

The
Corrupting
Will



Kar’Koss leaned against the old obsidian rod, feeling the warmth of the velvet wrappings against his skin. Aera - his dear staff - had been with him for so long it had become an extension of his body, feeling almost as natural as any of his four legs. Not so unusual, he thought, after all he’d had the staff longer than the legs.

Kar’Koss had found Aera many centuries past, back when he was still a frail human. He shivered just thinking about that time, when he was so weak, so helpless. It was such a long time ago, that he did not even remember what his name used to be. Over the years the staff had changed him, physically and mentally. It had shown him wonders he had never even known to look for, powers he had never dared to dream of. He had grown in size, now standing over 7 feet tall, and his body had strengthened, becoming lean and hardened. His legs had shaped into four massive needles, always eerily tapping the ground with a delightful sharp clicking sound. No longer was he the runt, no longer was he afraid. People had learned to fear him, and with Aera in his hand, nothing could stand in his way.

Standing on a half destroyed watchtower at the outskirts of the town, the Warlock glared out over the battlefield and carefully examined the fighting. Humans and demons were locked in a frenzied melee in the streets of the ruined city. A cacophonous crash erupted as the demons tore down yet another building to break through the enemy ranks.

The Empyreum's elite soldiers, known as the Chapter of Light, was holding strong and they were fighting fiercely. But there weren't many of them and their regular military was heavily outmatched by the powerful demons. They were dying, in droves. It seemed impossible that the humans would be able to withstand the invasion much longer.

The large demon curled his lips back into a broad grin as he watched Commander Azali tear through yet another line of unlucky foes.

"The town will fall within the hour." He said, with a voice pure as silk. His tone alluring and seductive, he continued; "Let the Herald know, the battle has been won".

The Shars'Rakk Incubus behind him nodded and turned, heading for the void portal to the Demon Wastes from which they had all emerged a few hours ago. Kar'Koss looked at the portal admiring his own handy work. It had cost many sacrifices and a lot of his own energy, but it had been worth it. He had cherished the surprised expression painted on Azalis face, when she realized he had transported her entire army behind the enemy defences and straight into the city. Impressing her was no small feat, and it usually came with even bigger rewards.

Kar’Koss sucked air through his nostrils, tasting it.

“Aah, the smell of blood so invigorates me” He said to no one in particular as he started descending the stairs of his makeshift command post, his long legs clicking against the stonework beneath him.

As Kar’Koss exited the tower into a small square, he was met by a large brutish demon with a gigantic sword resting on his shoulder. The beast bared his pointed teeth in a nasty grin.

“There you are Kar’Koss” he smiled sardonically, “I was beginning to fear you’d miss the fighting”. He stretched his arm out -gesturing to the burning city- and looked at Kar’Koss, a challenge flashing in his eyes, “...Again!” he added.

Kar’Koss was almost a head taller, but the massive muscular Gor’Rakk still made him feel small, and that annoyed him to no end. He did not like feeling small.

“What do you want Crakgul?” the warlock enquired using his staff to gently push him aside.

“Ahh, nothing. The answer is simply nothing... Nothing I’ve not already taken, that is” he grinned, that nasty smile still painted on his face. Noticing a couple of familiar faces in Crakgul’s demonic entourage, Kar’Koss could feel the rage starting to boil inside him.

“Don’t worry” the monstrous marauder laughed, “I’ll let Azali know of your generous donation to the war”. He

thrust the giant black sword into the air “MOVE OUT!” he roared, charging into an empty street towards the center of town, followed by his demonic vanguard.

Kar’Koss followed them with his eyes for a brief moment “The Primes take you Crakgul” he muttered to himself, deciding to control his anger this time. They’d been bitter rivals since the day Azali forced both of their warbands under her banner. In her own twisted wisdom, she had elevated both to Champions of her Legion, forcing them to work together. They had quickly become known as Azali’s Right and Left hand. Kar’Koss preferred to think of them more as her Brain and Ass.

He turned to the Shars’Rakk Overseer standing nearby, “What’s the status? How many did he take?”

A sudden burst of red clouded his vision and a jabbing pain stung his temple. The familiar warning signs passed as instantly as they had appeared, jerking him to attention.

“Arh! What is it? Where?” - He squealed to the staff as he straightened his back and scanned the area. The Overseer alarmed by the outburst started swinging his whip, commanding his troops into a battle stance. Before the Demons had a chance to organize, they were interrupted by a loud snap- as though the air itself cracked- followed by a concussive boom. The square burst into a bright piercing light, momentarily blinding the demons. A dozen bright light beams struck one of the farm buildings nearby in close succession. From it burst a group of heavily armored men,

Brandishing their massive weapons in a pure display of righteous fury. Within seconds demon blood was flowing thick in the ruined streets, and the Chapter of The Light swarming from the farmhouse was now advancing on Kar’Koss’ position, fast.

Kar’Koss released a primal scream, as much to shake himself of the shock as to intimidate the unexpected enemy forces. He drew back the staff and held it aloft for a second.

“It seems we will have some blood on this day after all” - He thought, as he unleashed an unholy bolt of pure dark energy. As the projectile reached the closest Brother it slowly wrapped shapelessly around him, swallowing him in darkness. It lifted him from the ground digging into him as he was screaming, crying for help. Within seconds the dark energy had errored through the massive golden armor and was digging into the man’s skin. Only moments later the Brother had completely evaporated, leaving no trace that he was ever there.

The staff sent warm approving pulses through his body and Kar’Koss lips drew back in a fiendish smile while he turned to face the remaining brothers. “Oh, how I’ve missed this.”

He swung the staff again, this time releasing a wave of razor sharp Pinth Needles. They penetrated three of the Brothers’ armor, leaving them gurgling on their knees, choking on their blood.

