

***** SYSTEM ADDENDUM ADDED BY USER NAME: [ERROR: REDACTED]**

ADDENDUM NOTE: "Two years after the events of *The Cage*" ***

Jakom stared at the floor, waiting for the screaming to subside and the crunching to cease. Holy as they may be, the offerings always invoked a wave of nausea and revulsion Jakom could never fully repress. Hearing it was bad, but seeing it much worse.

Jakom felt a hand upon his shoulder, and turned to see Brae'ach. The towering man was fixing his facemask back into position, blood dripping from underneath to add to the chitinous armor's old and growing red stain. Soft clicking emanated from beneath the holy cloth covering Brae'ach's mouth as he looked down upon Jakom. He began to speak, the air shuddering beneath the deep weight of his voice.

"You know I value your counsel," said Brae'ach. "Tell me what troubles you."

Jakom drew a slow breath. He did not fear Brae'ach, but he never wanted to test his companion's temper lest it be taken out on someone less favored.

"I fear we move too quickly," said Jakom. Brae'ach continued to look upon him with a warm gaze, betraying no reaction. "I mean to say," Jakom continued, "the holy power we have been granted is still . . . *untested*, in so many ways."

"You are concerned for my safety?" said Brae'ach.

"No. Well, yes," said Jakom. "I am concerned for the safety of our forces."

Brae'ach said nothing, waiting for Jakom to continue.

"We can only land so many troops. A war on foreign soil may prove costly. We only have so many loyal devotees, after all."

Brae'ach looked away, out to the glistening beaches reflecting the red light of dusk. The salt and iron on the wind picked up as a swift ocean breeze played along the shoreline.

"Do you know why Unity picked us?" asked Brae'ach. Jakom raised an eyebrow.

"I had always thought of it rather that we picked Unity," said Jakom.

"That is true, but not complete," said Brae'ach. "Unity was lying dormant, unknown, unclaimed for so very long. Why do you think it made itself known only now, and only to us? Why not the

Degor clans, or the Unfarin, or even the ancient Bogat? Many of Davah's tribes have walked these lands for millenia. Any one of them could have claimed Unity for themselves, but didn't. Why do you think that is?"

"They didn't know Unity was here," said Jakom.

"Ah, yes," said Brae'ach, turning back to face Jakom, a gleeful enthusiasm rupturing the deep voice that oppressed the air between them. The truth of Brae'ach's words echoed from the sands beneath them, undeniable. **"But we know. We found it. A simple cavern, revealed by an ordinary earth tremor, holding the greatest strength any Davah clan has ever known. We found it, at our most desperate hour, when our clan was all but lost. We found it, when it was the only thing in all the tribe lands that could save us."**

Jakom was tense. Brae'ach rarely showed such exuberance. It was uncomfortable, but intoxicating. Jakom had felt the Holy Word before, but it still was unnerving to experience it directly.

"That quake was not coincidence," said Brae'ach. **"Our timing was not coincidence. Unity saw in us the potential for greatness and willed the cavern to reveal itself! We consumed in holy offering and were blessed with these forms not because we were lucky, but because we were chosen! We were once the smallest clan, the most meager family. Now, the tribes of Davah crumble before us. Now we rule all the coasts and everything between."**

Brae'ach looked once again out to the seas, where so many ships stood ready to sail, flying the flag of Unity.

"Unity allowed us to choose it, because we were worthy," said Brae'ach. **"And our worthiness is proven by our total dominance over all the clans; a feat not seen in two thousand years."**

Jakom felt the resonance of the earth slowly recede, as the echo of the words faded. Jakom looked to Brae'ach and, after a moment of reflection, gently took his arm.

"I know we have been given a tremendous honor," said Jakom. "I only wish not to squander it."

Brae'ach knelt so that he was at eye level with Jakom, and placed his volcanic hands gently upon the young man's shoulders.

"I know it is difficult to see, as you have not received the Holy Form," said Brae'ach. "But there are such greater things beneath our feet than dirt and rock. Our power is fed not only through

sacrifice, but by slaying the enemies of Unity. We will use their dead essence to achieve strength far beyond even what we have known 'til now."

"I thought you, we, could not consume the unwilling?"

"A limitation we can soon overcome," said Brae'ach. "A great lock has been cut, an ancient door swung open. We must travel to the island of the grave-robbing Delves. Not for mere conquest, but to acquire a gift long sealed away which Unity can finally reclaim."

Brae'ach stood, and brought his hand up to his mask. "With it," he said, pulling the cloth away, revealing the long and writhing teeth cascading down his neck, and the myriad tendrils opening from the cavernous maw that expanded across his chest, "we need not hide any longer."

***** END ADDENDUM *****