with red runes. Behind them was a black throne covered in runes the colour of blood and around the throne was piles upon piles of skulls and behind the throne was a huge tapestry detailing the history of the Lhunur elves since they broke away from the council of elves and embraced the dark powers of Carfacion.

Upon the throne a black armoured figure was seated he wore his armour at all times as he was sealed into it centuries ago. At the helmet of the armour looked like that of a demon. The edging of armour was golden and over inch of the armour was written powerful runic writings to protect and preserve the wearer. The kneeling warrior spoke in a cold tone of voice "My lord Dûriach, you requested my presence?" Dûriach looked at the kneeling warrior before him and said in a deep, hate filled, resonating voice "That I did Nighthunter, I have a very special mission for you."

Nighthunter spoke again keeping his eyes fixed on the floor before him "What is it you wish my lord?" Dûriach laughed it was a deep booming laugh that filled the hall before he replied "I wish you to find a certain elf, his name is Elerossë Firréion" At the mention of this name Nighthunter looked at his liege his face contorted with fury and pure hate.

Dûriach looked at Nighthunter and laughed again "So you know this elf then?" Nighthunter replied "Yes I know of him and it shall be a pleasure to eliminate him for you my lord" Dûriach laughed again and said "You are to kill him and companions yet one of them an elf called Larien Elendil she is to be brought back here alive and unhurt we have a special ceremony prepared for her, You are to leave at once according to my spies he was last seen at the White stag inn in Veritas"

Nighthunter rose to his feet and said "It shall be so my lord" and with that Nighthunter bowed, turned on his heel and left the great hall. Nighthunter knew Elerossë Firréion aright it was all thanks to that elf that he had spent six whole months in the care of the torturer's in Dimaran keep learning first hand a whole new meaning of pain. That was until he had finally converted his faith to follow the only true god

Carfacion. Night hunter mounted his black steed he rode through the back city the road was slick with blood and screams filled the Nighthunter smiled thinking that at least someone was having this night and set off toward Veritas.

Back in the Great hall Dûriach smiled while drinking a vile red liquid from a gold goblet. Out of the shadows to Dûriach's right stepped a black robed hunched figure leaning on a black twisted staff. The hunched figure spoke in a low husky voice "So it is almost time for the ceremony my lord, Lord Carfacion will be pleased to be back on this earth and the world will bleed for eternity My lord" The two of them laughed manically. The robed figure then spoke again "My lord, are you sure it is wise to send just one warrior what if he fails?" Dûriach looked at the robed figure "Do you think I am foolish or stupid Neftathra? I shall not be sending him alone send word to the Luintarma I have a mission for them."

Neftathra looked up at Dûriach revealing for the first time he was heavily scarred every inch of his face was scarred and burned. His eyes were jet black and when he smiled it was clear he had lost most of his teeth. Dûriach then replied "I would never think that my lord, The Luintarma will be sent for immediately my lord, if you will excuse me my lord I have to do some preparation for the great ceremony" Dûriach waved his hand permitting Neftathra to leave which he did so he hobbled slightly as he returned to the shadows and vanished.

Nighthunter left the gates and boarded the first vessel leaving the dark land of Mithhithion a few hours later. The walls surrounding Mithhithion were tall and made of jet black stone all along the top of the walls were tall spikes many of which bore skulls upon them along the walls were several tall towers shaped like fangs stretching into the night sky.

Nighthunter's vessel the black serpent travelled for almost a day before he arrived at the shore of Tanhilion. Nighthunter then departed from the vessel and rode towards the gates of Veritas. By nightfall he had reached the gatehouse to Veritas as the captain of the watch approached him Nighthunter drew his crossbow and planted a bolt in the man's skull the soldier collapsed a look of shock upon his face. The guards drew their weapons and charged at Nighthunter.

Nighthunter smiled and threw a knife into the nearest guard it hit him square in the chest and his armour could not stop the poisoned blade. Nighthunter leapt from his horse and drew both his blades grinning manically and prepared to meet the ten remaining guards. As soon as the first guard reached him Nighthunter severed the man's halberd like it was made of paper and his blade carried on to sever the man's head his companions looked on in horror as Nighthunter then sliced another man in two laughing as he did so.

The remaining guards issued a war cry and charged at the slayer of their comrades Nighthunter charged the nearest of his attackers and with one blade he severed the man's leg just above the knee, then he with his remaining blade he impaled the guard's chest from the side just between the plates of armour as blood dripped from the dying man's lips Nighthunter whispered to the guard "Your god has abandoned you, you will be joining Carfacion soon he will torture you forever" and with that Nighthunter twisted his blade and sealed the man's fate.

In a whirlwind of destruction Nighthunter slew the remaining guards even though he was surrounded and outnumbered he ripped them apart with overwhelming ease. Nighthunter the walked into the gatehouse and opened the gates he then mounted his horse and rode into the city unchallenged.