Kar’Koss was laughing uncontrollably as he yet again swung the staff around to ready his third spell. This was almost too

easy, and he was starting to make sport of killing in creative ways.

“This time, let’s do something really fun” - he proclaimed to the staff as he drove it forward aiming at one of the Brothers charging right for him. From the Sapphire stone at the tip of the obsidian rod a lance formed from blue and black energy, flying directly toward the warrior.

As the evil lance was about to impact the brother, he was suddenly launched off his feet and pushed to the side. He came crashing down with a loud metallic bang, a little shook but seemingly unharmed. The dark energy instead collided with a large golden silhouette. A bright flash of light split the lance into a million little specks flickering in the gloomy light as it slowly fell around the large silhouette.

As the dark purple smoke from the nether spell evaporated, the sickly green light that always seemed to roam around the demon portals revealed the form. He was wearing an ancient ornamented golden armor adorned with a flowing burgundy cape. His face could only belong to a hero, with a jaw so chiseled the smithing god of the dwarves couldn’t have done a finer job. There he stood, Caeleth Dawnhammer, renowned protector of the realms, and ever a problem in these wars.

“Your terror ends THIS night!” - he announced as he hoisted his massive hammer off the ground, and started running towards Kar’Koss with long heavy strides.

Kar’Koss quickly regained his composure, lifting Aera into the air and then slamming it into the ground with all his might. The ground trembled as a thick dark smoke shot from

the staff covering the combatants in an instant. For three long breaths he held the staff in the ground fighting the power emerging from the blue stone. The smoke continued to blast from the staff suffocating anything in its path. As Kar'Koss finally let go of the spell, lifting it from the ground he saw the area around him covered in bodies, demon and human alike.

Everything was silent for a second, and finally Kar'Koss dared breathe freely again. He grunted to himself, satisfied. "But you are a wonder, my darling" he said to the staff as he stared into the blue gem that he liked to imagine was its eye. He felt a familiar sense of satisfaction spread through his body from the staff, letting him know that it too was content with the result.

Then, one of the bodies on the ground started to shift. Slowly but surely the giant golden armor of Caeleth Dawnhammer rose, as the large man climbed to his feet. He looked battered and hurt, but very much alive... and so very angry.

Kar'Koss starred at the man in shining armor, disbelief painted on his perfectly horrific face.

"I was sent to rid these lands of evil, and so in the name of The Light, I shall remove your black soul." Caeleth Dawnhammer growled in a hoarse but firm voice.

Kar'Koss frantically reared back on his hind legs and desperately swung out with Aera, but before he was able to complete his movement and with it a deadly spell, the staff

impacted with the giant hammer in Caeleth's hand, sounding a sharp metal clang. The warrior threw Kar'Koss' hand aside with a powerful effort and kicked the demon in the chest with his heavy metal boot.

Half screaming, half laughing, he fell to the ground. "You can't stop me!" he sneered incredulously. "You can't stop the invasion... I'm more powerful than anything you've ever known, I'll come back! I'll...ugh" The air was forced from his lungs and he let out a weak hiss as Caeleth's boot pressed against his chest, pinning him to the ground. Gasping for breath Kar'Koss looked defiantly at Caeleth "It's too late, mighty man. Your city has fallen!" he taunted mockingly through gritted teeth.

"Save your breath, dark one." Caeleth had regained his strength and his voice pierced the air, clear and powerful. "You'll meet your filthy creators soon" he continued "and I suspect you shall need all your heinous lies to avoid their torture.

For this day.." He held a brief pause as he swung the giant gold encrusted hammer above his head, the sun somehow at this very moment breaking through the dark clouds above, making his golden armor shine brightly. "You have FAILED!" he roared as he brought the hammer down, driving it through Kar'Koss' head. With a thunderous crack it split the stone beneath the demon's head in two.

As the warlocks demonic body slowly realized that death had taken it's agency it started falling apart. First it squirmed wildly before falling limp, releasing it's grasp on the staff.

Then each limb slowly started to liquify. Finally it all evaporated into dark mist, leaving only a small puddle of demon gunk behind.

As the staff hit the ground it completely changed shape. It shifted into a small wooden stick, the only thing making it look remotely different from an ordinary stick was the small blue gem at its tip.

Caeleth looked at it for a moment, before bending down to pick it up. As he lifted it up it transformed into a large beautiful sword before his eyes, encrusted with gold and with a large sapphire implanted in the pommel. He felt the sword's sweet temptation clawing at his very soul, pulling at his every desire.

“What foul sorcery is this?” He said to himself and no one at the same time, as he gazed at the object forming in his hand to perfectly match his armor. Without knowing why, it felt perfectly normal to address the sword as he would another living soul. “If you think I will wield the same weapon as a fiend of the void, you must be more wicked than he”.

With that, he tossed the sword into the great chasm, formed when the Demonic portal had first appeared. As it fell, the sword transformed once again into an innocuous wooden stick with a small sapphire at the tip. It soared through the air until finally, it came to rest, tip embedded in the grey dirt deep within the chasm.

The stick lay stuck in the ground while days passed and the war drifted on. Everything was silent, and not a soul was

moving for miles and miles. Even the wind seemed to have given up on the wasteland that once was the proud town of Thornbrook.

Then one day, someone pulled it ever so gently from its resting place. The presence of a living soul stimulated Aera once again. Hungrily it started lashing onto the soul, feasting like a leech on an open wound. This was going to be pure ecstasy. But something was wrong... It was not absorbing any of the new host's essence. Somehow this being was completely immune to Aera's invasive prying. How could this be possible?

The great Aera felt its will slowly but surely bend to that of its new master.

The End