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Tales from Sapience

Chapter 1

Cain moved swiftly down the cold and gray cobble-stoned corridor, his brisk pace causing the servants to scurry out of his way. His dark black and hooded robes swished along with him as he moved and cast a large shadow from the lanterns hung every few paces that gave off the impression of a ghostly wraith moving down the hall.

“My Lord, Eleusis has sent their full force against us this time, Seneschal Tranquility is personally accompanying their forces and Tyrannus Wulfen has asked that you see to the western ramparts as they have suffered the brunt of their attack.” Andelas said as he tried to keep pace.

Cain glanced askance at his personal assistant and waved his hand nonchalantly, acknowledging the fools request while already planning his moves twenty paces ahead of his opponents on the other side of the city of Mhaldors vast walls. Chunks of concrete began raining down around them here and there as the reverberating strikes of ballistae fire hammered their defenses.

“Attend to High Inquisitor Daitya at the front gate and tell her I require her to use the Assassins guild to provide a distraction amongst the enemy mage ranks in approximately one bell. Go.” Cain said in a raspy growl.

“But master I..” Andelas tried to say before he was cut off by a withering look from Cain.

His attendant muttered to himself and quickly doubled back in the other direction down the corridor without another word, towards his new task. Cain rolled his eyes at the thought of another minute with that simpering sycophant and continued on towards his objective, which was not the western ramparts quite just yet.

The ornate heavy wooden double doors at the end of the corridor opened at a gesture from Cain and he swept into the throne room of Baelgrim fortress as the doors banged shut behind him, startling all of the courtiers and nobles huddled here and there between the vast pillars that reached towards the blackness of the immense vaulted ceiling.

The audience hall itself was a vast cavernous space decorated in red and black that radiated a malevolence that was almost palpable. The decaying and rotted heads of slain enemies were piked in between the giant stone pillars, dripping the gods only knew what foulness that made the stench in the air almost unbearable, they were a testament to the unholy power wielded in the court of the followers of Lord of Evil.

The decadence of the chamber was on full display, with its evil accoutrements and gaudy baubles of gold and silver, bejeweled chalices and giant golden candelabras that flickered lightly making the blood red walls seem like they were moving of their own accord. As Cain moved through the chamber the sycophants all scuttled out of his way, quivering in fear of the tangible aura of power that surrounded him. He smiled cruelly as he approached the raised dais of the Tyrannus of Mhaldors gold, red and black throne.

“Tyrannus, I had warned you this would happen when you broke the Eleusian treaty and now look! I must personally win your little wars for you once again!” Cain rasped in a mocking tone.

The Lord of Mhaldor scowled miserably at his Minister of Security and at the same time backhanded a servant girl who spilled wine on his hand after another shock wave from the ballistae pummeling the cities outer defenses set her pouring off balance into his golden jewel encrusted cup.

“Cain, your impudence never ceases to amaze me. Not only you are you late to the defense of the city when I summoned you over 3 bells ago but you now dare to lecture me? Our Master will hear about this now, Go, attend to your duties at the ramparts before I really lose my temper.” Wulfen said.

Cain mockingly bowed to his Lord and swept his robes around as he moved past the dais into the antechamber that led to the western ramparts. His prepared spell runes that he had set 2 days past glowed intensely as he ascended the spiral stairwell choked with dust and smoke from the destroyed runnels above. He ran his hand along the archaic symbols of red, blue, white and orange and they brightened and then dimmed as he passed, gathering their power within himself.

He attained the top of the rampart where General Kaelin stood surveying the vast battlefield before him with his hands tucked behind his back at an at ease posture. The two Lieutenants and one runner who stood at his side bowed and retreated as Cain came up beside him and folded his arms before him within his robes.

“Everything is going according to plan General?” Cain asked.

“Just so Minister. Everything is as you ordered.” Kaelin replied.

Cain surveyed the smoke choked battlefield and the thousands of troops arrayed across the dark and marshy landscape with its dead and decaying trees and low red mist that pervaded the ground at knee height summoned by his God hundreds of years past during the Chaos Wars.