Nighthunter left his horse at the stable and walked stealthily through the streets till he found the White stag. Nighthunter walked in to the crowded inn and slipped through the crowd up to the bar and spoke to the barman "I am looking for an elf called Elerossë he's travelling with a female called Larien have you seen them." The barman looked at Nighthunter and replied "I may have seen them what's it worth to you?" Nighthunter smiled and slammed a long serrated knife into the barkeeps hand, as the man cried out in agony Nighthunter said "Well I'll let you live if you tell me if not ill extract the information I need" as he said this he laid several knives and other implements of torture on the bar at the sight of what was happening the building was quickly cleared of witnesses.

The barman looked at the tools and fear overtook him and he cried out "Okay I'll tell you please don't kill me" Nighthunter smiled and said "very well, continue tell me everything you know." The barman told Nighthunter about Elerossë and Larien seeking passage to Ulthuan and that they left with a party of dwarves. He also told him that the dwarf leading the expedition was heading to Karak-Vitern.

Nighthunter smiled and said "That's all very well and good now I'll just need to confirm you are not lying to me." The barkeep looked at Elerossë a look of sheer terror on his face he stuttered "How... are.. u going to do that?" Nighthunter smiled "I lied no matter if you told me or not it would come down to this" Nighthunter laughed as he picked up the first of his implements and said "I warn you I haven't done this in a while it will hurt a lot" he laughed manically. The screams of the barman filled the night, Three hours later Nighthunter left the inn carrying something in a sack and rode out of Veritas satisfied that the barkeep was telling the truth. When the guards arrived at the inn they found the barman pinned to the far wall by four black knives he had been flayed of his flesh and behind him written in blood was the message it said:

"Worship Carfacion if you wish to live
The time of blood is at hand."

Chapter 8: Karak-Vitern

On the dawn of the third day since the expedition had set out from Tarineth. Elerossë and the others arouse early eager to get into Karak-Vitern as soon as possible. Elerossë, Uli and Prometheus were at the head of the expedition which moved through the narrow, unstable and very dangerous paths through the mountains. They travelled on for hours till they found what they were looking for.

Before them stood Vitern the tallest mountain in the southern world at the base of the mountain, between the expedition and the mountain was a huge canyon so deep the bottom could not be seen the only visible way across this chasm was by means of a hugely ornate stone bridge, in front of the bridge stood two huge statues of dwarven warriors one of whom carried a huge axe one-handed while he was pointing at the route from where the expedition had come, The other was leaning on a huge warhammer. On the ground between the two statues was a huge stone plaque, as they approached Elerossë noticed there was an inscription upon the plaque written in dwarvish what it said was:

Visitors beware, Only true allies may pass, Turn back now for
you shall be tested fail and you shall not pass

Which when translated states:

“Visitors beware, only true allies may pass, Turn back now for you shall be tested fail
and you shall not pass”

The expedition moved closer and as they did so the dwarf statue leaning on the hammer turned its head towards them and said in ancient dwarvish “Halt, if you wish to pass you must answer me these three questions.” Uli replied in the same tongue “Ask your questions, guardian I am ready.” The statue looked at Uli and said “First, what is the name of the first dwarf lord?” In reply Uli said “Dragar Rockmane.” The statue then said “Second, What is Talric’s Flame?” Uli replied without hesitation “The axe of Lord Thorgrim Stormwind.” The statue then asked “Finally, What is the true name of the God of the dwarven kind?” to this Uli simply replied “Valin” with that the guardian replied “You may pass.”

Elerossë and the rest of the expedition passed the guardians and crossed the bridge and they approached the base of the mountain they noticed there was a huge stone doorway heavily engraved in dwarven runes, inside this doorway stood a huge steel door bearing the coat of arms of Karak-Vitern, two hammers crossed over an eight pointed star yet there was no handle or keyhole. However beneath the coat of arms was an inscription in dwarvish stating:

Welcome to Kazak-Veritas speak the word of passage to enter

This Uli said translated for them as:

“Welcome to Karak-Vitern you are welcome here friends”

Uli said something in dwarvish, there was a sound of machinery churning and chains rattling chains, soon followed by the sound of metal grinding against stone. Slowly yet steadily the huge metal door rose into what appeared to be solid mountainside above them. Elerossë and the rest of the expedition descended into the dark opening before them. Just as Elerossë was about to ask about light Promethius muttered something and a glowing orb appeared before him illuminating the area around them.

Elerossë and the expedition travelled downwards in a deep and very narrow tunnel that descended quite steeply. The expedition travelled down this passage for several hours, till they arrived at a large circular room at the end of the tunnel. This room was empty except for a large statue of a dwarven warrior. The statue was leaning on a huge two handed axe, the warrior was heavily armoured and had a stern and defiant look about him. According to the plaque beneath the warrior this was a statue of the dwarven god Valin. Around the wall of the room were seven large doorways each of which had a stone plaque engraved with gold lettered runes above them.

Uli led them to a doorway directly ahead of them this doorway led down to a great stone staircase the expedition travelled down these stairs which led into another tunnel. At the end of the tunnel the expedition found themselves in a large hall with six long stone tables running from one end to the other at each table there were about a hundred or so chairs. At the end of the hall facing the other tables were four golden chairs and in the center of these was a huge ornate golden throne.

