Prologue

Year: 20XX

Location: Sadrabad, Rostaq Rural District, Central District of Saduq County, Yazd Province, Iran.

Time: 1200 GMT

 Officer Azar and her partner Officer Goli, of the Iranian Highway Patrol Division, of the Iranian Police were writing a traffic citation to Mr. Zia, a member of the 3rd Martyrdom Brigade, martyrdom vest full of primed and ready explosives plus twin linked Heckler & Koch MP5s mounted on his bike with jury rigged trigger system, for speeding 3 kph above the posted speed limit on his motorcycle and not wearing a helmet. While praising him for his dedication to defense they chided him for speeding and not wearing a helmet, when the gate appeared 133 meters outside the village and 40 meters in front of them.

 Measuring 100 meters by 100 meters, and outlined by rune encrusted marble slabs that resisted all damage, the gate had no sooner arrived than several Wyvern riders flew out and began flying off. The first scouts of the Karazaki Empire, and following behind those scouts were disciplined ranks upon disciplined ranks of a military unit containing mounted human officers on huhorses (legs from knee down were horse like with hooves for feet and they had a horse tail above the anus). This was the Karazaki Empire's initial 8,000 strong expeditionary force led by Count Farata with the majority of his Men-at-Arms with 6,000 infantry, 1,600 mounted archers on huhorses, and eventually 400 Wyvern Knights.

 Officers Azar and Goli left the scene and began radioing for help as they sped towards Sadradbad. While successful in getting the alert out, they were martyred by a wyvern rider who had his mount breath fire on their patrol car just as two IRIAA Cobra Attack Copters traveling to a live fire exercise arrived on the scene to witness the next martyr.

 Mr. Zia was the next martyr, accelerating towards the foul invaders of Iran on his motorcycle; he plowed into their ranks and detonated his martyrdom vest, killing many, including Count Farata who charged him on his personal steed with couched lance only to be gunned down before his men by the mounted guns of Zia which killed his mount and hit him in the eye.

 In the village, the alarm was raised and the 400 villagers who were Basji Militia grabbed their arms and five more members of the 3rd Martyrdom Brigade grabbed their martyrdom vests, hopped on their bikes, donned their helmets because they feared getting a ticket, and launched their own martyrdom assaults with devastating effectiveness while driving the speed limit because they feared getting a ticket. The local police had nine members and they rushed to organize the defense while the local Mullah grabbed his sword and with his prosthetic arm wielding an AK-47 led his flock into the fray chanting prayers to Allah. Overhead the two Cobras engaged the seven wyvern riders, shooting all of them down, but a hundred more came out of the gate and engaged them, swarming them with fire breath, bringing one down.

 But help was already on the way. Four F-4Ds and nine F-4Es of the IRIAF were enroute, being closest. Not far behind, 30 F-5s including Iranian built derivatives were heading to the fray. On the ground, an Army Convoy heading for range practice diverted to the gate. All told the battle would last two hours against the Invaders whose fantasy army of swords and magic was no match against an army whose technology far outclassed bows and arrows. Iran would take 400 prisoners, including a Baron, 197 huhorses captured, and three wyvern knights also surrendered with their mounts. The men-at-arms titanium alloy breastplates, with a metal collar when combined with their Corinthian style helm protected the neck, worn over a shirt of titanium mail, itself worn over padded silk clothing with titanium greaves and titanium manicas worn over the sword arms provided surprisingly effective Level III ballistics protection to the torso, and the shields being rated Level III protection. It did not, however, stop shrapnel hitting weak spots, the Iranian Army’s new 7.62×63mm bullpup battlerifle rounds punching through, heavy machinegun bullets punching clean through, or blast overpressure. Especially blast overpressure which inflicted the majority of kills, a truism of Modern War since high explosives made artillery, not firearms the main killer. Though many men-at-arms knew battle magic and their lords were also skilled in magic and a few mages with staffs accompanied them, it made no difference in a battlefield dominated by high explosives.

 By the fourth hour, the Iranian Army had gone through the gate, and began securing a perimeter around it. On the other side of the gate, it was located in an open field three kilometers from a major river port called Yilla, the seat of the Farata County, and guardian of the only fordable spot of the Jytan River for 500 kilometers in either direction by the standards of a low fantasy world with a tech level equivalent to early 11th Century Europe but with Roman, Abbasid Caliphate, and Han Dynasty Engineering and Scientific Genius. Yilla itself was built on an island in the middle of the river's Lake Varta which was 180 kilometers wide and 225 kilometers long. Yilla was 5,987 meters long by 4,597 meters wide. It had a total of 47 Sentinel Island Fortresses, plus a 1 square kilometer legion island fortress, and helped formed the system of protection for the river trade and the bridge across it. 200 wyvern knights formed a permanent garrison backed by 1,200 men-at-arms and the sentinel forts each had 50 men-at-arms who covered the bridge within arrow range and had ballistas to attack ships that tried to assault them. The city itself had 67,000 residents and the west bank the Iranians had taken was the Count's personal manor and hunting grounds with 13 elves, 200 humans, 156 orcs, and 2,678 female, rabbit eared and whiskered, rabbit tailed, human looking slaves plus a free male rabbit, who managed the 8,000 hucows, 400 hucats, 200 hudogs, 890 huhorses, the orchards, and the vinyards, while the east bank held 11,000 citizens and 120,000 slaves who worked the fields in numerous farm villages and manor estates, plus 800,000 hulivestock. The next day 60 Homo sapiens idaltu and a female Homo erectus visited the Iranian encampment with an aquarium holding a Merman and Mermaid.

 For six weeks there was no pitched combat, aside from several lopsided skirmishes at squad level in the Iranian's favor. The IRIA contented itself with forming a 20 kilometer semi-circular defensive perimeter around the site with seventeen thousand soldiers, 1,200 light vehicles of all types, 700 AFVs of all types, 56 artillery pieces, 22 utility helicopters, and one Brigadier General and gave it the designation of IREF. Repeated attempts were made to open negotiations under flag of truce through the Countess's Steward with little result other than agreement to continue to supply the city with hucow milk, though soldiers on both sides opened up informal communication for trading purposes which was officially banned, but tolerated as it was another way to try and bring this war to a swift end as Iran did not really want a war. Iran had too many Earth enemies to really afford a major war with an inter-solar empire, even if it was quasi-medieval age technologically. Logistics, lack of information, infrastructure differences, and other issues all argued against conquest, that and Iran was a nation of peace, though it was not afraid to fight if necessary which it hoped to convey to the Karazaki Empire. Also during this time, DNA samples were taken and analyzed from the prisoners taken from the empire's force and the Count's manor grounds people.

 The results were as follows: DNA analysis shows humans, elves, and orcs to have 99.9% same DNA making all four essentially the same species, but more shocking was the fact that all DNA taken from three of the population samples (human, orcs, and elves) none showed lineage to Y-Chromosomal Adam or Mitochondrial Eve, which threw the Iranian Scientific World into chaos at the implications. The Idaltus and Erectus were also tested. The Idaltus being first born of Homo sapiens were 99.9% Homo sapiens sapiens DNA as expected.

 DNA analysis of the hurabbits showed their DNA code was 99.9% human with no rabbit DNA despite rabbit characteristics which threw the biologists into further chaos. They were sentient and sapient but otherwise normal human gestation time, but a high propensity for delivering quadruplets (80% of births) and Homo sapiens leporidae delivering eight babies per pregnancy are not unheard of and no Homo sapiens leporidae was known to have delivered less than two babies per pregnancy. The Iranians left the rabbits in slavery, and kept the rabbits in their normal duties while forbidding their men from fraternizing with them with little real success. The Iranians so far were not interested in conquest or changing the local power structure, only securing the safety of the Islamic Republic, if they were certain the other world couldn't just open another gate to Iran, they would have just blown the gate and never speak of it again. Thus they left the late Count's Steward in charge and kept requisition records so they could compensate the owner for the use of the land and slaves once they had a peace and trade treaty with the ruling power of this world. But the rabbits were human; it was possible for viable and fertile offspring to be had between a Homo sapiens leporidae and any other human subspecies so this policy could not be indefinite. It also left open the chilling possibility that some time in the past, sufficiently advanced aliens had tampered with genetic codes using a far superior understanding of genetics. If true, what happened to those aliens and what were they fighting?

The Merman and Mermaid were 99.3% Homo which caused a scientific shitstorm over the aquatic ape theory, especially as further DNA comparison with Erectus showed it shared 99.7% of the same DNA showing it was clearly in the Human family tree. The Iranians would continue to come across more archaic human and proto-human ancestors. Iran also had to rethink the concept of a baseline human which was now a patent joke, and had to figure out if it was possible to accord all species of the genus Homo the same human rights. The clergy were having a massive meltdown just thinking on it.