“It would be best if you exited this location, General. The residuals would destroy you.” Cain said as he began to slowly raise his arms and whisper silently to himself.

The General took his leave and as he did all the runes on the ground glowed brightly before dimming out as they did on the staircase. Cain raised his arms and a wave of power undulated over the landscape in a cascade of crackling fire and heat that decimated all before it.

Chapter 2

Cain struggled to hold the firestorm spell, his willpower draining fast. The waves of coruscating fire swept over the battlefield at a right angle to the fortress battlement and decimated the left flank of the enemy formation. The consequences were immediate and severe.

The front lines were closed with his own forces. Mounted Infernal knights of Mhaldor clashed with their counterparts in green and orange full-plate. Locked in bloody combat none of them saw the wall of flame fast approaching. The standards of Artemis, goddess of the hunt carried by the enemy knights withered and wilted under the oncoming wave of all consuming heat. The screams of the troops below carried all the way up to Cains position as human bodies melted within their heavy full-plate. The sound became deafening, drowning out all else.

Hundreds of troops fell almost instantly, among them a sizable portion of Mhaldors own forces. The tone of the battle changed almost instantly. The Mages in the rear rank of the Eleusian forces immediately turned their attention from the gargoyle riders harassing their flanks and focused their spells at the western parapet to their right. Cain stopped his fiery onslaught and flicked his wrists forward. A spell-shield coalesced around the top of the battlement and was hammered by fire and frost spells from below.

“Any time now Inquisitor.” Cain gasped as he struggled to hold the spell shield in place.

His dank, pure white hair hung in tight braids that now dripped with rivulets of sweat as his struggle against the hammering spells continued. They were tightly bound with silver clasps with their own spell runes etched into them that dimmed swiftly. His willpower was draining fast and he knew it,

A minute later he could see shimmering, nearly invisible humanoid shapes rise up in between the mage ranks. Then chaos. The Naga, Mhaldors elite assassins unveiled and wreaked bloody havoc among the mages, whirling their deadly daggers with precision.

Cain dropped his spell-shield and fell against the forward crenel gasping for air, fatigued but not out of the game yet. He was a powerful High-mage but he was not all powerful. His will power had been drained by the prepared spells and his own personal expenditure and he watched the battle below swiftly change.

The Nagaraja, Lord Tiamat, unveiled in the middle of the mage ranks with his subordinate assassins and laid bloody waste to the leftovers, laughing all the while. The right flanks of the enemy formation was collapsing in on itself and mingling with the middle infantry and archers. Chaos, just as he had planned. Cain snapped his fingers three times and his hidden holocaust elemental bombs exploded within the enemy ranks leaving them in tatters. Dozens of troops were thrown upwards and out by the triple blasts in the middle of their ranks.

Slowly the enemy troops began a disorganized retreat into the darkened forest behind them but were harassed by Mhaldors forces every step of the way after reforming into coherent ranks thanks to Cains initial firestorm collapsing his own left flank knight formations.

As Khoraji, the commander of the Infernal Knights and Nagaraja Tiamat cleaned up the bloody and muddy battlefield below, Cain caught his breath and tried to compose himself. He caught what he thought was a ghostly shape inside the archway east down the rampart inside one of the castle parapets, stooped with golden glowing eyes. But when he turned in that direction the supposed apparition was gone and the archway was empty. At that point two things happened.

First, the right merlons 5 yards away blew apart in a shower of stone projectiles that exploded outwards towards Cain blowing him backwards another 10 yards and sent him skidding along the top of the battlement on his knees and one hand, digging gouges in the stone as he cast about with the power of the wind, and came to a rest at the other end of the parapet. He looked up, his eyes glowing bright white. Second, Seneschal Tranquility, Lord-commander of Eleusis floated up and into view and came to rest hovering slightly above the flagstones, fury in his golden, feline like slitted pupils.

Chapter 3

Rajamalans were the fastest beings in Sapience, and Tranquility was no exception. He was renown throughout the realm as the fastest, and most deadly Monk in all the lands. Most even considered him the deadliest combatant and Cain could not disagree. He had fought him one on one several times and came out battered and abused every time, only edging out a victory once or twice.

