

# The Last Days of the Riven War

*12<sup>th</sup> Day of the first season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star.*

*In the east, the sky burned black today.*

*We have finally arrived at Klatu Pyramid. It has changed much in the ten years since I last laid eyes upon it. Fortifications span each of the greater tiers. Where once sacred ponds carried lilies, drained munition dumps remain. I recall bronze statues lining the Heron Song Tier, where my regiment has been billeted, but what has happened to them, I don't know. We'd hoped for a few weeks of rest here before the campaign season began again, but an exhausted messenger just came in through the Gate of Knowing. Whatever news he brings, he looked like the demons of the pit were at his heels.*

*13<sup>th</sup> Day of the first season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*So much for rest! We'd barely got our kit bags down before Otuga had us banking earthworks around the pyramid's lower tier. I know it has been a long time, but I don't think that any of us ever signed up for this.*

*The eastern sky has not lightened, and behind the banks of cloud a fire's embers glow. Whatever news that messenger was bringing, he disappeared into the Draoihn's chambers and has not emerged since.*

*14<sup>th</sup> Day of the first season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*A day can make all the difference. Whilst we were raising earthworks, Jurzon's wide patrol was attacked by something. I've asked the few surviving men about it, but they won't speak of what it was, or how a single beast could have destroyed half a regiment. I've known Jurzon for eight years. He owed me money. I doubt that I'll ever get that back now.*

*We all gripe that the Draoihn are distant, self-righteous bastards, but right now, I'm glad that there are five of them on the pyramid's top tier.*

*21<sup>st</sup> Day of the first season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*I doubt that future generations will ever know anything like this war. Assuming that there will be any future generations. In the last five years, the Sarathi have taken every city east of the Cold Plains. We never expected them to be able to break those lands so swiftly. But tonight we have music, a good fire and Kymiah managed to bring down a fat wild boar. It feels good to be going to sleep with a full belly for once.*

*31<sup>st</sup> Day of the first season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*Sometimes I feel that if we could dine on rumours, we'd be the best fed regiment in the whole damn world. If you believe the cooks, the sky was blackened by a fire mountain erupting. Listen to the priests and it's a sign of our victory. But the account that I fear to hear repeated is the one I heard from the second regiment while I queued for bread. They say that Kalass has torn through the world and is less than fifty shun away with her army. If that is true – if a Sarathi has indeed come for us – then we may as well have rumours for weapons, for all the good they will do us.*

*47<sup>th</sup> Day of the first season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*There is no privacy in this accursed place. Kymiah and I can find nowhere to be alone. Seeking a quiet spot on the pyramid's sixth tier, we ran into Baldun – of all the cursed luck. Baldun is not only Draoihn, but a Speaker on the Council of Night and Day. Relations between soldiers aren't permitted, and I thought he'd rebuke us. He sure as hell saw us. But he simply stared off towards the darkened sky in the east. I confess that over the past two weeks, that black shadow has somehow grown familiar to me – but the look on Baldun's face as he tried to stare it down put chills down my spine.*

*53<sup>rd</sup> Day of the first season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*A swarm of locusts descended on us today. I've never seen anything like them before. Long as your palm, buzzing. Eating everything they can get to. They came down so fast we lost half of the regiment's supplies before we got most of it indoors. We've stuffed rags around the door frames, the windows, anything to keep them at bay. The commanders issued a half-ration order the moment the doors were closed.*

*Baldun came to speak to us in the evening. He says that the presence of the locusts mean that the enemy are near, and worse, they have a Mawleth if they can command insects that way. I know of the Mawleth only from tall tales told around camp fires, but what I have heard makes my blood run cold.*

*Last Day of the first season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*Another two men, dead, this morning. That brings the total to twelve. The Mawleth always takes two. Always in pairs. Kills them. Skins them. Hangs them so that they'll be discovered come dawn. We sleep in groups of ten or more. Somehow, it still gets in.*

*The men are afraid. They ask me what good the Draoihn are if they cannot protect us from the Sarathi's dark sorcery? I fear I have few answers for them today. I saw Baldun taking hair and urine from some of the men. What he thinks that will accomplish in the face off this terror, I cannot say.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*Sometimes I feel a fool for doubting the Draoihn. Baldun keeps the Mawleth in a cage – all that piss and hair he collected went into some kind of trap. The beast is burned and tormented with fire nearly every hour, but the damn thing will not char, or die. Baldun says he prefers it that way, and that by hurting the minion, we hurt the master that set it upon us. But it also means that Kalass is on her way, and when she reaches Klatu Pyramid, her fury will be enough to burn the gods out of the heavens.*