 The hucows' DNA was 99.9% cow with no human DNA, with the exception of horns, ears, legs from mid-thigh down and tails, which were cow like, they looked human though their breast size on average breast size was a metric J cup. They had the mental capacity of a cow mostly but could manipulate things with their hands, though not use tools in a sapient way. They were used in the same manner as Earth Cows by the other worlders, even for meat, and the Iranians near BSODed over their presence, even the scientists who successfully in the lab fertilized hucow female eggs with Earth cows sperm and fertilized Earth cow eggs with hucow sperm. Only direct orders and reassurances from the clergy would get many of the soldiers to even consume milk products made from them as Iran wasn't going to ship cows through, not wanting to introduce invasive species or up the costs of the expedition. The hulivestock, which consisted of hucows, hucats, hudogs, huhorses, hupigs, hudonkeys, humules, hulions, hutigers, and huwolfs all looked human in general terms, but had no human DNA, only 99.9% Earth animal DNA. The implications were throwing the Iranians into shock. The Karazaki Empire considered sex with these creatures to be bestiality, which while not illegal as the Empire had more important things to police, it was socially wrong.

 For the Government of Iran, this was both a great opportunity and a great danger. Opportunity, because of a possible new trade venues to continue fighting the Islamic State, and danger because the US and its allies still could not get it through their heads that their days were numbered and were looking to drag as many people down with them as possible as they struggled to maintain economic/military relevancy after defeats from the Islamic State and its predecessors organizations that joined it. Fortunately no-one else picked up the event and America was too busy stupidly threatening China and Russia lately for no good reason while the US Economy continued to implode with the Gold Manipulation Scandal, and armed insurrection was starting to break out in the USA as its society further broke down and its military industrial complex further bankrupted it. The Iranians decided to just hide it in the open; they often made deliberate hoax announcements for hoax things and troll announcements to obfuscate their abilities. So they did the same here and announced another empire opened a portal to this world and they were defending themselves from the unprovoked attack and showed deliberately grainy gun cam footage of the event and invited, in their words, the most trusted news source of all to cover it, *The Onion*. The world laughed and didn't look further, so mission accomplished, even though Iran continued to cover it on its own local news thus openly fighting its secret war while other nations laughed it off and asked Iran to stop making up excuses for why its military budget was increasing and comply with demands to cease enriching uranium. For a wonder the Onion did decide to cover it and was given full access, no one actually believed them outside of Iran.

 For the Karazaki Empire on the planet Kar, news of the setback did not cause alarm. Having conquered the entire world and ruling it for 4,000 years and having finished unifying humanity 200 years later in the Unification Wars, the Karazaki Empire did not feel threatened by news of reverse in a distant province 6,700 kilometers from its capital. The Emperor could call upon inexhaustible armies from his million subject worlds connected by two-way land and sea based portals to his capital world, his standing state army of roughly 100 million Legionaries of the Adeptus Honorius, followers of the Codex Honorius, separated into 10,000 legions, ensured his hold over the worlds. No other lord could muster the loyalty of the Honorius, who were powerful magic users themselves, which had ensured Emperor Trazayn's divine rule for 4,000 years. Only the gods were more powerful, and they and their earthly Avatar representatives supported Trazayn's rule.

 An extensive system of roads and improved sea lane charting was allowing better communications and trade to support a growing industry of blast furnaces, factories, and oil/kerosene extraction/production throughout the Empire. Emperor Trazayn's realm was on the verge of an industrial revolution with only a few critical steps to be made to move from artisanal pre-industrial stage to true standardized mass-production industrial stage. More resources were needed to continue this expansion and raise living standards on the 100 High Kingdom worlds (a billion inhabitants at least) that provided the bulk of Trazayn’s conventional military, commercial, and political might and had a hundred legions each home based on them to keep them unassailable and serve as administrative HQs for the Kingdom Worlds (50 million inhabitants at least but under a billion) which in turn oversaw the Frontier Worlds (less than a 50 million inhabitants).

 The Count's magical researches into other further realms to feed this expansion was welcomed, and the Emperor had funded the research and expedition, but though reports showed it backfired somewhat, the Emperor figured it would still serve a purpose and work itself out. In time that attitude would change as he got a clearer picture of the situation, but for the time being the feudal structure of the Empire would have to begin working up a proper response as information flowed up the various chains of Governmental Response and various Feudal Commands responded to the development of the Farata County's invasion.

 The gods of the other world, led by High God Regulus, who took the form of a Man, for their part were sharply divided over the situation. To simply intervene was out of the question. That was a last resort option as such was their power that the last time Regulus directly exercised just a trillionth of his power in his true form on a planet 4,800 years ago, he reduced it to dust killing billions in just a single minute before withdrawing in horror at what he had done. Best to let their worshippers handle it for now, it was why they had guided Trazayn and reformed the Honorius from a non-political Demon Fighting Army to a State Army enforcing Human Unity. In any event they were not the original gods of Humanity and all were only 10,000 years old and had inherited the rulership of Humanity from the Greater Being known simply as Eldest who they both loved and hated as he was a terrible father who made many dark pacts with Demons that still haunted them though they were necessary to seal the Forgotten Door for which Eldest sacrificed himself to complete the final seal to save Humanity.

 This event had them utterly baffled. Far as they knew, Humanity, with the exception of the Galaxy they oversaw, did not exist elsewhere in the Universe. That was what Eldest told them, before killing himself to create the final seal on the Forgotten Door 5,000 years ago, the very act alone erased much of their memories, except Honorius and Lyra, and that of mortals of the ancient conflict requiring the Forgotten Door. For the Gods, the revelations that Eldest had withheld vital information shocked them. It was already bad enough Eldest erased large parts of their memories pertaining to their origins. Eldest caused mortal females and goddesses to become second class citizens with the Dark Pacts in order to seal the Forgotten Door. Eldest left one god essentially exiled with a goddess having to choose slavery to be with him. Eldest also forced Baltar, then god of festivities, to watch his own five year old demigoddess daughter and his mortal lover be brutally tortured, gang raped, and murdered by Demons to power a forgotten spell. That act changing Baltar from a jovial fellow to a sad, rational god of logic who never smiled and lived in horrified regret. Now this lost colony of consisting so far of only Homo sapiens sapiens appeared, and these human’s genetic codes were wrong, unstable, showing no signs of recent admixture for tens of thousands of years, and indicated they had been an isolated population for tens of thousands of years. This left the gods wondering what happened to humanity on the world they came from? The Gods wondered just how big a mess Eldest left them with and if they would ever be free from his terrible legacy they desperately wanted to undo, but could not lest the Forgotten Door reopen and the Others be let loose.

 Baltar, God of Science and Reason, and an Atheist who demanded logic and rationality of his followers, not worship, was the only god not to panic. Having long thought himself and his fellow "Gods" were really genetically enhanced transhumans with command of technology so advanced as to be indistinguishable from magic that Eldest had created for purposes unknown. Baltar now had a chance to put his theories to the test. It also helped that he through his mortal followers, control the gate systems. Baltar may not be privy to what precisely the Forgotten Door was or its composition, due to Eldest wiping his memories. However, Baltar knew the Others, from what fragments of his memory he could piece together, were an advanced xenocidal species that Eldest had waged war against for three billion years, sometimes alone and sometimes with Demons when they could put aside their differences long enough. The Forgotten Door was a weapon so monstrous and so dangerous that Eldest did not ever want it to be used again, hence why he broke himself to make it. Though because of his nature Eldest could not truly die, he could never take form in the material universe ever again, existing as a faint echo that only Baltar knew to listen for and did not share with his fellow ‘Gods.’

 With more mysteries than answers the Gods debated whether to appear before these Iranians in forms they were more comfortable with or allow Trazayn to handle this on his own while they served as guidance.

Chapter One

Six Weeks since the Gate Opened.

 Ortan Franc, Legatus and commander of the LVI "Purpureo Malleis" Legion of the Adeptus Honorius, who used Yilla and the surrounding Farata County as a home base when not on campaign, was doing paperwork, while eating a carrot, to prep the way for the main might of his legion to return from their various missions on other worlds and mass for the first time in 800 years as a Legion Formation. Some 10,000 Honorius, not counting female slaves who formed the legion's support staff, was enroute and needed to be accommodated. More than sufficient to push back through the gate and it was no more than a speartip for Feudal Levies, and Free Companies that were being raised from landed nobility and merchant nobility respectively to punish these new upstarts. While it was a shock that they were humans, it ultimately did not matter; they were subjects of the Emperor Trazayn who ruled the all the sub races of Humanity as ordained by the Gods. After meeting with their envoy and the Steward Heran of the late Count's estate over the past six weeks, Ortan had grown impatient with their inability to accept Trazayn's rule and enter peacefully into the Empire as a subject province. They even had the gall to demand to be treated as equals. Oddly they insisted Allah, an archaic term in Old Rabbit for Eldest, was alive and ruled them. Which was silly as the Gods would have known if that was the case.

