



“The time of reckoning is upon us, for no soul can hide in the shadows of deceit. As the day of judgment nears, each will stand before the light, their deeds laid bare. Let the righteous prepare their hearts, for in the reckoning, the divine will hold all to account.”

Book of Reckoning, Chapter 4, Verses 12-14

One Loyal Ties

A SHORT TIME IN THE FUTURE

THE SOUND OF THE GREAT HALL'S LARGE DOORS SWINGING open echoed throughout the chamber, reverberating off the walls and traveling to the center of the room where The Board* sat in session. The members surrounding the table were caught off guard and abruptly ceased their discussion. Ten singular eyebrows lifted in unison, surprised by the unexpected arrival, as no one else had been approved to join or present that day.

This meeting was critical and, more importantly, confidential. So much so that they had opted to keep the security inside the room minimal. Only the most trusted soldiers were present as a matter of protocol, but even they were ordered to keep their distance and mind their own business.

Reckoning of the Anointed

Since what was now being referred to as the *Blessed Battle*, security had tightened considerably. Restrictions reminiscent of the early days of the organization's post-Ustek/Kedt takeover were enforced at all times, whether they seemed necessary or not. The authorities were confident that the compound would never again be breached, especially not by such ordinary citizens as those who had taken the lives of so many valuable soldiers on that day.

Not surprisingly, this was just one critical topic of today's discussion. Since news of the Anointed Daughter's rise, rebellious factions had begun sprouting up in seemingly every corner of The City. No sooner would they quell one threat than whispers of another would emerge. Even more troubling, citizens were causing disruptions at SRA plants and other key locations, draining both time and resources.

Most of the unrest was minor—small-time individuals seeking to prove themselves. A quick intervention, whether by roughing them up, detaining them in the Facilities for a few hours, or threatening their families, usually made them back down. In turn, they would either cease their actions altogether or betray their fellow rebels to save their own skin.

However, one group had surprisingly gained prominence in the months following the battle. They were reportedly calling themselves the United Citizens Liberation Coalition, or UCLC. Rumor had it that their success was due in part to the inclusion of SRA defectors in their ranks. As of yet, no specific names had been confirmed, and there was little solid proof to verify whether the rumor was even true.

The most compelling evidence came from a symbol found at a compromised supply depot. It was nearly identical to the emblem used by a rebellion from decades past, the last time it was believed that the Anointed Daughter had walked among them. Back then, the group was known as the Citizens Liberation Army and had been quite formidable. However, without a physical prophecy to guide them, they eventually succumbed to internal strife and self-destruction.

The Board hoped for the new group to meet a similar fate, as this generation's Anointed had been missing for so long that they began to question whether she had ever even existed. No one could locate her; it was as though she had vanished into thin air. Many claimed to have seen her, even dragging innocent citizens forward who had been made to suffer "just in case."

Their best hope for capturing the Anointed and ending the dissension once and for all rested on an Amirite who claimed to have a credible lead on her and professed to know how to apprehend her. His arrogance was such that he dared to negotiate a takeover of the seat held by Commander Taaman Dupec—the request itself an act of treason, punishable by death. Yet, despite military backing and multiple attempts, his efforts had failed. The burden of his failure, coupled with the substantial bounty on his head, appeared to have forced him into hiding, much like the Anointed he was pursuing.

It was therefore all the more stunning when this "dead man walking" appeared before them voluntarily, unannounced and uninvited.

"What is the meaning of this disruption?" General Henry

Reckoning of the Anointed

Kelsard demanded, rising abruptly to his feet. His subordinates at the table following suit.

The sparse guards present quickly moved to their leaders' sides, weapons drawn and at the ready, waiting for orders from either the General or the Commander before taking any decisive action.

At the opposite end of the table, Commander Dupec rose slowly, a small smirk tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Razi Las. Fancy seeing you here after all your broken promises and failed efforts—capturing the Anointed ... taking my seat." His expression darkened, and he bared his teeth at the last statement.

General Kelsard's brows furrowed deeply, and his nostrils flared. "Are you implying we have a traitor among us? Take him," Kelsard bellowed.

"I would not be hasty if I were you," Razi warned as soldiers moved in to apprehend him. He spread his arms wide in a gesture of surrender while one soldier patted him down, and another stood nearby with his standard-issue Harbinger trained on him. Razi turned his palms up and raised his shoulders, as if pleading for a moment's respite, before continuing, "Taaman."

