

# **Reconciling the Functions of Tragedy and Fantasy**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of  
MA (by Research) at the University of Central Lancashire

April 2014

# ABSTRACT

This thesis experiments with concepts of fantasy and tragedy in order to produce knowledge through practice-led research that facilitates an understanding of the links between the genres. It demonstrates that tragedy and fantasy literature are compatible forms that can operate effectively in a self-contained narrative, explicating how eucatastrophe and catharsis perform the same task through the provoking and purging of different emotions. The conclusions of this research support the idea that applying the tragic mode to fantasy can help to critique contemporary socio-political events, as well as to question received versions of history, through the use of tragedies as co-texts to highlight plural subjectivities.

To this end, the thesis attempts to craft a creative narrative that combines elements of both tragedy and fantasy within which the theories and ideas discussed can be tested, effectively providing an example of the compatibility of both genres.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Robin Purves and Dr Catharine Frances for their understanding, sympathy, confidence and unflinching support when the road ahead seemed too long and the climb too steep, and through all the setbacks and false starts that littered each. Amidst the gathering clouds and raging storms of personal triumphs and tragedies, their patience, advice and empathy was ever my safe harbour. It has been my honour to have them as my mentors, guides and teachers, and I am forever in their debt. As Imam Ali bin Abi-Talib (may God be pleased with him) says, 'I am a slave of he who teaches me one letter. If he wishes, he may sell me; if he so desires, he may set me free; and if he cares to, he may deploy me as a slave.'

A special mention must be made of Isabel Maria Donnelly and the School of Language, Literature and International Studies who restored my faith in humanity through an act of extraordinary kindness. I am grateful to the University of Central Lancashire for the use of its facilities and resources and for the financing of my degree through the Gilbertson Scholarship, as I would not have been able to venture into postgraduate education on my own finances. I also extend my gratitude to the staff at the Graduate Research School for their understanding throughout my time on this course.

I would like to thank Shahzad, Nasrullah, Zakarya and Uways for their valuable insights, advice, proofreading and camaraderie. I owe warm thanks to all my friends and family who believed in me even as I doubted, and showed patience and consideration throughout the journey.

# INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that as the genre of fantasy did not have the 'intense period of historical and bibliographical scholarship' that other modes of writing went through in the nineteenth century, much 'basic critical-bibliographical work' is proceeding alongside the 'production of a theoretical literary scholarship' (Fredricks 36). The aim of this thesis is to experiment with the concepts of fantasy and tragedy in order to produce knowledge through practice-led research, helping to expand the field of fantasy research by facilitating an understanding of the links between fantasy and dramatic tragedy, a connection which has received little scholarly attention. The thesis will attempt to examine whether tragedy and modern fantasy literature are compatible forms, exploring whether tragedy and fantasy can still operate effectively when combined in a self-contained narrative. In order to provide a theoretical framework, Tolkien's theory on the ultimate function of the fantasy/fairy story will be used as a focus for this experiment in language. Tolkien argues that 'Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function, but the opposite is true of Fairy-story' ('On Fairy Stories' 68). According to Tolkien, the truest form of the fantasy/fairy-story is one that contains the consolation of a sudden turn of events that alleviates the tension and sorrow accumulated throughout the story (Cholewa-Purga 122). Tolkien creates the term 'Eucatastrophe' for this feature and states that its typical embodiment is the happy ending (Havirova 40). This concept of eucatastrophe is central to Tolkien's own fantasy works as well as many other works that followed in this genre, and there has been little attempt within the field to disprove this theory. The objectives of this research, then, are to provide an exploration of how fantasy might incorporate tragedy, observing whether eucatastrophe, fantasy's 'highest function', possesses a cathartic nature and if it can be retained by positing an equivalent form of catharsis through tragedy. Where tragedy traditionally exists within fantasy as merely a stage within a process leading to the consolation of eucatastrophe, this may enable fantasy to be written as a tragedy, making tragedy in fantasy more than merely a means to a eucatastrophic end.

Having stated the direction of critical enquiry and literary intent, it is important to agree upon definitions of the terms 'fantasy' and 'tragedy', and clarify what is meant by them in the context

of this research. According to the *OED*, fantasy is 'Imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present' or 'a genre of literary compositions'. It is understandable, then, that creating a definition of what constitutes fantasy literature has always been problematic, as:

Words like "fantasy" and "fantastic" derive from common parlance and popular culture, and because their semantic fields are at once broad and vague they are unlikely to be appropriate for the refined analytical techniques typical of contemporary literary scholarship (Fredricks 33).

Yet, despite this, various scholars have attempted to construct definitions or even holistic theoretical models of what constitutes fantasy and to conceptualize what is actually meant by 'the fantastic'. What Rabkin, Irwin, Tolkien *et al* seem to agree upon is that the central concept of the fantastic is the establishment of 'impossible realities' (*ibid*), or at least an '*unreality*' which makes the work depart from conventional notions of 'reality' and the 'real'. This idea is emphasised by Tolkien as he explains that fantasy is 'an equivalent of Imagination' combined with the 'notions of "unreality" (that is, unlikeness to the Primary World), and of freedom from the domination of observed fact' ('On Fairy Stories' 47). Another idea which fantasy theorists agree upon is that this *unreal*, imagined world must converge on the readers' understanding of the real world (Irwin 7). As Rabkin states, '[Fantasy worlds] are defined for us and are of interest to us by virtue of their relationship to the real world we imagine to have been thought normal when the story was composed' (4). In other words, the fantasy world must bear some relationship to and be in conversation with the world of the author and contain an element of recognition. According to Flieger, it is this recognition of elements of social-cultural and historical context that is 'the key to the whole idea, for it places the emphasis where it belongs: on the beholder rather than on something called 'reality,' about which there could be and often is disagreement. Recognition brings the idea home to the reader' (5). Kagarlitski proposes that in fantasy 'the real and the imaginary, the rational and the spiritual are inseparable' and fantasy only comes into being when 'disbelief arises side by side with belief' creating 'a mosaic of the probable and the improbable' (29). In summary, for the purpose of this research, fantasy will be

understood in terms of a secondary world containing elements of *unreality*, which is engaged through allegorical reference to current social, historical and cultural contexts.

Tragedy is defined by the *OED* as a 'literary work of a serious or sorrowful character, with a fatal or disastrous conclusion' or as a 'branch of dramatic art which treats of sorrowful or terrible events, in a serious and dignified style'. From a theoretical perspective, discussion on the effects and function of tragedy originate with Aristotle, who defines tragedy as '*mimesis praxeos spoudaias kai teleias megethos echouses*' or '*a mimesis of an action*' that is 'serious and purposeful, having magnitude' (67). This definition is further explored, more recently, by Steiner and Niebuhr, who perceive tragedy as 'focussing profound and ennobling truths about the human condition in the suffering integrity of the unique individual' (Dollimore xvii). For Steiner, in tragedy the protagonist must be broken by events that are unresolvable 'through technical or social means': the tragedy must be 'irreparable'. A.C. Bradley agrees, seeing the tragic figure as contending with an ultimate power, an irresistible force that brings about a new order (54), akin to Hegel's concept of Eternal Justice which restores 'the ethical substance and unity in and along with the downfall of individuality which disturbs its repose' (49). Conversely, Lever departs from this understanding, arguing that tragedy (especially Jacobean tragedy) is actually concerned with society rather than individuals and sees the suffering and conflict therein as a contingent side-effect of the 'social and historical forces focussed in state power', rather than any divine or natural cosmic order (Dollimore xviii). For Albert Camus, tragedy is generated by transition; it is 'born in the west each time that the pendulum of civilisation is halfway between a sacred society and a society built around man' (199). Moreover, he explains that it occurs when a man 'frees himself from an older form of civilisation and finds that he has broken away from it without having found a new form which satisfies him' (194). For the purpose of this research the term tragedy will be used in the Aristotelian sense, using Lever's and Camus' understandings of tragedy as lenses by which to examine state power and the transitions that change the course of civilisations.

With regard to methodology, this project will employ a practice-led research model (PLR), a process through which the critical and creative aspects of research work in close connection (Lasky 30). Practice-led research is a unique and dynamic methodological approach, which

forms an interdisciplinary method of enquiry, allowing ‘practitioners to initiate and then pursue their research through practice’ (Haseman 147). Essentially, a creative piece of fiction is written, followed by the iterative process of drafting and redrafting, creating an enquiry cycle which helps explore themes and generate knowledge through the act of creative writing. This method of enquiry will allow the project to experiment with narrative and language within a creative artefact, while demonstrating critical and theoretical knowledge, as well as an awareness of the context and tradition in which it is being written.

While the practice-led research model of enquiry has merit, there are, however, certain complications that arise from such an approach, which could be considered problematic and require addressing. Firstly, unlike the quantitative research model preferred by the sciences, practice-led research cannot repetitively yield similar results while employing the same approach (Boyd 2). This means that given the same set of characters and the same plotline to follow, no two creative-practitioners would write the same story or otherwise achieve the same result. Indeed, the same researcher attempting to answer the same research question a second time would be unable to reproduce the exact same story either. Secondly, and in close correlation to the first concern, there is inherent a degree of subjectivity and bias at the heart of practice-led research, as both the ‘subject and object of the research’ is the personal creative work of the researcher (Colbert 2). This makes it difficult to certify the objectivity of the method – especially considering the medium and the tools of critique are same. Moreover, the research topic can become ‘blurred or lost entirely’ as a researcher’s bias steers him/her to a ‘quasi-confessional mode’ of artistic statement (McNamara 5), rather than a true poetics which ‘formulate[s] and discuss[es] a critical attitude to their own work’, recognising a range of influences such as ‘the traditions they write within and against, relevant literary, social, and political contexts, and the processes of composition and revision undertaken’ (Lasky 14). This is a concern specific to PLR, where one’s own practice is the focus of the research enquiry, specifically in creative writing, which is always an enquiry into language and genre. Essentially, a PLR practitioner uses language to analyse language within a creative artefact that he/she has personally developed. Finally, PLR may be seen as counterintuitive and restrictive with respect



to the act of creativity itself, restricting the intuitive spontaneity of the creative process by limiting it to solving a very specific research question within a rigid framework.

Despite its perceived efficacy in the field of science, quantitative study can itself be argued to hold a 'false claim to objectivity', effacing as it does the 'particularities of lived experience from which situated knowledge emerges' (Barrett 135). Observed thus, the quantitative approach – with its reliance on collecting and replicating numeric data – may be limited to reductionist results, providing partial perspectives, and restricting enquiry to only that which can be weighed and measured. Conversely, PLR's more subjective approach has a capacity to explicate 'particularities that reflect new social realities either marginalised or not yet recognised in established social practices' (4), allowing a researcher to explore new frontiers of understanding and ask the question of 'what if', rather than gaze at the same turf from different angles. Indeed, PLR allows for subjective interpretation and a plurality of views unlike the generalizable and 'universal' knowledge gained from empirical studies, while acknowledging the researcher's own individual understanding and lived experience. Similarly, PLR offers the writer a unique tool and opportunity rather than stifling his/her creativity, as the analytical and interpretative aspects of researching may shed light upon insights that would be otherwise left in the dark, and thus help to reshape and improve the creative artefact itself. Moreover, the creative and analytical processes complement each other, with language being the medium and tool for each. This becomes more apparent when considering that the PLR practitioner can act as both a channeller of experience *and* a channeller of text and language, meaning all forms of text and language he/she consumes can in some form be made anew within his/her creative artefact. In short, PLR can inspire rather than restrict creative output, creating an intertextual dialogue between theory and artefact.

Very few attempts have been made to write tragedy within the fantasy genre. However, the few that exist show a diverse understanding of tragedy and the tragic, and can be said to have had various degrees of influence upon the 'Anubis' story. One of the few tragedies set in a fantasy landscape was Tolkien's own work, *The Children of Hurin*. Originally conceived in various notes in the period between 1916 and 1919 as 'part of a body of more or less connected legend[s]' (*Hurin* 11), it was published posthumously in various forms in *The*

*Silmarillion*, then in *Unfinished Tales* and again in *The Book of Lost Tales*. Finally, it was published again under the title, *The Children of Hurin*, after being edited into a more complete form by Christopher Tolkien, who deemed that 'there was a good case for presenting my father's long version of the legend' (9). The novel tells the story of the titular Hurin and his capture by an evil entity named Morgoth. Morgoth lays a curse upon Hurin and his children, Túrin and Nienor, forcing him to watch as they fall in love unaware of their relation to one another. In their despair upon the revelation of their true identities, they take their own lives: Nienor casts herself from a cliff, after which Túrin throws himself upon his own sword. There is a strong focus on plot rather than characters, in a manner akin to received myth which Tolkien was perhaps attempting to emulate, through which Tolkien explores the themes of free will and predestination. Tolkien's story owes a particular debt to Greek Tragedy and medieval mythology as, in his own words, it is 'derived from elements in Sigurd the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo' (*Letters* 131) and was 'an attempt to reorganize . . . the tale of Kullervo the hapless, into a form of my own' (124). While the style of narrative lies at the far end of the scale from what this research shall attempt, being a historical account told entirely by an omniscient narrator, the characterisation of Túrin Turambar is admirable and of a complexity that this project shall aim to recreate in its depiction of the central protagonist, Anubis. Túrin is described as a solemn, reserved man who is 'slow to forget injustice or mockery' and yet is also 'quick to pity . . . the hurts or sadness of living things . . . move him to tears' (Hurin 39). Yet alongside this, Solopova notes, he displays traits such as arrogance, pride and a desire for honour, which may be said to collude with his familial curse to bring about the demise of his friends and family (46-47).

'Akallabêth', another tale in Tolkien's *Legendarium*, also contains the elements of tragedy. Appearing as the fourth part of *The Silmarillion*, 'Akallabêth' is primarily an Atlantis myth, telling of the fall of the kingdom of Númenor as its ruling house gradually comes under the influence of a diabolical figure named Sauron. In the story, the Númenoreans are gifted with prolonged life spans and an island kingdom by a body of powerful spirits called the Valar. This longevity allows them time to evolve and attain great 'achievements in art and wisdom', yet it also leads to 'a possessive attitude' and awakes in them a desire 'for more time for their enjoyment'

(*Letters* 154). As Sauron's influence spreads within Númenorean society, he plays upon their natural desire for immortality and convinces them to invade the lands of the Valar, the Undying Lands, in order to gain it. In punishment for this affront, the kingdom of Númenor is swallowed by the sea. While written as a short story, 'Akallabêth' deals with very complex themes about longevity, aging, death and immortality, exploring how mortality is intrinsic to human nature (Hogan & Clarfield 10). The story unfolds over a great number of years, giving brief accounts of several generations of kings. Ar-Pharazôn, the last king of Númenor, who presides over the tragic fall of Númenorean society, is an unsympathetic and uncomplicated figure, perhaps due to the limitations of the short story format. Even before his ascent to the throne he is said to be 'restless and eager for wealth and power' and is leading armies east to 'extend [his] dominion over Men' (*Silmarillion*. 324). He claims the throne via a forced marriage of incest and in 'the glory of his power' sits 'brood[ing] darkly, thinking of war' (ibid). Perhaps his greatest flaw is arrogance in his belief that he can imprison Sauron and be unaffected by him. 'Akallabêth' is especially pertinent to this project because of the limitations of a word count, as Tolkien's ability to deal thoroughly with profound themes in a work of limited length is one which the practice-led research will attempt to emulate. However, Tolkien's decision to limit characterisation in order to tell the story as a historical account is one it is hoped the project can avoid.

Another author who attempts to write tragedy within a fantasy setting is Jacqueline Carey, whose *The Sundering* 'duology' can in the politest terms be described as a pastiche of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. The novels closely follow the plot of *The Lord of the Rings*, with the characters being recognisable analogues of Tolkien's creations. The novels are told from the perspective of Satoris, an equivalent of Tolkien's Sauron, whose battle with the Shapers, analogues of Tolkien's Valar, has left the world sundered. The Shapers are cut off from the world, while Satoris is left behind – biding his time, building his forces in his great fortress of Darkhaven. The central conceit of the series is that Satoris does not want to dominate the world, but is simply misunderstood. Listing the numerous problems of positing an evil dictator bent on conquest, and ultimately world domination, as being just misunderstood is unfortunately beyond the scope of this literature review. What is interesting in Carey's

appropriation, however, is the portrayal of Tanaros, who is the equivalent of Tolkien's 'Witch-King of Angmar'. Tanaros is given a genuinely tragic backstory wherein, centuries before the main story, he was the general of the human forces until he found his wife sleeping with the king, whom he had considered his friend. In his rage he killed them both and fled to Darkhaven, where Satoris gifted him with immortality in return for training his army of trolls and leading them into battle. Carey creates in him a sympathetic, conflicted figure and he remains interesting even as the story around him becomes progressively less so.

Finally, George R.R. Martin's, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, can be considered as a saga whose aims and narrative techniques are close to the aspirations of this project. Essentially, three different stories run through the series, intertwining at various points. It recounts a dynastic struggle between noble houses as they vie for ascension to the Iron Throne, as well as the threat of invasion in the form of supernatural beings known as the 'Others' and the efforts of an exiled princess to reclaim her right of ascension via the use of dragons. The series is as yet incomplete, with five books written of a projected seven but, taking into account the various prophecies littered throughout, may be assumed to end 'eucatastrophically'. Yet, the first book in the series, *A Game of Thrones*, viewed as a separate entity from the rest of the series can be construed as a tragedy, if Eddard Stark is considered as the central protagonist. His insistence upon acting honourably in a fantasy world in which honour means very little may be considered his tragic flaw. His refusal to accept his enemies' terms leads to his execution, leaving his daughters in their hands. Of most interest to me, however, is Martin's narrative style. His use of multiple closed perspectives throughout the narrative leads to a form of ironic mimesis in which the reader knows more than the protagonist, or point of view character, which can help enable tragedy to work within a fantasy narrative.

Told through a limited third-person narrative perspective, with the focus alternating chapter by chapter between the perspectives of several characters, Martin's style restricts the reader to each character's understanding of the situation and point of view (POV). Given the word limit, this project will have to constrain the POV to one or two characters, rather than the ensemble of perspectives Martin employs. Another aspect of his writing style I hope to emulate is his method of characterisation. Martin employs a form of indirect characterisation in which traits

and personality are inferable from an individual's actions, reactions, thoughts and emotions rather than through any direct intervention by the narrator.

To conclude, questions on whether fantasy and tragedy can interact faithfully and exist within a shared narrative, whether eucatastrophe and tragic catharsis have corresponding functions, and if tragic fantasy can shed light on contemporary social contexts, are at the heart of this thesis, which has been divided into two sections. The first section deals with the creative work, which will focus on the archetypal 'tragic hero' who must suspend the reader's disbelief, convincing him/her of his motives, and making him/her invest emotionally in his dreams and fears, and in the 'unreality' of the secondary world he inhabits. As well as this, it will attempt to synthesize aspects of current social and historical upheaval into an allegorical form. The second section of the thesis will be an exegesis of the creative work that will firstly explicate the way in which fantasy and tragedy interact within the creative piece; secondly, examine the work's narratology in relation to conventions of the genre; and thirdly, examine how successful the research has been in its engagement with the genre and in achieving its intended aims. Finally, the exegesis will expound on any issues I may anticipate going forward after this thesis.

# ***ANUBIS***

## **A CONTEST OF WILLS**

*War is deception.* That was what the Republic's military manuals taught. And Anubis had made it a mantra at the core of his strategies. War was deception, and today he would attempt to deceive his allies. *Yet it will be worth it,* he thought. The thought grew from the scene of destruction around him. So many injured; so many dead. *So many.*

The air was moist and hot; in the narrow city built close to a swamp-river, the blanket of clouds above gave no relief. Flies were everywhere. Behind Anubis lay the shattered facade of a tavern. It had served as his forward command post during the last hours of battle. The street before him was narrow and twisted, and the rows of houses seemed to huddle to either side of it, their walls and windows broken. Many of the houses were empty now, too dangerous to be inhabitable. Their previous owners sat or stood nearby, watching over the remains of their homes as foreign Meld-born soldiers marched up and down their streets.

The scrape of metal-toed boots over rubble alerted him to the appearance of a young officer, who held one of the I.F. Orbs in his gauntleted hands. Its pulsating glow lit up the shadows. And here comes the council's lackey, thought Anubis with irritation. The human boy had pestered him with the council's orders for the whole campaign. 'Lord Marshal?' the boy stuttered. 'The Supreme Council wishes to speak to you.'

Anubis shot him a glance from the corner of his eye and chose to ignore him. He had to steel himself first, before he faced the Council. Scatha had done her best to prepare him; soon he would see how well he had learned. He began the mental exercises, reaching to the back-brain, the under-mind, reinforcing his defences. Non-psychics had never mastered the complex feat, and it was a desperate strategy. Failure would expose him to the Council. It would mean death for him, and the outlawing of the Ever Victorious. The lives of all of his men would become forfeit.

Meanwhile the scavengers had come upon the scene. Around and beyond the seated general, teams worked to clear the street of rubble and return it to some semblance of normality.

Surveyors from various trade guilds and unions, accompanied by their own private security, were already staking claims and mapping who would rebuild and restructure which part of the map. Orderlies bore stretchers to and from a series of houses that served as temporary wards, where field surgeons battled to soften the blow wounded soldiers would inflict on government budgets. They would save what limbs they could and amputate the rest. Those deemed too costly to keep alive were killed. They would, no doubt, pay the families of the dead a suitable severance sum. Enemy combatants were all too costly.

At the very end of the street, a soldier had clambered onto the roof and raised the flag of the Ever Victorious Legions of the Authority. It hung limp and shrivelled in the windless air. The flag bothered Anubis a little. They had come to liberate, not to conquer; it was simply in bad taste. *I'll have to get it taken down later.*

It was distracting, sitting out here in the open, yet he preferred it to using the I.F. orbs inside the dimly lit buildings. The I.F. orb made him feel caged inside his skull. If the Supreme Council broke his defences and learned of the Meld-Born rebels that had been taken captive . . .

He didn't finish the thought. *Focus*, he chided himself. *I cannot let it happen.* His cadre of psychics could break the prisoners. They just needed time. Time that he would buy today. The Supreme Council had always been very strict on matters regarding Meld-Born prisoners. They were to kill any such prisoners immediately. The Alpha-Mould, ever the nemesis of the Republic and her allies, had made such rebel Meld-born into extensions of his will. Keeping them alive could cause exposure to the Alpha-Mould's corruption. Yet all intelligence suggested the men and women captured today were high up in the enemy's command structure. Killing them out of hand without carving open their minds would be foolish.

*Of course, the Council won't see it that way.* But Anubis was willing to take the risk of the Council's wrath. The information these prisoners carried could very well mean the end of the fighting. They had to know the location of the Alpha-Mould himself.

Anubis turned his gaze upon the human officer. Altair's boyishly handsome features hadn't faded despite the long year he had served with the Ever Victorious. Yet there were signs he had



been hardened by the months of being on the campaign trail: the line of his mouth, the creasing at the corner of his eyes. He would be gone soon. Humans never served alongside the Meld-Born for longer than thirteen months. The Republic feared they would become over familiar, maybe even friendly, with what the Republic considered to be their war machines. He cast furtive glances towards Anubis, quickly looking away when he saw Anubis staring at him. Anubis felt nothing but scorn for him.

The blood on the streets had not yet dried and the bodies of the dead were not yet cold, but already news had reached the bureaucrats. They would scour his brain and invade every corner of his mind. It was a brutal violation, being left completely exposed to the intelligence of those manipulative old men. No matter how high he rose, he would only ever be a slave. The Supreme Council were the true masters.

Yet today he would pit his will against theirs. Attempt to hide something from their mind probes. Achieving a victory here, however small it seemed, would be as great a feat as any achieved by the Ever Victorious on the battlefield.

‘Give it to me,’ he ordered, and the officer handed him the orb, relieved.

The orb was the size of a man’s skull and as heavy as a new-born babe. It looked like such a delicate little thing. A bauble. Eyes closed, he held it between his hands as if he intended to crush it and let the orb’s magic read his fingertips. He heard the voices in his head before the images formed. The Council, a murder of crows, perched above him upon an invisible branch. His skull throbbed with pain. It felt like lightning trapped behind his eyeballs.

*We congratulate you upon your successful campaign, Lord Marshall. Their voices were deep, sonorous, of a powerful timbre. This is a glorious day for democracy, a glorious day for freedom. New Nineveh is liberated, and no longer suffers under the tyrannous shadow of the Alpha Mould. We have here in the council discussed at length the merit of your achievement, and looked for a suitable reward. Be assured, noble Lord Marshall, we have planted your love in our hearts and in the hearts of the Republic, and under the radiant light of the Authority it will only grow in magnificence.*

Anubis squeezed his eyes against the pain. He could feel a vein throbbing at his temple. The barrier he had constructed faltered under the weight of their presence. He had to hold. A drop of blood trickled from his nose. *We have scoured two thirds of this city, there is no sign of Meld Chambers*, he said through the mental link. *The threat of New Nineveh was greatly exaggerated, it seems. The campaign has resulted in a disastrous waste of life thus far. And considering the improbability of finding Meld Chambers in the remaining residential districts, it is my hope that once the search is complete the Council will allow us to strategically withdraw and return home.*

The Supreme Council were silent. The shadow-men above him flitted back and forth as if conferring among themselves. Anubis was beginning to feel nauseated. He could taste blood in his mouth now, even as it ran down from his nose and over curled back lips. He could feel them prying through his memories and scouring his mind. He felt them brush against the barrier.