He was not so full of hubris as to not be wary around formidable opponents so he immediately snapped his fingers and summoned his elemental staff and crouched into a defensive position.

Tranquility was fast. The tiger like rajamalans used superior reflexes in martial arts, and a keen mind in telepathy to overwhelm and disorientate opponents quickly and efficiently. His light leather harness covered his furry red body, streaked with black stripes. Out of this harness a dagger flipped almost out of nowhere straight at Cains head that was deftly deflected by his twirling staff.

“So we meet again, fool. I will crush..” Cain began.

The attack came at blinding speed from both sides. Tranquility leapt at Cain with a spinning scissor kick to his left and right that was easily reversed into a roundhouse kick mid-air. Cain backed peddled while spinning his staff but was clipped on the right shoulder and spun around to land with a heavy thud against the nearby crenel. He threw his hand out behind him without looking and quickly coated the ground with ice from his bracers of frost. He spun back around just in time to see Tranquility land on the thick, slick, ice coated flagstones and lose his balance to fall in a heap. Keeping the pressure up Cain reversed his staff in his hand and let go with a blast of air that sent the master monk sliding into the far rubble of the parapet violently.

Tranquility kicked to his feet in a flash and let loose with two more hidden throwing knives. Cain deflected them haughtily and laughed while doing so, such an amateur move was completely beneath him. Until he realized it was simply a feint.

The attack came mentally. The monk had used the time Cain spent deflecting and gloating to mind lock him and he clamped down hard. He was mind battered mercilessly and stumbled back against the embrasure behind him once again, afflicted with visions that paralyzed him for a short time and threw off his equilibrium.

The sky grew dark and the rain began to pour in a raging torrent. Lightning crashed and when it did Cain became mobile enough just in time to look up and see a shimmering form perched atop a nearby merlon. He threw off the mind lock with the last bit of his willpower and sent another wave of fire at Tranquility that set him to backing up against the damaged section of the parapet. At that moment the shimmering form coalesced into another Rajamala. The Guild Master of the Naga.

Nagaraja Tiamat spun a silver dirk into his hand and sent it into Tranquilities back. At the same time he spun and leapt down through the crenel he was perched above and spun around mid-air to throw his silver tipped whip at him. The whip wrapped around the other Rajamala and sent him falling over the edge that was helped by another blast of air from Cain.

The two landed lightly on their feet on the lower rampart and Cain quickly ran over to the destroyed edge of the parapet and peered over, throwing his dark hood back over his head at the same time. Tranquility had turned and leaped down to another rampart and fled into the thickening darkness. Tiamat stood and watched after him, a smirk on his fierce and scarred feline face and glanced back up at Cain while he coiled his whip again and clipped it onto his harness. He took two steps forward and half ran half vaulted up the pillar and landed up on the battlement in a crouch.

He stood again and smirked at Cain.

“Lucky I was here. I have been here the whole time watching you fumble about against that fool.”

Cain snorted and turned to the battlefield once again, hands folded in the sleeves of his robes.

“Come, The Black Hand has called a meeting in the Order Hall.” Tiamat hissed.

Chapter 4

Tiamat joined Cain in surveying the devastated lands surrounding the Fortress. The battleground was covered in the dead and blood. Slaves scurried about picking over the remains and the chief engineer supervised the cleanup of the whole mess.

“Tranquility is a man of many words isn’t he?” Tiamat said as he stepped up beside him. Cain chuckled at that and continued surveying the damage, a slight frown on his face. As if Tiamat had read his thoughts he stepped forward and gestured at the battlefield.

“Khoraji will be none to pleased about your firestorm decimating some of his own Infernals. None to pleased at all.”

“He will get over it. He must. We will have bigger problems on our hands. Aegis and Artemis.” Tiamat said nothing to that but turned around and headed back towards the spiral stairwell and waited at its entrance impatiently for his old friend. Cain took one last look at the aftermath of the slaughter with a wistful smirk on his face and joined Tiamat in walking down into the lower antechambers.

They walked along the corridor side by side past the throne room and the mess hall towards the Black Chapel, one walking at ease and the other with his hands tucked deep within his robes.