The thing that worried Elerossë was that if there was an attack then where were all the bodies and if not where was everyone. As they approached there came a deafening roar from somewhere ahead of them. Elerossë drew the Phoenix claw from its sheath and was not surprised to find that the hilt of the blade was warm to the touch or that the blade was glowing crimson red. Elerossë knew that the foul magicks of the evil god Carfacion were nearby.

In response to this new threat the dwarves formed into ranks in the center of the hall ready to face the unknown. There was a large thud as something hit the huge double doors at the end of the hall. It was soon followed by another, then another the great doors had started to splinter and buckle in their frame. Then with a thunderous crash the doors gave way and crashed onto the stone floor.

About a hundred demonic creatures poured through the archway each demon was carrying two identical black, curved knives with serrated blades. The demons themselves resembled humans except that their flesh was the colour of blood, they had also had short sharp horns protruding from their heads, their faces had a bestial look to them and they had sharp fang like teeth. The demons cried out in a high pitched wail and leapt forwards towards the dwarves.

The handgunners replied to the demons cry with one of their own and fired at them with their black powder weapons. Several of the demons fell to the shots yet their comrades ignored their shrieks of pain if anything they increased their bloodlust and they charged forwards.

Promethius muttered an elaborate incantation under his breath while making even more elaborate hand gestures and then a spray of liquid flame was unleashed upon the charging demons several of whom were incinerated while others caught fired and shrieked in agony. Still the demons charged about a quarter of the demons clashed with the handgunners who hastily dropped their handguns and drew their hammers and axes. Such was the ferocity of the demons charge that five of the handgunners were torn to pieces before they could draw their weapons.

Uli took aim and fired with his multi-barrelled handgun it thundered and slaughtered a few of the demons charging toward him and the warriors. Uli laughed and went to fire again but this time the experimental weapon merely clicked and the barrel just smoked slightly, Uli cursed under his breath and discarded the weapon and drew his two handed hammer.

Elerossë charged at the nearest demon and swung the phoenix claw in a vicious arc slicing the beast in two just above the waist, the demon whimpered then fell to the floor defiling the stone floor with its vile black blood. Uli and the rest of the warriors gave a tumultuous war cry and charged at the demons before them cutting down several of the surprised creatures.

Promethius made another elaborate incantation this time slamming his staff into the ground from the tip of his staff flew a hail of burning arrows that descended upon their enemies with unnerving accuracy. Several of the vile beasts were struck down screaming in agony as the flames from the arrows engulfed them. As the last of the demons fell there was a loud deafening roar from somewhere up ahead.

Elerossë looked at the dwarves they had lost all but five of the handgunners three of whom were in no condition to fight. They had also lost six of the warriors as well they had a few that had minor injuries as well.

Elerossë and the remnants of the expedition travelled onwards through the doors through which the demons had attacked. After walking for a little while they came to two passages Uli led them down the passage to the right. They travelled down a large marble staircase at the base of which they found a huge steel door with numerous heavy bolts keeping it locked. Uli turned to the others and said "At long last we are here; this is the main vault of Karak-Vitern and the place where we shall find what we seek." Uli muttered something in dwarvish and the bolts on the door slid free and the steel door slowly opened inwards.

Elerossë and the others entered to find themselves in a huge, ornately decorated room. On every wall were shelves that reached from the floor to high above them. On these were all kinds of treasure weapons, gold, gems and many other precious items. In the center of the room was a steel box sitting upon an anvil. The box was inscribed heavily in dwarvish runes in the center of the side of the box facing them Elerossë noticed that there was a small circular indentation. Uli walked up to the steel box, took off a gold medallion he had been wearing which he placed into the indentation, Uli then whispered something and turned the medallion clockwise. The top of the box slid open and fell to the floor banging loudly. Uli reached in and pulled out what Elerossë saw was a stone medallion which Uli then placed in an ornately carved stone chest carried by one of the dwarves.

Without another word being said the expedition travelled back from whence they came. As they went to enter the great hall the walls shook violently and the doorway ahead of them collapsed crushing two of the handgunners who were the at the front. Uli cursed loudly and then said "Fortunately there is another way." The expedition then followed Uli down a series of tunnels till they reached a huge chamber as they entered they realised they were not alone.

Standing before them was a huge demonic monster that Elerossë had once seen a picture off in a huge tome in the white tower in Ulthuan this beast was a Sauravar the darkest servants and guardians of Carfacion. This creature was several times taller than even the tallest of giants, it was very muscular, its flesh black as night and as tough armour. The beast roared defiantly at the intruders to its home. The remaining handgunner fired at the Sauravar yet it did no harm to the beast which retaliated by picking up the dwarf, hurling him into the air and swallowing him whole.

Promethius invoked a whip of flame and lashed it out at the Sauravar the demon caught the whip and with one pull had lifted Promethius from the floor and caught him in his huge clawed hand. The Sauravar laughed in a deep booming tone before saying "Foolish mortal, now you shall pay for your arrogance." The Sauravar tilted its head back and lifted Promethius above his head preparing to swallow the wizard whole.