 At least they had the decency to return the bodies of the expedition force, though many of them weren't even recognizably human anymore. The elven Baron Yerrick only being identified by his shoes, his orc wife had made, which were all that was left of him, indicating very powerful weaponry typically only carried by Honorius to combat demons, their primary foes. The Baron always preferred to lead his household on foot and fight in the front ranks and paid for it. They also released unconditionally the survivors of the expeditionary force who were sent back with gifts and their daily wages paid while in captivity... They also gifted the Countess and her daughters a selection of their fashions. Odd people these Iranians, Ortan couldn't figure out if they were being obfuscating stupid or just were stupid.

 Then there was Heran, an Orc, a former Primus Pila of Ortan's legion, and a hero. Ortan felt sad for his friend and mentor that he was forced to endure captivity with the Iranians. Ortan remembered him as a centurion of 10th Cohort when Ortan was just an 18 year old Miles of 10th Cohort 4,995 years ago. Then 2,780 years ago, Heran fought the rebellious elven Duchess of Dera, Adriane on the colony world of Mera in single combat. Heran succeeded in subduing the genocidal bitch, who had the blood of 6,879,000 defenseless innocent female and child rabbits alone on her hands, and then retired with his 5,000 year service contract up to take up the position as Steward to the late Count whose family he was Kin to and were honored to have a Living Legend and Physical God as Kinsman and Steward.

 "Master, your wine," Ortan's brunette rabbit Lyra spoke to him, bringing him out of his remembrances and to her brown eyes. As one both their rabbit ears touched each other and their whiskers tingled as they exchanged sensory information.

 "Ah, thank you Nadia, and please get me the account ledger from the shelf," Ortan asked her as he looked at the magical 3D map of the region. It currently was showing the manor grounds and was updated constantly from the spy globe on the reconnaissance kite being flown over the legionary fortress at 800 feet and allowed him to see the Iranian Encampment around the gate from 60 kilometers away. With only 200 Evocati of the First Centuria, Evocati Cohort, some 300 newly trained recruits awaiting graduation and assignment to the 10th Cohort, and 120 new trainees under his command at the moment, Ortan had ruled out a deep strike till his legion got back. Heran had been enspelling locator globes, which the Iranians did not seem to recognize or know of, to ease the plan at great risk. But, once all the Evocati of the legion got here, they could perform a mass deepstrike into the Iranians' ranks and shatter them, opening the way for the Feudal Army to exploit the breach.

 "Here is the book master," Nadia spoke, bringing Ortan's attention back to her.

 "Thank you Nadia, you should get some sleep, I'll be working late," Ortan told his slave as he began to read from the distinctive red account ledger as Nadia could not read and a color code was needed for her to identify the various documents Ortan oversaw.

 Nadia, with 5,012 years of disciplined training as Ortan's personal Lyra slave since his joining of the Honorius, complied immediately, flattening her ears against the transparent black veil that covered her hair and face trimmed in gold with gold coins across her forehead and the bridge of her nose to her temple with a slit for her eyes and lower forehead. With a practiced grace she turned to the bed she shared with Ortan and began walking to it. Her uniform outfit aside from her veil, consisted of a black silk, gold laced, string cupless bra, whose gold strings formed triangle around her breasts with gold nipple piercings, had gold coins dangling from them and connected to each other on the front by a gold cord with strings of coins. Golds cords with gold coins hanging from them girded her waist and circled around her loins, framing her vulva with its vertically pierced clitoris, and the Mark of the Honorius branded and filled with gold on her mons, and a sheer black silk harem leggings covering her ankles to mid-thigh and attached to her waist cord with a gold cord and clip combination, with gold coins along the gold trimmed thigh band and ankle bands. Black leather slippers covered her feet and sheer black arm poofs covered her wrist to her upper arm with the gold trim bands having gold coins. A gold slave collar, with a gold identity tag listing her as Ortan's property, completed her uniform while Ortan’s nine other concubines also wore the same black uniform but with silver trim, piercings, coins, brand, and collars.

 Nadia had been with Ortan ever since she was presented to the five year old Ortan, first born son of the High King of Yeran who at five had with great pain and determination grasped a sword of the Honorius and pulled it from a rock to claim the power. Nadia had been five then, the fourth daughter of a slave who had the courage to enter the shrine of Lyra, Goddess of Love and Fertility, to be worthy to love a God. She and Ortan had been together for 5,012 years

 Ortan did not order Nadia around like his other concubines, essentially making Nadia his wife in all but name. Of course Nadia did domestic housekeeping tasks for Ortan, bore Ortan's children, and showed Ortan deference, but Ortan allowed Nadia free reign within the limits of her slavery. Still Ortan belonged to Honorius, and he like all Honorius had to sacrifice his humanity so others could keep theirs. Even in death he would still serve, unable to go to Elysia and eternal freedom. Nadia, an Avatar of Lyra like all First Concubines to a Honorius, would follow him to serve Ortan even in death by remaining his slave in the afterlife, the only way to stay by his side for eternity, just like Lyra did for Honorius so he would not guard the Forgotten Door alone and away from her love. It saddened Ortan as he could not give her, his Goddess, the freedom she deserved. But Nadia would rather stay by Ortan's side as a slave than be apart from him and free, such was her love for him, that it was a defiance of her slavery rather than her acquiescence to it. The other concubines in turn would gain freedom upon Ortan’s death and substantial dowries to help them find husbands and adopt any of Nadia’s nursing children as their own.

 A series of ancient and terrible spells that enslaved humanity as much as they protected humanity, but necessary spells as humanity would be destroyed without them. One spell for example, made it forbidden for all females, whether mortal or goddess, to read or write as anything written by their direct hand could be used to summon Demons. This was due to an anchor spell used to construct the Forgotten Door being a contract with Demons written by the Goddess of Poetry, Fleur, so that her son the god David would not be blood sacrificed instead. In return the Demon God Yriggan, who despised humanity the most, blood sacrificed himself instead knowing the price he exacted would greatly weaken humanity. The price was the empowering of females to summon Demons without writing their true names just by reading out loud the words they or another female wrote, then waiting ten seconds. However, Demons could not be controlled by females once summoned this way. So writing and reading were forbidden to be taught to females, even goddesses, so that they could not unwittingly summon Demons, those who broke that law were lucky to survive to be punished by the law as the Demons usually got to them first and dragged them to the Demon Realms from whence there was no return. So many legal bars to females and goddesses being equal to males were rooted in the desperate times of the Forgotten War and the terrible pacts made with Demons to save Humanity and Demons from extinction by the Others.

 It was this history of sacrifice and salvation that caused Nadia to turn back to her master, raise her ears up, and kiss him, "Come master, the Iranians aren't going anywhere and are content to hide in their metal boxes, the cowards, the fools. We… We should take their metal boxes away."

 Ortan laughed as he turned to her, his ears flicking high, as he stood and scooped a giggling Nadia up. As one their ears touched...

 "Sir, new enemy activity, and Heran has a message, orders?" Evocati Scout Decanus Opana spoke as his image rose from the desk in a magical 3D hologram.

 Setting down a miffed Nadia who was glaring daggers at the Decanus and lowering her ears in anger, Ortan responded, "I'm coming to Sentinel Keep twelve, Nadia sound the watch."

 Nadia raised her ears and with a complete 180 turn of temperament kissed Ortan, "Come back to me," she spoke as she pulled a lever on the wall that set the alarm bell ringing causing their four two-year old daughters to wake up, their ears lowered in crankiness at being woken up as they rubbed their eyes. The other concubines and their children by Ortan were also woken up.

 Ortan smiled at Nadia before drawing his Gladius from its scabbard and raising it to the ceiling, the tungsten blade bursting into flames as it was drawn. "**By The Power of Honorius! I HAVE THE POWER!**" Ortan shouted and immediately felt the infinitesimal part of Honorius's godly power within him fill him. Two rings formed at his chest and shot up and down, enveloping him in light as two wings of light shot from his back and framed him in bright light, summoning his armor and weaponry from Honorius's own armory. Time slowed and Ortan landed in cold water. A single tear fell into the water and the Goddess Lyra looked upon him with sadness for the fate Honorius had to endure to save Humanity. In turn an immense feeling of sadness and regret filled Ortan, from Honorius for what Lyra had chosen to stay by his side as she sprouted two angelic wings. A glimpse of a terrible war forgotten in history that he was born at the tail end of and leading to Eldest's suicide. A tragedy of the Gods, which was visited upon Honorius's chosen warriors, every time they accessed the power, and mirrored in their lives.

 The light and vision faded, lasting but a second in real time, leaving Ortan in a tungsten, ceramic, and titanium composite full plate armor crafted just for him by the god of forges Terek's own forge shop, topped with wings on the back of his armor, with an inner ballistic gel suit, and his copy of the Codex Honorius hanging on his right side by a platinum chain. A heater shield was strapped to his back. This was standard for all armor of the Honorius and per tradition was unadorned, with the exception of the shields and pauldrons which bore the legion number and symbol, to not differentiate the ranks to the enemy.