"Commander," Dupec corrected sharply.

"My apologies ... Commander. I have come here of my own free will and unarmed. I imagine my capture and execution have been hot topics at this table. Now, regardless of your opinion on what I have to offer The Board, it is moot since you have me in your possession. So, what harm is there in allowing me to explain why I have put myself in this precarious position?"

Dupec glanced around, feigning disinterest in what had brought Razi Las before them, while noting that he had come alone. “I do not see the Anointed among your company,” Dupec said coolly. “So, what could you possibly offer that would convince us not to blow your brains from your skull?”

Razi’s lips turned down, and his forehead creased at the threat from his former idol. “Something much better than will, respectfully, blow *your* brains from *your* skull,” he replied, turning to smile at the disgruntled General Kelsard.

Razi observed the mix of curiosity and intense desire for resolution on their faces, reflecting their urge to punish him for his blatant disrespect. He knew without question that his life was in jeopardy the moment he set foot on this compound, let alone in this room. They needed satisfaction, and if they couldn’t have the Anointed, they would not only settle for him but also seek retribution for the embarrassment of that fateful day. The only thing keeping him alive was the understanding that whatever had driven him to undertake such a risky move must be significant.

Dupec glanced briefly at his partner and technical superior, who clearly had no interest in hearing Las’s reasoning. Kelsard’s mouth tightened into a thin line, steam seemingly radiating from his temples, but he remained silent. Instead of speaking, he placed his palms gently on the table and sank back into his elite chair, followed by the others, acknowledging Dupec as the one truly in charge.

Dupec’s gaze shifted back to Las, who, by his expression, seemed to be requesting permission to step forward. Dupec’s manicured fingers gestured for him to approach. Razi moved

Reckoning of the Anointed

toward the men with an armed guard close by.

In the interest of transparency, Las kept his arms spread and his hands visible. “Thank you for hearing me. I appreciate your time. Especially since, when I was last here, I made a request that, to be fair, was unsettling to this Board.”

Dupec chuckled cynically, despite himself, as the muscles in his jaw began to twitch. “The audacity,” he said, his voice laced with disdain. “You offer nothing more than inflated ego and yet dare to reiterate your treason. Tread very carefully, Las. And, before you continue, let me warn you—do not mistake my generosity for weakness. There is nothing you can present to this Board today that will grant you access to my seat. I am simply curious to know what you believe will.”

Razi raised his palms in a defensive gesture.

“Oh, you greatly misunderstand me, Commander. I do not wish to have your seat—”

Before anyone could react, he dropped low, evading the weapon pointed at him. In one swift motion, he spun and grabbed the harbinger from the soldier’s holster.

“—I want his,” he finished, standing upright.

He extended his arm across the guard’s shoulder and, without hesitation, fired a shot into General Henry Kelsard’s forehead. The General’s expression froze in shock as blood poured from the wound. Moments later, his lifeless body collapsed onto the sacred table.

Razi pressed the expended firearm against the soldier's temple, then turned the other weapon—the one meant to keep him in check—and aimed it across the table at Taaman, who was now back on his feet.

Shock and mounting anger rippled through the leaders. Orders to subdue Las erupted into chaotic shouts, but the soldiers hesitated. One of their own was being used as a human shield, and any misstep could mean the same fate for their Commander as had befallen the General.

Despite the very real danger, a defiant Dupec roared above the chaos. “What are you waiting for? *Kill him!*”

The command barely left his lips when the soldier nearest him turned, leveling his weapon at the side of Dupec's head. The room froze in collective shock.

Before anyone could react, another soldier raised his weapon, this time aiming it at the temple of the man beside him. With practiced precision, he disarmed the stunned soldier, seizing both weapons before shoving him toward the vulnerable Board.

The sudden betrayal left the remaining soldiers and Board members in a state of utter confusion. Their eyes darted between the traitorous men and the weapons now trained on them.

Trembling with anger but still defiant, Taaman shouted at Razi, “How dare you! I will personally rip your—”

“Shut. Up,” Razi thundered impatiently, his voice cavernous and commanding. The soldier now holding Dupec in check turned and punched him hard in the mouth, shoving him

Reckoning of the Anointed

forcefully back into his seat.

