

They arrived at the tavern by late evening, leaving their travel-worn cart and the construct horse Invincible in the vast stable tended to by an elderly man. As though his eyes did not see Invincible for what he truly was, he patted the beast on the side and remarked, “What a strong stallion.”

Jakob could hardly explain why, but he had been drawn to *this* particular place, despite it just being a simple roadside tavern near the border that separated Lleman and Helmsgarten. As he looked at the three-storey, he could not help but wonder what significance such a seemingly-insignificant place might have for him.

Wothram and Mayhew flanked him, while Ciana walked in front, as they came through the double-doors and found the counter that doubled both as the reception for those seeking to overnight and those that dined and drank in the cosy ground-floor eatery.

The proprietor was a heavysset woman with narrow and suspicious brown eyes and short auburn hair.

“We’re full up on rooms,” she immediately told them.

Ciana seemed about to speak, when Jakob pushed in front and said, “I have heard from Kasper that you were in need of a physician.”

The woman blinked. “You know Kasper? Well why didn’t you say so immediately!? I have room in the basement if you don’t mind the rats and dust.”

He nodded and *that* was that.

The proprietor called her busboy to stand by the counter and make himself useful, as she guided Jakob and his entourage down a staircase that was somewhat hidden thanks to only being accessible through the kitchen.

“I ain’t never seen’t a doctor with this many followers.”

“These are uncertain times, Matilde,” Jakob told her.

Matilde froze mid-step. “How’d you know my name? Oh, I suppose Kasper must’ve told ya, huh?”

The basement of the tavern was spacious and reminded him a lot of the morgue in Hesslik and his laboratory in the Apothecary. He knew, thanks to his blessing from Nharlla, that Hargraves still ran the Apothecary without the city guard having any clue that he was under the sway of Jakob’s demonic spell.

After the proprietor went back up to the main room, Ciana gave him a strange look.

“Who’s Kasper?” she asked, “I thought you had no idea what this place was.”

Jakob just shrugged. “I have never met the man, but I know that he and Matilde are siblings.”

“And you knew that she would respond to you mentioning him?”

“Indeed. Though I also know that Kasper died to a bandit raid two years ago, but I suppose she has yet to learn this truth herself.”

“So... how are we to go about summoning this Sovereign?” she wondered.

“It is not an entity to be summoned, rather, it is a creature that must be made from three constituent parts.”

“And what parts are these?”

“The blood of the Seeker, the corpus of Pride, and the corpus of Envy.”

“The Seeker... isn’t that you?”

Jakob nodded. "I have yet to learn why my blood is required for this ritual."

Ciana frowned. "It feels like we are following the plans laid by someone else, without any say in the matter."

"Sometimes fate is subtle and unseen. Other times, its guiding hand is felt. Regardless, we are beholden to it and have no say in the matter, however it decides to manifest itself into our lives."

They spent the rest of what little of the evening was left clearing the basement of the mess of stacked chairs and unused tables, such that ample room was available for the rituals they would have to perform.

"How do you plan on gathering enough blood for the summoning tolls?"

"We do not require blood," Jakob told her confidently, as he was busy scratching the stone walls with a hardened half-metre-long claw on his right index finger.

"Why not?"

"Those we call upon will come willingly without a need for appeasement."

"Willingly? I've never heard of any demons acting like that."

"Nor have I," Jakob replied, "but this is what I have learnt and I do not doubt the voracity of the information I have been gifted."

Ciana tossed the chair in her hands onto the pile in the corner of the basement and then looked at what Jakob was busying himself with. "What are you doing?"

"I am ensuring this space is inviolable," he explained, while finishing up the carving of what looked like a disorganised bundle of snake-like squiggles that somehow formed an eye if you looked at it long enough.

As he moved on to another wall, and began scraping the next Chthonic Sigil into the stone, he continued, "Chthonic Sigils are the building blocks of this world. They are power given physical form. To one who is untrained in their usage or whose purpose for drawing them is meaningless, they are dangerous and destructive." He had a brief memory of Hessel attempting and failing to transcribe Sigils for Jakob to learn, as the Sigils destroyed whatever medium he transcribed them to. Except for something like Tungsten, there was truly no medium that could bear the strain of such powerful Sigils being inscribed upon them, even though he had assumed that flesh and hide could bear their inscription. He now knew that Sigils imploded if they were drawn without proper purpose. Truly, it was a fickle alphabet that jealously hid itself from the world, even steering the gaze of someone undeserving away from them, by mimicking the damaging properties of staring into the sun or by stinging the observer's mind painfully.

Ciana seemed to have no difficulties looking at the Sigils he now drew, nor did he feel the painful and disturbing effects he had felt in the past when attempting to study the Sigils that Hessel had drawn on both their stitched-flesh robes and their Apothecary laboratory's walls.

As he finished inscribing the second Sigil on the wall, he pointed to it and told Ciana, "*This here* is the Inverted Ear, it obscures all sounds within this space from being observed from outside." Then he pointed the first sigil, the bundle of squiggles, "*That one* is Nharlla's Tangled Eye, it obfuscates all attempts at observing this space. It should keep us hidden from both Sirellius' Scrying Powers and Grandfather's blood-tracking homunculi."

He was in the middle of inscribing a third Sigil, the Bottomless Well, when a scream tore through the air.

"Wothram, Mayhew, stay here and continue to clear space for us. Ciana, you and I have been summoned, it seems."

The Elphin looked at him confused, but followed him out of the basement nonetheless.

On the third floor of the tavern, they found several guests and the proprietor gathered outside a room. When Matilde saw Jakob and Ciana approach, she told the guests to make way for them.

Jakob had only just crossed the threshold of the room, when his nostrils were assailed by an acrid stench of days' old blood and another smell he could not identify.

"It smells of a Prideful One," Ciana told him confidently.

When he thought about it, the unidentifiable stench was somehow regal and authoritative in the way it worked its way through his olfactory pathway, like a cold and sharp spike jammed right into the region of his brain that registered and processed smells.

He looked around the room. The walls were covered in old dried drawings and texts that made little sense, even to his discerning eye. All the furniture had been upturned, with the bed lying on its side and the dressers and cabinets were all turned up-side-down for some reason. On the backwall which was directly opposite the doorway, was written a single name that he *could* read however, as it was clearly Demonic script.

In the centre of the floor, in a circle drawn in his own blood, lay a man who had gouged out his own eyes before chewing through both his radial arteries in his wrists and lying down in a spread-eagle pose as his lifeblood slowly drained from him to form a very deliberate pattern on the wooden floor.

Jakob turned towards the morbidly-curious observers and the stern proprietor. "This is the evidence of a demonic possession. I will need to conduct an exorcism, lest this entire building be condemned to its foul grasp."

"I thought you were a doctor," Matilde remarked.

"In these times, a doctor must know how to heal wounds both physical and metaphysical. It should go without saying, but I will require solitude for this."

He nodded to Ciana, who left the room and took up guard outside the door.

Once the door was closed securely behind him, he looked at the backwall again and read out loud: "Jøkull."

As he spoke the name, his gift of knowledge told him the Demon's full title:

"Lord of the Solitary Spire, Jøkull."