 A flanged shock mace lay at his left side, against armored demons at full strength it would break bones, against necromantic forces at full strength it would pulverize them to dust, against mortals at full strength it would accelerate their body to 1,702 m/s for a picosecond before sheer wind shear turned their body to find red mist, if a mortal was wearing armor they became a frag grenade as well. His gladius returned to his right side. In his hands was a tungsten longbow, with 1,000 kg of draw force, which fired arrows with a tungsten tip and hollow titanium shaft filled with WP. Upon contact with a solid object the arrow would puncture through armor, crumple, and detonate the incendiary load inside the armor and set the target on fire as well as disrupt enemy formations causing them to route. Only Honorius could use such arrows and they typically carried 60 in a ready pouch on their right side. WP grenades filled out their arsenal.

 Within Ortan's enclosed helm tactical overlays filled his entire field of vision updating him with information from spy globes, giving him secure communication channels, fixing locator globes for deep strikes, updating him to how many of his men were alive and their ranks as their armor and uniforms bore no rank insignia, range estimates in meters, wind direction and speed, and more. Ortan was Honorius, a God of War, an oath sworn defender of all of Humanity's various races from enemies from within and from without. War was his life ordained by Eldest before he gave up his life and godhood to form and seal the forgotten door which only Honorius and Lyra knew the location of. With a thought, Ortan teleported to Sentinel Keep Twelve. Only those who had accepted a small infinitesimal portion of Honorius could even hope to survive teleportation and the spell was only then used by the Evocati of the First Cohort. Even for Honorius there were limits and dangers to using teleportation, the maximum safe range was 20 kilometers without a beacon and that left one feeling as if they hit water in a belly flop. Ortan moved only 20 klicks though to Sentinel Keep 12 which was 10 klicks from the shoreline and a 10 klick hike from shore to the first Iranian defense line.

 Evocati Scout Decanus Opana was waiting for him, Veryan, the Lieutenant of the Keep who held it for the Countess, through the Lord Regent, was also there but not part of the Honorius. "Report Decanus," Ortan spoke.

 "The Lieutenant here has been sending unarmed swimmers out at night to sneak in close to the Iranians to spy while we monitor the river. Most get picked up, as if the Iranians can see in the dark, and then set loose after a meal with the Iranians. One of the swimmers decided to save trouble and turned himself in for a free meal, Iranian Dental Care, and Iranian Chocolate, which he enjoys, and noticed a buildup of military equipment not there three days ago, plus the building of strange buildings from sand filled bags. Heran gave him a coded poem." Opana spoke.

 "The soldier drew sketches for me of what he saw and relayed to me all he saw which I have written down here, but every time we sent an armed party to raid they are shot to pieces by their thunderarms, which are superior to our bows. Again I beg of you to unleash your Centuria and get some measure of revenge or I'll start to see morale decline again." Veryan spoke as he handed Ortan the sketches and written report while Opana fed his helmet feed of Heran's note to Ortan.

 Ortan took a moment to read the material and smiled. Heran had arranged for Ortan to pick up an Iranian and his rabbit slave concubine Heran had sold him. A risk worth taking as the Iranian worked in the Iranian HQ. Because the Iranians forbade their soldiers to have relations with rabbits, the lovers had to go into no-man's land to rut.

 "Veryan, understand we Honorius are not sitting on our heels, we have an overall battleplan we don't want to compromise and I do not want to assault the camp till sufficient forces arrive. However, this new turn of events shows the Iranians probably plan to expand their lodgment to gain more negotiation strength. This does justify an ambush though to off balance them till reinforcements arrive in four days. I will deploy a Triarch from here. Have a boat meet us five klicks downstream in one hour, executing now." Ortan spoke as he mentally assigned Opana's scout contubernium to the mission and sent orders to Tessarius Kyran to join him for the snatch raid with his Triarch so Ortan would have 35 men plus him and Kyran. Already on alert, they teleported themselves in and fell in line with Ortan, reading his mission briefing of the prisoner snatch as they did so.

 Looking over his hastily assembled raid force, Ortan addressed them quickly via secure line. "Alright, we teleport to the shore beacon placed by Heran to avoid being seen coming by boat or by wings. Understood?"

 Ortan received acknowledgements. "Execute!"

 All the Evocati along with Ortan were swallowed by golden rings. Upon coming out, Ortan landed on the shore as his helmet switched to thermal view mode due to the new moon this night. His mission roster immediately began updating showing all present and accounted for. “Go to stalk mode and spread out in skirmish formation, execute."

 Immediately Ortan's weapons and armor turned to digital camouflage, and his armor's wings folded down, and began to mirror the surroundings as he moved forward to link up with his command that would travel separated from each other by 3 meters. It took two minutes to fully link up and move forward at 500 meters a minute. Despite their speed, they made not a sound despite all the twigs and brush around them. Suddenly Ortan's ears, made even more acutely sensitive by his armor's auto senses picked up bootfalls not matching any boots he knew of and giggling. "Hold up, contacts." Ortan ordered before going to ground with his 36 men doing the same.

 Within seconds Ortan's display automatically assigned two tracking reticules to two approaching figures along with the attendant velocity sights that corrected for wind and told him where to aim to achieve a center of mass hit. Zooming in, Ortan could make out bunny ears of his sub-species Homo sapiens leporidae and a male of the human sub-species of Homo sapiens sapiens or simply men.

 "The next patrol isn't for another two hours Deliah, so we'll have that long to enjoy ourselves, now that I have paid off the video surveillance team," The Iranian spoke to the female rabbit who was holding fast to his side and indicating her desires quite plainly to her lover.

 Ortan inwardly sighed, a stupid way for a soldier to be caught. No matter, Ortan would take the easy prize offered tonight by Heran. Over the secure com, Ortan gave his orders.

 "Wait till he is fully in a compromised pos..."

 Ortan stopped as another sound drew his attention, a loud growling noise that his autosenses toned down. Looking to the left, Ortan saw an Iranian horseless cart come up and spotlight the two lovers. Immediately Ortan's autosenses switched to light intensification.

 "Sir?" Tessarius Kyran asked.

 "Hold tight. Prepare for tactical teleport." Ortan ordered as he reassessed the situation while a man, with braiding on his clothing which intel had tagged as a work uniform for high ranking officers, marched toward the couple with a woman, who was wearing man's clothing no less, but no identity bracelet of a free woman or a slave collar of a slave woman, holding manacles. This was a chance to snatch high value intelligence.

 Immediately the officer started ripping into the stupid soldier while Ortan assigned his group teleport sites. As they were only jumping LOS 58 meters, accuracy was within millimeters. Once certain of where they would end up, Ortan gave the order, "Execute."

 Again Ortan went through teleportation, appearing just to the left and 50 centimeters from the braided Iranian with his bow pointed at his face. Before the Iranian could react, Ortan gave him the traditional rabbit greeting, "Eh, what's up Doc?" Ortan then stepped in and bow whipped him in the face knocking him out cold. "Clear." Ortan spoke over the secure com.

 He received the same clear affirmatives from the rest of his command.

 "Do we bring the slave?" Scout Decanus Opana asked.

 "Yes, her lover may have told her things and she may be used to flip him. Decanus Herod set WP grenades on that vehicle with a 20 second fuse delay. Scout Decanus Opana, bug out with the prisoners to the rendezvous point. Everyone else, I am extending the mission. We need to know their response times. Execute."

 There were acknowledgements as his command began carrying out his orders with the designated four scouts moving off with the prisoners over their shoulders, leaving 31 men with Ortan. While Ortan had done what unaugmented mortals had not achieved so far, and more than achieved success by snatching the officer, he felt the need now to truly get a feel for how these Iranians fought. Legatus Keran from the Capital may chastise him later, but Ortan was going to risk it, that and the Codex Honorius supported this action. At 20 seconds, the WP grenades went off setting the vehicle on fire.

 A flurry of coded bursts on the AM channels was intercepted by Ortan’s helmet processor and automated programs tried to crack the Iranian Encryption. But the bursts were too short for the program to crack and it logged a partial decryption to aid later processing. A problem the Honorius have had ever since they learned that the Iranians were using radio waves to communicate over distances, which before only the Honorius had access to such communication magic. So far it looked like the Iranians had use of only AM channels, not FM, but they had very tight radio discipline which he admired and respected, some Honorius just could not shut the fuck up on the radios. You never knew who was listening and it was a violation of the Codex Honorius to use more than short bursts of vital info.