Had he failed? Did they know?

*We shall confer many titles upon you and have a triumph in your name, as well you deserve*, the Council finally spoke. *Yet now is not the time for returning. Our intelligence reports tell us that the Alpha Mould's allies escaped north even as you breached the city's defences. They travel through the Cassius Mountains as we speak. The Nam-Korran dictators have long despised our values and strength, and will no doubt welcome them with open arms.*

*Moreover, though we cannot verify the accuracy of this information, we have reports that the Alpha Mould himself has taken refuge with the Nam-Korran. Move north, we pray to the Authority that the rumours are true, so you can strike off the snake's head, once and for all.*

Anubis' stomach cramped. His mouth was full of blood, and he swallowed it down. He must have bitten his tongue. He tried to speak out, but his voice drowned beneath the Council's continued mental onslaught. He could feel the I.F. orb sapping away at his will-power. His psychic barrier was close to shattering.

*As such*, the Council continued, *it is the will of the Council – and, no doubt, the will of the Authority – that it be garrisoned by our troops and an embassy be built there as a symbol of our*

*enduring presence. To withdraw would be an insult to the soldiers who gave their lives, and to their families. We leave the organising of the garrison and selection of an ambassador to your discretion. We have no doubt that you will perform admirably in this duty as you have done in countless others. Keep us informed of your progress.*

The Council severed the connection and just like that, Anubis felt the oppressive pressure of their gaze lift away. Anubis peeled his hand from the orb's surface. The officer caught the orb just before it struck the ground. Anubis slumped. He wiped the blood from his face on a sleeve. His stomach convulsed, and he fought to keep from vomiting. Council reports always left him feeling violated. Having other people in his mind always did, though with Scatha it was different. But this? Protecting a small portion of his mind from their intrusion and keeping the Council from finding out had been torturous. Stopping himself from hiding his most private moments with Amalthea from them, in favour of hiding his mental training with Scatha had been almost impossible.

But had it worked? Had they seen through the ploy? He could not be sure. *Indecision is the parent of failure.* That was another thing the Republic manuals taught. Now was not the time to ponder possibilities. Now was the time to be decisive.

#

They looked more like peasants than officers, with their haggard faces and ragged uniforms. There were nine of them altogether, sitting around an oval-shaped table that was covered in several layers of maps. The room they had chosen was small for an inn of this size, and windowless. Wall-bracketed lanterns lit the room, their oily smoke burning their eyes and forcing the men to squint and strain their eyes, but the room had thick walls and a reinforced door. You could never be too careful.

It had been three days since the Council's edict, and Anubis had avoided further contact despite Altair's constant pestering and insistence that the Council required updates on his progress. The Ever Victorious were still entrenched in New Nineveh, and the Council were growing impatient.

The truth was he had been holding out for the interrogations of the prisoners to provide the key opening. But something had gone wrong.

Anubis turned to his generals and studied them carefully as they shuffled and squirmed in their seats. All seven generals of the Ever Victorious Legions and both captains of the specialist divisions were present. The true reason for this meeting had been kept secret, even from his own men. He looked around the room again but none dared meet his gaze. Coughing, fidgeting, and pretending to be engrossed in a study of the maps, they did anything but look at him. Except Scatha. She smiled as she eyed him from across the table. The presence of the Psy-Ops and Beast Corps division captains was controversial enough without her insubordination. But he had come to rely on her too often, and she enjoyed the power it gave her. She had led the interrogations and been the one to bring the unsettling news to him. She smiled knowingly at him. It was Anubis' turn to feel uncomfortable and to turn away to look to Tyr, his oldest companion.

The long years of fighting had not been kind to Tyr, his hairline had faded back to the top of his head, and the years had washed much of the colour from what hair was left. Even his beard was grey now with only a few streaks of black. He always sat stooped, as if the weighed down by the pressures of command. Sensing eyes on him he looked up at Anubis.

‘Any thoughts, old friend?’ Anubis asked.

Tyr cleared his throat and leaned back. ‘Well,’ he said, slow and deliberate, ‘we’ll have this city secured within five days at most. After that we could retrace our steps back to Dabel in time for the Thanath festival, restock and resupply, and then be on the road again in a week’s time.’

Anubis’ eyes drifted across the map before him, east of Dabel – back towards home, Republic City. The silence dragged, and soon the generals began to talk amongst themselves or offer suggestions and advice on strategies to close in on the fleeing enemy. He could hear the bitterness and resentment in their voices, though they did their best to disguise it. They felt as he did. They had been betrayed by the Republic. The State saw them as nothing more than

animals, hunting dogs to be unleashed and set upon the prey. Meld warriors, men spliced with animals. But they were so much more.

Anubis had led his men across half a continent, fought against a score of nations. They were making the world a safer place for every child of the Republic; for the Republic, which would not be terrorized or held hostage by those others who coveted her glory; and for the Authority. They had been honoured for their service. A new rank, a new medal, another promised parade in the heart of the capital. Yet, for all the council's proclamations of love and praise for the Ever Victorious, they were pushed ever further out, ever farther away. It seemed the Republic was making children faster than the Ever Victorious could save them. And now this.

'And if we go east,' he pondered aloud, and the soft-spoken words cut through the air like a drawn blade. A ripple of silent laughter passed across faces, but quickly evaporated when they realized he was serious.

'If we go east we will all face tribunal,' Scatha said with a smirk.

He nodded his head in acknowledgement. 'If we go east,' he said, 'we risk civil war.'

The anger was gone from the room. An uneasy silence slipped from man to man as each person considered what the consequences would be if they returned home. There was a knock at the door. A young female officer - Leana, if Anubis recalled correctly - opened it from the outside and allowed servants to enter bearing trays of food and drink. The generals took the respite with relief, voices rising into conversation alongside the hustle and bustle of the servants. But once the servants left the talk quickly faded. *They can hardly dare utter the thought of going against orders, Anubis thought, years of servitude to a single cause – we know nothing else, can think nothing else.*

He sighed then. The Authority and the Republic had gifted them. Lepers and cripples had been made into super-humans through manipulation of the meld chambers. Abandoned orphans who hadn't dared dream of walking or smiling or belonging had learned to run and laugh and fight as a unit. From being shunned as untouchable outsiders, they had grown to be revered as the Republic's elite legions. But the truth was the lower classes resented their rise and the

nobility envied their gifts just as much as they despised the mongrel otherness of their melded genes. And the council treated them as their attack dogs.

‘As you are all aware,’ he began, ‘I made a decision to go against protocol and keep certain prisoners alive. They have been interrogated by our psychic division. Captain Scatha, please inform the generals what we have learned.’

‘There were no psychics amongst the prisoners,’ said Scatha, ‘and so they were no match for the collective will of our psychic division. I can confidently say we broke down all of their mental defences. We were very thorough.’ She smiled again. She had a mean streak in her. Anubis had been informed that several of the prisoners had been reduced to mewling idiots.

‘Despite three days of psychic assault,’ Scatha continued, ‘the prisoners remained consistent in their answers and thoughts, repeatedly insisting that there is no figure known as the Alpha-Mould running operations. It is highly unlikely that the Alpha-Mould could operate behind the scenes without them having even the tiniest of inklings, especially when we have heard so much about him. Either the majority of their command structure is unaware of the Alpha-Mould’s existence or . . .’

She didn’t finish the sentence, she didn’t need to. Realisation spread like fire across the room. The Republic had lied to them, betrayed them on a much larger scale than any had suspected. The Supreme Council, or perhaps the Authority Himself, had been feeding lies to them and to the rest of the Republic. The generals sat stunned by this revelation and everyone seemed unsure of what to do or what to say.

The silence dragged on. Anubis looked from man to man trying to gauge their reactions.

‘Would you follow me east?’ Anubis repeated.

‘Yes,’ said Scatha fiercely.

Others were quick to nod in agreement. Vendis, who at times could seem more bear than man, rubbed his bearded chin as he cleared his throat. He rarely spoke, and when he did he seemed slow and ponderous, his voice a steady rumble. But his men loved him, for his wit was sharp

and quick on the battlefield and he was fiercely loyal to those who served with him, and his Gold Swords had a distinctly higher survival rate than any other legion. He was known to be generous with coin and miserly with lives. 'Forward or back, it makes no difference to most of us,' he said, 'there's days of fighting ahead either way. Personally, I've never cared for the Republic or its flimsy ideals. I don't care much for the Council either, or the Authority. I would as soon crack one of their heads as any others and that's the truth.'

'Over the long years we've served together, I have seen your best and your worst. To a man we would willingly march into Hell itself, without question. For me and my men, dare I say it, you are the Authority. Yet some in our legion have families in Republic City. *You* yourself have a wife there. And if we ever march east, there will be no forgiveness, no turning back.'

There was a murmur of agreement. One could not attack one's own home, some generals agreed, that was no choice at all. No, the only option was to follow the dictate of the Supreme Council, onward to Nam-Korran. *It's not easy to let go of everything you've ever believed,* Anubis reminded himself. *It's easier to simply close your eyes and follow the course. Let responsibility lie with someone else.* He remained silent and they took this as encouragement, assessing possible battlegrounds and minute details of logistics. Yet one sentence in particular occupied Anubis' thoughts, through all his attempts to dispel it. *You are the Authority.*

He shivered.

'They would have us march to the edge of the world and over it,' said Scatha, her voice dripping with disdain. 'They'll have us march on until an enemy blade has done for each of us, or time has made us stooped and feebleness has settled in our bones like rot. We're Meld-born, nothing more than animals to them. They don't want us 'home'. We are stronger, faster, more cunning, and they despise us for it.'

'I say we march east. If we move quickly, there need not be a war. There's but a token legion there and the police force. What are they compared with what we have seen? We'd scythe through them in an hour.' Vendis and Ghazi laughed heartily at that, and even the most

straight-laced of generals broke into smiles. 'We've spent our days and years policing the world against its wishes, let's turn back home and put our own house in order.'

Scatha smiled at Anubis across the table. It was as if she had read how he felt and spoken it aloud. She at once captivated and disturbed him. A tall, lithe woman-child with jaguar blood and a sword wound that had left her face scarred and her left eye a ball of milky white. She was the youngest captain in the history of the Ever Victorious and had graduated from the academy two years early. Scatha didn't talk about herself. But there were rumours.

Heated debate had erupted amongst the men over the risks and possible rewards. Some were horrified by the very thought of rebellion, others were eager for it, ready to clamp their jaws on the throats of their deceitful masters.

'And where do you stand on all this, Lord Marshall?' Tyr asked. 'This room is split down the middle, yet I'm sure if you make a decision all here will readily stand by it.'

All eyes turned toward him.

'I, for one, am tired,' he said, 'Tired of all the fighting, tired of being treated as an attack dog and set on whichever enemy takes the Republic's fancy. Most of all I'm tired of all the lies. But it is a dangerous road that lies ahead of us whichever route we take.'

'If it is to be done, if we are to go east, it will require extraordinary coordination and secrecy to ensure that the Supreme Council do not become aware of our designs, lest it lead to a long drawn out civil war, destroying everything the Ever Victorious have fought so long to preserve. It will be no easy task, but knowing what we now know, I see no other option.'

'My heart is with Scatha on this,' he said, finally, nodding his head toward her, 'we must make a world in which we can be equals. Such a world cannot be made in Nam-Korran, but it can be made in Republic City. We go east.'



## **THE SEAT OF MELANCHOLY**

It was surrounded by the ornate architecture of ancient temples and the equally antiquated buildings of the university, an eccentric mix of pillars and arches of honeycomb work. The stalls of craftsmen and traders had turned its wide expanse into a maze of alleys as narrow as the streets that fed into it. From the balcony above his coffee shop, Cora had a view of a large portion of the square. The stalls were sheltered from wind and weather and sun by multi-coloured canopies, various greens, blues and yellows. And in the narrow lanes between he could see the bustle of shoppers moving from stall to stall, some aimless, some purposeful, like nomads. The noise of the traders' haggling cries mixed with the bleats and squawks of the animals they sold. The smell rose up toward him along with the noise, the overwhelming smell of piled up mounds of fruit, mixed with the subtler smells of herbs, essences and spices.

That was two weeks ago. The square had changed. Gone were the market stalls and the vendors who had made the square their haunt for as long as Cora could remember. And for the first time Cora discerned the actual size of the square. It had become a heaving mass of angry people, the occasional banner or flag protruding here and there. Some of them had wanted to come into the coffee shop and climb onto the balcony. Cora had refused, afraid of what the consequences might be. There were always consequences for such incautious behaviour.

He had sent his waitresses, Mia and Hanna, home when the troubles began, seeing the first rumblings of discontent in the streets, not wanting either of them to get hurt. He was a witness to the protests from the very beginning. Students were the first to take to the streets, those ever-ready revolutionaries, chanting various slogans against the Supreme Council, some of the more daring against the Authority Himself. He had watched those pioneers being chased away by the state apparatus, and had thought nothing more of it.

Yet the protesters did not dwindle or disappear. Their numbers grew in fact, as students were joined by other outraged parties. Cora's customers shared rumours that a group of young girls

had been attacked by the secret police, that the Supreme Council had, or were about to, suspend the entire Senate, that a Meld-born's house had been torched, that the children of Republic City citizens were to be forced into the Meld Chambers. Cora hadn't believed that last one, but the others seemed very plausible, and increasingly so. He had, after all, been a witness from the very beginning. And Cora became angry as well, outraged even. But he never joined them. He only watched from his balcony, a cup of anise tea in hand.

Elind the Jeweller had joined the protests, had even encouraged Cora to join. They had come for him in the night. Men in plain clothes, they had kicked down the jeweller's door and dragged him away. Cora had lain awake that night, terrified and unable to sleep. He hadn't slept much since. No, he just watched, often ashamed when he saw the very young or very old amongst the crowds in the square, afraid all the time.

Within a week the security forces were outnumbered twenty to one. Yet the heavily armoured police held their own against the rebellious crowds, and the situation remained balanced on a knife edge. It would not be long before the knife drew blood. The protesters revelled in their strength of numbers, and the chants became more openly rebellious, calling for an end to the Authority, calling for an end to the Republic and her empire, and bravely meeting the attacks of the security forces. Cora thought he had dreamt these last days, never in his life would he have ever thought such things could happen. Elsewhere, however, the city was in chaos. The overwhelmed security forces had gathered their strength here and before the Authority's palace, choosing to harry protesters and protect officials rather than patrol the streets. Nightly looting and rape had become commonplace in the suburbs, and he feared for the welfare of his employees who had become like daughters to him.

The shop had long been closed. It was not wise to run a business such as his on the outskirts of the battlefield. Cora had set out his chair upon the balcony this morning, tea in hand, to perform what he saw as his duty in this revolution, to witness. If nothing else he could do that much. The sight that greeted him today broke his heart. Picking her way across the square between rows of people who had spent the night singing songs of freedom and were now soundly asleep, he saw Mia. She wore a red shawl about her shoulders; the colour had become

synonymous with the movement, with the symbol of the 'Bloody Hand' painted across many of the city's walls. There was a limp in her step. And the closer she came, the more of her features he could make out. Her bruised and swollen face froze Cora's heart.

'Cora,' she called, waving up at him. 'You have to come down. You have to come down, they've taken her.'

The cup fell from his hand and shattered as he stood up and gripped the balcony. 'Hanna? Someone's taken Hanna?' The words seemed to tumble out faster than he could think. 'Who has? Who's taken her?'

His arms trembled and his feet felt unsteady.

'The police, Cora. The police have taken her. I know where she is. I . . . tried to go in and help her . . . but . . . I . . . they . . .' She was dazed and confused. *Close to mental collapse*, Cora thought. *Something terrible must have happened to her.*

'You stay right there, girl,' he called. 'I'm coming down. I'll sort this out, don't you worry.'

He turned away from the balcony and on trembling legs began his descent. He should have known better than to think he could remain an observer forever. One could never stand so close to revolution without becoming part of it. Stepping out onto the street was terrifying. People steadily streamed into the square from all directions. The sounds of the security forces being marshalled were distinct, cutting through the noise of the slowly waking city.

'We have to get her back,' she sobbed as he reached her.

'It's safer if you stay here, I think,' he replied. He gulped as he said it.

'No! I want to come . . . she's my best friend. I want to help.'

Cora's face burned with shame. Even though she would be stepping into danger he was relieved she was coming. He was too afraid to go alone.

He put an arm around Mia's shoulder, doing his best to put on a brave face. Fear raked its claws across his belly. 'Come, girl,' he said more gruffly than he meant to, 'Let's go and bring Hanna home.'

And one couldn't live life, it seemed to him then, without facing fear and death. *If I live*, he thought, *perhaps I will understand life better and appreciate joy more.*

#

The city's once clean streets were chaos.

The violence that Cora feared had not materialised, but there were signs of it everywhere. Litter patterned the streets where clashes had taken place the night before, from discarded items of clothing to broken bottles and weapons. Refuse piled up on street corners or clogged gutters. Cora and Mia were simply an old man and a young woman, yet some pedestrians did everything to avoid them. Others, Cora and Mia went out of their way to avoid themselves, the angry types who shouted slogans and looked for an enemy with a predatory hunger in their eyes. On many a street the only living things they passed were the alley cats that prowled amongst the litter, licking at dried blood.

Approaching one of the central avenues, where traffic was picking up with the sun's steady climb, they heard the first rumours. It was a boy running past shouting at the top of his lungs in his high-pitched voice. Cora grabbed him by the scruff of his neck as he came by them.

'Slow down, lad. Catch your breath and tell me what's happening.'

'Outside,' the boy gasped, 'outside the city. The soldiers are here. It's an army, I think – I mean – a whole corps or legion or something. It's massive. They're here! Now! They're coming into the city.'

A wave of uncertainty hit Cora. *It may not be true*, he told himself. But if it was, and Cora was caught out in the middle of it . . . he felt light-headed. And there was the girl to think about. *Mia, yes, Mia!* He couldn't have her out here in the open, not with the soldiers coming. *Don't listen to your fear, old man. It's not true anyhow. Ask the lad.*

He tightened his grip on the boy, dragging him closer. Leaning forward, he said, 'Are you certain, lad? Did you see this army yourself?'

'No,' the boy said, firing off words at a rapid rate, 'But Beshar did, he went outside the old walls to run his kite, old uncle, I swear it on my great, great grandfather's grave and he saw them marching rank on rank and there were lots –'

'Did this friend of yours see their banners?' Cora interrupted. 'What signs or flags were they carrying?'

'He said they were carrying none, I swear it on my great, great –'

'Yes, yes, okay,' said Cora letting the boy go, who at once shot off down the road, shouting at the top of his lungs. Cora felt better for having asked him, a wave of relief flushing through him. There was no army at the gates; the boys had simply made up the story. *An army without banners, indeed.*

They continued on, through the thickening crowds. The place was full of gossip about riots and protests, rumours of armies marching on Republic City, about what was being done to prisoners. It was hard not to overhear people talking, though Cora tried to shut out their words. Nothing good seemed to be said by anyone. Cora's earlier apprehension returned. *Perhaps the lad wasn't lying, after all.* The closer they came to the garrison, the more people seemed to babble on about a bannerless army at the gates. All sorts of news was passed around, with no one sure of anything.

'People have gone out to see them,' shouted one man.

'The army is for the people. The army is for us,' another chanted.

'The Supreme Council called them back to the City to reinforce security.'

'The Guard were overrun! The senate's being ransacked by looters!'

'The mutants have declared independence for their quarter.'

‘The people and the army are one!’

That last seemed to be a popular chant and rallying cry. Slowly, slowly it was taken up by people across the road, as they began to move toward the police garrison, clapping and chanting. Cora and Mia were swept along with the crowd who seemed to gather momentum, finding a rhythm and chanting in unison. Mia moved closer to him, gripping his arm tightly. There was a wild look in her eyes, like a child facing down a racing chariot. Cora felt his own heart-rate increasing, felt its pounding beat against his rib cage. He didn’t like the way this was headed. The crowd seemed merry and boisterous, singing and chanting with enthusiasm, but Cora’s limbs were stiffening with fear.

The crowd approached a large crossroads and the garrison building became visible on the far side. He felt the warm piss soak his breeches and trickle down his thigh. A whimper escaped his lips. It was lost in the roar of the crowd. He tried to plant his feet and stop his forward momentum, but those behind kept pushing, eager to reach the front lines. He felt himself pushed forward. Mia, terrified, shouted something in his ear, but he could not make it out. Between the crowd’s noise and the sight before him, Cora was overwhelmed.

Two phalanxes, each three or four hundred strong, heavily armoured and carrying body length shields and heavy-looking pikes marched toward the advancing crowd. Twenty officers on huge warhorses marshalled them forward. The crowd around him seemed elated by the sight, their excitement reaching frenzy. The chant broke off into a cacophony of angry shouts and screams. A bottle was thrown across the divide. Cora watched it sail through the air, oblivious to everything else for that horrifying moment. It shattered against a shield.

The protesters charged towards the phalanxes.

All was pandemonium around him. The mob pulled him forward and he lost sight of Mia. He raised his arms, elbows in front of his face to protect himself. At first, he felt no pain with the thudding blows of fist and shield, merely his body’s response to the impact as he was knocked to and fro amongst the crush. A cudgel of some sort connected with his temple, and the stone road seemed to rise toward him. Dazed and down, the world moved in slow motion around

him, the armed guards laying into the protesters. And then someone stamped on his hand, breaking his fingers. The pain cut through the shock and made it all real.

Cora began to cry. He didn't belong here, amongst the violence, he wanted to return home. He was kicked even as he curled into a ball to protect himself. The impact turned his sobs into a wheezing cough as pain lanced through his side, slowly spreading out like a melting shard of ice.

He didn't want to live the revolution. He no longer had any desire to see it.

He felt a hand grab him by the shoulder and drag him back. The mob was retreating a distance while the armed guards held their ground. Some of the other fallen protesters were not so fortunate and the guards took turns in kicking and beating them. Cora looked up to thank the man who saved him from a similar fate. He was a complete stranger. The youth didn't seem to hear him, instead staring off to the right with a look of elation in his eyes.

Cora didn't understand, at first. And then he heard the horns blare and echo out across the streets. He turned to look as well and the sight awed him. They were dressed in black, plated armour wearing full-faced helms. There was not a banner or flag in sight. But Cora did not need flags or banners to tell him who they were. At their front, leading the line was a man whose exploits had made him an icon of the Republic. A sword-and-mace wielding, jackal-headed warrior, he let loose a roar and charged toward the disbelieving security forces.

Anubis and the Ever Victorious had come to Republic City. And they would fight for the people.

#

Smoke in the distance was the first sign of the city, a black column drifting ever slightly west. It rose out like the talon of some hellish titan. There was trouble ahead. Perhaps they should have turned back then, reassessed plans and thought new strategies. But so close to their goal the Ever Victorious became a juggernaut bent upon a single purpose, the thousands moving akin to a single entity, a being made of many. They would not stop now, even if Anubis called for it.

Anubis could feel the thrum of blood surging through his veins, that eager void opening in his chest, its lust for action, for violence, for appeasement. His armour, so heavy in ordinary

circumstance, felt like a second skin, the jackal-head helm became an extension of his own face. Even his sword and mace felt light, hilt and haft resting easy upon his palm.

*I will make the Council kneel today, he thought, I will lop off their old bastard heads.*

The Ever Victorious had split into three armies, and would converge upon the Authority's palace. Scatha and Tyr led the other armies; Anubis himself would bring up the main force. They would strike fast along the main avenues, relying on the shock and awe of their assault to sweep away resistance. The city would be taken swiftly, Anubis knew; it was the taking of the palace itself he feared. Scatha had warned him, but now he felt the truth of her words. The I.F. orb strained against his being, its pull was like a drug. The closer it came to the central intelligence orb, the stronger its power grew. Scatha had advised him to destroy it, yet a mixture of terror and lust stayed his hand.

Anubis despaired. *They rape my mind and have conditioned me to crave it.*

Tyr and Vendis and the others didn't understand. To them he was their Lord Marshall, as much a symbol as the insignia of the Ever Victorious. No, he could not confide in them. So he had turned to Scatha, for the Psychic Division were outsiders even among the Meld-born – and perhaps as their leader she would understand. He had opened up to her, had told her of his isolation and his fear. Just thinking of it made his chest hurt and face flush with shame. After all these years, and now so close to home . . .

It seemed he had unravelled the narratives of all the institutions he had once held dear, betrayed everything he once upheld. The weight of it all stifled his breath, threatened to crush him. Yet violence would purge him.