“The whole council will be there, I assume.” Cain said

“Aye, I believe they will, Father Ranzou is awaiting us in the Chapel.” Tiamat replied.

Cain muttered to himself. The last thing he needed was to be preached at by the leader of the Apostates guild, the Mhaldorian order of priests were an eclectic mix of devotees to the Lord Sartan, none of them were ever any use in combat asides for Father Ranzou himself, as dangerous in his own right as either Tiamat or Cain.

They approached the cold rolled steel doors of the Black Chapel. It was adorned with grinning skulls and other assorted hideous death masks. It dripped blood endlessly from the top of the runnels down through the different nooks and crannies around the skulls and masks set within the door. It opened silently as they got within 10 paces.

Father Ranzou was kneeling before an altar dedicated to the Lord of Evil with his back to them but stood and said in a booming voice,

“Come, you two are late, our Master brooks no tardiness, especially to meetings of great Black Hand importance.”

Cain gave a long suffering sigh and rolled his eyes at Tiamat who just shrugged. They followed Father Ranzou into an ante chamber where a giant shrine to Sartan stood. It was a mass of golden encased bodies in death throes reaching out for supplication or perhaps help that would never come. The mass of bodies were melted together in a horrid way and writhed about, a low moan and screams coming from it if you cared to listen close enough.

A inky black portal began to form a bit beyond the shrine as Ranzou whispered a silent incantation. Cain knew it by heart as the pass code to enter the Order Hall and whispered it with the two others.

“*auferam infirmitatem corporis.*”

The portal expanded quickly and engulfed the three of them. In a flash they were standing in a dark and silent antechamber that led to the main hall. Ranzou immediately threw down an eye sigil that burst into a bright flash of white. No Serpent-Lords or other assassins had cloaked in behind us. The security protocol was always followed.

They entered the main hall, a fire was burning in the giant black glassed fireplace and the entire cavernous chamber smelled of blood and fear. It seems Father Ranzou had just finished vivisectioning a slave and dissecting his remains to divine what our Lord might want from us this day. The council was seated at the porous blood soaked round table at the center looking irritated as usual. A dour bunch.

Cain looked around the table as Ranzou and Tiamat took their places alongside the Tyrannus, General Kaelin and High Inquisitor Daitya. All were accounted for except one. As that realization that no, he had not forgotten about it struck him. The attack came viciously and swift.

The soul-piercer rapiers flashed out of the darkness beside him and cut high and low making Cain reel against the wall of the chamber. He regained his balance swiftly and threw up another shield, this one formed of hardened air as the rapiers scraped off it, but the bastard had already cut his cheek and stung his pride. Mostly because he thought himself foolish for not expecting any payback.

Khoraji came out of the shadows behind his blades, whirling them in a blur, cutting down Cains shield swiftly. His face was locked in a snarl as he hammered away, each strike a killing blow if Cain could not hold his shield up any longer. Cain struck out with a blast of ice from his bracers and slapped the other rapier away with his suddenly materialized elemental staff. The two were locked in deadly combat until a daemon touched daegger cut the air between them.

“Enough!” Ranzou barked, still seated at the table, his daegger hovered between them gleaming wickedly.

“We have business to attend to here, for our Master, or have you forgotten? You may blood feud him after this meeting has concluded Lord Khoraji, now take a seat.

“Honor demands blood.” Khoraji snarled as he slammed his rapiers home into his dual sheaths.

“Piss on your honor, Khoraji. There is no room for honor when we cleave our enemies in twain and feed their souls to our Lord!” Cain yelled and advanced forward once again.

The daegger started twirling and hove towards Cains neck, stopping a mere half inch from it.

“Take a seat. Now.” Ranzou said quietly.

“You killed our men Cain, a step too far and I am quite inclined to allow this blood feud to proceed after this.” Wulfen sneered and set a sheaf of papers he was reading aside.

Cain snorted and brushed passed Khoraji and took a seat beside Kaelin. After a few moments Khoraji also came and sat at the table, glaring daggers at Cain the whole while. Ranzou glanced between the two of them before beginning the briefing.