 Within one minute the sky was brightly lit when something air-burst high in the sky and Ortan's helmet display automatically compensated by switching to normal view and his armor system switched back to normal mode. Targets began filling his field of vision and from outside his effective engagement range of 420 meters with his arrows or his fireball spells, and his command started taking heavy projectile fire. Ortan alone felt 144 separate impacts on his armor with no penetrations. A large growling noise and the sound of grape vines being uprooted caused Ortan to turn right and spot what the Lieutenant's scout had identified as a Scorpion light metal box. Turning to the threat, which was less than 40 meters from him, Ortan threw a WP grenade, fuse ignited by magic at the three second notch, in unison with Tyron's Contubernia using Ortan's helmet display data guided by Ortan's thoughts to synchronize their aim to perfect synchronicity. Armored in 12.7mm thick aluminum armor, the Scorpion was set ablaze by the WP grenades and three flaming, screaming, torches that used to be people jumped out shortly before the vehicle exploded and engulfed them. As it did so, Ortan frowned. Aluminum, if his helmet sensors weren’t malfunctioning, was more valuable than gold and just having aluminum silverware was a sign of great wealth few nobles could afford. Were the Iranians so wealthy to use it to armor vehicles? If so how could they produce it in such quantity? A mystery for someone else to figure out, he had a fight to win.

 Suddenly more objects with loud whistling sounds began air-bursting above Ortan's command showering them with shrapnel as his armor initiated a warning Ortan never seen before telling him Doppler signals detected and initiating proximity jamming. Again the blessed armor of the Honorius shielded them from the shells that disintegrated the feudal levies, which due the armor’s blessed countermeasures was blowing up prematurely too high in the sky to use its blast waves. Ortan's helmet display was awash in data streams tracking multiple projectiles at high speeds and that from only 56 men with several more joining them. Ortan could now see why the Feudal Levies got massacred; these Iranians with their thunderarms could throw out as many arrows as 13,000 archers and with more accuracy, higher loading speeds, and velocities. And the artillery fire, he was no doubt taking, didn't need line of sight and used far more effective explosive magic shells rather than solid balls or flame pots.

 Suddenly Ortan’s helmet registered a diverse array of radio signals not carrying Honorius identifiers, and a burst of encrypted FM signals which his helmet systems tried to crack. As this occurred a warning screen Ortan had never seen on his helmet display before began flashing, warning him of a missile lock, and informing him automatic countermeasures were deploying. Unbidden, a light reflect spell activated in front of Ortan and one of the Iranians holding and fiddling with a strange box with a glass lens(?), not held by other Iranians, that he wasn’t firing had a red dot on him which puzzled Ortan as his helmet display counted down seconds to missile impact while rounds sped right through the reflect spell which was designed to reflect light not solid objects. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, the countdown continued as a flaming object impacted into the Iranian and blew him and two others apart at 0. The warning message receded. Another warning, Ortan had never seen before, informed Ortan that a hacking attempt was in progress and firewalls were deploying, which confused Ortan as no walls of fire appeared. So many new countermeasures he had never used before, and Ortan was wondering if Honorius had anticipated many future threats and ensured his blessed avatars would have the best protection possible?

 A large armored box appeared with a long barreled cannon Intel had pegged as an Iranian Type-72Z metal box came up and another warning hit Ortan's helmet display warning him of electro-optical lock and magnesium flares deploying and reflect spells activating. From Ortan's back two box projections on his armor that all Honorius had but did not know the purpose of and had never been opened or could be opened and served as the base for their armor's wings, popped open and several miniature rockets shot out and flared bright with magnesium light which Ortan's helmet display filtered out while the Iranians were blinded. That did it for Ortan.

 "Engage them more closely, execute." Ortan ordered.

 As one, Ortan's force charged forward into the hail of fire amassed against them. Rounds bounced off their blessed armor, explosions from contact fused shells surrounded them but their blessed helmet displays allowed them to chart a course through the blasts, the tank's cannon and chain fed guns fired at them blindly but missed, then Ortan's men entered arrow range and began shooting. Iranians screamed as they ignited from the arrows’ incendiary payloads, and their line broke leaving the metal box without flank support. Rushing the metal box, Ortan summoned his mace to his hand while ordering Tyron to echelon right of him and Opana to go left of the Tank, and then jumped onto the turret of the tank. A hinged door blocked access to the interior, but with a mighty blow from the mace, the hinge popped and Ortan was able to grab the door and hurl it into a charging Iranian on the ground with enough force to cut him in half, before sticking his arm into the interior of the tank. There was a static discharge as Ortan felt his magic activate and begin showering the fighting compartment with a flame projection spell, setting the interior and its crew on fire.

 Warned by Tyron of several more Iranians charging him from the rear, Ortan back flipped off the metal box and pulled his gladius in midflight so that as he came down, he bisected one of the Iranians in half from his head down with it and sheathed his sword in one fluid motion. Stepping into the Iranians whose rounds continued to bounce off his armor, Ortan punched one Iranian soldier in the face with sufficient force to knock his head clean off his shoulders and send it flying into another Iranian's head with sufficient force to snap his neck from the impact. Summoning his shield to his off hand, Ortan activated the shock spell on it, used to stun armored demons, and slammed it into another Iranian. The shield's impact fatally electrocuted the Iranian and set his body on fire. Lashing out with his foot, Ortan kicked another Iranian in the crotch, the impact shattering the Iranian's pelvis and causing massive fatal internal injuries, while also sending him 70 meters into the air with the landing killing him. Grabbing another Iranian by the arm, Ortan hurled him at an apple tree, ripping the man's arm completely off from his body, causing a fatal blood loss wound. The Iranian impacted the tree with enough force to shatter it and caused the top half of the tree to fall on another Iranian soldier and crush him to death while Ortan re-equipped his bow. Tyron's men reformed to him and began shooting down several more Iranians who came charging out of the trees with weapons blazing as the metal box started to make popping sounds before bright whitish flames started shooting through the open hatch.

 "Sir picking up more Iranians coming up, a full company at least and four more metal boxes," Kyran spoke.

 "Begin falling back, execute." Ortan ordered just as several shoulder fired rocket propelled objects traveling at 115m/s fell amongst his command and airburst, showering them with fragments and buffeting them with more shockwaves. Tyron nearly got hit by one as well, his enhanced Elven reflexes barely allowed him to sidestep the projectile. Ortan was not as lucky and grunted as a M774 APFSDS round bounced off his armor at 1,475 m/s leaving a scratch on the paint of the crimson hammers decorating his pauldrons. ‘Demons Princes hit harder than that,’ Ortan grinned beneath his helmet realizing now that these Iranians would be no match for the Honorius, not even their metal boxes. Then Miles Derak’s icon blinked out, indicating a signal loss.

 “Derak’s down, I got him, some sort of round squashed itself against the back of his armor and exploded,” Tyron reported.

 “Forget falling back, teleport out now.” Ortan ordered.

 Total fight time against the Iranians had been five minutes. Later Ortan would muse that if the High God Regulus had had his way, the Honorius would have fought clothed in loinclothes and a small pectoral plate to better show off their manhood and scare their foes. If the Honorius had gone that way, Ortan doubted they would have survived feudal levy arrow storms much less the storm of firepower they faced from the Iranians. The Iranians would now know fear, and wonder what had hit them, then hide in their metal boxes. Nadia was right, they should take away the Iranian’s metal boxes, and Ortan intended to confiscate every last one of them.

 Once back in the Sentinel Keep, Ortan held up a hand to silence Veryan and motioned him out which he complied as no one wanted to disobey an Avatar of a God. Tyron removed Derak’s helmet and revealed a conscious, still alive, Derak who was cursing his armor for being broke with nothing responding. His contubernium had to manually remove his armor whose systems were completely locked up by the HESH round that hit him at the rear grills to the armor’s power source that was normally covered by the heater shields they carried while not interfering with the heat release. Hitting that right spot and squashing itself to the grill allowed the HESH round to disrupt the power supply to the suit, whereas a HEAT or Sabot round would have bounced off. Once Derak was seen to, Ortan pulled his copy of the Codex Honorius from its chain as his command huddled around him. Opening the codex activated the spells within and a hologram of Lyra appeared.

 "**Greetings Master Ortan, how may I serve you?**" The hologram spoke.

 "Armor warning system, Missile Lock, what is it, it activated in my last battle?" Ortan asked with sadness at the fate of Lyra who maintained the Codex Honorius for Honorius.

 The hologram pulled a scroll from offscreen and opened it, causing the hologram to show the scroll which then scrolled down to a classified section. Immediately Lyra reappeared, "**I'm sorry Master but you do not have clearance for that information, Honorius has been informed that your suit registered that warning and your armor diagnostics data is being downloaded. You must await a reply from Honorius. Anything else master?**"

 Ortan inwardly sighed, "No, I shall not require anything further, thank you."

 The hologram of Lyra then nodded, sprouted wings and faded into distant light.

 Ortan then closed the codex with a heavy heart. The price Lyra had to pay, the price Nadia had to pay, to stay with them, wore on him and his brothers-in-arms. Their failure to win the Forgotten War led to this and it was a failure all females of humanity still suffered from in the form of the Dark Pacts. The Honorius would not, could not fail the females of humanity again.