He would remake the world. Yes, make it all anew; wash away the guilt with blood.

#

The first to sight them were fearful and hid and watched from distance, or else fled down and away, toward the city. Children were the first to draw up courage and approach, and when they stood unharmed the men and womenfolk followed and fed their curiosity.



There was a sea of faces now staring at Anubis and his men. Signs of violence were everywhere. Abandoned carts and shattered stalls in market squares, and toppled or else defaced statues of the Supreme Council. Blood smeared the walls or lay in congealing puddles. The grey of smoke stained the air and Anubis caught glints down side alleys or beyond rooftops. Yet people gathered among the wreckage to stare, chanting slogans against the Supreme Council and the Authority – fearful at first and then, when the Ever Victorious made no move to halt them, with what seemed to Anubis an almost euphoric energy.

‘Down with the Authority!’

‘Death to the Council!’

‘The people and the army are one!’

‘Steady, men,’ Anubis called back to his followers. The crowd had begun to press in and drive them forward. A nervous Meld-born soldier may have lashed out when surrounded by such a frenzied crowd – Anubis had to struggle against his *own* instincts for battle, but the Ever Victorious had policed hostile cities before and had nerve enough to stay their hands.

Sounds of battle reached them from ahead. The clash of weapons against shields, angry shouts and the rage-filled roars of opposing forces. Were there other legions within the city’s perimeters? Anubis was not sure. The crowd around them seemed to want to push them in that direction. Anubis felt hands grasp his shoulder. He half turned, raising his mace to strike. It was an old woman. There was a startling fear in her eyes as she tugged at him. A soldier moved forward, wrenching her grasp and pulled her away.

This felt too much like a trap.

The insistence of the crowd was unnerving, and any minute a soldier would lash out. They could *feel* the threat, the sense of danger that pulsed through the throngs of men, women and children. *Are they trying to bait us in? Which army do they speak of? Us? Or another?* The thoughts rushed frantically through his mind, like an enraged bull charging to and fro.

He spotted a side street wider than the others, almost as wide as the main road they marched along now. Perhaps they could use it to avoid the possible threat ahead. Maybe it leads to another large thoroughfare. He would have to take the chance.

‘Sergeant,’ he called back to the burly wolf-like man behind him. ‘Relay the order, we’re changing course. Follow my lead; I am your point of reference.’

‘Very good, sir,’ the sergeant replied and promptly began to bark orders down the lines.

The people saw their change of direction and rushed to fill the entrance way. More people came up the side street behind them, until they stood eight or nine rows deep, shoulder to shoulder and leaving little room to push through. They continued to chant, but the mood had changed. Gone was any sense of fear or nervousness, instead replaced with a boiling anger. Things were about to get ugly.

A projectile sailed through the air and crashed against his shoulder. He felt the impact even through his armour and grunted in pain. Someone had thrown a stone about the size of his fist. Another came flying through the air, but he was ready this time. He deflected the projectile with his vambrace.

‘Ever Victorious,’ he bellowed, ‘defend yourselves.’

Shields were raised as more and more stones and other objects came flying through the air. The surrounding crowds roared with approval as the projectiles rained down on the soldiers, clattering off shield and armour. Men and women pushed forward from either side, making it difficult for the units to manoeuvre. A tent pole was swung. *Well if it's a fight they want*, he thought, *let's give it to them*. The Ever Victorious had broken legions; they would scythe through this rabble in a matter of minutes.

‘Forward!’

With Anubis' order, the soldiers charged forward like an overpowering wave. Anubis swung his mace into the shocked expression of a middle-aged man. He snarled with an almost feral rage

as the mace-head impacted with a crunch. He push-kicked the body before it had time to fall, sending it sprawling back and creating room to charge through.

The crowd had left itself very little room to turn and run, having packed body upon body into every street around them. People crashed into each other or were crushed between bodies as they struggled to move away from the swinging swords of the Ever Victorious. Amongst the noise and confusion, people farther back had no idea what was happening at the front and continued to try to push their way forward, further compacting those in between. Mini stampedes broke out amongst the crowd like swirling eddies in a river, stopping here and there as the tight space became checked their movement.

Anubis stepped over the body of a boy who had been crushed under foot by the panicking masses long before the soldiers had even reached him. He continued to swing his mace and blade to and fro, like a mad composer making music of screams and death. Some muted part of him raged against the killing, *knew* that what they did was wrong, but that voice was small and far away. The human part of him had peeled back and receded, violence had awoken Anubis the Death God and he would remain until enough sacrifice had been made to slake his blood-thirst.

They clubbed and stabbed and bludgeoned their way through until their shoulders hurt, and then suddenly the Ever Victorious legions were flowing out of the human crush and away.

‘Authority,’ swore the sergeant as he gasped for breath, ‘bet that’s what being born feels like.’

Anubis’ mouth upturned in a grim smile as he turned to look back at him. The sergeant only saw the emotionless stare of the full-faced jackal helm. He shivered and looked away.

‘We slow our pace for nothing now,’ Anubis shouted, ‘we’re already behind schedule. Cut through any resistance. Quick march! We do not stop until we’re close enough to see the thorns on palace roses.’

The Meld-born loped rather than marched, moving quickly along the wide avenue, eyes watching every opening in every building as the road curved to the right ahead of them. The

buildings were taller here and seemed to loom over the street. *Any number of hostiles could be hiding up there*, Anubis thought.

Crowds of people still converged on the Ever Victorious. Some cheered for them, others jeered or attempted fight against them, and some simply came to stare in confusion and wonder to see so many soldiers on Republic City's streets. Even amongst the Ever Victorious some wept, realising that they were revolution, and that the Republic had failed and things would never be the same.

'Sergeant, call forward the Psy-Opser,' Anubis ordered.

It was standard practice to have a psychic in each unit to help coordinate and relay orders. A pale, thin man moved forward and came alongside him. The Psy-Opser wore no helm and his long black hair was sweat-plastered to his oddly shaped skull.

'Are you scanning the buildings, Jeheris?' Anubis asked.

'I am now,' Jeheris responded, his wide forehead creasing as his eyes narrowed down in a frown. Anubis studied him briefly from the corner of his eye. The only male amongst the Psy-Ops ranks, the man was sickly-looking, his face too pale, his lips so red they could have been a wound. Jeheris was an outsider, even amongst outsiders. Anubis almost felt a kinship to him.

'I wouldn't worry much about the residents, sir,' Jeheris said after a moment. 'They seem a mixed bunch, sort of passive-aggressive, if you will. They'll spit on us but nothing more.'

'Any news from our other fronts?'

'General Tyr's forces are ahead of schedule, there's no activity at the docks, and all ships are anchored at port. Scatha says her lot have met resistance as well but are dealing with it even as we speak.'

The woman had a wild streak and it would not be beyond her to go out of her way and look for trouble. Anubis shuddered. What he had just done had been no less wild and no less reckless. *You're losing control, Anubis. So close to the end and you're losing control . . .*

'I think we may have some concerns of our own ahead, sir,' said Jeheris.

'What do you mean?' Anubis asked.

'I'm sensing two large groups of people ahead. They're giving off lots of negative, hostile energy – and it seems to be building. We may have a fight on our hands.'

The wound of his mouth split open into a grin and what little kinship Anubis felt toward him dissipated.

'Return to your position, soldier,' Anubis said, and the tone of his voice made Jeheris lose his smile.

The sounds of battle Anubis had heard earlier were increasing, joined by chants and cries that were also familiar. They followed the curve of the road and readied themselves for what lay ahead. Anubis readjusted his grip on his sword and mace. As the road straightened out it opened onto a crossroads, and that was where a battle was taking place.

The civilian mob retreated slightly away from the heavily armoured, cudgel wielding security forces. Both sides noticed the soldiers at the same time. An abrupt silence hit the crossroads like an epiphany. Anubis took a deep breath.

Both sides clashed again, hoping to take advantage of the perceived reinforcements.

'What do we do?' the burly sergeant asked.

Anubis loosened his wrist. 'We go through both of them,' he growled.

He roared and burst into a sprint, not waiting for the sergeant's response. He heard the sergeant bark out the order behind him.

'Forward the Ever Victorious!'

## **THE EMPTY CHAIR**

Anubis paced the chamber from one wall to the next, his body as restless as his mind. The council table lay in halves, the chairs and furniture broken or upturned. The Supreme Council was in a similar state. Anubis felt trapped and claustrophobic, as if his ribs were closing in on his lungs. His mind stumbled from one thought to the next, drunk and heavy on the violence. The mirrored columns of the chamber were for the most part shattered, and the man that stared back at him through the web-like cracks of what was left of them was not one he recognised. Soiled with the blood of others, there was madness in that stranger's eyes. It was no man; it was a horror.

*A Horror.*

He averted his gaze, too ashamed – too afraid – to look. Yet everywhere he paced the columns were there, thousands of broken images giving their skewed view of the world he had created. For the horror was of his doing. He had both won and lost today. The Supreme Council, ever the puppet masters whose fingers had pulled the strings, whose cruel wills had made of him a marionette, lay fallen, no longer imperious figures to tower over his mind and those of the Republic. As dead men, they were but frail and old, inanimate figures that had had their own strings cut.

The Ever Victorious had torn through the city and invaded the Palace, cutting down any resistance like a blade through tall grass.

Even now Anubis could hear his soldiers clearing the Palace's courtyards and rose gardens of what little loyal men remained. *The old order is dead*, Anubis thought, *from its ashes I shall make this Republic anew. I have to.*

He turned toward the steps that ascended to the High Chamber. The double doors were wide open, leaning out precariously on half-broken hinges. Inside, the chamber was mostly bare with marble floors and walls. Above, a triplet of skylights gave a view of the blue and empty heavens,

and at the far end, upon a pedestal, sat the Authority's empty throne. This *is what we worshipped?* Anubis sneered with contempt.

So many prayers he had uttered – to no one. So many had lost their lives, had given them freely – for nothing. There was no Authority, perhaps there never had been. Generations had lived and died beneath the rule of nothing more than an ephemeral idea concocted by a cabal of old men. Freedom, justice, equality, democracy . . . Authority, he supposed, was just another idea that did not exist. Not in this world. Anubis did not know whether to laugh at the madness of it or cry in relief. *I came to kill my god. Is it not better to find him beyond my reach?*

Had a burden been lifted from him? Or had he placed an even greater burden upon his own shoulders? He did not know. In fact, he realised, he knew nothing.

Anubis and his legions had not been the first of the Ever Victorious to make it to the palace. Upon arrival, he had found the entire eastern wing already on fire. Plumes of smoke escaped from shattered windows, waves of furnace-like heat rose up to the crackling cry of flames. The front gate had been pulled free and cast aside. Senate guards had tried to make a stand in the courtyard, a colonel forming a fighting square beyond the fountain. The colonel was dead, his blood flowing over the flagstones and mixing with water from the ruptured fountain. The groans of the few guardsmen who still lived could barely be heard over the sound of the burning palace.

'Put those poor souls to rest,' Anubis ordered a sergeant. A company immediately marched forward to attend the task. Human they may have been, but no living thing deserved to have its suffering prolonged.

'This doesn't look like Tyr's work,' Jeheris asked.

'No, it doesn't,' Anubis agreed.

'Well, we know who beat us here then, don't we.'

'Let's just follow the wreckage, soldier, and see where it leads.' Anubis knew all too well whose style of work this was.

'Aye, sir,' the Jeheris answered, bellowing a command to the nearest company to fan out. The field was theirs, but they left nothing to chance. That was why they were Ever Victorious.

They entered from the western wing, as far from the inferno as possible and made their way through the interior ministry. They came across a hallway full of babbling fools, men and women who had most likely worked as servants before having their minds shattered by a barrage of psychic attacks. They drooled and crooned with seriousness, singing half-remembered hymns before letting their faces slacken into idiotic laughter. Anubis seethed with anger, trembling with barely fettered rage. *These were civilians. I had ordered to use only the bare minimum of force required to subdue them.* He glanced toward a man who sat facing a wall and rocked so violently against it that his forehead bled. *No one deserves this. These were civilians.*

He gave no command, yet a soldier stepped forward, drew a knife and slit the man's throat. Others followed, knife blades flashing as they put what was left of these people to rest.

Level after level, they rose through the palace and each floor was a litany of insane images. Death and madness greeted them at almost every turn, until at last they reached the Supreme Council's chamber. The doors were untouched, impervious to the carnage around them. Made of Blackwood, they were huge and so dark they were almost ebony. The heavy wood was soundproof, granting the Council absolute privacy as they dealt with the affairs of state. Golden letters of calligraphy wrapped themselves around the arching frames and read: *Only the chosen may enter, for beyond these doors lies the Throne and Voice of the Authority.*

Anubis had felt his heart hammer madly, a cold fear making it long for escape. He still carried the I.F. orb, he was bound to it. Even now, so close to the endgame, the threat of losing everything hung stark before his eyes. Through the orb they could kill him, unman him, make him cower and kneel. He could afford them no time to think or react. Subdue them before your treason even dawns upon them. Yes. That was the way. He would strike fast and win the day.

*No, you fool! This battle must be lead from behind,* he chastised himself. *Let them not see you till it is too late.*



Yes. That was the way. He would let his soldiers be his fist. The Council would not know it was him. The Orb would never come into play.

His hands clenched and unclenched as he stared at the Blackwood doors. The Ever Victorious cast furtive, nervous glances towards him as they waited for an order. An insane thought raced through his head. Turn back. Turn back now, and they will be none the wiser. We're an unmarked legion, we can escape, make it all better again. Jeheris coughed and shuffled his feet loudly. Anubis turned his jackal-helmed face toward him, his eyes burning with anger. The bastard had been reading his thoughts. He gripped the sword hilt till his knuckle popped and began raising his sword.

*Bastard, read my –*

'Sir, to relent now is madness,' Jeheris frantically cried. 'We can be through them in the flash of an eye.'

Anubis raised his sword higher. The other soldiers stood rooted with shock.

No, he could deal with the psychic weasel later. He let his arm slowly come to rest back at his side. Jeheris was right, though. If he gave in to his fears here the men would lose all respect for him. I would no longer respect myself, he thought. Now was not the time for second thoughts; he had come too far into this action.

'Wedge formation,' he said. 'I will take point. Give me plenty of room; I don't want to take your heads off by mistake. Make it bloody and short. Do not stop until you are *sure* they are dead.'

The Ever Victorious took up their positions and waited for his signal. Anubis looked right and left before nodding his head once. Twirling sword and mace, he stepped forward kicked open the doors to the inner sanctum of the Authority.

The Ever Victorious' charge into the chamber lasted all of three steps before it stuttered to a halt.

Bodies lay scattered like forgotten toys across the chamber. A great table that had once been the room's centrepiece was now in two pieces, collapsed in on itself down the middle. An old man had been thrown down upon it with force enough to break it. Pieces of mirrored glass crunched under their booted heels, cracked, floor-to-ceiling, mirrored columns still shed slivers of glass like dead skin. Torn blue curtains lay before the servants' door they once hid. Bodies and broken furniture were strewn all about, and the denizens of Scatha's Psychic Division lounged in between. They slowly rose and saluted the confused general and the soldiers who had followed him in expecting battle.

'Psy-Ops, sir, reporting,' said one with a lopsided grin. 'Mission accomplished. We got them.'

The Psy-Opsers were all smiling now. Anubis looked around at the corpses. The Council he had feared for so long, these old dead men. He felt numb. *I am free*, he thought. *Free*. The corpse of one lay close by him. Limbs twisted at insane angles, jaw broken and hanging slack, its eyes were still open, staring at him, unseeing. A great sadness settled on him, then, bore down on him so much that he felt tears begin to brim beneath his helm. He looked around at the Psy-Opsers. The room was silent now save for the odd piece of mirror that came away from a column here and there to shatter on the floor.

'Secure the palace, douse the fires and pacify any remaining resistance. Set up a –' Anubis paused midway through giving orders and looked around.

'Where's Scatha?' he asked.

'She is having a private audience with the Authority,' said the lopsided grinner, pointing toward a pair of doors at the far end of the room that had been battered open.

*The Authority.*

Anubis stumbled forward toward the broken doors. As if sensing his approach, one of the doors leaned out on its badly replaced lower hinges, the top hinges ripping free. He pushed it aside and it came off completely, thudding to the floor. He stepped through.

Three columns of sunlight came down from the skylights above, exposing the raging wars of dust motes and making it difficult to see the far end of the room. Anubis stepped through them with slow reverent strides, hefting sword and mace. Perched upon the edge of a throne meant for a giant, Scatha swung her legs back and forth like a child and giggled. Anubis looked about. The room was plain, oval shaped and unadorned, the marble floor and walls hiding nothing. There were no other exits beside the one through which he had entered.

'I don't understand, he said, 'where is He? Where is the Authority?'

Scatha's giggles transformed into howls of laughter.

Even now Anubis shuddered at the memory. Yet, it was the image of Scatha seated upon the throne that had spurred his instincts. It was the shadow of the Authority that kept order in the Republic. The Republic needed the Authority. They would accept him; after all, he was a hero. The Republic's great Lord Marshall, Anubis, ascended to the seat of Authority. Yes, he would bring order and true justice, and be a figure of inspiration. He stepped up to the empty throne and turned and sat.

The seat was wide and cold and hard. He had to stretch his arms wide apart to even rest his hands upon the armrests. The backrest was too far back for him to recline against. He would have it replaced with a seat of more proper proportions. Beneath the passionless face of his helm, Anubis smiled.

*Anubis, the Authority.*

## **MANY MEETINGS**

The senators shuffled into the room with the slow bewilderment of people lost in a strange dream. Chairs had been arranged before Anubis in two rows of fifteen and they took their places in silence like schoolchildren, waiting to be admonished. The room Anubis had chosen was long and high-ceilinged but very narrow, the windowless, wood-panelled walls giving the perception of being trapped in a box.

Anubis let them sit and wait for a while and watched them twitch and shudder under the scrutiny of the guards lined up behind them, until the smell of their fear and sweat suffused itself with the smell of the polished wood. Finally, he decided to enter.

A panel on the wall before them slid open and Anubis stepped out, wearing what he hoped was a charming smile.

‘Senators,’ he said, ‘I am honoured by your presence.’

‘What is the meaning of this?’ said a senator, his eyes aflame with indignation as he stood up. Others followed his lead and stood also, echoing his demand for answers like swimmers coming up for gulps of air. Indignation was something familiar to them, practised as it was in the senate house on a regular basis. ‘The senate has been the centrepiece of governance across the empire for centuries. You can’t dissolve its powers. The people will not stand for this.’

‘Sit down, senators,’ said Anubis. As an afterthought, he added, ‘please.’

He stood with hands clasped behind his back and patiently waited for them to adhere. Seeing him unresponsive to their cries of disbelief, they reluctantly took their seats and waited for him to speak.

‘Very good,’ said Anubis. ‘Now . . . this is not a debate. You are no longer ministers. So please, for your own safety, do not speak unless expressly told to do so. I have never been fond of politicians and do not want to converse with you for any longer than necessary.’

‘And yet you desire to become one,’ said the senator who had first spoken. ‘By giving yourself and your subordinates control over all affairs of state, by launching this ill-advised coup, you have entered the political arena.’

Anubis stared at the man. Senator Borhen had an incredibly serious face, with round bird-like eyes. The man was showing more backbone than sense. Anubis wondered how he had remained a senator, let alone a government minister for so long.

‘I assure you, senator, that the coup and subsequent dissolution of certain governmental bodies have been not only carefully calculated, but have also been necessary steps for the survival of the state.’

Borhen raised his eyebrows at this but did not interrupt, allowing Anubis to further explain.

‘The fact of the matter is,’ said Anubis, ‘the previous regime was a divisive and corrupt one. It did not allow any true opposition and used religious rhetoric to justify its tyranny and oppression of the very minorities upon whose labour and sacrifice this theocracy was formed.’

‘Lord Marshall,’ again Borhen interrupted, ‘are you not also trying to justify what is essentially an illegal act by couching it in the religious rhetoric? You have replaced elected officials with an illegitimate cabinet, headed by you, an illegitimate Authority.’

There were nods of heads and murmurs of agreement from the senators. Anubis forced his lips back into a smile. It did not come so easy this time. He ignored Borhen and instead addressed the whole group.

‘Senators, this is a critical stage we are passing through, one in which we either succumb to more violence and chaos, or move toward stability and resurgence.’

*Authority preserve*, he thought, amused by the notion that he was praying to himself, *I’m beginning to sound like a damn politician.*

'I can understand many of you have qualms about the current state of affairs in such a fluid and ever evolving situation. But I assure you that this is merely a transitional phase, and I am willing to offer concessions to reassure you of the legitimacy of everything that I have done.

'Gentlemen, I hold you in high regard, and while the dissolution of the senate was unfortunately a necessary step, I know that there is no future for this republic without your commitment and support. I am sure we here can come to some preliminary agreements which will bring us toward your reinstatements . . . or perhaps even promotion to higher posts.'

Even Borhen sat down. Anubis watched with amusement and disgust as the politicians' minds began to shift gears and look for opportunities.

#

'How went your taming of the politicians?' asked Vendis with a growl of laughter.

'It's not nice to laugh at the misfortune of others,' replied Anubis.

They sat along a triangular table in what was once the chamber of the Supreme Council. The debris had been swept away and new furniture brought in to replace what was damaged. The mirrored columns had not been repaired however and the cracked and broken glass showed warped and strange reflections. Incense burned in pots placed in every corner of the room, filling it with the smell of Agar wood. Its smoky haze made the place feel more like a temple which was, Anubis felt, proper.

'Do we have them?' asked Scatha.

'Most, I should think,' said Anubis. 'I'm not sure about Borhen. That one is hard to read and seems to have the cold-blooded nature of a snake. There is greed there, to be sure, but whether it is enough is anyone's guess.'

'Then let us assume we have them and turn our efforts to the Mob,' said Scatha. 'Public opinion is crucial; a state lives and, eventually, dies by it. If we engage with the Street directly, we will be seen more favourably.'

‘You make it sound like the ‘Street’ is one monolithic entity, Scatha,’ said Tyr. ‘It is not.’

‘Perhaps it is,’ said Anubis. ‘I agree with the gist of what Scatha says. The people have only seen violence these last few weeks, violence and chaos and oppression. It’s time we showed them something else.’

‘You have something in mind?’ asked Vendis.

Anubis nodded his head. He had been thinking of this since before they entered the city, remembering the old ‘Summer’s End’ festivals from his youth.

‘We mark a day of celebration, an empire-wide celebration to mark the end of tyranny. And we give this city a spectacle the like of which it has not seen since the days of Osu – a day of parades and exhibitions and festivities.’

Anubis carefully studied their reactions. Scatha and several others seemed enthused. Yet a minority of his followers did not take to the idea as fervently. *It’s never simple is it*, he mused.

‘Tyr, you do not seem as keen, or is it just that your seat is uncomfortable?’ There was a round of polite laughter at his jest; Tyr’s look of disconcertion only seemed to deepen.

‘My lord, I do not believe this to be the wisest course of action. This city has bled for these last weeks, taken many wounds. It is too soon for celebrations and ceremonies, don’t you think? My advice is that we mark tomorrow as a day of remembrance and give the city time to heal, because celebrating so soon after such loss is akin to pouring salt upon wounds.’

*Perhaps he is right.* Tyr had often been a level-headed voice of reason – cautious and world-weary to be sure, yet always persuasive in his logic. Perhaps it was too soon. After all, a lot of lives had been lost . . .

‘All this talk of wounds and healing,’ said Scatha, addressing everyone before turning to glare at Tyr. ‘Perhaps you should have been a field surgeon.’ She turned back to address the rest of Anubis’ council, ‘Besides, staying with your analogy, if we wait any longer I should think the

wound is going to fester rather than heal. We need to act quickly, and act now – as we did with the senators. Redirect public emotion and opinion towards optimism and achievement.

‘The way Lord Tyr speaks you would think the Authority called for displays of garish –’

‘Garish or sombre,’ Tyr interrupted her, ‘the tone matters not. It is unfeasible to expect people to react positively when we declare celebrations of our victory so soon in the face of their personal tragedies.’

It was Anubis' turn to interrupt him. ‘We will be celebrating *their* sacrifices, *their* loved ones. It will be a celebration of their achievements, of their status as martyrs.’

‘Couch it in whatever terms you want,’ said Tyr. ‘It may not be seen that way.’

‘Yes . . .’ said Scatha, nodding sagely, ‘if they were all born pessimists like you, Tyr Urizen.’

‘No,’ said Anubis, ‘I’ve made my decision. We go ahead with the celebrations; we have no time to be constrained by nets of caution. Let us move on to other matters.’

He turned to Scatha. ‘The Psy-Ops divisions are to relay the new state of affairs to all provinces across the Empire. Send a separate message to our garrisons to carefully monitor the reaction of local dignitaries and quickly depose of any showing rebellious tendencies.’