“After the extermination of the forests around Mhaldor isle re-initiated by the Tyrannus we have been having skirmishes against the forestal allies off and on. Today, as you know was their first large assault and so now we know they are not on equal war footing with us, at this time. Intelligence reports Cain?”

Cain shifted in his seat from his staring contest with Khoraji to address the entire table.

“Current intelligence suggests that due to the Tyrannus and his actions the treaty that we broke invoked a second, secret treaty they had with the Ashtanis. Ashtan and Aegis, The God of War have sided with Artemis and her tree-huggers. His premise for this action is I assume due to his troops being able to move through the forests freely. Which we will no longer be able to do without being attacked by every vine and butterfly I might add, thank you for that Tyrannus.” Cain finished with a smirk on his face.

“The body may be made stronger through combat, Cain or did you forget our Masters Truths?” Wulfen stood and said before going on.

“Or perhaps as I have seen lately you have fallen out of favor with the Truths much like you have disregarded every city law I have enacted! You are the Minister of Security and should toe the line! We may be all equal in here but out there you belong to me.”

Cain waved his hand dismissively and stood up before pacing around the table and saying.

“What! Will you never cease prating of laws to us that have swords by our sides? Wulfen you are the most sniveling paper pusher I have ever known and it is beyond me how the Master saw fit to put a non combatant in charge of this city, you are worthless. Where were you when I just fought Tranquility on top of the fortress?” Cain snarled in a raspy growl.

“But you don’t have a sword.” Tiamat said.

“More like, just a staff.” Kaelin replied.

High Inquisitor Daitya had enough and stood. Along with Khoraji, hands on his rapier hilts.

“Cain, you should choose your words more wisely here in the sanctum of our Lord.”

Chapter 5

They were all on their feet now. The arguments broke out left and right, Ranzou trying to calm everyone down so that they could get back to business and Wulfen threatening Cain with expulsion from the city and the Order.

“It is beyond me why the Lord sees fit to allow sniveling rat civilians to oversee the Military and the combatants, I fight and die for our Master every damn day. What do you others do? Push paper! I am the strong, does the truths not say the strong should rule the weak!?” Cain yelled. But before he could go on further Daitya had flash stepped over to him and a neatly hidden wicked twelve inch long stiletto was now underneath his chin drawing blood.

“You know nothing of our Masters truths! You were simply initiated due to your combat prowess, obviously not your petty intellect.” She hissed while jabbing the stiletto further, Cain frozen but smiling down at her.

“ENOUGH!”

They all instantly dropped to their knees in utter agony, every single one of them now screaming and claspng their ears, blood flowing freely from their facial orifices. The cavernous chamber instantly went dark red and the flame in the fireplace expanded to the ceiling before going out in a puff of smoke. A red and black mist of blood began to coalesce in front of it. The blood dripped from the portal like mist and began to coagulate and drop to the floor in sickening thuds. From it a boot emerged, adorned with skulls of silver and black. The rest of the hulking body with blood red skin emerged carrying with it an impossibly sharp scimitar encrusted in gold and jewels. Adorned with gaudy golden jewelry and body chains the form raised to its full height of fifteen feet, glancing about the chamber with a slick bald head adorned with more golden filigree chains and fiery red eyes that looked like molten lava.

They all stopped screaming as one and were left gasping on the floor in a kneeling position before slowly looking up in shock. Sartan, The Lord of Evil. Their Master, had arrived.

“Arise children, and attend. Cain stay where you are.” Sartan growled into the shocked silence and moved to the near bookcase full of His own litanies. He put away the scythe into His golden bejeweled sheath and pulled a book at random and held it in His giant hand.

“I watched your battle with Tranquility. You had help in the end, so enough with your gloating.” Sartan glared at Cain before allowing him to stand. Fiddling with the clasp on the book cover. He threw it into the dead flames of the fireplace before turning to face His servants once more.

“This will be short and sweet. There is a traitor among you. Here in the city. My divine limitations do not allow me to point the finger directly, but you must find them before my brother Aegis and sister Artemis form a cohesive attack force. Cain, as Security Minister you are failing Me for allowing this to occur. Find him swiftly or face My wrath. If you fail Me, I will see you become a lowly maggot and have you placed into the center of the city as a reminder. For a century.”