Razi's chest heaved with fury, as though he were the one betrayed. "All of you! *I* am in charge now. You do as *I* say! I understand that these changes in structure are sudden and confusing, but exercise a little patience, and all will be made clear. As for the rest of you, lower your weapons or needlessly perish."

As Razi anticipated, the Great Hall doors swung open and closed again, their echo resonating through the chamber. Firm, steady footsteps mingled with the click of heels approaching in the distance. Razi kept his gaze fixed on the faces around the table, savoring their disbelief as they recognized the arrival of their most revered and trusted soldier and Sister.

For a brief moment, Razi closed his eyes and inhaled deeply, savoring the scent of genuine fear that now filled the air. He reopened them at the sound of the Head of the Board, Israd Ars, gasping the name, "Iwin."

"Iwin? Iboisa?" Taaman said, surprise in his voice. "You two are involved in this treachery?"

Unbothered and unashamed, Iwin confidently stepped forward, moving aside to let the Elite Sister present what she carried. Covered entirely by a black cloak, the large object drew all eyes in intense curiosity. She set it on the table and removed the cloak, revealing a small ginger boy. He looked up at the assembly with a frightened expression that mirrored theirs. His puffy, reddened eyes matched the color of his coarsely textured hair. The only thing keeping him from bursting into tears was

the sweet kakali nut he suckled.

The men at the table exchanged anxious glances, murmuring with curiosity and disbelief. The child appeared to be no more than three or four years old. His skin was a hue unfamiliar to the younger members and, for the older ones, reminiscent of the era before Ustek's rise to power. His small face was dotted with freckles on his eyelids, cheeks, and nose, with a few stray ones reaching his chin.

The boy's peach lips quivered, and his breath quickened as the strange men reached toward him, trying to touch him to confirm he was indeed real. He leaned away fearfully but remained calm under Iboisa's gentle, motherly touch.

"Impossible..." a voice murmured.

"Where did you find ... this?"

"Ittas is alive?"

Razi watched as the significance of the child dawned on the others. It meant that Razi Las had accomplished in a few months what the SRA had never fathomed or achieved in all their time in power. This realization bolstered his resolve, reaffirming his belief in his right to claim the top seat of the Allegiance.

"How ... where...?" Dupec inquired.

Razi laughed heartily, waving one of the firearms like a reprimanding finger. He glanced at Iwin and gave a slight nod, which also served as a signal to the Sister. She leaned forward and whispered something kind into the child's ear—his eyes

Reckoning of the Anointed

lit as she spoke. In that moment, she was unrecognizable from the birthright whore she had been all her adult life, appearing instead as the loving mother she had always secretly wished to be. The boy turned and scrambled willingly into her waiting arms. Iboisa smiled warmly as she covered him once more, then turned to depart.

Taaman's expression shifted sharply, as if waking from a distasteful dream. A strange pride lit his face. Seemingly forgetting he was now a prisoner, he said, "I was mistaken about you. This discovery ... it is certainly worthy of a military pardon. Why do we not discuss—"

Israd cut him off. "Commander, I understand that in light of this revelation, you may be willing to overlook his crime against you—and the risk if word spreads that Ittas lives. But have we already forgotten his offense against our General? His blood has not yet run cold."

Razi's eyes narrowed and his irritable nature returned. "I do not require your pardon. Have you somehow missed that *I* hold *you* at gunpoint? You no longer have authority here," he sneered.

Dupec leaned back in his seat, undeterred by the weapons trained on him or the knot swelling inside his lower lip. He steepled his fingers, lids dropping into a hooded gaze. "Let us discuss this, Las. Israd is correct—if word gets out that Ittas still exists and could be backing the Anointed, chaos will ensue, jeopardizing this regime. So let us speak as gentlemen. Put the guns away. I will dismiss the Board. We will dispose of the General quietly. No one ever needs to know what transpired here today. You cannot truly believe you will get away with this."

Razi shoved aside the soldier blocking his path and handed one of the weapons he held to Iwin. Iwin turned and walked coolly toward the chair occupied by Taaman Dupec—one he had held for decades, long before either Iwin or Razi had been born. Iwin stood before the chair, staring defiantly at Dupec, arms crossed, with the weapon pointed downward.

Razi approached the head of the table and pushed the former General's body, letting it fall heavily to the floor. He then took the seat for himself, propping his legs on the edge of the table to avoid staining his boots with the blood of the deceased leader. A satisfied smirk spread across his face. "I already have," he said.

