

# PROLOGUE

*“This body and soul shall carry the will of our Masked Gods. My life is forfeit to our holy artifacts. My blade will cull those deemed Maverick without mercy or repent.” ~ The paladin’s oath*

*Clang. Clang. Clang.*

A death knell rang from atop the cobblestone tower.

*Drip. Drip. Drip.*

The somber pitter patter of rain was met with the solemn, yet forlorn gazes of the knights, squires, and paladins present in the courtyard of the citadel. Thunder clapped in the distance and ferocious winds picked up tempo. The crashing wakes beneath the citadel carried the stench of the saltwater all the way up. A small party of knights led by a single paladin slowly trekked over the ramparts heading towards the courtyard. In tow was the corpse of a fellow paladin. An elderly man awaited to convene with the party. As they inched closer the knights, broken and beaten, assembled into formation which allowed the surviving paladin to approach the elderly man with the corpse.

“Shame,” the old man said under his breath, “This was a valiant one. What exactly happened, Maugrin? As I recall your party was sent on a simple excursion to collect a mask that was reported in the area. How does a fellow paladin end up dead?”

Maugrin replied, “I killed him.”

The knights who were already residing at the citadel readied in a combative stance. Weapons drawn. Tension pierced the previously melancholic atmosphere. The old man raised an eyebrow. A mask of his own phased into reality and covered his face. It began to glow and surge with power. A mighty gust formed around the old man as his ornate robes swayed and teetered.

Maugrin continued, “He went Maverick. I never expected this to happen either.” Maugrin pulled out an iridescent red crystal and presented it. “At our campsite, I awoke to find him missing. I searched for him and stumbled across a rocky outcrop where I could hear his voice as well as another...” The high tension still lingered – doubt tainted the air around them. “An envoy of the Ruby Isles met him there to fulfill some sort of bargain. The head of the envoy managed to escape with the mask while his lackeys kept us distracted.”

“Go on...” the old man insisted.

“Their fighters were formidable, yet nimble. Their equipment must be infused with some sort of unknown reagent. The knights could barely keep them at bay while I fought with Bellathor. He left me no choice but to end him – I couldn’t risk knocking him unconscious to have our inquisitors interrogate him.”

“Aye. Sir Plax... All of it is true.” A knight from Muagrin’s party meekly spoke.

“I made sure to bring his body with me as you are the only one capable of removing his mask, as an Augur of our Brotherhood; as well as the mysterious crystal.” The localized wind died down and Plax’s mask faded back into the ether. Maugin and his team sighed with a collective breath of relief. The tension slowly dissipated, and the knights from the citadel lowered their weapons.

“Impressive Maugin. Very impressive. Bellathore was quite the prestigious paladin. Not to mention you haven’t fully mastered the power bestowed upon you by your own mask yet.” Plax continued to ramble; he took the crystal from Maugin, “Now I see why the pope himself has a keen interest in you.”

“Me?” A confused Maugin retorted, “what do you mean?”

“The pope has requested your presence at the monastery east of Daggermaw Hold.” An air of unease fell over Maugin. Ironically for him it was easier to stalwartly explain his actions of disposing of another paladin than it was to understand why the pope would request his presence. “Rest up for tonight and depart tomorrow. I’ll be sure to convene with other augurs regarding this crystal. This may prove beneficial to the Brotherhood.”

Plax departed from the courtyard. Two other knights took the corpse of Bellathore, and the party of knights standing at formation broke down to relax and take respite from the tension that had shaken their nerves.

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*“I choose not the path of the holy warrior – I choose the path of knowledge. Knowledge will propel the Brotherhood to new heights. Zealous conviction, and the unending search for answers is the path I choose” ~ the augur’s oath.*