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 Nadia was sound asleep with the children and other concubines when Ortan entered his quarters after releasing his powers.

 Nadia's left ear flicked Ortan's way as he approached her sleeping cushions and pillows, while one of their daughters nursed from her breast. Bending down, Ortan kissed his nursing daughter Hera’s forehead and then Nadia’s before kissing his other three daughters by Nadia, all of whom sighed in contentment and touched their ears to his in their sleep. Ortan’s other three dependent children were sons and were curled up with their mothers on their sleeping pillows and cushions. Though Ortan found these concubines desirable, he did not love them, and they knew it. But Ortan was not unnecessarily cruel to them, slavery being cruel to begin with, and their children once weaned at five if they did not embrace the path of Honorius or Lyra would be assured education and nobility if a boy, or a dowry and a good husband amongst his brother’s nobles if a girl. Though Ortan had given up his birthright to be High King of Yeran, his brother still recognized him as kin and Ortan’s mother still made trips to visit him and see her grandchildren.

 Going back to his desk Ortan sat down again. Honorius did not sleep, their eyes never closed once they got the power. They could relax, but they never slept. It was the price of war, to sleep was to let your guard down, and disaster followed. No Honorius had slept for 5,000 years since the Forgotten War ended.

 Clius, two years old awoke with a start, weary eyed, he moved away from his Elleth mother Idril, his whiskers leading him to Ortan. Smiling, Ortan picked up his son and brought him back to his desk, his son falling asleep again in Ortan’s arms as Ortan resumed his paperwork.

 After an hour, Idril, Ortan’s second concubine, woke up and recognizing Clius was missing, stood up in alertness before spotting him in Ortan’s arms. Approaching Ortan, Idril, Ortan’s concubine for 4,995 years, spoke in deference as she came for her son.

 “Master, Clius is drooling on your uniform and probably hungry, may I feed him?”

 Ortan looked up from his report on the raid, and noticed that indeed his son had drooled over him, before smiling and handing his son to Idril. “You may have him back. Oh I forgot to tell you your daughter Angela had twins. A boy and a girl, the letter came in the morning.”

 Idril smiled behind her veil at the news her 79th and only surviving daughter had given her grandchildren again, before kissing the forehead of her son as she put him right on her silver pierced and engorged nipple before speaking, “Thank you Master for the news.” Idril spoke as her son nursed.

 “Rest now,” Ortan ordered, pointing to Idril’s cushions and pillows.

 As Idril complied, Ortan thought back of all his children, only 26 sons and 57 daughters were still alive. Six of his sons were Honorius, one, his 1807th and oldest surviving son by his woman concubine Yarra, was now a Centurion in the 501st “Imperiosus Pugnus” Legion, and the others were also nobles in his brother’s court. Forty of Ortan’s daughters were Lyras and had their own masters, the remaining 17 were free females who stood beside their lord husbands and ran their holdfasts. But the majority of Ortan’s children had died in the numerous wars for humanity’s survival. Wars that had also claimed his father, youngest brother, three sisters, seven uncles, three aunts, and many other family members. Billions died every day, including thousands of Honorius, the blood of Martyrs kept humanity standing and few were those who lived to 500 or more.

 Thoughts of his 1807th son, Centurion Yakul Franc the Hero of Yvatch who slew 60 Demon Princes and 12,000 demons single handedly after everyone else in his Centuria had been slain defending the gate, reminded Ortan that he had not impregnated Yarra for a decade. Getting up, Ortan grabbed a draught of Moon Flow antidote for the Moon Stop birth control potion he had his concubines drink when not chosen to bear his children. Once Yarra drank the potion she would become fertile immediately and impregnated after he deposited his blessed seed. Upon waking from Ortan’s gentle hand, Yarra needed only to see the blue vial to know Ortan’s intention.

 “Master, thank you for the honor,” Yarra spoke in a trembling voice. As the daughter of a Feudal King whose crimes against humanity warranted the intervention of the Honorius by order of the Gods 4,695 years ago, she was a war prize Ortan had claimed as his share of the spoils. Yarra also personally witnessed Ortan slay her father, three uncles, and her eight brothers effortlessly and brutally in less than ten seconds, and had been splattered with their blood. Even after all this time she still had not gotten over that day, that her male kin were at fault for genocide, her part in it, repented, and moved on, only ever seeing Ortan as the instrument of doom that slew her kin, never seeing the redemption Ortan’s enslavement of her offered. Had the Feudal Lords of that era stepped in, she would have had no hope of regaining her freedom as once a female is enslaved she is always a slave. The Honorius were the exception per their need to ensure their children’s welfare after death.

 No matter, Ortan thought to himself as he watched Yarra drink the draught, wincing at the foul taste which Ortan did not sweeten which was only allowed for Free Females, not even Nadia could have sweetened Moon Flow/Stop. It was one of the post-Forgotten War laws which Free Females insisted on to provide a thin veil of distinction between them and Slave Females and unfortunately Ortan had to abide by it. Once she had handed Ortan the empty vial, Ortan wasted no time placing Yarra in display position with knees spread wide, arms up and wide out, hands behind her head, and breasts lifted. Then Ortan bent her over to usage with head and breasts into the floor and butte lifted high, then Ortan took her without foreplay which was only allowed for Free Females. Another law the point of which escaped Ortan, but one he had to follow. Even the gods had to follow the laws and there were few loopholes.

 Yarra for her part didn’t make a sound and placed her mind far away, pretending it wasn’t her being raped by the man who killed her male kin in front of her. It wasn’t her who was soon to be pregnant with the children of a monster who served an oppressive tyrant who taxed them heavily to fight his constant wars. Yarra’s father had no choice but to tithe the Demons regular slave sacrifices to protect their lands, they were only Erectus, mindless brutes who would not be missed and her family got the Demon’s protection and trade in magical artifacts. If Feudal Lords had crushed her father, at least she could have killed a few with a knife, having practiced on several Erectus slaves in her youth. Sure Yara would have had her throat slit after they raped and killed her in rage for doing so, but she would not be in this situation. But the Honorius did not kill females and children, it was their highest law, and the reason Yarra was enslaved at age 25. All because her father didn’t want to marry her off till he could gain another kingdom by it. Yarra had tried to commit suicide numerous times already, but the other concubines had foiled her attempts and Nadia hid the scars with her healing magic and kept quiet about them to Ortan.

 Nadia, how Yarra hated her and her constant attempts to befriend her and get her to accept her slavery. Yarra didn’t want Nadia’s friendship, she just wanted out any way possible. Yarra felt Ortan’s release, and as usual felt shame at the little bit of pleasure. Ortan didn’t leave right away bringing her up and molesting her for a bit by massaging her breasts before releasing her. Yarra re-covered herself as best she could, but her garb only framed her feminine charms. Yarra might as well have gone naked. But Yarra was required to wear it as the silver coins on it were Ortan’s money and he plucked the coins from them to make purchases. It was an especially humiliating act to Yarra when Ortan did that to her as the message intended or not was she changed value from the coins Ortan hung or took off her clothing. Come morning Nadia would as usual praise Yarra’s hated children thinking Yarra cared about her children, speak her platitudes in their morning bath as she helped Yarra wash, and lead them in the domestic duties with her usual cheer that made Yarra want to hurl at Nadia’s happiness in slavery. Did Nadia not have ambition to be more than Ortan’s prized breeding mare? Seriously what was wrong with Nadia? Yarra had told her often to her face that she hated her and hoped Ortan died only for Nadia to try even harder to do nice things for her, even calling Yarra her most trusted friend to the other Honorius Concubines. Yarra had even slapped Nadia in the face a few times only for Nadia to apologize to her for making her angry and beg her forgiveness. Nadia even took the onerous task of breastfeeding Yarra’s children for her, because it was too much a burden for her skin, she said and it was the only useful thing Nadia ever actually did for her.

Yarra’s only hope then to escape this hell would be that Ortan died in battle and she could finally don an identity bracelet, corset, opaque face veil and headdress of a Free Female, and marry into a merchant nobility family and just forget this chapter of her life. But Ortan had a bad habit of surviving battles and her slavery was starting to look to be eternal, especially if Ortan hit the magic number of 5,000 years of service to retire in four months. Nadia was even talking to Ortan about retiring to a Frontier World when his service contract expired with Ortan agreeing and mentioning that ruling a small fiefdom with her, Yarra, and the other concubines on either side of him in display position as he held court would be a pleasant retirement to which Nadia was giddy for. Nadia even talked Ortan out of freeing Yarra, because she had no kin, largely thanks to Ortan, and freedom would be cruel to Yarra. The thought of her charms being permanently on display to male lust horrified Yarra, but talking to Ortan was out of the question as her situation could become worse.