‘Rebellious tendencies,’ said Scatha, raising a brow, ‘that is a pretty broad description.’

‘I find myself in agreement with Scatha,’ spoke Vendis. ‘Too many officers may see this as a means of settling personal vendettas.’

‘Perhaps they will; perhaps they won’t,’ replied Anubis. His head was beginning to hurt, a dull throbbing behind his right eye. *I don’t need you second guessing me, damn it*, he thought. *I need things done. It wasn’t like this when I was Lord Marshall. Speed is a necessity, why can’t you see it? I don’t want to end up mired in an empire-wide counter insurgency.*

‘Yes, Lord Marshall,’ said Vendis, bowing his head.

Had he spoken aloud? He was losing control.



‘I think that settles it then,’ he said. ‘You all have duties to attend to, so I’ll not keep you. We will convene here at this hour daily. If anything comes to your attention that requires more immediate answers, relay it to me through Psy-Ops. Dismissed.’

Chairs screeched as the generals and officers drew them back, a hum of private conversations began as they ambled out, as if the room had been holding its breath and now released it.

‘And one more thing,’ Anubis called out, rubbing a knuckle against his temple. ‘Have Psy-Ops relay the message that the Alpha Mould is dead – killed by me personally.’

Silence shot across the room like a crossbow bolt, hammering the far wall of the corridor and ricocheting back. Every head turned to gape, eyes wide, faces made disagreeable by their disbelief.

‘Oh, come - the thing was a fiction anyway, a lie made up by the Supreme Council - one that caused us all no end of grief. It is better to use it than to cast it aside. It is justice.’

At some point, he realised, he had begun to shout. The men still stood silent; still stared at him. *Judging* him.

‘You all have tasks to perform,’ he said in a more calm voice. ‘Don’t let me keep you here.’

The conversations resumed and they left the council chamber rather more quickly. Some people still lingered, to Anubis’ disappointment. Scatha and her first, the tall Psy-Opser who had entered the city with him, remained by the door, a vulpine smile playing across her face. Closer to him stood Tyr.

What does the old grey-beard want now?

‘Are you alright, old friend?’ Tyr asked.

Anubis was touched by the genuine concern in Tyr’s voice. The man was the first and possibly most loyal of his followers, though sometimes he made it very hard to remember that. *Still, I can be kind to him. I owe him that much.*

‘Fine . . . just tired, I think. That’s all, just tired. Why? You have something important to tell me that couldn’t be said before the council?’

‘No . . . well, yes. Why haven’t you summoned or even met with your wife? We have been here for three days now. Why haven’t you called her? Are you afraid?’

‘Yes,’ said Anubis, quietly so only Tyr would hear. Even as the words left his mouth he realised they were true. ‘Yes, I’m afraid of seeing the disappointment in her eyes when she sees what I have become. I have nothing to show for all my years away but scars. Yet if I can achieve here what I set out to do, what we set out to do, then perhaps I will be able stand before her unashamed.’

Tears threatened to escape the old man’s eyes. Looking past him, Anubis could see the other Psys-Opser had gone, and Scatha stood by herself. She met his gaze and nodded before slowly moving off.

‘You’ve no reason to be ashamed, lad.’

Anubis shifted his eyes and fixed them back upon Tyr. ‘Thank you, old friend. It means the world to me to hear you say that.’ He clasped Tyr’s shoulder briefly and smiled. ‘Go, Tyr, you have important affairs to attend, as do I.’

Tyr left and Anubis stood alone in the chamber. His eyes caught his reflection in one of the shattered columns. The reflection’s head had swelled well out of proportion. He looked away. An incredible amount of anxiety welled up and threatened to drown him. *I’ve been hiding behind duty too long*, he thought. *She’ll know, no doubt, that I’ve returned, but how can I tell her everything? How can I tell her that everything has changed? How can I repay her faithfulness with revelations of betrayal? She will see.*

He stood there awhile, alone with his morphed reflections, lost in thought. He was beginning to consider sending an escort to bring her to the palace, when a young officer entered the chamber and approached with a load of files in her hands. He had seen her before somewhere.

'Reports from the frontier cities, Lord Marshall,' she said. Thus far only Scatha had adopted the use of the title 'Authority' for him. *She's probably waiting for me somewhere*, he remembered. He chuckled at the thought.

'Sir?' the soldier questioned.

Anubis shook his head and dismissed her, gratefully settling down to pore over the details and pushing his domestic affairs to the back of his mind. He decided they could all be dealt with after the public celebrations.

#

Cora watched in disgust as people milled about the square, placing wreaths and garlands around soldiers' necks. Others clapped and chanted patriotic slogans, and sang in praise of Anubis and the Ever Victorious. Much of the debris, dropped flags and torn banners, sticks, stones and the other flotsam left in the aftermath of the riot, had been cleared up. Much of the graffiti that had defaced the public buildings had been scrubbed clean. The blood remained though, in dried brown patches across the floor of the square. In between the sweat and stink of living humanity, you could smell it.

Cora's face had swelled up, the bruises rising purple and ugly, squeezing one eye completely shut. Children openly stared at him in grim fascination. His left arm had been splintered and tied to his side so it would move as little as possible. He had taken to wearing a cloak to cover up his disability. It was hooded, but he never wore the hood. *I look fiendish enough without it*, he thought.

He made his way through the early morning throngs at a snail pace, ever careful to avoid brushing his broken arm against anything. A group of Ever Victorious soldiers were stood around one of the few stalls up and running in these cold early hours, flirting with the young woman who stood behind it. The sound of their laughter was a harsh bark to his ears. *Half-animal scum*, he thought. The Ever Victorious had become the city's law enforcers in the days after the violent coup. Packs of them stalked the streets, discouraging the types of gatherings that formed mobs during the civil unrest.

Cora stopped and frowned at them, even though it made his head hurt to do so. A few of the soldier looked at the disfigured old man and then at each other and laughed once more. Their sergeant, a squat man with a face like a bulldog, was leaning across the stall murmuring something to the young woman who blushed in return. Cora felt the bile rise in his throat. It was men like these soldiers who had brutalised and killed Hanna and Mia.

‘Move along, old man,’ said one of the animals, his stern gaze fixed on Cora.

Cora turned away and continued on. He was not yet ready for confrontations.

People flocked back to the square and the thoroughfares as the day progressed. It was a weak effort to return to normality and their old lives, before the revolution. Cora wandered idly among them, moving along from stall to booth, counted the little few who had returned and the many who had stayed away. Each person he met recounted horrors to him, spoke of the loved ones they had lost, of the abuse they had suffered at the hands of the security forces. And he told them of what they had done to his girls.

Cora was shocked to learn celebrations had been organised by the Lord Marshal. Parades and firework displays had been arranged for the next three nights and days.

It seemed funeral processions were streaming out from every area and every corner of the city. There were so many dead that people were forced to wait in line or bury their dead in mass graves. Most had opted for the former. And while the citizenry mourned, the rulers wanted to gloat their triumph. There was an ugly mood in the air. Republic City bristled with anger. And Cora felt so much a part of it. For most his life he had been an observer, separate and remote even, living so firmly among the masses. But today he felt part of a whole, a single emotion; a single resentment. He was no longer afraid.

On the Street of Jewellers he met Jo the Butcher. A tall, barrel-chested man, the Butcher had been a prize-fighter of some renown in his prime. He was an acquaintance of Cora’s, a regular customer of his coffee shop, but he met Cora today as if he had come across his long lost brother.

‘Cora!’ he shouted out. The Butcher embraced him and Cora felt as if he had been enveloped by a bear. ‘I almost didn’t recognise you there. But you’re just the type of man we need.’

‘It is good to see you alive and well too, Jo, but whatever are you talking about?’

The Butcher clamped a hand down on his shoulder, ‘There’s a gathering taking place of respectable community figures and . . . well . . . they seemed to think it prudent to include an old bruiser like me too. Good, respectable men and womenfolk like you will all there. Well, men like you, not womenfolk like you.” He grinned. “You should be there too. They’re hoping to begin positive discussions and the like, get things moving and start rebuilding.’ He squeezed Cora’s shoulder. ‘You should come,’ he said one last time, before heading off through the hustle and bustle, no doubt to spread the message along to other ‘respectable’ people.

Cora stood still among the heaving mass of the busy street, lost in thought. *Perhaps I can make some use of this. Perhaps the people will decide the city’s fate.*

#

The gathering was unusually quiet, sombre. Men and women spoke in low whispers in groups of two or three, taking comfort in the proximity of known faces and casting furtive glances now and then toward people sitting at the other sides of the square. They were the influential ones, the people who had gained reputation and respect across the districts of the city as people worth listening to, yet no one was willing just yet to step forward and speak.

The chosen location for the meeting was a simple hall set at the end of the Merchant quarter, just where the residential district known as the Crow quarter began, and was used in better times as a school. It had been unused in weeks, the streets far too dangerous for children to travel, yet it still carried the air of hope and optimism that the school always had for Cora. The broad, colourful paintings of children plastered two of the walls in overlapping layers of sunshine and rainbows. A third wall held a stout, well used blackboard, and the smell of chalk dust permeated the air. Old, worn looking benches made of pine, their surfaces smoothed from decades of use, had been rearranged into a square around which the people sat or stood.

Cora sighed and looked about at the people gathered. Though they had come from far and wide across the entire city, he was surprised to see he recognised more than he did not. The tall, imposing baker, Big Red, whose freckles failed to either soften or hide her stern iron-like features. Cora had made the mistake once of entering her bakery to browse some of the products. He had ended up leaving weak-kneed and signed up to a long term contract which made Big Red his main supplier. She had a sharp tongue and a sharper wit and would oft-times dominate any gathering she took part in, yet today she seemed subdued and heart-broken. She sat hunched forward, staring at her feet, merely answering with a nod or a shake of head to any greeting or question directed at her. Her son was a student at the university and had been among the first protesters against the High Council. He had gone missing three weeks ago.

Old Graves, the poet, had made an appearance. Unusually sober, and yet still smelling like he had soaked himself in piss or ale, head turned sideways, moving his hearing horn to and fro as if he were trying to pick up some hidden sound or, more likely, listen to every conversation at once. The Rodelo brothers who ran the Inn of Sinners on Victory rode, leaned against the far wall and nodded at Cora as their gazes met. Dasegai, the self-titled 'Merchant-Prince', whose dark skin and lavish use of ivory marked him as a man from the Far West, yet who had lived in Republic City for as long as anyone could remember. Lukyan, Salva, Ordan and Bendigo, Wynn, Alupa, and Jo the Butcher; all familiar faces, some of whom came and greeted Cora or offered their condolences. But there was no smiling or joking or laughing, even amongst those who considered themselves friends. There would not be for a long time.

The door to the hall shut with the thudding finality of the last nail in a coffin. The whispers stopped and a hush settled over the gathering. Makdus, the man who had closed it, purposefully walked out into the centre of the square. Those gathered watched with anticipation, the steady tap of his boots against the hard stone floor and the restrained swishing of his senator's robes the only sound. He stopped in the centre and took his time to slowly turn full circle, his eyes roving across the crowd seeming to make eye contact with everyone. He was a tall, grey-eyed man with a melancholy visage, whose honey-tongued eloquence had seen him rise far above his Crows Quarter beginnings. Until a week ago he had

been a senator and representative of the people. That status had been taken from him within a day of the Meld-born, Ever Victorious taking control of the city. However, he had served the people long before he had become a senator, and seemed to want to continue serving them now he no longer was.

‘Evidently,’ he began, the words flowing with the precise coherence of a man long used to public speaking, ‘those who would be here with us today are here already, and no else will come to attend. I believe it is time we made a start.’

Talk began of the losses and damage done to the city, people taking turns to take the floor and express their opinions on what could be done to help families and communities rebuild. Cora, for the most part, drifted in and out of attention, lost in his thoughts. So many properties had been destroyed. So many people had been hurt or injured. It seemed the fury of the mobs had caused more grief to the people than the state. *Yet if we let this moment pass*, he thought, *we will simply have let the cycle of oppression continue anew.*

‘And what’s to be done about this new so-called government?’

Cora’s ears perked at this remark, bringing him back from his pondering to focus on the speaker. It was Belar, the elder of the Rodelos. There was a general mutter of discontent through the audience; they seemed to be a consensus that the soldiers had done more harm than good. Cora listened intently.

‘Can we really let an army, especially *this* army rule over us?’ Belar continued, ‘I mean, they’re Meld-born. Made from the blood of animals. Can animals rule over men?’

Many spoke up now to voice their agreement. Makdus stood once again to take the floor, hands raised, calling for quiet.

‘Dear friends,’ he pleaded, ‘dear friends, please. We are here to discuss the social issues, and community regeneration. Let us not turn this into a dangerously political debate –’

‘And what of the Lord Marshall Anubis,’ said Big Red, standing for the first time. Makdus gestured for her to sit down and wait, but she ignored him and instead turned to face those

crowded along the benches. Cora allowed himself a brief smile. 'He's claimed to be the Authority. Does he think taking this city raises him from half-animal to half-god?'

More shouts of approval came at this statement, as well as more questions. What had happened to the real Authority? Had he deserted his people? Had Anubis managed to kill a god – their god? Cora could feel the blood racing through the veins of his chest. Perhaps he would not have to speak. The crowd seemed to feel as he felt. *The people will rise up against this monster*, he thought, *they know it is what must be done*.

'He claims Godhood!'

'Half-animal, Meld-born bastards -'

'They stole the People's Revolution!'

Cora waited, leaning forward, perched at the edge of his seat. They were at the very crest of it now. Surely they would reach the same conclusion he had already in his heart.

Makdus spoiled the gathering's momentum. A brief lull in the voices were all he required, his own voice ringing out like a clarion. Cora's hopes shrivelled with each pronouncement.

'Hold your peace, dear friends,' he said. '*Hold your peace*. Have you heard yourselves? Have you listened to the madness you speak? You cry out against the tyranny of these soldiers, this army, because they overthrew rulers with whom we had become repulsed. Yet who here would rather see the theocrats – the Supreme Council return?'

The crowd quietened, exchanging uneasy glances.

'It is true that we had hoped to rise up and take control of our futures. I, like you all, feel that our moment of revolution was usurped by these Meld-born. But what do you suggest we do? Take up arms against the greatest army in history? I have as much cause as any of you, and if it were possible, I would be the first to stand against the usurpation of this great city and empire. I would be the first to raise my fist.' He shook his head then, and smiled, a benevolent teacher rebuking his pupils. 'Except, I do not see how we possibly could. No. Let us rebuild our lives now



and let this storm settle behind us. Who knows? Perhaps if we give these Meld-born the time and chance to see reason, they will relinquish the state, see the madness of what they do. Let us continue rebuilding. We have already lost too much.'

Cora stood, not waiting for the murmured responses of agreement which were quickly beginning to swell. He had to speak *now*. Makdus had led the gathering far away from the road he had hoped they would walk. Whatever chance he had to turn them back to it was now, else they were lost.

'Makdus is a wise and honourable man,' he said. Makdus bowed his head in his direction, still wearing that teacher's smile. 'Makdus is wise and honourable, to be sure, yet I must speak against him today.'

'He speaks of loss. But what has he lost compared to others here? His political position? The status that went with it? What is that loss compared with those who lost their closest and most dear? What is that loss compared to Big Red's, who does not know whether her son lies in some cell or lies dead? What is it compared to Alupa, who watched as her husband was killed by the merciless hands of our so-called saviours? What is it to my loss? My Hanna was taken from me by the old regime and her dogs. My Mia was taken from me by the dogs that make up the new one.'

There was little response, save a few nods of heads. But he had their attention. Many had lost loved ones and his words resonated with what they felt. He pressed on, sensing his opportunity, words tumbling out, driven on by his outrage.

'I crossed much of the city to be with you today. I walked its streets and avenues this morning to be *here* today. And what did I see? Squads of soldiers patrolling everywhere, at every corner, watching us with their inhuman eyes like prison wardens.'

'And now, affront upon affront, they have declared three days of *celebration*, honouring themselves and their victories while we in the city mourn for our dead. They would have me *celebrate* the *bastards* that killed my Mia. We are at a pivotal moment in history, and there is no denying that what we choose to do right now will either be praised or cursed by generations

to come. We have a choice: either we watch as these sons of rats and pigs take what they will and crush all we hold dear underfoot, or raise our voices together as one until our cries for justice and the right to self-govern are heard by those seated in the high halls of power.

‘Will we allow history to pass us by? Will we allow this opportunity to fade? Will we allow our situation to regress back to state control and aggression? Will we forget the *hundreds* of Mias and Hannas that died in this city we call home, so we can live as loyal pets and make gods of dogs?’

For a brief moment, he thought he had them. Some had stood up during his speech, stomping their boots on the hard floor in a show of approval. He looked around from face to face, but none was willing to meet his eye. *They are still too afraid*, he thought – knew. Despair clawed at his chest.

It was Big Red who finally spoke, her voice unusually subdued. ‘We can’t, Cora. We hear what you say and, for the most part, agree . . . but we can’t. We lost much but we still have our lives, still have some precious things worth protecting.’ She shook her head. ‘We can’t afford to lose anymore.’

‘The lady is right, friend,’ said Bendigo, who had sat in silence throughout the meeting. He straightened his hat and stood to address the crowd. Cora thought it peculiar that of all people there, Bendigo the teacher looked least comfortable and the most out of place in the setting of the school. ‘As she says,’ Bendigo said, ‘there is still so much that could be lost. We won’t build a future for our children by leaving them as orphans.’

There were many shouts of approval at this, and Bendigo seemed to preen under the roars of support. Cora wiped his forehead with an old kerchief, brow furrowed as he stared unseeing at the floor. There were a few more people who stood prattled about how ‘they had lost too much’, but Cora ignored them. The matter was already decided.

‘Cora?’ It was Makdus who spoke, looking sympathetic. He wore the mask well. ‘Do you have anything further you want to add to the debate, or shall we let the matter pass?’

Cora looked up. The whole gathering was focused in his direction. 'You're all too afraid,' he said. Some stood immediately to rebuff this accusation, those who still had enough fire in their bellies to not like being called cowards. Cora waved an arm at them, telling them to sit. 'It's okay,' he said, 'I don't begrudge you for it. You see, I know a bit about cowardice myself. I can tell you fear and cowardice are like a rockslide or an avalanche. One cowardly decision leads to another, and another – until your whole life is gone and you are left with your head buried in the dirt, waiting for the rest of your body to follow . . . Until a week ago, I had *my* head buried in the dirt, thinking myself safe because no one wastes their time on a coward, and they took my girls from me whilst I wasn't looking.' He shook his head, his eyes scanning their faces for a man or woman willing to meet his gaze and finding none. Not even Jo. 'You keep telling each other how you've lost too much. Perhaps the truth of it is that you haven't lost enough.'

'I've already decided what I have to do. Maybe, when you've had time to think it over yourselves, you'll come to the same conclusion. I, for one, will not let the Anubis morph this city into his version of a perfect republic. He's Meld-born, crossbred only for war. How do you think such a warped mind sees civilisation? Is that the future you want, the Authority you want?'

'Regardless of the futility of my actions, I promise you that in three days, at the close of these celebrations, I will march on the imperial palace – alone if I must, along the very route that this dictator used to lead his legions into the city.'

Silence met his final statement, so complete that noises from the street across the yard drifted into the hall. Cora turned on his heel and strode out with the slow, sombre steps of a man walking to his funeral.

## **LONG WALK TO FREEDOM**

Cora stood on Kharne Street by the gates where Anubis had entered from, and wondered where everyone was. The street was always busy, especially at this time of day. There were usually throngs of people packed into the wide avenue as they entered or left the city, forcing one to wade instead of walk through the mass of humanity. Stalls should have been lining its sides, private sellers pushing through the crowds to steal customers from stall owners, children squeezing between the hundreds of adults to pick pockets, stealing from buyers and sellers alike. But today Kharne Street was empty. Word had spread through the city that Cora meant to march on the palace. Perhaps they too had simply not lost enough. He sighed, wondering how much more people had left to lose.

The dusty kerchief he mopped across his brow smeared the sweat rather than wiping it off. He had only walked to the starting point from his house, yet already he stank of sweat. *With the people or without them, I will march*, he thought. He looked around one last time. The street was empty, save the flies his own stench had attracted. Tucking the kerchief into his belt he shrugged and set off.

Once he started, it did not take long before he felt the eyes upon him. They were watching him from the windows and the doors. He thought he could hear them whispering too, though no matter how much he strained his ears he could not make out any words. *Let them watch*, he told himself. *I am beyond caring*. As he made his way down the street, the feeling of being watched did not leave him. If anything, it grew more intense. Cora wiped his brow again. At the very least what he did and what was done to him would be witnessed and remembered. Perhaps he would become an anecdote for why the Authority should never be questioned. Again, he told himself he was beyond caring. He ignored the small voice in the back of his mind that said he was lying.

There was no one on the second street or the third. On the fourth street a stray dog joined him.

'See the courage of this dog!' he cried out to his hidden neighbours, his heart shaking at the temerity of his words even as he spoke them. 'Do you see? Even this stray dog is fed up with the rule of his cousin, the Authority.'

The dog sniffed at his hand and walked beside him, then after a minute or so peeled away and padded into an adjacent alleyway. Cora walked on alone, less sure than ever, still afraid, though he denied it, and almost ready to give up. Even a stray dog had more sense than him. What was he doing walking the streets alone?

On the fifth street he came upon a group of children playing and he almost faltered mid-stride. He had not realised how lonely he felt walking the city alone. As he drew near he found that he recognised them. He had seen them playing on this very same street before the world had gone mad. They stopped their games and stared at him with mouths agape. Cora had the feeling that they had chosen to play on this street to get a look at the fool who marched on the Ever Victorious. The boy that had first told him about the Ever Victorious arriving in the city was there too. He nodded his head at Cora. Cora grinned, trying to exude a confidence he did not feel. *They will remember what I did. Perhaps they will tell stories of Cora, the man that defied the Authority and went to war against the Ever Victorious. Yes, Cora, and maybe they will not laugh as much on the sixth or seventh telling.*

Cora marched on . . . and the children did too. Cora looked around and found that every one of the boys and girls had joined him. He fought back tears that threatened to shatter the image of bravery he hoped he was projecting. They were walking with him.

'What are you doing?' he asked them. 'Go back to your games. Go. You are too young.'

They just laughed. One of them, a girl no taller than his hip, reached up and took his hand. She smiled up at him and he could not help but smile back. They began to chant slogans from the protests against the Supreme Council, changed to refer to Anubis' new regime. Cora found himself joining in, taking strength from their youthful enthusiasm. He scooped a small boy up onto his shoulders as they marched and took hold of another boy's hand.

They passed onto the long, curving avenue which led to the crossroads where the citizens and the garrison had clashed. These days the garrison house was manned by soldiers of the Ever Victorious, rather than a constabulary. Cora got a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. He had already been assaulted once on those very streets by men garrisoned in that same building. The first time he had come marching with thousands of angry people. This time he came with a dozen children.

'At the first sign of trouble,' he warned his young companions, 'you run. If they leave the garrison house, turn away and run as fast and as far as you can. I don't want your innocent blood on my hands.'

The soldiers watched as Cora and the children approached. An Ever Victorious flag hung idly above the street in the windless air. Cora's throat was dry. Two men stood on guard outside, another three were playing a game of cards around a table by the wall. The children seemed oblivious to the danger despite Cora's warning and were chanting anti-legion slogans at the tops of their high-pitched voices. As Cora's small group passed by the front of the garrison house, one of the guards peeled away from the doors and approached. Cora tried to subtly increase the pace they were walking at.

'You kids marching on the palace?' asked the guard.

Before Cora could reply, one of the children said, 'We're going to tell Anubis what we think of him!'

'Well,' said the guard, looking over his shoulder at his companion, 'I hope he doesn't shit it too much, because I'd hate to get called in to face you savages on the field.'

All five guards burst into laughter and Cora nervously joined in. He was happy to be the butt of their jokes if it meant getting by them without costing the lives of these children. One of the card-playing men added, 'Hey, old man, could you spare some men to buffer the border patrols out west, I hear our neighbours are getting edgy.'

Cora listened to their jokes and laughter until his small group was out of sight of the guards. It took him another minute or so to steady his nerves. They followed the curve of the road until it opened up on Gomi Square. With its wide open area and the public buildings that surrounded it, Gomi Square had been a place where families came to be together and have fun before the rioting and the coup changed all of that. The square had been alive with puppet shows, circus troupes, jesters and wandering magicians, and dozens of stalls selling a rich variety of food and drink. After the coup people did not see much point in coming to see acrobats, fools and fire-swallowers, and the activities that brought the square alive had suddenly stopped and left behind an empty open space where none ventured when the sun set. However, today the square was not empty.

Today there were more than two hundred people gathered, carrying banners and waving flags. Cora could not believe what he was seeing. Hope blossomed in his chest and quickly sprouted through every fibre in his body, causing his limbs to tremble. He quickened his pace and the children began to chant with renewed vigour. The crowd gathered on the street joined in and Cora found himself shouting loudest of all.