Elerossë bellowed a challenge to the Sauravar in ancient elvish, the Sauravar looked down at the elf curiously before saying "So you wish to challenge me to single combat do you elfling?" Elerossë replied in a deep resonating tone "That I do demonkin, put down the human unless you are afraid to face me." The Sauravar laughed louder than before and dropped Promethius. While at the same time the beast drew a knife as big as a man from behind its back, the knife was curved with a serrated blade it was black yet it was almost completely covered in dry flaking blood.

Elerossë gave out a cry of war and charged at the Sauravar swinging the phoenix claw in a deadly arc the demon lashed out kicking Elerossë to the floor with ease. The Sauravar then went to crush Elerossë by stamping on him yet Elerossë rolled out of the way thrusting the phoenix claw into the side of the demons leg and then twisting the blade. The Sauravar roared in agony then hurled its knife at Elerossë who barley avoided the blade by rolling out of the way of the knife that crashed into the stone floor about six inches to his left.

Before Elerossë could get to his feet the Sauravar grasped him tightly around the waist. The pressure of the demons grip was making it hard for Elerossë to breathe let alone think. As the Sauravar raised Elerossë upwards the elf had an idea he gripped the phoenix claw tightly in both hands and raised the blade over his head. As the Sauravar tilted back his head Elerossë took his chance and with all his might hurled the phoenix claw which with a sickening crunch went into the Sauravar's neck. The beast bellowed in agony as it fell its knees, and then crashed to the floor releasing Elerossë from its grip.

Elerossë slowly got to his feet and climbed up onto the dead body of the Sauravar he then clambered over the beast till he got to the neck and once there he gripped the hilt

of the phoenix claw and tried to tug it free yet the blade would no yield. Elerossë pulled with all his strength and the blade still would not come free. The Sauravar's body started to crack and splinter a strange orange light emitted from the beast's eyes and mouth. Uli and the others sensing danger pulled Elerossë away from the beast and over to the stairway at the end of the hall. As they climbed the stairwell there was a huge explosion behind them and the path behind them was sealed forever. Elerossë and the others carried on till they saw a light at the end of the passage they carried on up these stairs which eventually led them to the surface.

Chapter 9: The end of the beginning

Elerossë and the remaining members of the expedition travelled for two days back to the wood elven lands aided greatly by the map given to them by their guide. At long last they had arrived back in the forest Tarineth. They were welcomed by several rangers including Talepador who smiled and said to them "I am glad to see you have returned, what happened to the rest of your comrades?" Elerossë detailed for Talepador the events that took place in Karak-Vitern. Talepador's smile vanished in an instant "I am sorry to hear of your losses, we must return to Tarineth with all haste my friend."

Talepador then guided them the rest of the way he then left them at the very border of Tarineth and returned to where they had met him. Almost as soon as they arrived Larien and Tári were running towards them Elerossë stopped, turned to them and then ran to them hugging them both in turn. Larien then smiled, embraced Elerossë and then whispered to him "My love, I was worried about you I am so glad that you are safe, I missed you so much." Elerossë embraced Larien and whispered "I love you too and I have returned to you both as I promised." Elerossë then turned to Tári picked her up and hugged her close and said "I missed you too and I hope you have been good for Larien." Tári smiled and replied "I have been good haven't I Larien, I missed you Elerossë" Elerossë kissed Tári on her forehead and then said to them both "We shall rest here tonight and tomorrow we shall set off for Ulthuan." The three of them spent the rest of the day resting, playing and laughing. When the sun was setting the three of them went to the guest house for Tári did not want to return to the orphanage.

Meanwhile somewhere in the rolling hillside to the east of Tarineth, Nighthunter was westwards upon the back of his black steed. Suddenly a cold, ethereal voice spoke from the shadows which Nighthunter faintly recognised. "Nighthunter you are a hard person to find." Nighthunter turned and drew his crossbow he found himself face to face with a lightly armoured elf carrying a black staff in one hand and a curved sword in the other. This elf had long black hair which was tied back, he had a black cloak tied loosely around his neck, and beneath this he wore black leather armour. Engraved on this elf's forehead was the symbol of a crescent moon with an arrow going through it, this was the mark of the Luintarma, the infamous and notorious personal assassins of Lord Dûriach.

Nighthunter sneered and said to the elf before him "Dûrlammen, what are you doing here and where are your lackeys, hiding I suppose." Dûrlammen smiled and replied "Our great lord Dûriach has sent us to aid you in your mission and make sure you don't fail, as for my comrades they are close by." At this seven heavily cloaked and hooded stepped out of shadows surrounding Nighthunter. Each of them wore an ornate mask to hide their faces and carried long two handed swords which Nighthunter had little doubt were poisoned.

Nighthunter returned his attention to Dûrlammen and said "I suppose we had better set off we shall be there soon." Dûrlammen smiled and replied "Agreed and it is a pleasure to work with you Nighthunter maybe one day you will accept our invitation to join us." Nighthunter merely scowled at Dûrlammen then rode onwards the other Luintarma mounted their horses and the ten of them set off eastward into the night.