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 The Iranians retaliation for the raid came swiftly at dawn. Their artillery pounded Sentinel Keep 12 to rubble in a two hour bombardment with a mixture of HE and WP shells, the latter an unpleasant shock, rudely waking up all those asleep in Yilla and its surroundings. Using their flying machines, the Iranians deployed several squads onto the rubble who swept through the remains with flame throwers and demolition charges. The few survivors of the bombardment quickly surrendered, before the Iranians withdrew via their flying machines. Forty-six men of the Countess Farata's household had perished, though six men-at-arms, the 20 support slaves, six wives, and 12 children survived in the deep cellar to surrender. The Iranians per their ways released them all after six hours, except one of the wives who they were performing an emergency C-section on and who would be released as soon as the mother could travel. Ortan, however, had refused to commit his forces to the fight, wanting the Iranians to think his attack was a one-off event and grow complacent.

 "Legatus Ortan, quite a stir you caused," Legatus Keran spoke over the communication globe from his position in the Imperial Palace.

 "I had reason to suspect..."

 "Oh spare me Ortan, you aren't in trouble, in fact you just got the Iranians to solve a headache with the Imperial Parliament for us. Parliament was advocating dropping our demands for unconditional surrender for negotiated vassal protectorate status in exchange for the Iranians sharing their technology with us. The capture of that Nazi Officer, who dared to besmirch the pacifist Jewish priesthood of David the God of Healing, by claiming his chest tattoo is a Star of David and he is a Jew, shows that some of Adriane’s former Nazis may have fled to the Iranian's world and killed any further arguments, especially as the Gods can’t detect recent admixture amongst them. They are pure strain Homo sapiens sapiens, which shouldn’t be possible without genocide. Seriously, the Nazi couldn't lie better; everyone knows the pacifist Jewish priesthood of David uses a red swastika for their symbol, hell they eat a vegetarian diet only. They most certainly don't worship the dead demon prince Yahweh who you killed seventeen centuries ago by the way. Finally the revelation that the Iranian's teach their females to read and write was the final straw. I'm surprised they haven't been wiped out by Demons yet, but we can't afford the risks. The Emperor now has the full political support of the Empire to accept naught but unconditional surrender from the Iranians and the Gods have declared the Iranians must be stopped and subjugated to ferret out Nazi Criminals for great justice. Furthermore we are to establish an inquisition to put an end to their female literacy." Keran spoke.

 "Who is the overall Expedition Commander for the Feudal Army then?" Ortan asked.

 "That would be your cousin, High Marshal Uriel Franc, who is bringing three million fighting rabbits he managed to rally to his banner already including your sons and four of your grandsons. The first group will reach you in nine days. The Emperor will also formally declare the Iranians in revolt in four hours." Legatus Keran then killed the connection.

 Looking out his window, as immense joy took Ortan at fighting alongside his kin, Ortan watched for a few moments. The majority of the camp's concubines were doing laundry while the dependent children and trainee Honorius and Lyras were playing or assisting around them. Yarra was being congratulated on her pregnancy along with a few other concubines of other Honorius and four new babies born yesterday to an Orc Lyra, two women concubines, and an Elleth concubine were being presented for the first time to the other concubines and Lyra. In four months, he would retire, and take a fiefdom of an entire world offered by his brother on the Planet Berkshire which had 180,000 Homo erectus and 30,000 Homo habilis living on it currently in fishing tribes along its coasts.

There Ortan would build a main Palace and city, and other administrative centers with which to hold court with Nadia and the concubines. All of whom would be kneeling in display position on either side of his throne with legs spread wide, hands behind the back of their upright heads, backs straight, and breasts lifted high to show his wealth and power. Nadia was giddy just thinking of it, but not Yarra, but she would not accept her slavery as permanent, just, and repent of the part she took in her family’s genocide. Nor was Ortan blind to what happened amongst his concubines, he knew of Yarra’s deeds, but unless Nadia spoke up, he would pretend otherwise. That Yarra spurned Nadia’s forgiveness and friendship angered Ortan, but he would not take public notice so long as Nadia tolerated and even loved Yarra. But Yarra would pay, he well remembered finding her room at her family's fortress and the female Erectus slave she had been torturing to death and the skulls in the room kept as macabre trophies told Ortan that she was a full participant in genocide. Ortan had hoped slavery would bring her redemption, but it did not.

A knock on his door, brought Ortan back to his job of running the fortress. "Come in."

 "Sir the prisoners you wanted to see," Tessarius Morean spoke as he brought in the foolish Iranian soldier with the rabbit concubine and the woman they caught, who was placed in a scold's bridle when it was clear she could read and write. That way she at least could not read aloud her writings and summon Demons. The Iranians were very pale from being forced to watch the Nazi's execution this morning by being immersed in the sulfur that was used to massacre Ortan’s defenseless kin.

 "Captain Moshe was no Naz..."

 "Silence, think of yourself first and forget that Nazi scum, and sit down," Ortan cut off the Iranian soldier in Old Rabbit, the only language they had in common though they called it Arabic, as he pulled the soldiers personal effects out and pulled out their ID cards which had their pictures, an interesting use of copying magic. They stated he had Sergeant Adeleh and Private Farzad.

 The Iranians looked at each other before turning to face him. Tessarius Morean sat the woman in a chair and bound her hand to it before removing the scold while the male Iranian took a seat.

 "Under the Geneva Conventions, you cannot..."

 "Never heard of the Geneva Conventions," Ortan cut off the female, "You were taken in arms against the Emperor Trazayn and now the Gods, by all rights, I can enslave you Sergeant Adeleh, but since you can read and write thus represent a danger to society, you will instead have your memories erased in totality and sent to a rehabilitative hospital till you are able to regain basic motor and social skills, then sold off as a slave to cover the cost of your rehabilitation."

 "That's completely ridiculous, what..."

 "Silence, speak when spoken to or else," Ortan cut the Iranian woman off.

 "**Allow her to speak, son of Honorius.**"

Ortan and Morean dropped to their knees and bowed their heads as immense power filled the room as Baltar, God of Science entered the room which suddenly felt too small to contain the very condensed essence of the God's appearance in a form everyone in the room was more comfortable with. Taking the form of a brown haired, hazel eyed, Orc, Baltar stroked his waist length beard as he set his fedora down on Ortan's desk followed by his wizard staff, before gathering his grey robes and sitting in Ortan's chair, lighting a smoking pipe as he did so. With a sweep of his hand's Adeleh's arms were unbound.

 The Iranians were utterly silent, staring in shock at what could not be denied, a god walked amongst them. With his sight, Baltar could see their genetic legacy, two lines each anathema to magic and demons. Unlike him and those skilled in magic, they could not redirect their bodies’ electromagnetic fields to manipulate hydrogen. They were barely capable of static shocking each other.

 "**I am Baltar, Master of Logic and Rationality. You are a lost colony of humanity, though we do not know how, or what sets you apart from humanity of the Empire. Your people are an enigma. My father Eldest never once mentioned another world of humans outside our Galaxy, though we long suspected that humanity may not be native to this Galaxy. But by coming here, you are now our subjects through the Emperor we have chosen to lead humanity. We shall forgive your ignorance if you acknowledge our laws and submit to them.** **This means Adeleh you must have your memories erased as we cannot be certain that what makes you invisible to Demons won’t dilute when your world is reintegrated into the Empire and admixture begins since females of this realm who merely read what they write can spark off a Demon Invasion. We can't take any risks as far as Demons are concerned unless the benefits far outweigh the consequences. Regular Demon Invasions through compromised portal gates are bad enough. Any questions?**"

 Sergeant Adeleh finally able to fight her shock stood up and slapped Baltar across the face, "Fuck you! If you are a god, where have you been! If what you say is true why haven't we been fighting Demons every time I and the two and a half billion educated women of Earth read and write? Where were you when tens of millions died in the World Wars? Why should we submit to you?"

 Baltar motioned Ortan to stay where he was, before facing Sergeant Adeleh, "**If your definition of a God is that of a caring omnipresent and all-powerful-being, then I am not a God. Truth be told, I, a supposed God, don't even believe in my divinity. However, it is true I can manipulate matter at the subatomic level, though whether that makes me a God or a sufficiently advanced Transhuman depends on one's point of view. And make no mistake, I have Human DNA. We share the same genetic legacy, you and I. Know this though, if I could do so, I would change the Dark Pacts, but I can’t.**"Baltar paused as sadness became apparent on his face, "**I must weigh the survival of humanity against my own selfish desires, I did it once when I allowed my... Oh Marlene and Cara, forgive me, but the alternative would have been worse. Rational logic dictates I could not spare my mortal love and our daughter and let humanity be destroyed. It also dictates that humanity is better served by being united under an Absolute Monarchy led by a competent Emperor with a Parliament to advise and assist him in ruling. Sergeant Adeleh, if you wish, I can end your life and you'll live in freedom of Elysia. But we can't allow females to read and write so long as the Others stand poised to exterminate humanity while we lack a way to win a war with them if we restarted it. Nor can we, the ‘Gods’ just intervene, our powers are so great in our true forms we could easily reduce a world to ash killing everyone.**"

 "You sick bastard. I am a free woman; we'll fight for our freedom. You'll have to root us out of mountains, skyscrapers, in the air, in the oceans, and in space. We'll never surrender the gains we made in human dignity over the last century. I will be free, humanity will be free, and we'll kill those who stand in the way of freedom." Adeleh spoke as she again slapped Baltar across the face.

