

Chapter 19

The Keep

These hallways seemed to span for miles. Endless gloomy brick, as far as the eye could see. In truth, Seer did not quite know how deep it really went.

After walking for what felt like an eternity, he took a torch from the wall, which made him feel like some kind of intrepid adventurer, embarking on the dungeon crawl of a lifetime.

He knew what was out there, though, and he was approaching it rapidly.

With every echoing step, his heart climbed further into his throat, as hissing whispers shot through his head.

He shut them out, shaking his skull side to side to keep the spirits away. It had been so long; he had become sensitive to them again.

He rebuilt those mental walls quickly, though, and proceeded deeper into the keep.

Faintly, he began to notice the sound of rushing water. Only a few more doors.

A voice sounded from nearby.

"Witness the Eye, and it witnesses you. Let it in, let it see."

He knew that one; it still gave him the creeps. Even so, he followed it through an archway to his right, where the hallway opened up into a colossal open room.

High up above, a stream of mountain spring water came falling down towards a gigantic underground lake, around which a walkway had been paved into the rock, which circled it before joining a large platform upon which stood a small group.

In the middle, two Knights and an Oathkeeper, all of which Seer knew by name. Around them, knelt in a circle, sat about ten blindfolded initiates.

"So, Tears, who will be first?"

The Oathkeeper's voice bellowed into the room, reverberating, and making the initiates flinch.

Seer watched as one of them fidgeted.

"You seem anxious. Are you not ready to join us?" The Oathkeeper asked, to which the initiate shakingly answered.

"I am not ready. I wish to leave." The fear was palpable.

Seer took a deep breath, when the Oathkeeper gestured to him.

Seer quietly stepped forward, before kneeling down next to the shaking initiate.

A rumble passed through the mountain, sounding a deep roar that washed over them like a wave.

"Do you feel it?" Seer's question, muttered under his breath, earned a shaky breath from the initiate.

"I... I can feel it. I've never felt so helpless before," the initiate whimpered, a tear escaping from beneath the blindfold.

"Don't fight it. Let it happen... Look back."

The young male heaved a hitched breath again, before lifting his chin to the sky.

"Look back," Seer repeated.

"Get up," the Oathkeeper commanded, to which the initiate silently obeyed, as he carefully climbed back onto his feet.

Guided by Seer's palm between his shoulders, the young man approached the lake and stepped into the water, before kneeling down again into it.

"It's so cold," he muttered, finally, before Seer pushed him forward, face down into the water.

He scarcely had to keep the man still.

He did not struggle when his breath ran out.

He did not flinch when water seeped into his lungs.

He did not cry when Seer pulled him back up, his heart still.

Seer turned him around and placed him upon his back, onto the gentle stream to the middle of the chamber.

He watched as the lifeless one was carried to the center, where the moonlight shone upon him from so high above.

A phrase uttered:

May Aval watch over you, in this age and the next.