The next morning Elerossë and the others awoke early and gathered their belongings. Tári was very excited for she had left Ulthuan when she was very young and had no memory of her home there. Elerossë, Larien and Tári met with Uli and Prometheus and the rest of the dwarves near the borders of Tarineth. Also waiting for them were Súrion, Talepador and Lady Aradalwen. Súrion smiled as they approached and said "Not leaving without saying goodbye I hope?" Elerossë replied "We wished to set off early my lord and did not wish to disturb you."

Súrion said to them "Well before you go I wish to ask you to give this to your father." Súrion then handed to Elerossë a scroll of parchment tied with a red ribbon bearing the seal of Tarineth Elerossë placed the scroll into his belt he then bowed and replied "As you wish it shall be done" Talepador then stepped forwards and offered his hand to Elerossë who took it in a firm grip. Talepador then said "Farewell my friend I wish you a safe journey." Elerossë smiled and replied "Talepador my friend, I would ask you to come with us yet I know you shall say no." Talepador laughed and replied "You know me too well my friend, we shall meet again I am sure." With that Elerossë, Larien, Tári, Prometheus and the remaining dwarves set off from Tarineth towards Veritas where Uli's ship was docked.

Elerossë and the others travelled westwards towards Veritas they had travelled for no more than a few hours when they found themselves encompassed by a mysterious and eerie fog. Prometheus uttered an incantation under his breath and a warm breeze swept over them growing stronger and stronger till the mist started to part. From out of the mists an eerie voice spoke to them "So Elerossë Firréion, we meet again." Elerossë looked and saw mounted upon a black steed a heavily cloaked figure. Elerossë replied in a deep resonant voice "Do I know u Lhunur traitor?" Nighthunter laughed and replied "Has it been that long you have forgotten me, my brother?"

Elerossë could not hide his surprise as he replied "Amras, could it be I thought you fell at the battle crystal fang." Nighthunter replied his voice full of anger "You left me to die on that forsaken plain I called to you and you fled like a coward." Elerossë replied enraged by Nighthunter's comments "I am no coward! The order to retreat was given we had to protect his lordship." Nighthunter sneered and replied "How is father? He loses both his sons this day." Elerossë drew his longsword and replied "I challenge you Amras to single combat." Nighthunter dismounted drew his twin blades and replied "I thought you would never ask, I half expected you to run away."

Just then Dûrlammen and his followers appeared on Prometheus's right. The wizard uttered a powerful invocation and bolts of flame flew at the Luintarma and three of them fell flames engulfing them as their robes caught light and they shrieked in agony. Three of the flaming bolts flew directly Dûrlammen the sorcerer shrugged and snapped his fingers and the bolts fell to the floor smouldering in the long grass. Larien drew her longbow and fired at Dûrlammen the arrow flew straight and true at the sorcerer's head yet at the last second Dûrlammen grabbed the arrow mid flight shook his head at Larien and snapped the arrow in two. Larien took aim again and fired again this time at one of the closest Luintarma the arrow this time hit its mark, it struck the robbed figure in the neck all he could do was whimper as he fell to the floor.

Elerossë and Amras charged at each other both of them let out tumultuous war cries as they ran Elerossë was armed with his Longsword and his dagger where as Amras was armed with his twin blades. Just before they reached each other Amras placed both blades in one hand drew his crossbow and fired. The bolt hit Elerossë in the chest yet bounced harmlessly off of his magical armour; Amras cursed and threw aside his crossbow.

Uli bellowed a mighty roar and charged at the remaining Luintarma drawing his warhammer as he ran. The first follower he met he swung his warhammer in a vicious arc the follower raised his blade to block the hammer shattered the blade and crunched into the mans side as the man lay on the floor screaming in agony Uli bought a second blow down on him silencing him forever. One of the Luintarma circled silently behind Uli and prepared to sever the dwarf's head with his longsword held in both hands above his head. At the last second the follower behind Uli cried out in pain and fell forwards an arrow in his back, Uli turned and smiled at Larien before bellowing a challenge at the last of the Luintarma.

Promethius stared at the sorcerer Dûrlammen and cast a powerful invocation sending a ball of flame at the sorcerer. Dûrlammen spoke an invocation under his breath and a sphere of purple encompassed him protecting him from the blast of Promethius's spell. Dûrlammen smiled spoke an incantation in the black tongue and bolt of jet black energy was hurled at Promethius. Promethius muttered something under his breath and a bolt of pure white energy flew from the end of the wizard's staff striking the black bolt head on. There was a crash like thunder and a blinding flash as the two spells collided nullifying each other.

Elerossë and Amras collided head on sparks flew as their blades met, Amras thrust one of his blades at Elerossë, and Elerossë parried the strike with his dagger then countered swinging his longsword in a deadly arc at Amras's head. Amras blocked the blow and smiled saying "You will have to do better than that, Brother." Elerossë roared in anger pushed Amras back and swung two deadly strikes at Amras who dodged both blows laughed and said "You should watch that temper, my dear brother one day it might get you killed."