The dark red light in the chamber flickered for a moment and with that He was gone. No fanfare this time, He simply vanished before their eyes silently and instantly.

“I will depart immediately. Lady Daitya, can you find a slave and use your unique skills to find out what he knows? They whisper amongst themselves.” Cain said while dodging out of the way of Father Ranzou who bowled chairs and other members of the council over trying to get to the fireplace in time to save the Lords book from going up in the smoldering flames.

“At once. Kaelin, with me.” Daitya said as she left to the exit chamber with General Kaelin in tow.

“Tiamat, will you accompany me back to the throne room.” Cain said while also heading for the exit corridor. Tiamat shrugged and followed Cain, while he attempted to clean the blood from his fur. They used the exit phrase and arrived in the Chapel again. The High Inquisitor nowhere to be seen. They moved swiftly towards the throne room but Cain made a left before its grand entrance door and headed off in the direction of the living quarters.

“What now, we are heading towards your office.” Tiamat said.

“Aye, I know who the traitor is.” Cain replied and glanced at him.

“And you did not bring this to anyone’s attention...why?” Tiamat hissed.

“My suspicions were not confirmed until just before the fight with Tranquility. And besides I wanted to see whom else his conspirators was. Where there is one traitor, there is always more.” Cain said and entered his office.

“And that poor slave that is about to get eviscerated?” Tiamat asked.

“For fun, and to keep your woman out of my hair while I work.”

Tiamat chuckled at that and they stepped around his office desk to an antechamber. The chamber where his assistant had his small office off of Cains. They burst in on a sleeping Andelas, groggily coming to his senses after being asleep on a stone slab. He looked about skittishly and then grimaced and arose swiftly, his eyes glowing golden.

“Took you long enough Cain.” Andelas said as he summoned a staff and a wolf and hawk came through a portal out of thin air. The small office was suddenly awash in action. Andelas kicked over the table and sent hundreds of thorns at the two Mhaldorians which were barely deflected by an air shield thrown up by Cain. Tiamat flipped backwards out of the office on to the top of Cains table with a map of Sapience on it and had his blades twirling in his hands. The wolf lunged at Cain who slapped it aside with his staff and the hawk harassed Tiamat with an ear piercing shriek.

“A Sentinel, I always knew you were a traitor Andelas, I just didn’t know which guild you belonged to until you confirmed it for me on the ramparts tonight.” Cain said as his whirling staff deflected more thorns from the forest vines Andelas had summoned. They grunted and gasped as they deflected each others attacks. Each one advancing forward and taking a few steps back in the fray. Tiamat had finally thrown a dagger at the hawk and pinned it to the far wall where it screeched incessantly. Cain was finally able to get in close and cracked Andelas over the head with his staff where at the same time Tiamat threw his whip at him and got the Sentinels staff arm bound. He took out a

second whip and sent it flinging through the air binding his other arm and heaved him forward into Cains office. Cain then kneed him fully in the face breaking his nose and stepped aside as he flew forward into the office face first and lay still on the floor finally. The two spirit animals disappeared in a green mist and the office was suddenly quiet again.

Cain and Tiamat strolled the ramparts of Baelgrim fortress as preparations were made for the next assault by the combined forces of Ashtan and Eleusis. It was a sunny day and the birds were out chirping. Which disgusted them both. Cain sent a bolt of fire at the nearest decrepit tree and some of the chirping was silenced immediately.

“So, we did not find the other one?” Tiamat asked.

“We will in time, High Inquisitor Daitya is working on Andelas still, he will tell everything he knows soon.” Cain said as he stopped and surveyed the engineers placing traps and pits on the grounds before the fortress. Tiamat began to suddenly back away, a sudden smirk on his face as he reversed his course down the rampart in the other direction backwards.

“Good luck.”

Cain turned around and saw Khoraji advancing towards him kicking up dust down the rampart, the naked soul-piercers gleaming in the afternoon sun.

Cain sighed and advanced to meet him.