With a subtle tilt of his chin, Iwin silently ordered Dupec to vacate the seat. For a moment, Dupec's pride flared—struggling against the last scrap of courage he had left. He swore and stammered as the reality of his defeat settled in. He had lost this battle before he even realized he was at war.

The soldier beside him yanked him up roughly, clearing the way for Iwin to take the seat. Then, without a word, another soldier moved to disarm his comrades—just in case one felt bold enough to resist.

Razi continued, "Everyone, please welcome your new Commander, Iwin...?"

"Kaeleg," Iwin added.

"Commander Iwin Kaeleg," Razi finished.

Dupec stood nearby, at gun point, under duress, flustered, infuriated, and feeling shamefully helpless. He glanced at his

Reckoning of the Anointed

Board members, most of whom he had personally installed in their roles, and then turned his gaze to his soldiers. He watched in real time as their loyalties shifted, driven by self-preservation.

“Well, what are you waiting for? I assume I am to be subjected to the same fate as Kelsard,” Dupec said.

Razi replied, “Not necessarily. You have a choice—you *all* have a choice. Israd, my friend. Long time, no see. If I remember correctly, you are the Head Council of this Board, yes?”

Israd, deliberately avoiding eye contact with his former Commander, cautiously shifted his gaze to the new General. Weighing his options and the best means of survival, he looked up, forced a smile, and bowed slightly in deference to the new leadership. “Correct. And the one who granted you the power of Auctoritas and access to Allegiance soldiers,” he reminded Razi.

Razi offered a scornful snort. “Yes ... I have not forgotten so soon.” The pair exchanged silent glances before Razi, without provocation, aimed and fired again, hitting Israd in the chest. Shock filled Israd’s eyes as his body jerked backward, tilting the chair and sending him crashing to the floor. Clutching his wound, Israd searched for words that his stunned mind couldn’t grasp. “It seems I need a new Head Council,” Razi continued, his voice steady.

Dupec didn’t react, only watched as Israd’s life gradually left his traumatized body.

Razi continued, “Since you, former Commander Dupec, are familiar with the business, I would be willing to offer you the role on a trial basis. What do you say? Join Kaeleg and me in creating

a new, more effective Allegiance, or stay loyal to your friends, Henry and Israd?”

Dupec’s entire frame tensed. His nostrils flared in disbelief, and his breath came silent and ragged. A twitch crept beneath his right eye at the insult—this lowlife now calling the shots and offering him a seat *on his own council!*

And Iwin? One of his most elite and trusted soldiers—sent to bring justice to the Anointed and Razi—had become a turncoat. Worse still, he was no ordinary soldier. His name carried weight across the compound, and his allegiance could tip the scales. If he had chosen a side, others were certain to follow.

Still, he loathed the fact that, deep inside, a small part of him harbored admiration—the part that respected the courage and audacity of Razi’s boldness. Perhaps he *had* grown complacent in his leadership, and the unexpected events of the morning were what he needed to rekindle his dormant Amirontian pride. This was how his people could be so easily swayed. Though the idea of assuming a subordinate role to these two ... *children* was offensive to him, he also recognized that choosing a senseless death held no honor.

Taaman Dupec swallowed the bitter taste of his pride and walked silently past Iwin, stepping over Israd’s lifeless body. With a dismissive shove of his foot, he moved the corpse aside, righted the chair, and took his seat—now symbolizing his new role as Head Council.

With his restructured Board complete, Razi set his feet firmly on the floor as he sat upright. Leaning forward, he clasped

Reckoning of the Anointed

his hands on the edge of the table. “Excellent. Now, gentlemen, we have much to accomplish in a very short time, so let us call this meeting to order.”

He paused, smiling a genuine smile despite himself. As he scanned the faces around the table, mentally noting who would stay and who would be terminated, he reflected on finally achieving what he had always wanted. To his surprise, he felt a deep sense of disappointment at his inability to share this victory with his twin sister, Aissa. Despite the hurt he felt from her choosing the treacherous mariuchan*, Olivia, over him, he had repeatedly tried to give her the chance to see the error of her ways.

Ironically, it was the actions of a Marinite farmer that made it clear what he must do to gain the closure he needed to reach the heights he had always dreamed of. His smile faltered as a wave of sadness washed over him at the memory of her questioning and disappointed eyes looking into his as his chilla knife was plunged deep into her side, but he quickly pushed it away. He was happy and where he was meant to be.