Dûrlammen was surprised at this humans resilience each spell he cast he countered. Dûrlammen then saw a small elven girl hiding close to the elf Dûriach wanted so badly, just then Dûrlammen had an evil plan he prepared his most powerful and deadly spell. A huge ball of black flame issued from Dûrlammen's staff, Promethius prepared for the blast then the ball flew past him. Promethius then saw the spell flew straight towards Tári, Promethius uttered a simple spell placing him between Tári and the spell. The bolt hit Promethius seconds later he had no time to protect himself in a second nothing remained of the wizard except his staff and a pile of ash so strong was Promethius's will he never even cried out as the black flames engulfed him.

Dûrlammen swept forwards on his horse he raced toward Larien she screamed as he cast a spell to bind her and Tári. Within minutes Dûrlammen had pulled both Larien and Tári on to the back of his horse. Uli saw Dûrlammen's actions swung a vicious blow killing the last follower and chased after him. Elerossë took his eyes off of Amras when he heard her scream and called out to her.

The next second Elerosse felt a sharp pain in his side he fell to the floor he turned and saw Amras standing over him holding a blood stained blade Elerossë cried out to Larien. Amras smiled and said “I will take good care of her and my daughter don’t you worry” Amras laughed manically as he mounted his horse and rode after Dûrlammen. The last thing Elerossë saw before the darkness overtook him was his love been taken from him and his niece and he could hear Amras’s laughter resounding in his head and the darkness swallowed him.

Chapter 10: Destiny's beginning

As the darkness slowly lifted from Elerossë an ethereal voice spoke in the back of his mind, "It is time for you to awake and embrace your destiny." Elerossë awoke his head spinning and his vision a little blurred then as the room came into focus he found he was laying in one of the beds of the Guesthouse in Tarineth. Elerossë looked around the room and standing by the window stood Súrion in a flowing white robe Súrion smiled at Elerossë and said "Your awake I am glad are you feeling okay?" Elerossë smiled weakly and replied "I am fine just a little groggy and light headed." Súrion laughed and said "well I guess that is to be expected considering you have died and risen again."

Elerossë suddenly remembered being stabbed in the side by Amras and ripped open the cloth shirt he was wearing and looked at his right hand side, he was stunned there was not even a scar. Elerossë then noticed a strange mark on the back of his left hand the marking appeared to be six runes each inside a small circle and all the circles were linked together in a circular pattern. The runes were Fire at the top, to the top right was the rune of Life, at the bottom right was the rune of Earth, at the bottom was the rune of Water, to the bottom left was the rune of Order and to the top left was the rune of Air. In the center of all the runes was the symbol of a rising phoenix and etched upon it was a rune Elerossë didn't recognise.

Elerossë looked at Súrion his mouth wide open as he tried to speak Súrion smiled and said "I was wondering when you would notice that." Elerossë looked at and asked "What is it?" Súrion laughed and replied "That is the mark of the Luinëdal it appears you are the chosen." Elerossë looked at Súrion in disbelief he had heard the legend of the Luinëdal a thousand times when he was a child Elerossë then turned to Súrion and asked "I thought that was just a myth" Súrion smiled again and replied "No it is true and you are living proof of that." Elerossë then looked at the mark on his hand then back at Súrion took a deep breath and asked "well not that I am saying I believe you but what is this rune?" Elerossë pointed at the rune etched onto the Phoenix. Súrion walked over to Elerossë took his hand and looked closely at the rune smiled and replied "That is the rune of the Luinëdal now I think you should rest." Elerossë shook his head and said "No I must go after Larien" Elerossë then tried to get up yet his head spun and he fell back onto the bed. Súrion walked over to Elerossë and said "You need rest my friend, tomorrow we shall discuss the rescue of your love." Súrion then left the Guesthouse and Elerossë drifted into a deep sleep.

Meanwhile aboard the black serpent Larien sat quietly in the corner of her cell facing the door at the end of the hall, Tári held closely to Larien crying quietly against her. The room was so dark that Larien could make out very little except the black steel bars in front of her and the door at the end of the hall. Up on deck Amras looked at a small crystal on the bracer on his left arm, Amras touched the crystal and the jewel glowed dimly a voice spoke into Amras's mind it was that of Dûriach's arch sorcerer Neftathra "So you have the girl? And the other he is dead I presume?" Amras concentrated his mind and replied without so much as moving his lips "Yes I have her and Elerossë Firréion is dead as ordered I request further orders" Neftathra replied "Good you are to travel to Thaliur we shall meet you there is that understood." Amras hesitated but then replied "Yes it shall be done."