 Baltar looked upon Adeleh with sadness as he again motioned Ortan to stay where he was, he could not blame her for resenting, hating him. But as one charged with protecting Humanity, the only duty he held sacred above all others, to the point he gave over his beloved daughter and mortal wife to Demons, Baltar had to enforce the Dark Pacts. Maybe one day, they could piece together what Eldest had intended and reopen the war against the Others and gain freedom by tearing up the Dark Pacts that kept the Forgotten Door closed, but it was not now. Now, Humanity would have to fight a full scale civil war amongst itself over faith and unity and there was no stopping it. For the Greater Good of Humanity, this war had to be fought if a united humanity was to be possible, "**Legatus Ortan, send them to the capital. Adeleh, I’ll pay for your rehabilitation, after which your kinsman Farzad here will marry you and is forbidden hence with from divorcing you. It is the best I can do for you on this mortal plane.**"

 With that Baltar stood up and black raven wings sprouted from his back and his form began to brighten as he faded in light to curses from Sergeant Adeleh who was promptly placed back in a scold.

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 Legatus Ortan walked arm-in-arm with Nadia. Nadia was positively beaming beneath her veil at Ortan's announcement that Earth would be his last assignment before retirement. The two of them moved to the parade ground to hear the Emperor's formal announcement of war to subdue the Iranian Rebellion and to bring Earth back under Imperial Law via the Parade Grounds large communication globe. The gold coins on Nadia’s black uniform added a musical accompaniment as they walked. On her back she had deployed her white angel wings, the indication that she was an avatar of Lyra, Ortan being in armor minus his helmet could not deploy his real wings. Upon entering the parade ground, with a center holograph of Honorius and Lyra who took the form of Rabbits, Ortan was saluted by the assembled Honorius present in their armor minus helms and bowed heads of their Lyras which Ortan and Nadia returned.

 Ortan addressed the graduating recruits as was tradition for the Legatus upon their completion of basic training. "Recruits, nearly five millennia ago, I and Nadia stood where you are and were addressed by Legatus Sarkli prior to the Fars Campaign, we represented then as now the finest of Humanity. My current lofty position seemed so far away then and I like you was still getting over the joy of being deemed ready to fight. But you will get your chance soon enough to prove yourselves. Appreciate all your Lyra slave does to keep you in fighting shape by feeding you, nursing you when in ill health, mending your clothes, holding your money, raising your children, and providing you with moral support. You will not succeed as a Honorius without her; reward her love and faithfulness for you with faithfulness and love in return. History of warfare has shown time and again that strategy, not experience, quantity, or quality, decides wars. Sometimes that means the best way to win a war is not to fight it, and for those trained for war, that is the ultimate test of your strategic reason. Can you walk away from a fight you aren't winning and can't find a way to win? We Honorius did it once in the Forgotten War to avoid a pointless final stand against the Others. Can you ignore provocations and find a better solution than just throwing the hammer down on every national insult. Restraint is just as important as action; your duty is to know when to employ either Milites."

 Ortan paused for dramatic effect while the graduates’ absorbed their new rank, before continuing, "Soon we will be attacking a rebellious colony of humanity. Your Codexes have been upgraded with everything we know so far about their capabilities. We Honorius will have to carry a large portion of the fighting as the feudal levies and free companies are too outclassed to fight on even terms till we can crush the enemy’s artillery and metal boxes so they can close in for the kill. We will be operating blind for the most part, but we can't wait for further intelligence, we must strike now. But remember restraint when we take action against the Iranians for their rebellion. They are our fellow Humans, if they surrender before it is too late, you'll accept it. When the battle is over they'll be judged on a case-by-case basis. Now the Emperor wishes to address the Empire."

 With perfect timing, Ortan stopped his speech as everyone turned to face the hologram which switched to show the Emperor's banner of the flame winged High God Regulus crowning the emperor whose face faced forward symbolically showing the Gods’ backing of Trazayn and their granting of the right to command the Legions to guard the realms of humanity. Upon the same banner was the veiled figure of the Empress Tasha who likewise was being crowned by the swan winged and veiled High Goddess Ophelia. Before them stood the assembled ranks of 100 Honorius of the I Legion “Idaltu” bowing before a mortal whose rule was by divine right.

 The hologram shifted down showing the black Homo sapiens idaltu Emperor Trazayn who dressed as a blacksmith and still practiced his old trade. The Emperor slouched on his chair, his bearded chin resting on his left hand while his right hand held his blacksmith hammer, an old friend that had slain many foes indirectly by forging many great spears and slew a Grulaith directly, a feat no Honorius ever accomplished and made the Emperor a living legend to even the Honorius and earned him his crown. A plain uranium glass crown proclaimed him Emperor. The Empress by contrast sat straight, not that she could slouch in her corset, and her clothing was opulent with many contrasting and complimentary colors and jewels, her blue face veil bore many gems, and her uranium glass crown over her headdress bore many gems. The Emperor like all wise males let his wife enjoy her adornments, with his money of course, it made for a happier wife and less strife. Males who engaged in bling themselves, especially Feudal Officers, were just plain odd and asking for trouble.

 “Greetings my friends,” The Emperor spoke in a soft voice. “I’m not one for much talking so I’ll get to the point so you can return to your trades.”

 Empress Ophelia turned her head to her husband and tapped her right index finger once on her throne. The single subtle gesture Ortan had come to know over the millennia caused the Emperor to sit up straight in his throne before continuing without breaking stride.

 “It has come to my attention a lost world has turned its back on the Empire and refused to surrender for integration into the Empire. Therefore, I declare the Iranians to be in open revolt against the Empire and Gods, to be harboring Nazis, to be suspected of genocide, to be teaching females to read and write, and thus forth their lands and property are forfeit. I call on all available men of justice to deliver the Imperial Justice to these rebels.”

 The Empress tapped her foot once and held her right pinkie finger up. Another subtle signal that meant the Empress was pregnant again, her first one in two decades.

 “Before I release you back to your trades, the Empress has an announcement.”

 The Empress nodded to her husband in thanks, but having done a tour as a honor guard to Trazayn for a century, Ortan knew the Empress really ran the show, but unable to read or write, she could not rule, only reign through her husband. That wasn’t to say the Emperor was stupid, far from it, but he couldn’t bring the whole sociological picture of his Empire together like his wife could.

 “My friends,” The Empress began in an equally soft voice as her husband’s own, her eyes showing her joy, “It is with joy I announce my 402th Pregnancy in the 4,120 years I and my husband have been married. Like you my sisters, I do my part to ensure the realm is defended and like you I have had to bury many of my children who I nursed from my breasts only to have them so quickly fail to the dangers facing humanity. But each child we have is yet one more slap in the face of those who seek to snuff out humanity. May the Gods bless us all.”

 The Emperor stood from his throne and offered his hand to the Empress who took it and stood up to stand by the Emperor’s side. Together they waved to them, “Farewell our friends,” to which the assembled crowd waved back, as the hologram switched back to Honorius and Lyra.

 “Staff meeting in the war room in 45 minutes.” Ortan announced as he lifted a giggling Nadia up. “As for you, think we can put the next half hour to productive use?”

 “Oh Master Ortan, now that you mention it,” Nadia pulled herself closer to Ortan’s ear and whispered, “I want another litter, the first I’ll be able to raise to adulthood.”

 Ortan smiled, “Now we have agre…”

 “Sir! Urgent Message from Heran, the Iranians plan to cross the river and seize Yilla in an hour, they are breaking out into combat formations now!” One of the trainees came running up to Ortan as the watch alarm sounded.

 Nadia’s face became a very cute death glare at the messenger and her ears lowered at being foiled in her quest to have time with her master as Ortan gently set her down.

 “I’ll make this up to you Nadia, I promise,” Ortan spoke as he picked up his helmet from the podium.

 Nadia did an immediate 180 and smiled before kissing Ortan’s cheek, “Just save some energy for me, don’t waste it all beating these Iranians and their metal boxes.”

 Ortan nodded his head before donning his helmet, “All units prepare for battle, alert Yilla to defend the city, Cohorts II to X, take wing and attack. Evocati we teleport into the Iranian Encampment to these pre-prepped co-ordinates now! Execute!”

 Throughout the fortress 1,000 Evocati teleported at once to the pre-planned areas Ortan was going to brief them on. Ortan had no time to draw up a new plan on the sly, he had to trust his individual unit officers to improvise on the spot. The Codex Honorius best advice in this type of situation was to attack hard and fast and trust in your comrades to exploit all opportunities.