And of all people, he had the Anointed Daughter of the Marinites to thank for it.

†

WHERE I AM FROM, IT IS BELIEVED THAT LITTLE GIRLS ARE born with their destinies already mapped out. And my path was no different—though the one who raised me, my Mira, chose to keep this hidden from me.

I believe it was fear that stopped her. Fear that the truth might take me away from her—the same way it had taken my mother. The same way it had taken her husband, her daughter, and her son.

Instead, she told me vague tales of a girl child destined to bear the weight of a great responsibility: to liberate the people of our planet, Marieux. The prophecy had been passed down for generations. The girl was at times called the Goldenborn, named for the anointing she would possess.

These stories were meant to offer hope to a people suffering under deep oppression—born from a broken treaty, a string of betrayals, and the selfish ambitions of two power-hungry leaders: the Marinite, Henry Kelsard, and the Amirite, Taaman Dupec.

But it had not always been this way. Our small agricultural planet—the tiniest in the Zephyrnox Theta system—was once peaceful. It was chosen to become the cradle of revolution the day Vincent Ittas, leader of the planet's oldest living clan, was overthrown. He and his council had ensured harmony and prosperity. But the Shadow Wars—and the attempt to erase the Ittas bloodline—plunged Marieux into chaos. Chaos we could only dream of ending.

And so, the tales of the Anointed became more vital than ever, reminding citizens that hope was not lost. That Deus had not—and would never—forsake them.

As expected—just as other mushas and miras did—so did mine pass these stories down to me. Stories of hope. Of resistance. But what she did not tell me ... was that they were more than

Reckoning of the Anointed

prophecy. They were *my* path. *My* destiny.

She did not tell me that the girl in those stories—was me.
Olivia Vala Eso Kalaath.

The Anointed Daughter of the Marinites.

The Chosen.

†

I STOOD WITH MY TEAM AMIDST THE GATHERING OF EXILED Ittas citizens, beside a flame symbolizing the burning away of the past. As the ceremonial Rite of Sacred Farewell unfolded, I recalled the purpose described in those stories. I was to be more than a symbol of hope; I was meant to be a guiding light in a dark world, leading my people back to the peace they deserved.

The sound of drums set the rhythm of the ritual. Faraji, Charleston, James, LarS, and I stood alongside the Clan Chieftain, the Ittas siblings, and others tasked with joining this leg of the fight for Marieux. Emotions of pride, fear, anxiety, and joy were visible on the faces of the gathered.

The Grand Sultanate lifted the hem of her long garment as she walked toward each waiting soldier. A small boy followed her, carrying a tin of ceremonial blue clay. The marking and accompanying prayer were intended as both a physical and spiritual token of protection and blessing.

As she approached, coming closer to me, the last in the row, my eyes stung, but I quickly shook it off. The absence of Aissa, who would have had a blue streak pressed upon her forehead

and later made a snarky, teasing comment about it, caused a pang in my chest. I inhaled deeply, embracing the pain, and closed my eyes, picturing her face beside Jayde's, and holding it there. I exhaled and reopened them just in time to see the Grand Sultanate approach me.

She bowed slightly, and I returned the gesture. "Blessed, are you ready?" she asked.

I took a shaky breath, looked up at the dark night sky, and answered, "Yes, heiress."

I leaned forward as she pressed her thumb into the tin, gathering a generous amount of blue clay. She then applied it firmly to my forehead, moving her thumb down slowly as she spoke in the oddly accented manner of all those from Ittas: "In this moment of parting, we gather as one, seeking the favor of the Divine. May the light of Deus guide your path, and as you, the Anointed, are the sword, may His strength be your shield.

"As we mark your brow with the sacred emblem, may it be a sign of protection and courage. Return to us safely, embraced by the blessings of the ancestors and the love of your people. Tu ha-nek Gelvor, zelaren brak har lor brak vun ha-drekis thar.¹"

The Grand Sultanate turned her face toward the congregation. She paced in silence, observing the faces of her people as they chanted softly in their foreign tongue, while the music built.

1 In the name of our Most High, go forth with honor and the grace of our shared spirit

Reckoning of the Anointed

“*Cum Korr brak, unis ha-u²!*” came the cry from somewhere within the crowd.