Elerossë awoke early the next morning and was relieved to find that his head had cleared. Elerossë got out of bed and hastily put on his armour that they nearby and gathered his weapons from the table. Elerossë then headed to the door of the guesthouse he was just about to open it when it opened and in stepped Talepador. Talepador looked at Elerossë and smiled "I'm glad to see you are up Lord Súrion sent me to wake u and bring you to the council." Elerossë looked at Talepador and said "What is this council meeting about?" Talepador sighed and replied "I have no idea maybe he's going to publicly recognise you as the Luinëdal" Elerossë looked at Talepador and said "So he has told you that as well, do you believe it?" Talepador looked at Elerossë his face was sullen and full of sadness "I do for I say you laying dead on lust one week ago." Talepador then smiled and added "but you are back with us now and that is good now we must attend the council" Elerossë just followed Talepador out of the guesthouse and thought silently "It can't be, how can I be the Luinëdal."

Elerossë followed Talepador silently shadowing his footsteps suddenly Elerossë remembered something and turned to Talepador grasped him by the shoulder and said to him a look of fear upon his face he spoke in barely audible whisper "Did you say I was found a week ago?" Talepador nodded Elerossë sighed and a tear fell from his eyes "I have little chance of catching up with them now do I?" Talepador stopped and looked at Elerossë and replied "Don't give up hope my friend, we will find Larien and Tári I am sure of it" Elerossë smiled at Talepador and said "thank you my friend, I shall not give up." Talepador nodded and the two of them walked on towards the great council hall of the elven people.

The council hall was a huge dome topped white building in the very heart of Tarineth forest. The entrance to the hall was up a huge flight of stone steps at the top of there were two huge wooden doors stood before them on either side of the door stood an elven ranger. The rangers nodded and saluted Talepador as they passed them, Talepador then opened one of the huge doors and they went inside. Inside the floor was white marble, and as they walked silently along a long hall on either side were statues of past rulers and famous heroes. As they reached the end of the hall they found another pair of huge wooden doors before them this one was guarded by six rangers and Lamalas who looked at them and said in a cold tone "Hand over your weapons before you enter" Elerossë and Talepador handed over their weapons to the guards. Lamalas stared at Elerossë with suspicion and Elerossë noticed that Lamalas's gaze lingered on the marking on his left hand. Elerossë and Talepador then walked past Lamalas and entered the main hall.

The main hall was a huge circular room all around the walls were eight tall columns reaching up to the ceiling. In front of each of the columns was a statue of an elven hero or ruler. All along the walls were vast banners of war and tapestries depicting the history of the elven people. High above them Elerossë could see the domed roof with wooden timbers crisscrossing high above them almost completely covered in shadow. In the center of the hall were twelve wooden chairs and a wooden throne they were not alone in the room sitting upon the throne was Súrion who waved at them and signalled them to come closer which they did so taking seats on either side of him.

Sitting in the chairs around Súrion were two dwarves one of whom Elerossë recognised instantly as Uli the other was an older dwarf his hair was grey and his face sullen. Also sitting in the ring of chairs was a heavily armoured man he had short brown hair and a stubbly beard, upon his armour was a crest depicting a sword and shield the symbol of Dimtûr. To this man's right sat a lady with long jet black hair braided with gold, she wore a deep blue silk dress and upon her neck was a golden necklace she looked at Elerossë and whispered something to the man next to her who smiled and nodded.

On the man's left sat another two figures Elerossë recognised the first directly to the man's left was Findecano Larien's father he wore a scarlet robe, he had long brown hair tied neatly back Findecano looked at Elerossë then looked away quickly as Elerossë met his gaze. To Findecano's left sat Elerossë's father Dimthulë Firréion phoenix lord and ruler of the Tárasir elves, Dimthulë was wearing a white robe and a silver breastplate emblazoned upon which was the crest of Dorathion. To the left of Dimthulë were seated two Tal'Enréd, The Tal'Enréd were like most of their kind tall and muscular, A Tal'Enréd are furred creatures that resemble a cross between a man and a feline. The Tal'Enréd to the right had grey fur and a white beard he had a scar right across his left eye. The other Tal'Enréd had reddish fur and across his chest he wore a leather sash.

To the left of the reddish Tal'Enréd were two empty chairs these chairs were meant for the representatives of the Dragul people. Dûriach and his armies waged a long and brutal war against the Dragul and drove them to extinction over a thousand years ago. In the seat next to these sat a strange elven lady she wore the clothing of a druid a fur cape and white robes and a light brown eagle sat upon her shoulder, she had long light brown hair reaching to her shoulders and deep blue eyes. Elerossë suddenly realised why she seemed so strange for saw she was a half elf. The seat next to her was empty and the one next to it was Súrion's throne Elerossë noticed there were no representatives from the aquatic Kalliss people yet that was not unusual they rarely cooperate with the other races at all.

Súrion then addressed those gathered "Greetings, my friends I guess you are wondering why I have invited you all here, so I shall explain it has long been known that Dûriach seeks to revive his lord the foul one, and we know all too well the prophecy of the Luinëdal the reason I have invited you here is because the prophecy has come true," Súrion then pointed at Elerossë "Here stands the Luinëdal." Those gathered stared at Elerossë and then the red furred Tal'Enréd said in a deep growling voice "you expect us to believe this puny elf is the Luinëdal" The Tal'Enréd laughed deeply. Súrion rose to his feet and pointed at Elerossë saying in a deep resonating tone "He is the Luinëdal he bears the mark of the chosen one" The red furred Tal'Enréd walked up to Elerossë and looked at the mark on his left hand, he inspected it closely then said "Could be fake" Uli then stood to his feet and roared "He is the Luinëdal I saw him die with my own eyes are you calling me a liar."

