

Into the Madness



Helleden surveyed the damage in the Chamber of the Wise. If not for the body of his beloved beast lying in a pool of blood, he might have been ecstatic.

The king of Zephyr had been murdered here. That should have been enough to make the sorcerer happy but it didn't. His troops couldn't find any trace of Malcolm's body.

The disappearance of his demon wraith, Barong, also had him baffled. Barong and the Sentinel had been entrusted to deal with the Wizard of the North. They should have been more than a match for him, but so far, Helleden hadn't found any indication the meddling wizard was dealt with. Perhaps

those answers would make themselves clear once they searched the remainder of the complex.

What troubled Helleden most was that *two* Wizards of the North had entered the fray. He knew about the incumbent wizard holed up within his aerie atop Dragon's Tooth. That was fine as long as he remained there, but he hadn't. As unsettling as that revelation had proven, the appearance of the second wizard disturbed him greatly. If this was indeed Phazarus, Helleden's latest firestorm might not suffice in quashing further resistance.

He cursed himself. How had he not detected Phazarus' movements? Over a century had passed since the old wizard had retreated to his cave.

The revelation of the earth blood fount tasted bittersweet as it came on the heels of the re-emergence of Silurian Mintaka. His archnemesis had survived the destruction of Iconoclast Spire and would be coming for him. Fortunately, the fool had unwittingly provided him with the earth blood's location. If he, the greatest sorcerer to ever live, was able to harness its power, nothing would stand in his way. Not even Silurian.

He had contemplated sending his forces north out of Carillon, but he needed to see for himself what had transpired in Gritian and discover the true identity of the second wizard. And to confirm with his own eyes that his pet, the Sentinel, had been slain. There were too many variables to account for before he traipsed north into the Wilds in search of the earth blood.

His bloodshot eyes surveyed the carnage in the great cavern. Judging by the shattered doorway, the chaos in the Chamber must have been incredible when the Sentinel had made its appearance.

On the platform at the far end, the chambermaster's corpse rotted—a polearm driven through his abdomen. That was unfortunate. The old fool had proven useful.

A muscular, red demon trotted into the Chamber and dropped to a knee, oblivious to the splinters on the ground. "M'lord, Barong has been found."

Helleden frowned. “Dead or alive?”

“Dead, m’lord.”

Helleden kicked a fragment of the broken entranceway into the audience pews and paced through the bodies sprawled along the aisle—most of them Gritian militia peppered with crossbow bolts.

The Sentinel’s corpse showed marks of wizard’s fire on its hide, but a heavy blade had been the instrument of its death. Who could’ve slain his wondrous beast with a blade that size? He doubted even the new Kraidic emperor possessed the strength to cleave the Sentinel with one strike as the wound suggested. The wizard surrounded himself with formidable companions.

Pacing back to the steps at the base of the platform, he stopped. He didn’t need to go up there. He required a way to track Phazarus, or whoever the wizard was. With Barong’s demise, he only had two demon wraiths remaining capable of picking up the wizard’s trail. The last time he had heard from Surgat was when the incumbent wizard and Silurian had slipped across an ice bridge on their way to Grimward.

Helleden growled. How Silurian survived the cataclysm of Iconoclast Spire, he had no idea. He suspected the northern Wizard of the North had played a role in the man’s resurrection.

Helleden strolled back to the demon. “Rise, Dagan.”

The horned wraith jumped to its feet, its red eyes staring straight ahead.

“I need you to take a squad of our best troops north.”

“As you wish, m’lord,” the demon answered with a deep voice.

“Travel to Serpent’s Nest Island and locate the ancient source of magic there.”

“Aye, m’lord. It shall be done.”

“I also need you to locate Surgat and send him to me.”

Dagan inclined his great head.

“And then you are to find the northern wizard and his companion.”

Dagan nodded.

“The wizard’s companion is Silurian Mintaka.”

Dagan’s dark face twisted with a scowl.

“Hear me when I say that killing Silurian is your primary objective. If you survive, kill the wizard as well.”

“As you wish, m’lord.”

Helleden made to step past Dagan into the tunnel but the demon’s voice stopped him. “What of the Kraidic emperor, m’lord?”

Helleden glanced over his shoulder with narrowed eyes. “If he still lives, feed him to your troops as retribution for his failure.”