As they reached the crowd that had been waiting for their arrival, Cora recognised the men and women he had raged at days ago. His heart soared with joy and what had been a foolish and pointless walk to the palace mere moments ago became a real possibility of being heard. A small part of him even saw a chance to make an actual difference to people's lives.

Jo the Butcher smiled, the gap-toothed expression slightly comical on his face. 'You didn't think we'd let you get beaten up and arrested all by yourself, did you?'

Cora did not know what to say, so he simply embraced the man.

They were all there: Big Red, Wynn, Alupa, the Rodelos – even senator Makdus was present, looking wise as he leaned on his walking staff.

'I don't understand,' said Cora. 'You're all here – I mean, what changed your minds?'

'Your courage,' said Big Red.

‘Aye, your courage, old man,’ agreed Jo.

As the crowd set out towards the imperial palace, they were slowly joined by streams of people made bold by the defiance of Cora and what was already being referred to by everyone as the True People’s Revolution. The word had gone out that they were marching on the palace, and the people had answered.

#

‘We are not having this discussion again,’ snapped Anubis. ‘Always I hear the same arguments from you, Tyr. There are times when I wonder if Scatha is more man than you are, or if you are just more of a woman.’

The moment the words left his mouth, he regretted them. Tyr was his longest serving general and only Scatha herself was more trusted than he was. It had been a poor choice of words.

‘I very much doubt that, Lord Marshall,’ said General Tyr.

He was about to snarl a reply, but kept his peace instead. He could let it slide this once. He deserved it after what he had said to the man who had spent a lifetime fighting by his side. They sat opposite each other by a fire place in a reception chamber they had never been in before, a *chatarang* board between them. It was Anubis' move, but he could not decide on what to do next whilst Tyr continued to complain.

‘Lord Marshall – Anubis, please, look at how powerful you have allowed her to become in so little time,’ said Tyr after a long silence. ‘Not a year ago she was captain of Psy-Ops, an able leader of her divisions, true, but hardly influential. Now? Now she is the Authority’s liaison with the army *and* what’s left of the senate. No one person has ever held so much power over the empire since its very beginning, other than the Authority, Osu and you yourself. You have let her get too close, and you do not see it. She influences your decisions more and more, and you do not see it. She was amongst your least trusted advisers in the field and has now become your sole trusted adviser, and *you do not even see it*. That woman may have cat’s blood, my



friend, but behind those smiling lips she has the fangs of a viper. Do not let her sink her teeth into you.'

*Too late for that*, thought Anubis even as he said aloud, 'I'm well aware of her progress these last few months, general, and it is a testament to her abilities and talents, her hard work and her *loyalty*. I will not have my inner circle bickering amongst themselves like spoiled children whilst I try to maintain order in my Empire.'

Tyr said nothing and stared down at the board. Satisfied that he had quelled Tyr's baseless warnings for the moment, he turned his mind back to the game. It was going well. Tyr had lost most of his best pieces, and Anubis had even managed to promote one of his, making it a second queen. He had two queens on the board, though the original was pinned on his side and not really in play. It did not matter: they had reached the end game and Anubis could make do without that piece and win with his second queen and *ruk**h*. He was about to make his move when Tyr spoke again.

'How is your wife, Lord Marshall? I have not seen her around the palace.'

Anubis paused. 'Well enough, I should think.' He moved his *ruk**h* into position to attack Tyr's dark priest. The priest could not move as it was protecting the king, and though Anubis would lose the *ruk**h* in the next move, his new queen would win the game.

Tyr looked up and met Anubis' gaze for a moment. 'She will be wondering why you haven't called her to the palace. Every other soldier in the legion sought out their spouse or lover within days of arrival. After so long on the front lines . . . men and women always seek the company of their other.'

Anubis' face became taut and he sat very still. 'What are you trying to say?' he snarled, standing up so suddenly that his chair fell away.

*You know what he is saying because it is true*, said a small voice in his head.

Tyr said nothing. He calmly looked down at the board, which served only to infuriate Anubis more, and then moved his one remaining *ruk**h*. 'Mate,' was his only reply.

Anubis tore his eyes from Tyr and looked down at the board. Tyr's *ruk*h was attacking his king. The king, surrounded by pawns and a second *ruk*h, could not move. Anubis had never lost to Tyr before. Never.

'Well played, General,' said Anubis, glaring at Tyr through narrowed eyes. 'We have had enough of games, anyway. I have an assignment for you. You are to take the Beast Corps out into the country to perform military drills and exercises. Their lack of discipline has caused much of the discontent in this city. We cannot have them sitting outside the city forever. They are already causing problems in the countryside. The Dauntless will go with you for now to keep the Beast Corps in check, but you are to choose and mentor a suitable successor to your generalship during your time there. You leave *immediately*. Further orders such as how long you are to continue these drills and the logistics will be delivered to you in the field.'

Tyr's mouth fell open. 'Lord Marshall, you cannot be serious.'

'I am very serious, General.'

'I am your oldest and longest-serving companion. We have been friends since you were but a pup. Sending me away is a mistake.' Tyr's pleading tone, and the genuine tears that threatened the old man's eyes, struck Anubis deep. 'Please,' Tyr begged, 'reconsider.'

*What am I doing?*

The words spilled out of their own volition. He had no more control over them than Tyr did. 'You *are* my oldest General. You were my friend all throughout my years in the legions and my command in the Ever Victorious. But the Authority has no friends and never has. And I am now the Authority. An old general deserves an easy post, an old friend a place to retire. You have both. This is my final decision. The Authority has spoken.'

*There was Osu, Anubis. Osu was named Friend of the Authority.*

'Sir,' said Tyr, his voice hardly holding. He saluted Anubis with a hand that shook with emotion.

Anubis returned the salute and was more successful in hiding his own emotions.

Tyr turned to leave and strode towards the elaborately carved wooden doors at the far side of the room. He threw them open, but then stopped and turned back.

'Is there something else, General?' said Anubis, his voice barely above a whisper.

'Yes, Authority, there are two things I would say, if I may?'

His use of the title was like a hot poker against Anubis' heart. They had lost something in this room that they would never get back. 'You may.'

'To Anubis, the boy I once taught and my dearest friend, I would say this: meet with your wife and rekindle what you once had. Human she may be, but her family fought long for the rights of the Meld-born and it is unfair to wait so long to acknowledge her presence here.'

Anubis nodded his head once. 'And the second?' he asked, his voice breaking.

'To the Lord Marshall of the Ever Victorious, the man I fought and bled alongside for many years, I would say this: it has been an honour and a privilege to serve you. I have nothing to say to the Authority.'

'Get out,' growled Anubis.

Tyr saluted once more and left. Anubis straightened out his chair and sat down staring at the *chatarang* board, studying it. Had he been looking at the entire board and all of the pieces, he would have seen the danger. He toppled the table with a roar, scattering game pieces into the fire.

He went to the fire place and leaned on the mantelpiece with both hands, staring down into the flames. *My first queen*, he thought.

Administrator Thull, a scrawny man with a twitchy nose and a voice that sounded as slimy as his palms were sweaty, arrived a short time later with word that an insurrection had taken place in one of the coastal cities which the garrisoned legion there had failed to quell. Thull lifted the table and reset it, leaving the *chatarang* board on the floor. He rolled out a map and Anubis walked over to join him. For the better part of an hour they talked about the worsening

situation on the coast and the need for more military support in the area. The problem was that the legions that Anubis felt he could rely on for such a task were already deployed in the field and spread thin. As Thull and Anubis were discussing viable options to buffer the legions on the coast, weighing the loyalty and martial prowess of one general over another, a young officer came in bearing news. She was completely out of breath.

'Lord Marshall?' said the woman from the doorway. 'Authority? Permission to-'

'What do you want?' said Anubis, turning to find a girl dressed in an officer's uniform she hardly filled. She was barely old enough to make it into the legion. They had not had any new recruits since the coup, so she must have joined the Ever Victorious months before they had marched on the capital. She had chosen a difficult time to be a soldier. For some reason, he did not recall her name though he recognised her face from somewhere. There was a time when he would have known exactly where he had last seen her and what her name was – perhaps even a few details about her. That was before his responsibilities had been increased from being the Lord Marshall of the Ever Victorious to the Authority of the Empire.

'There is a large protest in the city that is gathering momentum by the minute. They are marching on the palace and are nearly at the gates. What are our orders?'

Anubis scratched his chin. It had already been a long day. Between the morning he had spent with concerned senators, his argument with Tyr, and the news of the coast he already had enough on his mind.

'Place a company at the gates but do not engage them unless they attempt to enter the palace grounds. The last thing we want is another massacre in the city. They're just a vocal minority, nothing more. They will dissipate once they realise how ineffective their efforts are. And send word to General Vendis to report to this chamber at once.'

'Authority,' said the officer as she saluted, and left as quickly as she came.

Anubis sighed. He had had enough of war games for a few hours at least. He turned back to Thull and gestured to him to ready a quill and parchment. When he was ready, Anubis said,

'General Vendis and his Gold Swords are to lead a third of the Ever Victorious to the coast to quash all signs of rebellion. Ghazi and the Dread Company will go with them. The command will be Vendis's.'

When the document was written, Anubis signed it and added his seal to it. He then took his leave from Thull, citing a headache. In the passage he pulled up a servant and ordered her to find Director General Scatha and tell her to report to his chambers at once.

## **THE FANTASY OF DICTATORS**

Anubis sat upon the Throne of Authority, feeling like a fool in the too-big chair. It dwarfed him, made him feel insignificant and was uncomfortable to sit on. Yet more and more often he found himself alone here, sitting on the symbol of his power, squirming and fidgeting for a comfortable position. It was the farthest room from the site of the protests.

Such was their racket that he could hear their din even here. The distant clamour of drums and shouts had become as familiar as a heartbeat throughout the palace grounds. It had been several days now since they had begun their mummer's show, yet they showed no sign of abating, rather their numbers may have increased. The dull thud of crowd-clearing psionic blasts came every minute or so. Anubis sighed, remembering the fireworks and celebrations from weeks ago.

*Oh, but that was a good time,* he thought.

He had sat then as he did now, head against the throne's backrest, staring up through the room's three skylights, watching as complicated patterns of light spread across the night. The thud of the psionic blasts out beyond the palace sounded very similar to the eruptions of the waves of fireworks.

*Yes, the perfect end to the perfect day.* He closed his eyes, listening for the sound of them and for a moment he was there again.

The parade had been a success. The second and fourth legions of the Ever Victorious had marched through the city with much fanfare. Banners were unfurled from the roof of every public building, draped upon monuments, hung from the height of every tall bridge or archway. Anubis had never before seen so many waving flags, or so many onlookers crowded along every avenue and street. He had witnessed the triumph of the late General Bakhtyar as a lieutenant still in the training pens. Even that momentous occasion seemed like a minor procession compared to his celebrations.

And the fireworks!

They had begun just as dark first spread its cloak across the sky, and had continued on unending until after midnight. He could still hear the distant explosions, the thuds and bangs, as the throne room was lit in multiple hues and ever-changing patterns by display after dazzling display. *The people will remember these days forever*, he had thought. *Generations to come will speak of the day Anubis rose to the Throne of Authority. I wonder where Amalthea watched the fireworks from.*

Someone coughed and Anubis opened his eyes, the smile on his face quickly replaced by a grimace. The psionic blasts were still just that, blasts and not fireworks. Thull stood before him in a stooped way similar to how Tyr would stand at the end of a battle, filled with regret. He felt remorse threaten his own heart and snapped at Thull to counter it.

‘What is it?’

‘Lord Authority there are reports of famine reaching us from the Southern Reaches,’ Thull replied. ‘They have been in drought for months.’

‘So send them aid. Have three or four regiments escort a supply train south.’

‘Lord Authority . . .’ Thull wrung his hands. It was a pathetic gesture. ‘We cannot afford to allow any more soldiers to leave the city. How little we have are barely containing the protests.’

Anubis sighed and leaned back, closing his eyes again. ‘Send the men,’ he said. ‘I’ll not have children starve in my Republic.’

‘And the protesters? We can’t contain them!’

‘I will speak with them.’

‘What if they don’t want to listen?’

‘I will make them hear!’ he shouted. ‘Now go, fool, before I teach you how to speak to your superiors.’

Thull dropped to his knees. 'Forgive me, Lord Authority. I didn't mean to overstep.'

Anubis said nothing and the administrator quickly fled.

*I have let them grow bold, he thought, they challenged my right to rule and I have done nothing to respond. No longer . . . I shall make a display of my power, cow them, and show the people I am in control.*

#

Psy-Ops had scattered across the city. It was a great risk because the protesters now heavily outnumbered the palace's defenders. Until now they had remained largely peaceful, with only small pockets of violence. But if the majority attacked the gates, the palace would be overrun. What he was about to attempt had never been done before. There was also some risk to his own psyche too, but then he was used to risk.

Anubis stood before his throne with Scatha a step below him, eyes closed in concentration. It was the first time he had allowed her close to him since the night after his confrontation with Tyr. He had felt his shame anew when he awoke the following morning. Since that day he was overcome with anxiety just being near her. He hid his thoughts from her, carefully shielded in the manner she had taught him. He had been careless to do that before, not so now.

*After this is done I will call for Amalthea, or go to her myself and beg forgiveness.*

But first he had to deal with the protesters. He shifted from foot to foot, coming up off his toes - slightly unbalanced, and waiting for Scatha to give him the go ahead. He wiped the sheen of sweat from his forehead and rearranged his clothes again, tugging at his sleeves and straightening his collars.

'Are we ready?' he asked for the tenth or eleventh time.

'Almost,' she again replied.

*I should have let Thull write everything down, he thought again, by the time they're ready I'll have forgotten every damned word.*



'We are ready, Lord Authority,' said Scatha.

It came so abruptly that Anubis was caught off guard. His entire face felt aflame, as if it were being seared by lightning. And then he felt the touch of every mind across the city, he pervaded all thought. He was everyone and everything. Even as blood vessels exploded, and blood poured from his eyes, ears and nose, he felt exultant. Harnessing the power of his Psy-Ops forces, he would address the minds of the population directly.

*This is what true godhood feels like.*

#

Cora and a few others snaked through the vast crush of bodies, handing out bottles of water to the protesters. The sheer multitude of people in the plaza before the palace had raised the temperature to sweltering levels. Protesters had unfurled and hung huge banners from buildings all around the plaza and crowded on balconies and rooftops shouting encouragement to their comrades below. Everywhere Cora looked people were beating drums or chanting, or sitting on the few patches of scrubby grass waving Republic flags. Until a week ago, he couldn't have even imagined such numbers.

*And from so many different walks of life,* Cora mused. Rich, poor, young, old, male and female, it seemed all the citizenry of the city had been united in this cause.

Today the crowd had moved right up to the very gates of the imperial palace. There were no Psy-Opsers here to push them back with their migraine inducing psionic attacks. *Perhaps they've given up, now that they've realised we can't be frightened off.* As much as he liked the thought, he very much doubted. Some of the bolder protesters had even scrawled signs or slogans on the walls of the palace itself.

Cora turned to offer a bottle to a young woman, when the attack came.

Pain exploded behind his eyes, filled his head and drove him to his knees. Wave after wave of nausea ripped through him, his stomach churning, forcing him to wretch. All around him

people were on their knees, moaning and screaming. He noticed as someone threw themselves from a rooftop. The noise of the impact was drowned out by the cacophony of groans. Blood began to pour from every orifice, as if some unseen hand were squeezing him like fruit.

And then the vision came . . .

Anubis, face taut, stiff with rage, eyes blazing, standing before a great throne. He drummed his fist at Cora with every word he spoke, hammering it down at chest level to drive home the truth of every statement. Cora cowered before the angry deity that towered over him..

#

*My children, citizens and great people of this Republic. I have been following with great concern the events of recent days.*

*I speak to you at a critical point in this great republic's history, one that tests us all and threatens to sweep us beyond the borders of hope. We are living through painful days – days of fear, concern and anxiety over what tomorrow may bring. The previous weeks have been filled with loss, with great sacrifices that paved the way for a new beginning. Yet now we must decide as a people the direction this new chapter takes; we must choose between chaos and stability.*

*It is because of this stark reality that I have taken the initiative on your behalf, of forming a new government, based upon principles of truth rather than held up by a tent pole of lies, and to restore law and order, so the People's Revolution can become complete. And we as a people can emerge stronger, unified and stable.*

*Yet there are some with particular agendas, who call for a counter-revolution, who seek to destabilise this great empire, who seek to stifle its progress. They seek to discredit me with their lies and deceptions. Name me half-animal. Name me false-god. They seek to exploit our aspirations to spread chaos and violence, to violate the legitimacy of this Republic, to harness*

*the power of the mob for their own vile intrigues.*

*A counter-revolution? Hah! They have nothing to do with revolutions. A revolution needs leaders. Who leads them? The true revolution has a leader; Anubis is the leader of the revolution, and one never to step down or shy away from his responsibilities. There is a counter-revolution of ignorance built upon falsehood and lies. Those who protest outside the imperial palace walls are criminals, rats and the scum of the city. No one of sound mind would ever take part in their actions.*

*I urge the people to come out of their homes and reclaim the streets. Those who side with Anubis and the revolution, I urge you to drive out these treacherous vermin from the plazas, clear the grounds outside the palace, chase these protesters away.*

*To you protesters I say this: relent from this folly, or soon you will face the full consequences of your actions. I have not yet ordered the use of true force. You have no idea what my legions are capable of ... I could make the world burn.*

*Relent from your folly. Your shouts and screams are worthless. Your marches do nothing but tire your feet. Your actions and the actions of any that side with you are inane, worthless. I will never leave my seat. I love this Republic too much for that.*

*I never sought power and only shouldered this obligation after the lies and deception of the previous regime became apparent. You all know what I have given for this Republic. I am and always will be a soldier of the Republic and could never betray that trust or back away from my duties. I am determined more than ever to guard and safe-keep our revolution's legitimacy.*

*I have lived and fought for the sake of the Republic. I slew the Alpha-Mould. I have defended this Republic's sovereignty and interests for a lifetime on many a foreign soil and on this land I will die and history will judge me and others for our merits and faults.*

*I would invoke the name of the Authority to aid in honouring this pledge. But as Fate has decreed I am now and forever more the Authority of this Republic.*

#

Cora opened his eyes and found himself face down on the ground. He felt two pairs of hands circle around his arms and was slowly hauled up to his feet. The smell of vomit and blood was everywhere. He looked about him. All around people were rising up, clothes stained with blood, they looked like veterans after a brutal battle.

Tides of fury and outrage rolled out across the crowd. Rather than being cowed, the people were further galvanised and infused with a new energy.

Cora climbed up onto the remains of a statue of a former Supreme Council member, using it as a makeshift podium. 'Does he think we are children to be frightened by his sorcery?' he shouted, sensing and channelling the mood of the crowd. 'He shows off his muscle, will we be intimidated by it?'

'No!' the crowd roared, 'We are not frightened!'

A single word became their slogan and every drum was beat in time to it.

LEAVE! LEAVE! LEAVE! LEAVE!

Bottles were pelted through the palace gates and at the walls. More and more people converged on the plaza from every street, some brandishing rocks, some sticks. Hundreds and thousands of people, all were cramming into the open square before the palace. The outrage had spread across the city as people recovered from the shock of cerebral intrusion, incensed and angered. More and more protesters joined the masses outside of the imperial palace.

The crowd went wild as a soldier, a human officer by the looks of him, was hoisted on to shoulders and carried toward the centre of the square.

'I am Altair of the Ever Victorious,' he shouted, 'and I tell you now that I am with you! The human soldiers are with you! We are with the people!'

'The people and the army are one!' the crowd began to chant. A familiar chorus to Cora's ears, but he welcomed it. 'Down with the half-men! Down with the Meld-born!'

*Down with Anubis. Down with the Meld-born.*

#

The air of smug contempt that exuded from the senators was almost enough to drive Anubis over the edge. His show of patience was a barely held façade that threatened to collapse. *They want me to beg*, he knew. *They want the Authority to get on his knees and plead.*

There were only four senators here. It was all Thull had managed to scrape together. Anubis couldn't fault the little weasel, he had done his best. The fact was with the human soldiers joining the mob outside his gates, it was a wonder any humans remained at all – especially influential senators. Of the four remaining, Borhen was perhaps the most surprising. He had been the most vocal in opposition to all of Anubis' edicts.

'Senators, please,' he tried again. 'At least address the crowds and reassure them that we are working toward a positive resolution. Calm them . . . I don't want more of our citizens getting hurt.'

'And we tell you again,' said Borhen, the look of sympathy so obviously false on his face that Anubis wanted to reach out and crush his throat, 'as much as we share your opinion regarding the well-being of our citizens – and sympathise greatly with this very sensitive predicament you find yourself in – we cannot become a mouthpiece for the Authority. We are the people's representatives, and we can only speak on their behalf.'

Anubis leaned his elbows on the table and pressed his face against his palms, kneading his temples. The palace was so undermanned, without reinforcements they would soon be overrun. The protesters had turned violent and the crowd of hundreds of thousands was like one great heaving beast, mindless with rage and intent upon destruction. Hundreds had been slaughtered attacking the gate, perhaps over a thousand. But even Meld-born tired, eventually. He would not let matters come to that. He had options remaining, but there would be more blood on his hands by the end of them. The senators were the last hope for anything resembling a peaceful resolution.

*Still, I won't abase myself. Not before these creatures.*

'If you are representatives of the people – then act like it! I charge you with creating a transitional council tasked with creating a timetable for restoring a civilian government. We will rid the system of its theocratic hierarchy.'

'An excellent idea, Lord Authority,' said senator Urvais, 'we shall convene the people and discuss the best way to move forward.'

*Yes, an excellent idea, senators. Just let the sands run out and let time kill the Authority's reign.*

'Very good, senators. I look forward to our next meeting. Dismissed.'

The senators shuffled out of the room while Anubis remained with his head in his hands. He was alone for a while before his next interruption – well not truly alone, never alone when the voice of the people reached every nook and crevice of the palace. In silence, palms rubbing his eyes, he listened to them call for his downfall. He hadn't wanted this. His Republic City, his perfect republic, would have raised the Meld-born to an equal status as their human cousins – not turn them into hated monsters. Yet the choices had been taken out of his hands. There could be no true co-existence. It was one or the other – survival of the fittest.

*I will reverse the order of the world. Enslave them as they would enslave us. Yes . . . No.*

'Thull!' he called.

The administrator scurried in. He was never far, always present to answer at every beck, every call.

'You are a good human, Thull,' said Anubis approvingly. 'Not like the others.'

'You honour me, Lord Authority,' replied Thull, bowing low.

'I have two tasks for you, friend. Firstly, you must send an escort for my wife to be brought to the palace. I have missed her soothing presence greatly. The Lady Amalthea's presence may

serve as a balm for the whole palace household, her wise counsel as a source of inspiration for me.'

'Indeed, Lord Authority. It will be as you say.'

'Secondly, send summons for Tyr to return with the Dauntless and the full complement of the Beast Corp back to the city and the palace. We shall bolster our defences while we seek a peaceful resolution.'

A great deal of tension fled from Anubis as he gave this command and, he was pleased to see, obvious relief etched the face of his aide.

'Immediately done, Lord Authority. By your will.'

Anubis chuckled. He had never seen the man leave so fast.

For all their disagreements, Tyr was loyal, the one man he could always rely on. Fortune had favoured him greatly that in his madness he had not sent him far away. The Beast Corps would wash the streets with human blood. They would suppress and pacify all hostility to his rule. As well as this, he would have to order that no one be allowed to come or go from the city until the crisis resolved itself, and once Psy-Ops had recovered from their previous efforts they would make sure no news of the protests reached other provinces. *Amalthea's family are quite influential among the city's aristocracy, perhaps I can use their influence to my benefit. Limit the culling.*

She didn't need to know about Scatha, he had decided. He simply wouldn't tell her.

## **OF GODS AND MEN**

Anubis sat on the Throne of Authority, alone with his thoughts. The room was completely empty now. How long had it been since he had slept or felt the wind on his face? He did not know. He tried to remember. It had been six, seven days since the popular protests had become open rebellion... more? A tray of uneaten food lay nearby at the foot of the dais. The smell of alcohol, rotten fruit and urine permeated the hall.

Outside, the chanting continued endlessly. Night and day, they chanted. Over and over. For the first few nights after he had taken up permanent residence in his throne room – not unlike the Authority of old, he mused – Anubis had managed to scrounge a few hours of sleep. But soon he started hearing the chanting in his dreams, then he started seeing the crowds baying for his blood, and before long he was dreaming of being locked up in his throne room. After a while telling the difference between waking and dreaming became confusing. Had he slept these last few days? He did not know. He pondered if their throats would ever tire, or if they would cease at some point for rest. Perhaps they had set up a rota, taking turns to yell abuse at him. He cackled at the thought.

