

Flames upon Pyres

Prologue: A Flaming Rebellion

Lord Daemus looked out over his magnificent city now in flames from the balcony of his royal palace. His promise to the people was now lost, and he felt the burn from this broken promise flare in his heart. A tear streamed down his cheek as several taverns and homes collapsed in on themselves. Daemus was completely taken by surprise when his brother, Captain of the Royal Guard, Leondre began leading a rebellion against the city during the 202nd annual royal ball.

Daemus was immediately sealed in his chambers under royal protection when the first signs of fighting started. It wasn't long after that when the fires broke out around the city, and the visible fighting in the streets began. Leondre's soldiers were a group of men that Daemus had never really liked, but had always had a strong respect for because of their dedication. It hurt his heart even more to know that these men were responsible for this mayhem.

Suddenly the doors to his chamber burst open and his best friend and loyal protector Jak entered, fully clothed in plated leather armor with the royal insignia of a diamond with a dragon ensnaring it, painted upon the chest plate. He was followed by a dozen other heavily armed men with the same chest plate insignia. Jak walked closer to Daemus and bowed on one knee.

"My lord, we must depart quickly, they have broken through the first palace gate, it won't be long before they break through the second," he said, breathing heavily.

"But my people, my city, my country!" exclaimed Daemus, glancing yet again at the flames that were engulfing the city; cries of pain and screams of fighting could be heard in the distance. "I can't just leave them behind!"

"I know it must be hard for you, but there isn't any time," said Jak. "At least if we escape we may live to take back the city another day, you are still the emperor of this kingdom."

Daemus contemplated this for a moment, thinking once again of his poor people who would now be under the rule of his brother Leondre. More tears began flowing from his eyes as he started to understand the truth behind Jak's words. He decided, against his previous judgment, and decided to leave safely with Jak.

"Alright I will leave with you," he said.

A look of clear relief flowed over Jak's face as he heard these words. He nodded and motioned for Daemus to follow him. The other men, all formerly part of Leondre's Royal Guard, saluted Lord Daemus with a hand over the heart and a bow, and then followed Jak out the door. Daemus followed until he was standing with the men in his bedroom chamber hallway.

"Six of you behind, six of you in front with me, the emperor's safety must be protected at all costs," Jak said, moving in front of Daemus. The 13 men took their positions with Daemus

in the center and began walking to the door on the west side of the hall way. There were magnificent paintings by various famous authors hanging on the walls. Daemus was sad to leave these treasures behind, but he was now more concerned with taking back his city from the vile Leondre.

“We are going to take the secret passage that only you and I know about out of the city,” said Jak. “Well now all my men know about it too, but they are loyal and would do anything for you and I.”

Daemus nodded as he recalled the location of this secret exit and entrance. It was in the palace library, a place Daemus often went to study the cultures of other lands and civilizations. It was also where he was taught daily to be a proper emperor by his father, the previous emperor, Lord Demaska. The place held good memories of him and his father, and Daemus was sad to have to go to it one last time in such a horrible event.

The party made their way to the door, and Jak opened it. Everyone piled through as quickly as possible in to the upstairs throne room, used strictly for negotiations. There was a sudden smash and the splintering of wood could be heard in the distance. All of the guardsmen drew their long swords and equipped their iron bucklers, which they had had slung over their backs.

“Curse it all, they’ve broken through the second gate, there isn’t any time,” said Jak, readying his stance for combat. “They will be up the stairs in moments, you must run to the library yourself, and we will hold them off.”

“I would rather die with my protectors than flee like a coward and leave them to die,” replied Daemus, motioning for a sword.

“No!” shouted Jak. “You are being a fool, you must leave at once, there are horses waiting outside the secret entrance gate with more soldiers to defend you, there isn’t time to argue, go now!”

A shocked look came over Daemus’ face for a moment, when suddenly the throne room door flew open and Leondre, followed by at least twenty of his men entered. They had their swords drawn and all were heavily armored. Jak shoved Daemus toward the door to the library as all of the guardsmen created a line between Leondre’s forces and him.

“Go now my friend!” shouted Jak as Leondre began screaming orders at his men to stop him. “I’m sorry for our friendship to end in such a tragic way, may we meet in the afterlife!”

Daemus began backing up as Jak launched forward at the nearest soldier, followed by six of his men. He quickly slammed his blade in to the throat of one of the men, and then thrust it into another’s chest plate through a small crevice. The two men crumpled before him, but as Jak tried to swipe at another, he was impaled through the waist by the sword of none other than Daemus’s traitor brother, Leondre.

“No!” Daemus yelled, as one of Jak’s guardsmen retreated back from the line and pushed him through the doorway to the library. “Jak!”

“Be safe my emperor,” the man said, and then slammed the library door shut.

Daemus was distraught, he rushed back to the door and tried to push it open again, but it was sealed from the other side. Tears began flowing down his face as he realized he couldn't stay there for long. He felt so useless, more useless than he'd ever felt before. The emperor should be able to do so much more, he thought. He backed away from the door, the sounds of swords clashing and shields deflecting could still be heard from the other side.

Realizing that he was wasting the time his protectors had likely given their lives to give him, Daemus turned around and began running down the library hall to the back, where the secret entrance could be found. The library was massive, spanning thousands of books, and dozens of shelves. Torches on the walls lit the entire room as he reached the bookshelf which would be his salvation.

He grabbed the book *A Life of a King* from the shelf, which was in actuality, the key which fit in to a secret lock hidden behind a torch. The edges of the book from which you opened it were all shaped to various edges and curves which would seem odd to anyone but the person who knew about the passage.

He took the book over to a lone torch hanging on a back wall. He turned the torch sideways, then pulled it all the way down, revealing a book sized slit. Daemus put the book in the slot and waited. Moments later, several clicks came from an area of wall next to the torch, and Daemus pushed on it. The wall area gave way to a passage with stairs leading in to darkness. He grabbed a torch out of its holder nearby and stepped in to the passageway. Daemus looked for a small portion of the stone wall that was elevated higher than the rest, found it, and then smashed it with his fist. The passageway entrance slowly swung closed, and with a couple of clicks, sealed shut. Daemus was left in the dark with his torch providing the only light source. The key would be fine where it was for now, once the passageway was locked from the other side, the torch would reset to its normal position, concealing the key and the slot it was in.

Just as Daemus was about to begin walking down the steps, the library room door could be heard slamming open from the other side of the wall.

“Where is he, find him you fools!” Daemus heard Leondre command his men.

Those words felt like a stab in the heart for Daemus, for he knew now that the men who had so selflessly given their lives to save his were now either captured or dead, with the latter being the more predictable outcome. He also remembered that his friend Jak had been stabbed completely through the waist and was likely lying in a pool of his own blood back in the throne room. Daemus had to support himself against the wall as he wept silently for his friend, and his loyal protectors. He also wept for his brother, the man he would one day have to kill. Life would now be very different for the man who once ruled and protected the giant city of Fortareata.