Elerossë sensed something strange coming from the shadows above them Elerossë could sense something was there. As one of the rangers guarding the chamber drew near Elerossë grabbed the elf's sword drew it and in one swift movement threw it into

the shadows above. There was a tumultuous crack and one of the beams collapsed and fell to the stone floor in between them.

A second later a dark figure also fell from the rafters above almost completely covered in black the figure landed on one knee. The figure then looked up there was a gasp of surprise from those gathered the figure was that of a dark haired human girl no older than eighteen or so. Súrion who was standing next to Elerossë handed him a small stone talisman with the symbol of a mountain bearing the rune of earth upon it. The girl smiled stretched out her right hand and with a flick of her wrist she then hurled three small metal knives directly at Elerossë who looked instinctively at the talisman Súrion had given him and in a deep resonating voice shouted "Tarcir" the talisman flashed a bright blue and blue sphere shimmered around Elerossë the moment the knives hit this barrier rusted as if they had aged a thousand years and then they shattered.

The assassin looked at Elerossë in disbelief before drawing her longsword and diving at him. Elerossë saw a flash of green light come from his right and then several green ropes had wrapped around the assassin tying her tightly as she fell to the floor. Two rangers hurried forward and dragged the girl away. Súrion then turned to those assembled and said "I wasn't planning on a demonstration yet I think this proves what I have told you" Those gathered murmured then the human sorceress stood said "I Sophira of the Order of Valisha am convinced." Uli then stood and said "I Uli Stonefist of the Redbeard engineers and emissary of high runebreaker Thorgrim Firebeard also acknowledge Elerossë as the Chosen of the gods." The heavily armoured man stood next saying a calm tone of voice "I Tamas, templar of the holy order of Dimtûr do also recognise Elerossë as being the chosen one." Tamas then saluted Elerossë and re took his seat.

The grey haired dwarf next to Uli looked at him then rose to his feet and said in a deep tone of voice "I Valir Starbeard, representative of dwarf lord Ulric Ironjaw also recognise Elerossë as the chosen." The grey furred Tal'Enréd stood forward and said in a deep brooding voice "I Kalima chieftain and leader of the Tal'Enréd also recognise Elerossë as the chosen." The red furred Tal'Enréd looked at Kalima opened his mouth to speak yet Kalima silenced him by saying "I have made my choice Karima and that is final." Karima looked at Kalima for a minute then looked down at the floor and replied "I agree, my lord." Next to stand was Dimthulë Firréion he looked at Elerossë for the first time and the spoke to those gathered in a deep resonate tone "I am Dimthulë Firréion, phoenix lord and the rightful ruler of the Tárasir elves, I recognise this elf as the Luinëdal but not as my son Elerossë Firréion for he is dead, I have no son" Dimthulë then turned and swept out of the hall Findecano looked at Elerossë he opened his mouth to speak but then turned and followed his lord out of the hall. Súrion then stepped forward and said "Then it is agreed that Elerossë is the Luinëdal, I hereby present him with this talisman" Súrion then handed Elerossë a large wooden talisman with a large indentation in the center, around the edge was an etching showing birds and trees and at top was the rune of Life.

Elerossë then waited while the others left and once he was alone with Súrion turned to him and said "My lord, I must go after Larien where is she?" Súrion looked at Elerossë sighed and said "I can see that you are determined she is being taken I believe to Thaliur Island" Elerossë then turned to leave and Súrion placed his hand on

his shoulder and said “please before you go meet me at the clearing west of here at sunset and bring Uli Stonefist with you.” Elerossë looked at Súrion and replied “I shall meet you there at sunset.”

Súrion walked down the cold dark staircase to the cells below at the base of the stairs was a long dark hallway which Súrion walked slowly down. There were several wooden doors on each side at the end of the hall stood yet another wooden door this one was guarded by two rangers who saluted Súrion as he opened the door and entered. The room Súrion had entered was dark and dimly lit by three torches the room was divided in two by a series of metal bars on the side Súrion was on a ranger sat at a small wooden desk. On the other were a series of benches on one lay the girl that had attacked Elerossë. Súrion walked up to the bars and said in resonant tone “Why did you attack us, who paid you assassin?” The girl rose to her feet and walked to the bars she then spat at Súrion who then said “Fine you shall remain here till you change your mind” Súrion then left the cells without looking back.

An hour later the door to the cells opened again this time it was Lamalas who entered he looked to the guard at the desk and smiled. Lamalas then drew a crossbow from beneath his cloak and fired at the ranger. The ranger was taken by surprise and fell to the floor silently. Lamalas then walked up to the bars the girl on the other side ran to the bars and said “I knew you would not abandon me, my love.” Lamalas smiled and replied “You have failed me” Lamalas then fired his crossbow hitting the girl in the chest he then turned and left her to die.