DOWN WITH ANUBIS! DOWN WITH THE AUTHORITY! JUSTICE AND LIBERTY! DOWN WITH THE MELD-BORN!

He had listened to their repetitions forever it seemed. Sometimes, when his mind wandered, he found himself chanting the litany along with the people. Then when he came back to his senses he would stop himself mid-sentence and lapse into silence once more.

In the Council chambers beyond the newly-fitted, great golden doors opposite the Throne, representatives of the people stood with the tall, red-lipped Psy-Opser whose name he was past caring to remember. Amidst their conversations beyond those doors he had heard the name of Cora, an unimpressive looking man from all reports he had heard, but one who was being set up to become a sort of Head of State in the new order they were planning to establish in the city.



Before the traitors had broken through, two bodies had been brought in via the servants' doors. A dozen or so servants had entered carrying them to him, as well as bringing more food. Their mouths and noses were covered to keep them from retching. He ignored them as they went about completing the orders he had given them and instead found himself lost once more in the halls of memory, reminiscing over what the people were now calling the Last Days of the New Authority . . .

#

'Authority,' said the young officer as she saluted.

Anubis, who stood on a balcony overlooking the sea of protesters shouting slogans beyond the outer palace walls, did not bother to return the salute or even turn to acknowledge her. He still did not recall her name, despite using her as a glorified messenger these past few days. It was probably a great honour, since she was seeing the Authority himself every other day. Anubis replied, 'Speak.'

'Authority, I have word from General Tyr. He . . .' She lapsed into silence.

'Speak,' repeated Anubis, making his impatience clear in the way he said it.

'Authority, General Tyr said . . . General Tyr refused to return with the Beast Corps.'

'He *what?*' snarled Anubis, turning towards her with eyes filled with savagery. In seconds he had his hand around her throat and her feet off the ground. For a few long moments he slowly squeezed the air out of her, until her eyes began to roll into her head. Then with another snarl, he released her.

It took her a few more moments to stop coughing and steady herself before she spoke again, one hand rubbing her throat where it was already beginning to bruise. 'He said it was a . . . direct violation of the Codes of Combat, Osu's Book of War and the Legionnaire's Oath and . . . and therefore he could not accept those orders. He told me to say that the last legitimate

orders he was given were to remain in the country, carry out military drills and await orders regarding . . . logistics.'

Anubis shook with rage. The officer took an involuntary step back but then steadied herself once more. He could smell her fear. 'I need those men.'

'Yes, Authority.'

'The Beast Corps could end these protests in a day.'

'Yes, Authority.'

'What am I to do with only a third of the Ever Victorious? I need shock troops, not veterans.'

His troops were spread too thinly across the city. The protests were growing more and more violent, and with each clash the protesters seemed to be gaining ground. Almost every human soldier in the Ever Victorious had deserted or joined the protests. The greatest soldiers in the history of the Empire were fighting against bakers and carpenters and perfume sellers.

And they were losing.

'What are your orders, Authority?'

Anubis looked back at the officer, forcing his eyes to focus on her. 'Get the word out to all officers in the field. All forces within the city are to converge upon the palace and reinforce perimeter security. If the people want to tear down the city, let our high walls echo as they bring their houses down. If they want to burn away their livelihood, then I say it let it burn. Let them all burn.'

'Authority,' said the officer with a salute and then ran to obey his commands.

Even Tyr had betrayed him, thought Anubis as he watched her leave. They were all of them untrustworthy. They sought only power for themselves. And why not? They had already lived to see one Authority brought low and replaced. Why not another? Tyr had the Dauntless and the Beast Corps, but he could not wrest power from Anubis with them alone. It took two legions to

utilise the Beast Corps effectively in battle. Vendis both the Gold Swords and the Dread Company, but those legions were far away on the coast and he and Ghazi would have their hands full dealing with the rebels. Perhaps they would try to carve themselves an Empire of their own there. Anubis would have to send Scatha to deal with him soon, once the protests had been dealt with.

*Scatha.*

Tyr had warned him of her, back when he was still loyal. She had done nothing that would suggest she was as treacherous as the rest of them. Nor had Vendis for that matter. But she was sly and cunning, and had a way of looking at all men like they were prey. And Tyr was right: he had not trusted her so easily a year ago. She could have planted trigger words in his mind when he was alone with her.

Anubis clasped his hands behind his back and listened to the people chant and scream. The mob had become an animal that jumped and pushed and threw itself at the palace gates. It was the Beast Corps now, and it was not planning on stopping.

#

Days passed by with little change. The protests if anything grew more popular. It seemed the entire city had set up camp outside the palace. From his balcony Anubis could see rivers of people stretching back into the streets beyond Authority Square and out of sight. Day and night the protesters chanted, day and night Anubis would return to the balcony to watch. Some of them seemed to be driven by an endless rage aimed at Anubis and the Ever Victorious, at a lifetime under one false Authority or another, at what they saw as their Meld-born oppressors. Others had created an almost carnival like atmosphere. To them, the protests were a celebration of the New Authority's impending fall. It continued in this way for a week, and Anubis got used to their shouted slogans and anti-Authority mantras until it faded into background noise. And then the reports started coming in.

News of the Republic City protests had spread across the Empire, sparking widespread discontent amongst the masses. Similar protests had sprung up all over the map, in every major

city and port. Worse, Vendis and Ghazis legions had been ambushed by a large, as of yet, unknown force on the way between Fort Watchtower and the city of Qohak. A few survivors that had been found wandering the woods nearby claimed that their legions had been decimated by an alliance of a score of turn-cloak human legions. There were other stories too, of thousands of corpses scattered across miles of train under a sky made black with vultures. What had been a small rebel contingency in a few coastal cities had become a civil war between Meld-born and human.

Bouts of rage began to take him. He would topple tables, throw cutlery at walls, hurl expensive ornaments out of windows. He had almost beaten a soldier to death. When his rage had dissipated and the Meld-born had been raised to his feet, the soldier had used what strength he had to salute. In his shame, Anubis had contemplated killing himself. Yet as impotent as he felt, could he really take such a coward's path? Instead he lashed out at the walls and furniture, at portraits and statues, swore at anyone around him.

Nothing was going according to plan.

Was commanding an Empire so different to commanding a legion? Were the two so far apart that a man who had nothing but success in one could not do a single thing right in another? There was something larger going on here. If there was one thing that he was not, it was incompetent. Someone was sabotaging his orders. At first, he thought it was the young officer who had been carrying the orders to his generals.

He had Psy-Ops interrogate her in the dungeons beneath the palace to make her profess her crimes. She had started confessing as soon as the pain began, but none of it was genuine. Psy-Ops said as much. He learned everything about her in that one day, and got the names of many people from her. It seemed she was accusing everyone she had ever met of treason. She had died talking about how she wanted to become the Authority herself. Anubis gave out orders to capture the people she had named to put them to questioning, until this traitor was found. In his heart, he knew that nothing would come out of this line of questioning. He already had his traitor. He knew exactly who had betrayed him. In the end, there was only one person who could.

It was not long before he found himself stalking the passages of his palace in full armour, carrying his mace at his side in an armoured fist. Servants and soldiers alike scattered before him, abandoning their duties and their posts to get out of his way. They were beneath him anyway, he paid them little heed.

Corridor after corridor, like a bull blindly charging through a labyrinth, he kept going. A tall shadow with a face like a ghost caught his attention. At first he was affronted that the man hadn't run in the face of his rage, but the smell of the *kef* weed as he approached the man quickly explained.

'I know you,' growled Anubis, grabbing hold of his lank hair and jerking his head back. 'You're Scatha's second-in-command.'

'Jeheris, Lord. I was with you when we took the city.'

'Where is she?' Anubis screamed at his face. Jeheris tried to turn his head away, as if that would save him.

'I saw her headed toward your quarters, lord. She said she was expecting you.'

Anubis threw the scrawny thing aside and stalked off toward his bed chambers.

#

He found the traitor where he had seen her often in the days after the coup, lounging on his bed in a delicate silken shift. She smiled that wicked smile, stretching her body with languid feline grace, purring softly. For how long had he been mesmerised by this act? How many times had her purring lulled him into believing she was his most loyal companion?

She lay down on her side, propping herself on an elbow, still smiling, and said, 'Bringing a mace to bed, Anubis? That's a little sordid, even for you.'

Anubis snarled and covered the distance between them in seconds. She was unarmed and had her guard down. How had he allowed one so unprepared for danger to rise so highly in his

regime? Why had he allowed such a treacherous thing into his bed? He only stopped bludgeoning her when his arm grew weary. There was not much left of Scatha's beauty by then.

Hours later, a messenger found him sitting on the edge of his gore-spattered bed, still tightly clutching the bloodied mace. The messenger swallowed nervously and bowed deeply, not daring to raise his head.

'What is it now?' said Anubis when the messenger did not speak. 'Has plague struck in the north? Has someone poisoned the food and water in the palace? Perhaps the Meld-born are turning on each other depending on whether their fathers were dogs or pigs?'

He laughed at his own humour until his throat was hoarse. The messenger cringed as if he were about to be struck. Anubis stared wide-eyed, unblinking, at the ruin of his former lover, out of breath from laughter.

'Well?' Anubis gasped, 'Out with it!'

'Authority . . . It is your wife, the Lady Amalthea. She was amongst the protesters on the day of the coup and was killed in the fighting between the Ever Victorious and the palace guards. Her father said he had been trying to reach you since the incident, but could not get an audience with you.'

'Oh.'

The mace fell to the carpeted floor with a dull thud.

#

When the people broke through the legion lines, Cora was in the second wave. He witnessed the whole thing happen from a position of serenity in the eye of the storm. The day had begun like any other, walking over to a nearby camp fire to get a plate full of stew and some bread to eat it with and breaking his fast with a group of complete strangers, sat in companionable silence. He joined the protests as usual, and as usual he was pushed up to the forefront and given a podium upon which to speak from.

He had gotten so used to speaking in public over the past few days that he did not even recall what exactly he had said to spark the people off. It had been something about 'Anubis' claim to godhood'. He had expected the angry roar, but instead of dying down after a few seconds, it continued to swell. Ten thousand angry voices rose over something he could not remember saying, something the vast majority of them had not even heard. A ripple ran through the ocean of people as the roaring continued. It reminded Cora of the wind as it combed through blades of grass over the hills south of Republic City. Then the crowd suddenly surged forward and Cora was swept up by the people towards the palace gate. The Ever Victorious tried to hold their lines, but within seconds the crowds had swept aside the barricades and run through the soldiers. The floor beneath their feet was slick with blood, though whose it was unknown to them.

They entered the palace tumultuous, swift and unstoppable - driven forward by the sheer emotions of the people. It had happened so suddenly that the palace was unprepared. There was no second line of defence to speak of and those in the palace that saw the crowds coming turned and ran for their lives. Those that did not were trampled or torn apart.

Cora found himself rushing down a winding spiral staircase with nearly a hundred others, entering the dungeons and freeing detainees. He found Elind the Jeweller in a dark cell behind the eleventh door he unlocked. He was weak and malnourished, beaten until he was almost unrecognisable. His fingers and toes had been broken and one of his knees smashed. He did not recognise Cora. He heard Big Red crying in a cell three doors down, she had found her son but he was not alive. Cora left Elind in the care of some of his fellow rebels and climbed back up the stairs to re-join the masses as they brought low an entire regime in a single day. He had no time to think about what this meant, or what would happen once they finished what they had begun. He left those thoughts for later, when questions would be asked over the blood on the soles of their feet and the savagery that was even now being inflicted on servants in the many chambers within the palace.

A group of young men and women found him climbing out of the dungeons and whisked him away towards where the rebel leadership had gathered, outside the Supreme Council's

chamber. They were joined there by a Meld-born officer of the Ever Victorious, a man by the name of Jeheris. He was a high-ranking member of the Psy-Ops division, pale and thin, a scarecrow wrapped in black. Jeheris had been working closely with the Senate and the protesters against the regime. As Cora drew near, Jeheris cut short a conversation with a small man that Cora believed was Administrator Thull, another regime turn cloak, and peeled away from the rest of the group, striding over to meet him.

‘Cora, I presume,’ he said, his voice as oily as his dark hair.

‘Jeheris.’

‘The palace is ours. Orders have gone out to rein back the protesters, but they are little more than an angry mob. I do not think they will answer to orders.’

Cora nodded as he continued towards the Council chamber doors. Jeheris fell into step beside him.

‘They may if you say the orders came from me,’ Cora replied. The idea was still strange to Cora but he knew it was true.

‘I already did.’

Cora looked up at Jeheris and found the man smiling. Here was a dangerous man. ‘Of course you have.’

‘It was necessary. We need to rein them in before they do more harm than good. All that remains is to formally take back power from Anubis and give it to the people.’

‘Agreed. Who is in the Supreme Council chamber? Why haven’t we gotten in yet?’

‘A few loyalists remain in there – Ever Victorious men and women. They will not stand aside. We will have to deal with them first.’

‘I see,’ said Cora, turning to face Jeheris at the blackwood doors. ‘Why is it that they are so loyal and you are not? Why did you side with us instead of him?’



'Perhaps, I believed that you were all on the side of Justice, and my conscience didn't allow me to stand against you,' smiled Jeheris. 'Maybe it's because I believe that the people and the army should always be one.'

Cora laughed harshly.

Hundreds of people marched down the passage towards them, shouting slogans and clapping hands. Their clothes were spattered in gore. Many carried swords, but most had makeshift weapons ranging from wooden clubs to kitchen knives. A dozen of them were hauling a large wooden beam on their shoulders, intending to use it as a battering ram. Some wore legion uniforms.

Jeheris sighed. 'You will laugh, but okay. When the looting and the rape and the murder is done, and make no mistake that is what is happening right now in this very palace, the Meld-born will once more be thrown down the social ladder to the very bottom. We will be things for entertainment or fodder for your armies.'

Cora began to argue, but Jeheris silenced him with a gesture.

'Let me finish. It will be so unless we do something about it before it gets to that. Otherwise this cycle will continue until there is no Republic left. That is why I joined you. It is my hope that we can find another way of living together, a better way. If no one is there to speak for the Meld-born when the new order is established, it will all begin again.'

Cora smiled at him and offered him his hand. Jeheris took it.

'Well,' said Cora, 'we will have need of a Minister of Defence, Lord Marshall.'

#

Cora stepped over dozens of bodies on his way to the throne room doors. There had been ten soldiers in the chamber. They had killed many more. The senators threw open the doors in an overly grand manner that Cora felt was silly and disrespectful of the people whose blood still pooled warmly under their heels.

The throne room was a magnificent place, or had been once. The entire hall was built with marble and a rich blue carpet had been rolled out across it. Richer tapestries hung decorating the walls. Three skylights filled the chamber with lances of startling sunlight. But for all its understated splendour the throne room had seen better days. Where once the chamber may have smelled of heady perfumes, it now stank of death and other things. Where once eyes would be drawn to the beautiful tapestries, now they were drawn to the smears and stains on the carpet.

Upon the gargantuan marble throne, sat the corpse of a woman whose body was so decomposed that one could scarce tell if it were a woman at all, let alone human or Meld-born. Like a child's doll that had rotten. On the steps of the dais leading up to her throne sat the reason for all this anarchy, clutching another corpse in his hands. This one was clearly a woman, though she had been treated far less kindly in her final moments and was missing most of her head. The corpse that had been arranged on the throne stared down at the Authority with the hard, cracked eyes of the dead. Some of the senators behind him lost their breakfasts as the stench hit them. Jeheris merely wrinkled his nose. And Cora did nothing.

'Authority,' said Cora, 'on behalf of the people you swore to protect and the Senate of the Republic, I ask you now to formally return power to the people and the Republic.'

The man did not stir.

'Lord Marshall,' tried Cora, 'on behalf of the people you swore to protect and the Senate of the Republic, I ask you now to formally return power to the people and the Republic.'

The man sniffed but made no move to acknowledge their presence.

'Anubis, on behalf of-'

Anubis lifted his blazing eyes to meet theirs so suddenly at the mention of his name that the entire entourage jumped. His words dripped with venom as he spat them, and his reply was both short and final. 'I am the people and the armies and the senate. I am the cities and the

rivers and the mountains. I am the Authority, now and forever. How can the Authority ever hand over power to you? Gods never cede to men.'

Silence fell. Anubis returned his gaze to the corpse in his arms. Cora turned towards those gathered and addressed them.

'You have all heard the last words of the so-called New Authority,' he began. 'You have all seen the madness in his eyes. There is naught to be gained from killing this man, he has lost everything he could lose and is already dead. Bar every door that leads into this room. Bar every door in the palace. If the Authority will not hand over his power to mere men, then we will make our own power and leave him to his. Let his empire become this room. Let his palace become his tomb.'

People rushed to obey. The hall emptied out and Cora walked to the doors he had entered from. As he began to shut the doors, something caused him to stop.

'Mia and Hanna were my girls and you took them from me. This palace and all the Authorities who ruled from it, tore down my world and took from me.'

Anubis did not even react. Cora shook his head and was about to shut the doors when Anubis spoke one final time.

'Two queens . . . Remember. . . I remember . . . I remember her name . . .'

 Cora shut the doors.

Cora barred the doors and walked away, leaving Anubis to rot away his final moments, alone with the results of all he had done. An empty palace and the corpses of the women he loved.

Two dead queens and their king.

# ***All Can Be Justified, No One is Just:***

## **An Exegesis of *Anubis* as Tragedy and Fantasy**

### **Rhetoric, Genre and Mode**

*Anubis* is a work which attempts to combine two literary genres, tragedy and fantasy, in rebuttal of Tolkien's argument that they are in essence antithetical. In this section, I will attempt to provide an understanding of the generic and modal features of fantasy and tragedy to illustrate the manner in which the work of fiction locates itself within a theoretical understanding of these genres. Essentially, the term genre codifies the content, structure and reader expectations/response of a work of fiction, which can be used to 'collate' texts and create a classification of texts that are similar according to these fundamentals (Attebery 14; Mendlesohn xiii). Genre A mode is 'a stance, a position on the world as well as a means of portraying it', meaning the way in which 'the essentials of character, dialogue, action, and physical setting' are depicted within a text, as well as the way in which 'appearance behaviour, thought and speech' are interpreted (Attebery 2). It is a feature of narrative, an element which can appear in any form of genre. In this exegesis, the terms 'tragic' and 'fantastic' denote the mode of the writing, whereas the usage of 'fantasy' and 'tragedy' denotes the genre.

A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible though stories set there may be possible in its terms (Clute & Grant 338).

Here, Clute and Grant provide a definition of the fantasy genre, explaining the type of content a reader expects to find when reading a story labelled as 'fantasy'. The *Anubis* story is set in a Secondary World containing elements that 'distinguish it from reality as currently perceived'

(Clute & Nicholls 409), which places it within the broad context of what the fantasy genre implies. Fantasy is not a homogeneous format, as it can accommodate many possibilities of sub-genres, and various taxonomies exist by which its subgenres are classified. In placing *Anubis* within the genre, numerous classifications can be considered in order to clarify the type of fantasy that it represents. The first consideration to make is whether *Anubis* qualifies as 'High Fantasy' or 'Low Fantasy,' distinctions which do not signify levels of literary worth or quality, but simply designate whether the work is wholly set in an alternative (secondary) world, or set in the primary, perceived world with the inclusion of fantastic elements (Buss & Karnowski 114). If the work inhabits a secondary, 'other' world then it is High Fantasy, examples of which include works like *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Wheel of Time* and the *Shannara* books; if the work is set within the primary world – a simulacrum of the 'real' – either partially or completely, then it is Low fantasy. For example, works such as *The Borrowers*, *The Green Mile* and the *Sookie Stackhouse* novels may be considered Low Fantasy, as the fantastic intrudes into the primary world. From this distinction, it seems obvious that *Anubis* is a work of High fantasy. However, as Chandler ('A Game of Subgenres') notes, some recent works of what would traditionally be classified as High fantasy, such as George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, are being categorized as Low because they abandon the convention of the elevated style of language associated with High fantasy for a switch to a less stylized register to portray a type of 'gritty' hyperrealism. Alongside this, there is less emphasis on traditional fantasy tropes such as magic, and more of a focus on the dynamics of essentially human conflict. *Anubis* contains many fantastic elements, such as the Meld-born and Psy-Ops, yet the focus of the work is primarily on the human conflict at the heart of revolutions, the *realpolitik* engaged in by various state apparatuses in opposition to the grassroots insurgency of revolutionaries, and the events and decisions which lead to the rise or downfall of forms of government. Consequently, *Anubis* may be regarded as a High Fantasy work that is written in the style of a Low Fantasy, although, it could be argued that the language in my story is not imbued with enough gritty reality to completely fall into a Low Fantasy style.

Mendlesohn posits an alternative taxonomy in which fantasy works can be categorised according to the 'means by which the fantastic enters the world,' as either portal-quest,

immersive, intrusive or liminal (xiv). The portal-quest fantasy is concerned with 'entry, transition, and negotiation' (xix) and follows the protagonist from the familiar into the unknown, with the reader depending on the protagonist for 'explanation and decoding' (1). Immersive fantasy employs an 'irony of mimesis' to circumvent the mediation of language so as to present the fantastic as ordinary for both reader and protagonist (59-60). In intrusive fantasy, there is a clear division between the perceived reality of the protagonist and the element of the fantastic, which 'disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated' (115). Finally, liminal fantasy is the rare form in which the story 'estranges the reader from the fantastic as seen and described by the protagonist' (182), where the fantastic almost intrudes upon the real, but is not allowed to do so. Stableford, however, qualifies this categorisation and contends that the liminal is merely a subcategory of intrusion fantasy (218), to narrow down the classifications to intrusive fantasy, portal fantasy, and immersive fantasy (xlvi). In my opinion, the primary aim of this taxonomy is to locate works within fantasy as a genre and the fantastic as a mode with as much precision as possible, so as to promote discussion rather than to provide general and unalterable definitions, so Mendlesohn's more comprehensive categorisation provides a better scope for generic and modal identification. As well as this, I feel these distinctions have important and distinct implications for the writing and construction of the narrative – with important linguistic consequences, as each separate category brings with it a unique set of reader expectations, as well as specific forms of rhetoric to meet them.

Having discussed the system's merits, the question arises as to where *Anubis* fits in this form of classification. It can be argued that the rhetorical strategies of *Anubis* most closely resemble those of an immersive fantasy. Stableford asserts that immersive fantasies are those which enable readers to enter into 'a wholehearted heterocosmic creation, without warning or guidance,' by establishing facilities that allow them to feel 'quite at home there in spite of its strangeness' (xlvi-xlix). Mendlesohn clarifies that it 'presents the fantastic without comment', providing no 'explanatory narrative' (xx) and instead seating the reader in the 'heads of the protagonists, accepting what they know as the world, interpreting it through what they notice, and through what they do not' (59). Internal focalization is key to the immersive mode of fantasy's ability to create an 'irony of mimesis' (*ibid*), for to 'grant the reader more information

than the protagonist has is to unseat the reader from her perch' (112). In *Anubis* concepts such as super-soldiers and psychic abilities are taken for granted by the characters, and the reader sees the world from the closed point-of-view perspectives of Anubis and Cora. For example, when Anubis calls forward Jeheris to scan ahead during the coup, it is said that 'It was standard practice to have a psychic in each unit to help coordinate and relay orders' (Anwar 35). This 'casualization of the fantastic' is discernible through the way in which it is described as ordinary (Mendlesohn 73). The I.F. orb is a fantastic object which provokes awe and fear, because Anubis is in awe of it and fears it, acknowledging at one point that the Council could use the orb to 'kill him, unman him' and 'make him cower and kneel' (Anwar 39); whereas the existence of the Meld-born themselves is presented as an unremarkable fact, because Anubis himself is Meld-born and the concept is mundane to him (21). Much of this familiarisation of the unknown and fantastic as real and taken for granted comes down to manipulations of style, as 'other worlds in fiction are, after all, created from language, so it is reasonable to assume that style is integral to this endeavour' (Mandala 31). A more detailed analysis of the stylistic features and narratology of *Anubis* will be given later in this exegesis. Another distinction of immersive fantasy is that the characters internally focalized (i.e. point-of-view characters) are '*antagonists* within their world', meaning they 'know' enough about their world to question its accepted orders while remaining immersed within it (Mendlesohn 66-67). Mendlesohn notes that it is this ability of the characters to 'ironize the world around them' and act as antagonists to it that allows fantasy writers to create works which are recognisable as fantasy but which contain 'no or very little magic' (*ibid*). The character, Anubis, very much fits into this category, being disenchanted by the state which he has served in his world (Anwar 21-22), and having enough knowledge and agency to turn his antagonism from questioning into action (24). Briefly, then, *Anubis* can be considered as an immersive high fantasy story, written in a low fantasy style.