“*In vires Deus, ha-tharins korr³!*” the gathered replied.

The call and response echoed through the air, each cry from the leaders answered by the crowd in perfect unison, their voices rising and falling like waves crashing upon the shore.

“*Cum tympanis sonoribus, ha-zorar loth⁴!*”

“*Mittimus korr, zelin altior⁵!*”

The rhythm pulsed through the gathering. Many had their eyes closed, their faces streaked with emotion as they raised their outstretched arms toward Deus in prayer. Others swayed, lost in the ancient cadence, allowing their bodies to be taken over by the music and the moment. I watched in amazement as children clasped hands, jumping and twirling in circles, their laughter mingling with the chants.

The beat of the live drums grew stronger, faster, the sound reverberating in the night until it reached a fever pitch. The crowd moved as one, driven by the rhythm, by the call and response, by the history woven into every note. My own head fell back, eyes closed, arms wide, allowing the spirit of the moment to consume me, my face drenched in both sadness and joy.

2 *With courage we stand, united as one!*

3 *In the light of Deus, our spirits are strong!*

4 *As the drums beat loud, our hearts fill with fire!*

5 *We send forth our warriors, to rise ever higher!*

After a time she deemed sufficient, the Grand Sultanate raised her arms slowly, and all sounds unrelated to nature died down. Her naturally small voice somehow grew larger, filling the entire space. “We have gathered here today to honor and bless those who embark on a journey of great courage. As we send our brave ones forth, let us remember that their strength is our strength, their courage is our courage. We stand united in purpose and spirit, bound by our shared commitment to our land and each other.

“As they face the trials ahead, may we remain steadfast in our support and unyielding in our faith. Let this day be a testament to our unity and our resolve. *Vun Gelor vires dris orak, lor brak orak tutar zelar ha-ul*⁶. This is our vow, this is our blessing. Farewell, and may you return in peace and victory. *Ahr-mun, Deus.*”

“*Ahr-mun, Deus,*” the crowd replied.

At the culmination of her prayer and speech, an unexpected warmth spread throughout my body, startling me. My lungs filled deeply, as though the air had thickened, making each breath feel rich and heavy. A tingling energy coursed through me, unfamiliar and strange, yet somewhat comforting. It was not the sharp tingle of danger, but something else—something I could not name. It felt peaceful, yet powerful, as if it was quietly growing inside me.

For the first time since accepting my birthright, a sense of unwavering certainty and fearlessness settled over me, though

6 May the Divine light your way and guide you safely back to us

Reckoning of the Anointed

I could not explain why. I looked down at my hands, trying to make sense of the vibrations running through my skin. I did not understand what was happening, but I knew instinctively that something profound had shifted within me.

LarS, standing beside me, whispered my name. When I glanced at her, her eyes were wet, her smile radiant. “Your eyes...” was all she managed to say.

Gasps arose around me, swelling like a fierce wind. Though I could not see my own eyes, I knew with certainty that my glow had pierced the dark film meant to cover them. Following my instinct, I reached up and removed the film, allowing the power of Deus to shine freely, amplifying the glow of the nearby flames.

The strange warmth flickered beneath my skin, spreading outward, as if it had been waiting to reveal itself. I wiggled free from my heavy jacket—my savior that had shielded me from prying eyes for so many years. The cool night air brushed against me, but I hardly noticed it for my focus was locked on my bare arms, awestruck as the patch of golden flesh began to fill in before my very eyes.

Soon, the gold was completely gone. I felt the warmth deepen as rich melanin spread across my skin, filling in like night overtaking the day. Dropping down, I clumsily grabbed my jacket and pulled out my blade. I scraped the concealant from different sections, only to reveal the same deep hue underneath. My heart pounded so strongly I thought it must be creating its own rhythm, one that all could hear.

“Amen Deus,” I repeated, over and over, eyes closed, face

tilted toward the sky, tears streaming from the corners of my eyes. To share the traits of my people was all I had ever wanted.

I reveled in the cool night air caressing my freshly shaved scalp, feeling a strange relief, as though shedding an old skin. When I was ready, I raised my head, feeling their eyes bore into me, and allowed them to witness the face of righteousness staring back. For all present, there would be solace in knowing that a reckoning was coming—guided by Deus and led by me, the Anointed Daughter of the Marinites.