Having located the creative artefact within fantasy, an equivalent attempt must be made to locate it within the generic and modal landscape of tragedy. Unlike fantasy, which relies on a plurality of definitions and classifications in order to provide a clear, comprehensive and inclusive genre theory, tragedy is an established genre that has had a clear definition and distinction since Aristotle's *Poetics*. This is not saying that there is only one, unchanging

definition of tragedy which is Aristotle's. That is not the case. However, Aristotle provides a poetics and a narratology as well as explaining what tragedy is, which have proved very useful in creating a narrative structure that can incorporate fantasy and tragedy.

According to Aristotle, if a play is the 'imitation of an action which is serious, complete and substantial,' which 'evokes pity and terror' in order to bring about the *catharsis* of those emotions', then it is tragedy (6). For Aristotle this process of catharsis, the purging of negative emotions, is one of tragedy's primary functions. He further elucidates that by an action which is 'whole' and 'complete' he means 'it has a beginning, a middle and an end' (7). Incorporating this aspect of tragedy was perhaps the most problematic when constructing *Anubis*, for although the work presented has a clear sequence of action with a beginning, middle and end – it is still a fragment of an envisaged much larger work. Initially, the intention was to present the 'first act' of the overall *Anubis* story and feature many more perspectives from different characters, such as those of Scatha and Jeheris, as well as a character named 'Oracle' who was cut from the present work entirely. However, during the course of this research it was decided that in order to investigate how tragedy can work within the parameters of fantasy, some sort of representation of a completed structure – with definitively tragic aspects – was required. Aristotle also proposes that a tragedy must feature three plot-elements, namely Reversal (*peripeteia*), Discovery (*anagnorisis*) and Suffering (*pathos*) (11) and that the protagonist's suffering must be caused by *hamartia*, a 'Fatal Flaw' in his/her understanding or moral character that brings about a disastrous choice of action (13). *Reversal* is when circumstances seem to be developing in a certain direction, but then suddenly 'reverse' and develop in another. For example, in Sophocles' play, *Oedipus Rex*, the news of Polybus' death seems good initially, but is then revealed to be disastrous. Anubis's biggest *Reversal* comes when he stops second-guessing his actions and the actions of his soldiers and sits down upon the Throne of Authority, claiming complete sovereignty over the entire Empire and proclaiming his own Godhood in a single action (Anwar 43). The second element, *Discovery*, is when the protagonist moves from ignorance to awareness. Again, Oedipus is an example of this when he kills his father in ignorance, only to later learn the truth of their relationship. One moment of *Discovery* comes when Anubis is informed by Altair, the human officer who becomes a glorified



messenger for him, that General Tyr has refused to return to Republic City with the Beast Corps (80), but a truer moment of *Discovery* occurs for the reader upon learning that the traitor in Anubis's regime was Jeheris (86), and not Scatha, as Anubis had led himself to believe (83-84). Another *Discovery* takes place when he realises that one of the human noblemen who had been requesting an audience with him for weeks (48) was the father of his wife, Amalthea, who had died protesting against the Supreme Council in favour of Meld-born rights when Anubis's soldiers trampled over the protesters on their way to the palace during the coup (85). *Suffering*, the third element of plot, is a destructive or painful act, which should create sympathy for the protagonist. A Sophoclean example of this might be when Oedipus comes upon the body of Jocasta and gouges out his eyes with despair. Anubis suffers when he kills his mistress, Scatha, for what he wrongly believes was her part in his political downfall (84) and then learns that not only is this not the case, but that he was also unwittingly the slayer of his wife too (85). His Fatal Flaws are many in number. The first is assuming that political leadership can be treated in the same manner as military leadership, with people following unquestioningly a chain of command structure when carrying out his orders (48, 83); the second is his infidelity towards his wife (32) and his fear of presenting himself to her after having been unfaithful to her (49-50).

A governing concept in Aristotelian thought is that of Universal Order, with the assumption that order is superior to chaos, and that everything has its rightful place in the grand scheme of things. It is the breaking of this order that causes the occurrence of *hamartia* and which is put right by the 'just if inscrutable powers' (Lever 10) of Universal Order through 'simple reversal of circumstances' (McLeish xi). Camus argues that the ancient belief in this concept of order was primarily a belief in nature, and to rebel against it 'was butting one's head against a wall' or attempting to 'beat the sea with rods – an act of insanity' (27). Moreover, to the Greeks, destiny 'was a blind force to which one submitted, just as one submitted to the forces of nature' and so the 'imprecations of the Greek tragic heroes cursing their fate, do not imply complete condemnation' of Fate's dictat and reordering. As Camus continues:

Oedipus knows that he is not innocent. He is guilty in spite of himself; he is also part of destiny. He complains, but he says nothing irreparable. Antigone rebels, but she does so in the name of tradition, in order that her brothers may find rest in the tomb and that the appropriate rites may be observed. In her case, rebellion is, in one sense,

reactionary. The Greek mind has two aspects and in its meditations almost always re-echoes, as counterpoint to its most tragic melodies, the eternal words of Oedipus, who, blind and desperate, recognizes that all is for the best (*ibid*).

Some more recent theorists have continued with this idealist reading, regardless of whether they perceive the impinging metaphysical powers as just or unjust, and view the tragic protagonists' suffering as 'inescapable yet mysteriously ennobling, even redemptive (Dollimore xvi). Steiner (9-10), Niebuhr (158), and Bradley (54) share a perception of tragedy as being caused by some form of higher metaphysical power, and also 'focussing profound and ennobling truths about the human condition in the suffering integrity of the unique individual (Dollimore xvii). Niebuhr encapsulates this perspective on integrity and suffering when he asserts that the true tragic hero 'defies malignant power to assert the integrity of his soul' (156) and 'plunges into the chaos of war with a full understanding', either in defiance of the forces opposed to him or to 'submit himself as their tool and victim in recognition of his common humanity with those who are unconscious victims' (158). For Steiner the most cogent expression of tragedy comes through the excesses of suffering, wherein:

lies man's claim to dignity. Powerless and broken . . . he assumes a new grandeur. Man is ennobled by the vengeful spite or injustice of the gods . . . Hence there is in the final moments of great tragedy, whether Greek, or Shakespearean, or neoclassic, a fusion of grief and joy, of lament over the fall of man and of rejoicing in the resurrection of his spirit (9-10).

Furthermore, Steiner posits that the protagonist's excesses of suffering derive from his/her breaking by events that are unresolvable 'through technical or social means': the tragedy must be 'irreparable' (8). A.C. Bradley concurs, perceiving the tragic figure as contending with an ultimate power, an irresistible force that brings about a new order (54), akin to Hegel's concept of Eternal Justice which restores 'the ethical substance and unity in and along with the downfall of individuality which disturbs its repose' (49). At length, these readings share a common view of tragedy as a means of discerning insightful 'truths' about the human condition through the suffering of an individual.

Having said this, Lever's contrasting understanding of tragedy (and especially Jacobean tragedy) as being concerned with society rather than individuals, wherein the suffering and conflict are contingent side-effects of the 'social and historical forces focussed in state power' rather than any divine or natural cosmic order, is perhaps more salient to my own fiction (Dollimore xviii). According to Lever, 'the fundamental flaw is not in the [heroes] but in the world they inhabit: in the political state' and in the 'social order it upholds' (10), and therefore in tragedy 'it is not primarily the conduct of the individual, but of the society which assails him that stands condemned' (12). Having asserted this, however, Lever further proposes that 'What really matters is the quality of [the heroes'] response to intolerable situations' (10), so perhaps tragedy is to some extent concerned with the conduct of the individual after all, in that the society inhabited by the tragic hero is flawed but as far as the tragedy is concerned, the narrative focus is on the hero's response to those social fissures. In *Tragedy and the State*, Lever presents us with two Jacobean subgenres within the tragic mode – both of which contain aspects that are echoed within *Anubis*. Firstly, there is the revenge play, which centres on a protagonist who is confronted by iniquity in the form of a 'tyranny immune to criticism or protest' (*ibid*). Faced with the general corruption of the state, the protagonist is challenged with the 'imperative necessity to act, even at the price of his own moral contamination' (12-13). Anubis sees the corruption of the state in the inequalities amongst the citizenry and the lies that have been fed to both the soldiers and the people in general to enable the orders of the Supreme Council to be carried out, and is left with no other choice but to stand against this corrupt regime (Anwar 24). To do this, Anubis and his armies kill innocent people who stand between him and the council (34, 37-38), despite his own conscience telling him that this is wrong (39); he assumes the Throne of Authority, despite the blasphemous nature of doing so (42-43); and even goes as far as claiming 'the Alpha-Mould is dead' and 'slain by [his] own hands' (49), becoming complicit in the lies that he set out to erase (24) - all of these morally questionable things and more are carried out to finish what Anubis starts when he disobeys the council's order and marches on the capital to bring down the regime that he sees as corrupt (*ibid*). The second subgenre is the heroic play, where the focus is on 'a great man, presented as superhuman in his courage, his nobility, his faults of impulsiveness' or his 'virtuous disregard for

human baseness', who despite his perceived super-humanity is 'overthrown by the quiet but deadly machinations of policy' (Lever 13). At the beginning of the story, Anubis is widely recognised as the single greatest military asset in the empire (Anwar 17-18), referred to at one point as an 'icon of the Republic' (31) and his soldiers are willing to follow him at the drop of a hat (22-24). Added to all of this, he is Meld-born and therefore quite literally superhuman as well. When he trades his command tent for a political office, Anubis's own policies become frighteningly similar to those of the previous regime, as he attempts to replace an anti-Meld society with an anti-human society (77-78) and claim the same powers that the Supreme Council and the Authority claimed (43-45), which results in his subsequent downfall.

For Albert Camus, tragedy is generated by transition; it is 'born in the west each time that the pendulum of civilisation is halfway between a sacred society and a society built around man' (199). Moreover, he explains that it occurs when a man 'frees himself from an older form of civilisation and finds that he has broken away from it without having found a new form which satisfies him' (194). This last theory may best locate *Anubis*' place within tragedy, as *Anubis* is, after all, a story set where the pendulum swings – between theocratic rule, martial rule and democracy. In summary, as a tragedy, *Anubis* may be said to follow the structure of classical Greek tragedy with the themes of Jacobean revenge plays and heroic plays. Finally, it could be said that *Anubis* follows the more materialist components of Lever's and Camus' concepts of tragedy than the idealist definitions of ennobled suffering and metaphysical redemption.

Having focussed on locating the creative artefact within the modes and genres of fantasy and tragedy in this section, the following section will discuss Tolkien's views on the inherent hostility between the two modes, via a close reading of his essay, 'On Fairy-stories'. As well as this, it will attempt to examine the similarities between the two modes/genres and explore how fantasy may incorporate tragedy despite the reservations held by Tolkien.

## Tolkien's Dichotomy of Fantasy and Tragedy

'Far more important is the Consolation of the Happy Ending . . . all complete fairy-stories must have it . . . I would say that Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite—I will call it Eucatastrophe . . . It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat ('On Fairy-stories' 68-69).

Tolkien's essay, 'On Fairy Stories', which has been called 'the fundamental document of modern fantasy theory' (Stableford xlv), sets up a dichotomy between tragedy and fantasy, suggesting that for fantasy to function successfully it must provide us with a *dénouement* wholly different to dramatic tragedy. Eucatastrophe, fantasy's 'highest function,' is coined in opposition to catastrophe, which Holman and Harmon define as 'the final stage in the falling action, ending the dramatic conflict . . . used mostly in connection with a tragedy' and 'by extension to designate an unhappy ending' (73). Accordingly, '[in] the strict sense, every drama has a catastrophe' (*ibid*). Tolkien further posits that 'Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy. Fantasy, even of the simplest kind, hardly ever succeeds in Drama, when that is presented as it should be, visibly and audibly acted' ('On Fairy-stories' 50). In order to understand Tolkien's broad assertions regarding the dichotomy between drama (and especially tragedy) and fantasy, a close reading of his essay is necessary.

Primarily, Tolkien formulates a poetics for fantasy, insisting that it is a genre which performs 'three fundamental and vital psychological functions: recovery, escape and consolation' (Stableford xlv), serving almost as a fantastic analogue to Aristotle's three tragic plot-elements (reversal, discovery and suffering). Interestingly, he prefaces his arguments by proclaiming that fantasy is not concerned with the beings that inhabit it, but rather with '*Faerie*, the realm or state . . . the Perilous Realm itself' ('On Fairy-stories' 9-10), which seems to echo Lever's sentiment that tragedy is concerned with society rather than individuals (Dollimore xviii). Of course, Lever also notes that the hero's response is the central concern of the tragic plot in

Jacobean tragedy, but it can also be argued that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* explores Middle-earth through Frodo's response to the threat of Mordor and the One Ring. Tolkien initiates his discussion of the first of his three elements, stating that:

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say “seeing things as they are” and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say “seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them”—as things apart from ourselves (‘On Fairy-stories’ 57-58).

Tolkien explains that the world around us has lost its wonder because of our appropriation of it through familiarisation. The ‘things which once attracted us’ we have locked ‘in our hoards,’ having ‘acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them’ (58). Fantasy has the ability to present the reader with an ‘arresting strangeness’ (48) that is at odds with their perception of ‘reality’, to defamiliarize the everyday and commonplace. In other words, his recovery thesis suggests that the Perilous Realms, the secondary worlds of fantasy, distort or unpeel what we assume to be ‘real’, removing ‘the blinders imposed by the real world’ (Mandala 12) and thereby renewing and refreshing our perceptions of a primary world ‘dulled through familiarity’ (Swinfen 6). Tolkien posits that this renewal of perceptions reveals profound and fundamental truths and allows us to ‘recover’ them. Fantasy does not ‘manipulate readers into passive acceptance’ (Le Guin 40), ‘it challenges them to look afresh at their lives, right down to the smallest details’ (Mandala 12). In *Anubis*, we are presented with a secondary world filled with genetically engineered super soldiers and psychic warfare, a world which on the surface bears little resemblance to our own. However, as the narrative of the story outlines the politics of this new world, it begins to look into issues that have very strong implications if viewed with an eye to the primary world. Examples include the conscripting of an army of local people to fight against an enemy who ‘they see as their own’ and a nation going to war to protect the population from non-existent weapons due to lies told by the state government; governments that rule their people through fear and oppression and popular revolutions being hijacked by people with selfish, racist and fanatical agendas.. This is shown in the story when the Meld-born legions of the Ever Victorious are sent to fight against their fellow Meld-born and the Alpha-Mould, only to discover that neither the enemy nor the weapons capabilities exist and that

their own government has 'lied to them' (Anwar 22). In short, the text takes the familiar and makes it unfamiliar, allowing the reader to view his/her own world from a new perspective, the perspective of individuals who are 'there'. As a British Muslim writer of Asian descent, my perspective of the world is rare in that often times I stand at both sides of the argument, defending one from the other and vice versa. In my fiction, I am perhaps attempting to reconcile two very diverse worldviews through figurative representation, as well as give the readers an insight into this way of viewing the world from different perspectives, making the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

Having described the estrangement of the trite and familiar, Tolkien's vision of fantasy progresses to the second element: Escape. The words 'Escapism' and 'Escape' commonly carry negative connotations in the field of literary criticism, especially when associated with fantasy. Shippey (viii) explains that critics often view it as 'a kind of literary disease' whose sufferers, the readers and writers of fantasy, 'are fleeing from reality'. Tolkien rejects this 'tone of scorn and pity' with the view that it is based on 'a misuse of words and confusion of thought', in which they are 'confusing . . . the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter' ('On Fairy-stories' 60). The notion of 'Escape', in the Tolkienian sense, is linked strongly to the idea of 'Recovery'. The modern human being is a prisoner, he argues, of 'the rawness and ugliness' of 'self-made misery' and the ills of a grim and terrible world: 'hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death' (64-66). In this mad world escape is the rational option, and fantasy provides that escape by reminding us of what is actually real, for the 'world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it' (60). For Tolkien, fantasy is not created to satisfy some fleeting whim, but to challenge readers by interrogating what have become 'habitual and reflexive modes of thought' and accepted patterns of thinking (Swinfen 231; Mandala 11). Fantasy is not divorced from 'the complexities of the human condition, but fundamentally involved with them' (Mandala 13). The true escape of fantasy, then, is the liberation from the prisons of habits and conventions in the contemporary, real world (Mathews 57). As Jackson (3) notes, 'a literary fantasy is produced within and determined by its social context'. Tolkien's notion of modern man as prisoner and his escape from the horrors of reality into the realm of fantasy is not dissimilar to the Platonic prisoner's escape from the cave

and discovery of the higher metaphysical realm beyond. In *Anubis*, the reader is allowed to escape the claustrophobic environment of the accepted worldview and allowed to enter a wider world that incorporates worldviews that may not be as readily accepted in the society the reader lives in. For example, the idea of a theocracy being succeeded by a democracy is considered a good thing in modern western society, whilst a military coup resulting in a dictatorship is considered to be a bad thing. However, when placed within a secondary world and told from the perspectives of people who are 'there', the reader is made to look at both the positive and negative aspects of a military dictatorship, and, likewise, democratic rule. For instance, if dictatorship is put in place to secure order after a time of turbulence and decrease violent clashes on the streets, are the people better off living under such a form government? If the people being given free, democratic rule to govern themselves will result in a return to racially-motivated violence and an apartheid state, is it really an improvement from said dictatorial rule?

Finally, Tolkien considers 'Consolation', the third element of the fantasy/fairy-story, as the most important. He states, concerning 'the Consolation of the Happy Ending . . . [that] all complete fairy-stories must have it' ('On Fairy-stories' 68) and creates the term 'Eucatastrophe' – 'the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale)' (*ibid*) – to describe this element. For Tolkien, this Consolation is the most pure form of fantasy, 'the higher or more complete kind', and the mark of a good story which can:

give to child or man that hears it, when the "turn" comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality (*ibid*).

Tolkien promotes the eucatastrophic tale as the contrary of tragedy by asserting that 'Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy', and that 'Fantasy, even of the simplest kind, hardly ever succeeds in Drama, when that is presented as it should be, visibly and audibly acted' (50). Moreover, he goes on to argue that it is a 'misfortune' that Drama is considered a branch of Literature, when it is 'an art fundamentally distinct from' it (49). His explanation for this assertion is that 'even though it uses a similar material (words, verse, plot)' (51), Drama is an art whose primary form



of expression is designed for auditory and visual presentation, for performance on a stage rather than to be read in a written, narrative form. For Tolkien, 'If you prefer Drama to Literature . . . you are apt to misunderstand pure story-making' (51-52), especially Fantasy story-making which is 'a thing best left to words, to true literature' (49). I would argue here that Tolkien's views may have been limited by the potentials of genres at the time he was writing, and so do not reflect the contemporary world of literature, screen genres and/or digital potentials. There is also an indication in the text that Tolkien shares the idealist view of drama and tragedy as being 'concerned with the characters as individuals' (Lever 10), and the 'integrity of the unique individual' (Dollimore xvii) since he asserts that if you 'prefer characters, even the basest and dullest, to things' ('On Fairy-stories' 52), then you cannot successfully write a fantasy, which must have as its primary concern the Perilous Realm, the existence of the state rather than the individual.

Tolkien also explains what he perceives to be a further disadvantage of a dramatic format when attempting to merge it with elements of fantasy: 'due to the fact that the producers of drama have to, or try to, work with mechanism to represent either Fantasy or Magic' (50). This is, primarily, a criticism of the *performance* element in drama and the 'inadequacy of stage-effects' to represent a 'fantasy of forms' and 'visible shapes' (78). However, he goes beyond this superficial criticism to assert that:

Drama has, of its very nature, already attempted a kind of bogus, or shall I say at least substitute, magic: *the visible and audible presentation of imaginary men in a story*. . . To introduce, even with mechanical success, into this quasi-magical secondary world a further fantasy or magic is to demand, as it were, an inner or tertiary world. It is a world too much (51).

Here, Tolkien expresses an essentially Platonic notion of representation akin to the theory of forms. For Plato, what we perceive as 'reality' – the physical world around us – is an imitation or 'faint copy' of the transcendental Ideas or Forms which are the 'underlying principles of reality, and it is therefore once removed from 'true' perception (Selden 9). Art, then, becomes an imitation of imitations, twice removed from 'the essential nature of a thing' (*ibid*). To illustrate this, Plato presents the analogy of three beds: the bed which 'exists in nature . . .

‘made by God’, ‘which is the reality of a bed’; ‘one made by the carpenter’, in imitation of the transcendental Ideal; one made by the artist in imitation of the carpenter's bed (*Republic* 597). Tolkien believes that Literature, the written narrative, is closest to the transcendental ideal form of objects and makes a distinction between it and other forms of art, especially drama, because they impose a single visible presentation (‘On Fairy-stories’ 77). This is why ‘In human art Fantasy is a thing best left to words’ (49), because narrative ‘works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive’, ‘at once more universal and more poignantly particular’ (78). This is a Platonic ‘distinction of the visible and intelligible’: dramatic performance can only present ‘shadows and reflections’, whereas the purpose of fantasy narrative is to allow the reader to ‘Recover’ those transcendental ideal forms which they more closely resemble (*Republic* 509-510). Tolkien’s assertions raise questions concerning whether drama’s ‘highest function,’ tragedy, and its supposed antithesis, fantasy, can interact or coexist within a shared narrative at all but, despite the assumption of a radical dichotomy between tragedy and fantasy, there may be common elements between the two modes, which suggest that they could conceivably coexist within a narrative text, despite Tolkien’s reservations. After all, before any production practice or communal reception takes place, Drama exists and is constructed solely through writing. Moreover, language is the DNA of all forms of fiction, which must self-reflexively and by default be concerned *with* language (Quilligan 15). It is the substratum that allows the transfer of story from book to a stage, a movie screen or a ballet. Drama and prose narratives both use language as a medium of representation, and therefore language is their intrinsic source of focus and prime subject, ‘for the “characters” of a Drama or novel, as well as its “plot”, have no existence except as “precipitates” from the readers’ memory of the successive words’ he/she has read (Chatman 136). Even Tolkien (‘On Fairy-stories) must, grudgingly, admit this is the case, stating that Drama ‘uses a similar material (words, verse, plot)’ to narrative art, and to this I would add that, as Quilligan suggests, all verbal artefacts (i.e. words) are ultimately about the making of them (i.e. words)(15). Beyond this linguistic rebuttal, there are also generic qualities, of form, content and reader response, which are intrinsically similar between these genres.

High Fantasy can be considered, in some sense, a continuation of the epic poetry of antiquity. Indeed, Donaldson suggests that ‘all epics are fantasy’ (12), observing that the enduring epics of

English literary history all employ 'the metaphor of magic and the techniques of personification' (13). Wordsworth's, *The Prelude*, is perhaps the exception which proves the rule. Aristotle notes many similarities between epic and tragedy, as they are both 'an imitation of serious subjects' and all components of an epic are also present in tragedy (*Poetics* 5). He notes that despite tragedy being designed for dramatic performance (22-23), whereas epic is 'the imitation of events by means of narrative without action', its *muthos* (plot) should still be structured in the manner of drama (23). The fundamentals of the epic plot correspond to those of tragedies: they may be organically unified, or episodic (if there is not one central action but a series of unconnected happenings); however, they must have a beginning, a middle and an end. As well as this, Toohey notes that 'an epic, like tragedy, should contain reversal, recognition, and calamity'(2): a structure which Mendlesohn identifies in much 'modern, three-volume quest fantasy' and in portal fantasy (3). Toohey further observes that chronicle epics are identifiable 'by a concentration on the fortunes of a single city or region' (4), again a feature common to fantasy (Mendlesohn 3) and analogous of the notion of spatial unity in tragedy. Additionally, Aristotle prescribes that:

like tragedy, epic must divide into the same species, either simple or complex, a story of character or suffering . . . its components should all be the same; it requires Peripeteia, Discoveries and scenes of suffering (*Poetics* 24).

Aristotle provides no suggestion about the possible role that catharsis may perform in an epic, yet in his treatment of tragedy he indicates that it is the effect of plot and the characterization of the protagonists which creates catharsis (13-14). Therefore, it may be assumed that it has a role in epics, in as far as he dictates that the epic plot and characters should be similar to those of tragedy stating, 'Its *muthos* (plot), like that of tragedy, should be constructed on dramatic principles' (23), 'Like tragedy, epic should be "simple" or "complex", should be based on character or suffering' (24). Moreover, 'With the exceptions of lyricism and spectacle, its components should also be the same', in that it should contain 'reversals, discoveries and scenes of mourning' (*ibid*). Freud, much later, made catharsis an axis of his psychoanalytical theory and practice, relocating it from the sphere of aesthetics to therapeutics. He extended the idea of 'the cathartic experience of drama' to include several other forms of 'creative

writing', including epic poetry (Abdulla 32). Moreover, Freud suggested a correlation between catharsis and identification, as well as between catharsis and self-expression in therapy. In fact, although he later turned towards 'free expression and abreaction', it is his interpretation of catharsis that has remained the essence of 'all post-Freudian psychodynamic therapeutic schools' (Cholewa-Purga 123). It is this Freudian idea, of an experiential process that breaks psychological bonds in order to purge distressing or disruptive emotional states, which is developed further in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by psychotherapy theorists. For Kenneth Burke, catharsis 'is more than simply a literary term but rather 'a concept that involves the reader, the critic, the society and man's overall concern with symbols' (Abdulla 21). He sees the catharsis of tragedy which operates 'through pity and fear' as a proxy for 'catharsis through love', as the 'state of identification or communion with the object of one's pity' can be conceived as 'nearly like the kind of identification or communion one feels for a loved object' (Abdulla 113). Cholewa-Purga explicates this idea further, suggesting that the catharsis provided by 'the sudden turn' of eucatastrophe is 'more therapeutic than the cathartic catastrophe of sorrow and affliction' (125). Through this conception of catharsis which builds upon the foundations of Aristotle via Freud, the similarities between the notion of catharsis and eucatastrophe and the ways in which catharsis may be transcribed into fantasy slowly begin to emerge. I hope this becomes more transparent as the similarities between drama and fantasy are further clarified.

Drama and Fantasy both rely upon a 'willing suspension of disbelief' ('On Fairy-stories'), or at least a willing participation in their secondary/quasi-secondary worlds. It is only in this state that a genuine understanding is built between the reader/audience and the hero's/heroine's actions, motives and emotions, which then will lead to 'identification, empathy and finally catharsis' (Cholewa-Purga 125). Duggan & Grainger assert that this 'shared world of imagination' and the "'as if" principle of 'archetypal and atavistic psychology' enables us to approach universal human truths, and see 'the imaginative personification of archetypal images' as 'encounter rather than escape' (22). It is this encounter, which precedes catharsis in both tragedy and fantasy, making previously unmanageable emotions become manageable (42). This is the point at which fantasy and tragedy can be seen to converge: the catharsis of fantasy providing purgation combined with consolation, relief and joy at the 'sudden joyous

turn' ('On Fairy-stories' 68) of the plot; the catharsis of tragedy providing purgation through sorrow and pity at the moment of catastrophe and failure of the protagonist. Whereas, through Tolkien's definition, both genres deal with polar-opposite emotions, they both provide purgation through heightened emotions that are triggered by ultimate fate of fictional characters in secondary worlds. Tolkien had studied Greek philology, as well as Latin and other ancient languages (Carpenter 45-46), and his construction of the term, '*Eucatastrophe*', from the Greek '*eu*' and '*catastrophe*', as well his use of the term 'Consolation' for the final element of fantasy, seem to suggest an awareness of the closeness of the effect of eucatastrophe to the effects of tragic catharsis. The *OED* traces the etymology of catastrophe to Greek words, καταστροφή and κατα-στρέφειν. Northrup observes that the word 'catastrophe' is a compound verb, derived from κατά (down) and στρέφειν (to turn) containing the meanings 'to overturn', 'to subdue', and 'to direct towards', as well as the more common meaning, 'to come to an end' and 'to close', the nominal form of which came to mean 'an end', 'a conclusion' and 'the ruin of a person'(831). To this, Tolkien adds the prefix, 'eu' that inserts the sense of 'happy' or 'fortunate' into the verb, so a eucatastrophe then can be construed as a 'happy conclusion', but also as the 'fortunate ruin of a person'. The term 'Consolation' originates in Latin from the noun 'Consolatió', which itself is derived from the verb 'consoláři', a word composed from the prefix 'con' and the verb 'sóláři', meaning 'to provide solace' and 'to mitigate' (*ibid*). Even the 'happy ending', then, must sooth and give solace, 'reinforcing the notion that even the good catastrophe comes with a grief or sadness that must be soothed' (*ibid*). It is in considering these aforementioned similarities, that an attempt to explore whether tragic catharsis can be posited in fantasy and still give 'a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth' (71) and – to rephrase Tolkien – provide a 'fleeting glimpse' of grief as poignant as joy, can be validated. In *Anubis*, the republic returning to the hands of the people is eucatastrophic, in that it is a result of the 'fortunate ruin' of Anubis (Anwar 88-90). The final scene in the story leaves Anubis, the central protagonist, locked away in his 'empty palace' with the 'corpses of the women he loved' (90). His life is not only ruined but effectively over, the implication being that he will starve in the throne room. These unfortunate and tragic events are coloured by the more upbeat results of his failure, as we see Jeheris and Cora agreeing to end the cycle of human/Meld-born

violence that has plagued the republic by working together to ensure that both races are treated equally (88) - a treaty that is formed as a direct result of the failure of Anubis' government. It is a tragic eucatastrophe.

Finally, we are left with the notion that drama, as an art form is unsuited to the presentation of fantasy or the fantastic, because of its reliance on 'counterfeited forms' and 'mechanisms' as a 'substitute magic' ('On Fairy-stories' 50-51). It is important to note that Tolkien states that Fantasy 'hardly ever succeeds in Drama', not 'never' (50). Tolkien's original 'On Fairy-stories' lecture was delivered in 1938, and the subsequent essay published in 1947 (*Tree & Leaf* vi). In a letter to Milton Waldman, written in 1950, Tolkien expresses what may be considered a different view:

I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story - the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths . . . it should be 'high', purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama (*Letters* 167).

Here Tolkien expresses his wish to create a Legendarium that could work as a uniquely English mythology; he would write the broad history of Middle-earth but leave scope within his narrative for other artists to add to its tapestry. Tolkien would not leave scope 'for other minds and hands' to paint and make music or drama if he thought these other art forms incapable of successfully presenting fantasy. Finally, in his masterwork, *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien himself mixes generic modes and styles, his narrative varying between ironic, low and high mimetic, romantic and mythic modes (Shippey 221-223), and there are definite tragic elements within the text – Gollum/Sméagol is perhaps the most tragic figure in all of High Fantasy. Perhaps, then, the Tolkien of later life would approve of attempts to combine these seemingly dichotomized genres, and may even have someday discerned a way to complete his own attempt at tragedy, *The Children of Hurin*, which he began before *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* but chose to abandon in favour of these more eucatastrophic stories (Rosebury 108).

Perhaps this abandonment was due to the flaw in his theory that eucatastrophe is the antithesis of tragedy, whereas they are quite compatible.

Having presented an argument for the validity of an experimental fiction that seeks to establish whether or not tragedy and fantasy can interact creatively within a narrative, questions inevitably arise over what kind of epistemological purpose a tragic fantasy might serve. The following section will seek to answer these questions, by suggesting that the two modes can complement each other to shed light on contemporary social contexts.

## **The Epistemological Purpose of Tragic Fantasy**

Stephen Donaldson notes that whenever humankind wishes to articulate a transcendent thought regarding its own self-perception, it invariably turns to the epic and therefore essentially fantastic mode of writing (12). As stated previously, fantasy literature is fundamentally involved with real-world concerns and the complexities of the human condition, its secondary-worlds are analogues of our own realities and events within them are critiques of contemporary society and its contemporary problems (Swinfen 2). Fantasy is a 'literature of challenge, a genre that dares to suggest the systems and habits we call life may not be life at all' (Mandala 12). It explores 'the space between history and fiction' and shows that 'history is only half of lived reality', the other half to do with 'mysteries, quests, heroes, comedy, tragedy, impossibilities, symbols, order and resolution, all of which are to be found in 'the stories by which we make sense of history' rather than in the empirical world we perceive (Attebery xi). This makes it a perfect tool for providing us with an increased awareness of the 'complex nature of the primary reality', as well as allowing us to explore 'beyond empirical experience into the transcendent reality, embodied in imaginative and spiritual otherworlds' (Swinfen 234). As for tragedy, Albert Camus, whose own tragic works offer profound critiques of the politics of the previous century (Novello 260), suggests that 'our time coincides with a drama in civilization which might today, as it did in the past, favour tragic modes of expression' ('On the Future of Tragedy' 299). In fact, for Camus, 'great periods of tragic art' can only occur 'during centuries of crucial change, at moments when the lives of whole peoples are heavy both with glory and

with menace, when the future is uncertain and the present dramatic' (295). Yet, what can tragedy add to fantasy's critique of the modern world? How can it enhance fantasy's socio-political commentary on contemporary events, and what makes it appropriate for this task?

Lever argues that in a contemporary world which is 'alienated in poverty and affluence', 'dehumanized by state bureaucracies and military machines', the greatest imperative is 'survival in the face of impersonal power drives' rather than a profound study of the human condition (1). For him, in such a time tragedy can be prioritized because it is 'inseparable from life, life from politics, and politics from a sense of the past' (*ibid*). Aristotle famously stated that the difference between tragedy and history is that tragedy is more philosophical, and deals with what might happen rather than what *has* happened (*Poetics* 9). In 'Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Subjectivity', Edith Hall suggests that tragedy can do more than speculate on what might happen, but can also shed light on the perspectives of the losers, those voices so often silenced in the writing of histories by the victors. While history relates the testimony of Agamemnon, tragedy can represent the fate of murdered Iphigenia who 'wasn't around to testify' (Kadare 109). Hall demonstrates how Greek tragedy is used in a group of post-war novels to bring into focus the question of rival subjectivities, i.e. 'the radically different ways in which individual subjects can each experience the "same" events' (Hall 24). Imre Kertész's *The Pathseeker*, and Aleksandar Gatalica's *Euripidova Smrt (The Death of Euripides)*, both employ Greek tragedy as a mythical analogue to comment on the holocaust, and thereby circumvent the prevalent anxieties amongst post-war artists regarding the novel's ability to comment on atrocities committed on such a scale (Pritchett 75-81). Similarly, Ismail Kadare employs Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* as a counterpoint in his own novel, *Agamemnon's Daughter*, to comment on the dehumanizing political landscape of communist Albania during the early 1980s. According to Hall, this process of using tragedies as co-texts can help to disengage us from 'received versions of history', which inevitably empathize with history's victors, and give voice to the unaccounted-for by brushing history 'against the grain' (32), to show 'that history was contested and that fiction can uncover the power relations that determined the process by which history was made' (34). In a similar way, *Anubis* attempts to demonstrate that tragedy can also be used in fantasy to comment on socio-political situations of the contemporary world,



by adopting dramatic tragedies as co-texts in order to attempt to access the subjectivity of the 'disempowered wider community' (Hall 29). Indeed, in *Anubis* I employed two points of view to tell the story, Anubis and Cora, not only to give either side of the struggle a voice, but also to show *both sides of both sides*. The revolution is shown as both a people's struggle for freedom from oppression under a military dictatorship (Anwar 75) and a series of personal vendettas that quickly morph the revolution into a borderline racist popular movement (57, 60-61). At the same time, Anubis' Authority is depicted as both an often heavy-handed, hypocritical, and socially detached military regime (42, 44, 47-48) and a flawed man's struggle to run an empire as best he can, at one point he tells Administrator Thull to send four regiments from his undermanned garrison to deliver food as he refuses to let 'children starve in [his] republic' (70), and to hold it together as it teeters on the brink of total collapse (48).

Paired with fantasy's ability to explore 'the space between history and fiction', tragedy works in a similar way to fantasy by moving 'away from everyday life in order to embrace it', with 'contemporary issues constantly lurking below the surface of historical or fictitious settings' (Lever 1-2), namely 'the phenomenon of state power and the debasement of human values' (18). Moreover, tragedy does this by interrogating 'structures of belief' which legitimate 'prevailing power relations' by 'seizing upon, intensifying and exposing contradictions in the prevalent social order' (Dollimore xxiii). Indeed, Fantasy performs a similar role in exploring the way realpolitik affects contemporary society. *The Lord of the Rings*, the patriarch of the modern fantasy novel, is filled with realpolitik, as Mendlesohn notes:

Essentially high politics, it is the politics of kings and princes, wardens, and stewards, of decisions made and mysteriously carried out. The carrying out is never depicted; the link between decisions and action is hidden. This is politics as magic, the will and the word transmuted (67).

George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* cycle is another, more contemporary fantasy which contends with the theme of realpolitik within the *Lear*-like feudal context of a secondary world. The schemes and secretive deals of the ruling elite, without ethical concern for human cost or consequence of policy (Lake & Morris 158), are a central force in the plot of the series. Society at large cannot contribute to the strategic decisions of the elite, yet its fate is often determined

by them. Alyssa Rosenberg (2011), in her essay 'Realpolitik in a Fantasy World', gives a brilliant analysis of how realpolitik permeates Martin's text, from state formation and border issues, to diplomacy, banking and technological warfare. Similarly, in *Anubis* I have experimented with the use of the Shakespearean tragedies of *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony & Cleopatra* as tragic co-texts for my own narrative, which acts as witness to and critic of the events of the twenty-first century, such as the War of Terror and the Arab Spring, and the realpolitik which made them possible, commenting on the way in which socio-political situations focalize society and people at times of upheaval. Despite its closed-perspective focalisation of two central characters, it attempts to show how the subjectivity of ordinary people can 'leak' into the narratives of power politics, whether through terrorised passivity – witnessing and thereby sanctioning the dehumanizing atrocities committed by the elites to valorise their own authority – or the act of objecting, dissenting and rebelling. Moreover, the narrative attempts to expose the 'human cost' of unscrupulous and coercive current-world realpolitik, regardless of whether it is in the guise of 'pragmatism' or political 'realism' (Wolfowitz 66-68).

To this degree, narrative authority is perhaps the most problematic and contentious issue for the creative artefact. The topics of perspective and focalization within the text of *Anubis* are dominated by the voices of patriarchal figures of 'authority', namely Anubis and Cora. Many of the female characters are marginalised to roles where they function as motives for the actions of men, often dying 'off-stage' with their deaths told through second-hand accounts rather than shown to the reader (Anwar 51, 85). Yet, I feel this marginalisation also helps to highlight the issues of subjectivity and witnessing. The narrative moves from one account of authority, the theocratic state of the Supreme Council, to the account of Anubis' rule as 'Authority', and finally ushers in the democratic state of the 'people' with Cora as its figurehead. Yet many more subjectivities are glaringly absent. Mia, Hanna, and Amalthea play pivotal roles in bringing about the revolution, each of them giving their lives for the cause and affecting the leadership on both sides of the struggle in fundamental ways as a result (37, 51, 85), but they are conspicuous by their absence in the endgame, perhaps showing that not all victors have an equal hand in writing out the histories. It is difficult to provide multiple subjective accounts

within a novella, due to the aforementioned limits of the format, yet it may be argued that Cora stands for a plural subjectivity, with various people allowed to speak through his chapters and perspective (53-56, 75), as opposed to Anubis whose focalization is taken up with the narrow viewpoint of *realpolitik* and an absence of other voices. On the other hand, it could also be argued that Cora is not representative of the people, as he is defined *against* the people for the majority of the narrative, first through his own passivity as he is shown at several points 'watching' the first revolution happen (25-26), then at the gathering in the school through his objection to *their* passivity (58), going as far as telling them that the reason for their lack of action is that they have 'simply not lost enough' (60). Subjectivity or the representation of it is important to immersive fantasy, and makes the plausibility of the subject's reflections a key site for examining the reader's response.

## **The Narratology of *Anubis***

The narratology of the creative artefact, 'the nature, form and functioning' of its narrative (Prince 66), as well as its taxonomy have been analysed and explained throughout the exegesis, via the classification and location of the *Anubis* narrative within the genres of fantasy and tragedy, and as an exemplar of the generic structural paradigms given by Aristotle and Tolkien respectively, using aspects of Discovery, Reversal and Suffering, as well as Recovery, Escape and Consolation. However, there remain some issues of narratology which can be considered pertinent to the fiction's success in achieving a narrative which functions as both tragic and fantastic.

Focalization, the subjective perspective from which situations and events within the diegesis of the narrative are presented, is central to creating the ironic mimesis which helps establish the immersive quality of the fantasy, as is the ironizing perspective of the reader beyond the focalized character's knowledge, which can make the protagonist's choices seem more tragic. High Fantasy narrative structures are commonly focalized through one or more protagonists functioning as the central consciousness of the narrative. They are often emblematic, most commonly representing good in a 'dualistic (even Manichean) system where good confronts

evil' (Clute & Nicholls 410). This may be partly due to the fact that in fantasy fiction the 'internal crises or conflicts or processes of the characters are fashioned into external individuals or events' (Donaldson 7). In fact, the game of *chatarang* between Anubis and Tyr (Anwar 64-65) is itself a form of externalised internal conflict, although the story as a whole contains very little of it (i.e. externalised internal conflict). *Anubis* employs a limited third person perspective and internal focalization, which 'entails conceptual or perceptual restrictions (with what is presented being governed by one character's or another's perspective)' (Prince 32). Important events, such as the deaths of Mia, Hanna and Amalthea, the rebelling of cities along the coast and Tyr's refusal to reinforce the imperial palace, are conveyed third-hand through the experiences and thoughts of Anubis and Cora. The protagonists, then, may either misinterpret events, or make decisions based on faulty knowledge or a limited understanding of the 'fluidity' of their situations, as Anubis does in sending the majority of his loyal military apparatus away from the city to deal with rioting on the coast, mistaking the rioting on his doorstep as a 'vocal minority, nothing more' and assuming that 'they will dissipate once they realise how ineffective their efforts are' (Anwar 68). The more equipped reader knows that this is a turning point in the narrative, partly due to knowledge gained from the Cora perspective, and partly through awareness of generic structures, knowledge and awareness which enhance the tragedy. Since Greek tragedies were well-known tales re-told by the poets, and were celebrated for the particular merits of their *telling*, rather than the structure of the plot, ancient Greek audiences also had foreknowledge of the protagonist's fate, which may have helped induce the 'tragic fear and pity' required for catharsis (*Poetics* 14). It could be argued that even apparently formulaic fantasies work in a similar manner to the classic Greek tragedies, in that while their plots may be familiar the details of the world-building and the *telling* of the story are unique, and are what appeal to their readership. Similarly, limited perspective and internal focalisation are techniques that can be helpful in immersive fantasies, such as George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, R. Scott Bakker's *Prince of Nothing* and Steven Erikson's *Malazan* series, in order to 'construct an irony of mimesis' and present the extraordinary as ordinary by interpreting the world through the limited perspective of characters for whom the fantastic *is* ordinary (Mendlesohn 59-62). Therefore, while *Anubis* may be seen as breaking with some generic

conventions, such as emblematic Manichean duality and predominantly externalised struggle, it does employ perspectives and focalisation techniques 'appropriate to the reader expectations of the category of fantasy' (Mendlesohn xiii).

As stated, characterization within high fantasy narratives is emblematic and often dualistic, presenting a clear dichotomy of good and evil. Characterization can also be externalised with physical appearance representative of a moral profiling, beauty equalling goodness, etc. Having said this, in contemporary fantasy fiction this convention is so commonly subverted that it could be argued the opposite is the current convention in this regard, with beauty being characteristic of evil. The character, Darken Rahl, in Terry Goodkind's *Wizard's First Rule* is a good example of this relatively new convention. Characterization in *Anubis* is mostly achieved through the technique of indirect characterization. Direct characterization establishes character traits through the focalized character or narrator himself, whereas indirect characterization is 'deducible from the character's actions, reactions, thoughts, emotions etc.' (Prince 13). In *Anubis*, indirect characterization is employed throughout the story. For example, we know that Anubis is not a wholly selfish person bent on ruling the empire, because his actions and his own internal reasoning tell us that he feels his people have been used by the Council for their own ends (Anwar 23). He takes no pleasure in killing innocents (40-41), tries his best to keep civilian casualties low (21), and only dissolves the senate and takes over the leadership of the empire to re-establish order (44-45). The reader learns through Anubis's inner thoughts, the conversations he has with his generals, and through his actions, that he is not an altogether evil man. As well as this, the protagonist/antagonist relationship between Anubis and Cora is indirect, and they are both characterized with sympathetic motives and qualities, rather than in an emblematic mode of good and evil. Making both sides sympathetic is important for tragedy as 'the forces confronting each other in tragedy are equally legitimate, equally justified' ('On the Future of Tragedy' 299). For Camus, this is what separates tragedy from melodrama, in which 'one is good and the other is evil' (*ibid*). In tragedy 'each force is at the same time both good and bad', 'all can be justified, no one is just' (299-300).

Another convention of the fantasy genre is to characterize as 'type' rather than as 'individual'. Characterizing as 'individual' is usually based on 'close observation of real people' to create a

character that 'represents human nature' in that 'we recognise in her (described) appearance, her recounted actions, and her reported words a being separate from but similar to ourselves', which generates a powerful affective response in the reader (Attebery 70). Such a character can be compared to 'the psychological concept of the Other, recognition of which is essential to the formation of Self' (*ibid*). On the other hand, 'character as type' presents characters as archetypes that, according to Le Guin, 'break the conscious daylight personality into its archetypal unconscious dreamtime components' (107). Such characters perform roles, for instance Hero, Guide, Villain, Temptress, which serve as narrative functions in order to move the plot forward. Joseph Campbell provides an analysis of the various archetypal tropes within mythic narratives in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. As Attebery points out:

Both kinds of character are forms of narrative discourse. Neither is inherently superior. There is no particular virtue in being motivated by envy, melancholy, or some other trait rather than narrative necessity (72).

*Anubis* employs elements of both constructs. Primary characters within the narrative (Cora and Anubis) are portrayed necessarily as 'individuals', in order to make them sympathetic and relatable to the reader and to increase the tragic power of the narrative, as well as to help immerse the reader in their worldview so as to achieve a proper immersive fantasy. Conversely, secondary characters function as types, either providing a motivation for the primary characters, as is the case of Mia, Hanna and Amalthea, or to perform a role which will allow the narrative to progress toward its tragic conclusion, such as Vendis' role in leading a major portion of the army out of the city (Anwar 70).

Lastly, names within the story also correspond to a form of characterization. As Rimmon-Kenon has suggested, names can be analogous to character-traits through four methods: as visual representations, such as using the letter O in association with 'a round and fat character and the letter I with a tall thin one; as acoustic representations, 'like the buzz of flies in the name 'Beelzebub'; articulatory, like 'Grad-grind' in Dickens' *Hard Times*; in the morphological construction or 'semantic parallelism between name and trait' (68), such as the wargs in Tolkien's *Legendarium*, which are constructed from the 'Old Norse *vargr* and Old English *wearh*, two words showing a shift of meaning from "wolf" to "human outlaw"' (*Road* 74), Hiro

Protagonist in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, or King Shrewd, Prince Verity and the rest of the Royal household in Robin Hobb's *Farseer* trilogy. The names of integral characters within the *Anubis* narrative correspond to this fourth category, with Anubis, Amalthea, Tyr, Cora and Scatha being names which appear in various mythologies and carry mythic connotations. For example, Scatha is derived from Scáthach, literally the 'shadowy one', who was a legendary Scottish warrior-woman in Irish mythology, who 'initiates young men into the arts of war, as well as giving them the "friendship of her thighs", that is to say, initiating them sexually' (*Encyclopaedia Mythica*), the warrior Cu Chulainn being one of her well-known students (Campbell 295). The name can also be seen as a derivative of 'sceaðā' which is a word of Anglo-Saxon origin which can mean 'one who works harm' or 'malefactor' (*OED*). As can be seen from the aforementioned examples, the use of morphological construction and semantic parallel in nomenclature as a means of characterisation is a well-established convention of the fantasy genre.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis has explored the relations between fantasy and tragedy as genres and the tragic and fantastic as modes through the production of a creative work. In this practice-led research, the aim was to assess whether tragedy and modern fantasy literature are compatible forms, investigating whether tragedy and fantasy are capable of functioning effectively when combined in a self-contained narrative. This study has shown that a narrative can be located within the theoretical, generic and modal features of fantasy and tragedy by defining the boundaries of the two modes/genres and exploring the points at which they appear to overlap. A close-reading of Tolkien's essay, 'On Fairy-stories', analysed the structure of high fantasy narratives and revealed why the professor expounded that fantasy and tragedy are opposed to each other and perform antithetical functions. Moreover, a close analysis of Tolkien's theory of Eucatastrophe, which he argues is fantasy's 'highest function', and catharsis, which Aristotle suggests is tragedy's highest function (*Poetics* 13-14), reveals that both elements perform the same task through the provoking and purging of different emotions and are therefore possibly

compatible. The conclusions of this research support the idea that applying the tragic mode to fantasy can help to critique contemporary socio-political events, as well as to question received versions of history, through the use of tragedies as co-texts to highlight plural subjectivities which history may otherwise sweep under the rug. These findings, hopefully, enhance our understanding of the concepts of fantasy and tragedy and can be applied to other studies to help advance knowledge within the field. Finally, whilst presented as a narrative whole with beginning, middle and end, the creative work is a fragment of a larger work excerpted in a form appropriate for initiating a study into fantasy and tragedy. It may be interesting to carry out further experimental investigations to explore how tragedy may work in fantasy beyond the structures expounded in Aristotle's *Poetics* and Tolkien's theory of Fantasy, in the extended frame of a novel-length work. This will give the researcher better tools to create a plurality of subjectivities, as well as to explore and critique contemporary socio-political events in a more exhaustive way. Finally, the novel-length format will create the opportunity for expansive world-building to create a more immersive fantasy.



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