*9<sup>th</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*A mist rolled in from the west last night, and when it finally parted, we could see them arrayed on the plain. The numbers Kalass has brought to bear nearly stopped my wrinkled heart. The only question is why she has not yet ordered the attack.*

*15<sup>th</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*I have not had time to write for many days. My fingers ache from gripping my sword so long that I can barely hold the quill. We have lost three thousand men.*

*Kalass has taken the lowest level of the pyramid. This pile of rock seemed like a refuge when we arrived. Now I see only a tomb.*

*18<sup>th</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*For two days Baldun held Kalass back at the foot of the pyramid, but today, disaster struck. Chains of darkness held his shifting forms down long enough for Kalass's vanguard to scale the pyramid wall and hack him to pieces. The pyramid's base is stacked five high with the enemy dead, but they fear the Riven Queen's lieutenant more than they do our arrows.*

*Arrows. We'll miss those when they tomorrow when they run out.*

*21<sup>st</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*We have lost the outer tiers, been forced to retreat into the pyramid's interior and seal the warded doors. The generals are dead. Their captains are dead. As I sat in the gloom, the last five-hundred men began looking for somebody to lead them. I do not know what leadership I can offer, trapped here in the dark. I have told them to keep the lamps low. That is all I can offer.*

*22<sup>nd</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*I do not know where the dream came from, but we cling to life by a thread. I awoke knowing of a tunnel, hidden beneath the floors, a black passage that delves down beneath the pyramid. Somehow it will bring us out beyond the Halashan Mountains. It is icy cold here, and there is no guarantee that we are not walking into a dead end. But somebody has been here before.*

*Within an alcove, I found a silver lance and a circlet of milky white crystal, just as the dream told me that I would. I do not know what it means, but I have carried the cumbersome thing since. I have trusted the dream this far.*

*Eighty volunteers stayed behind as a rear-guard, promising that they will catch up to us when they can. I do not think they will be coming.*

*27<sup>th</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*Fate curses us. She offers hope, then breaks it like old bones.*

*After five days beneath the earth we emerged to find Kalass must have known the valley into which we would emerge. She is camped with three whole legions below us. We have sought other paths, but there are none. We have no food, and only the water that we can lick from the walls.*

*They have seen us. If you have found this, know that we hoped to die with honour.*

*29<sup>th</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*A miracle! We are delivered, blessed by God and all of her Scions! It has been a week since we found daylight again. Daylight. For a while I didn't know if we'd see it.*

*As Kalass's army sounded their horns, a great drum sounded and a vast army rode into the valley. Draoihn, Hexen, even the Druya. The enemy were routed, and from my vantage I saw Kalass herself crushed by a molten hand that burst from the ground beneath her. Her end was not swift, and her magic resisted it for nearly an hour, but it was a fitting end for a Sarathi.*

*I have heard that the general of this strange army wishes to meet me. They say he is only a child, but after all I have seen in this war, nothing really surprises me now.*

### *37<sup>th</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*Roast pork. Wine. Kymiah in my arms and a warm hearth. I know that this lull in the fighting cannot last forever, but for once, the news is good. The Riven Queen is being held in the east, and King Torne has slowly worn down her forces in the south over the summer.*

*Some of the men who survived Klatu Pyramid have asked leave to go back to their farms before winter hits, but I have had to refuse them. We cannot spare a single hand. Not now, at the turning of the tide.*

### *42<sup>nd</sup> Day of the Second Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*Maladon called a council of war today. It still feels strange to take orders from a child, but I suspect that he is older than he seems. He speaks of a century long battle he fought and won long ago, before the Scions walked the earth. A war that should not have been won. His resolve gives the men strength. I dread to think what he has seen – although that's assuming he has eyes at all beneath that scarf. For some reason he wanted that old lance and crown I brought out from beneath Klatu Pyramid. I was more than happy to hand them over.*

*We will need all of his wisdom in the fight to come. The Riven Queen has broken through on the eastern frontier and sacked the river city. Junath is all that remains to us now.*

### *33<sup>rd</sup> Day of the Third Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*For five days we have been harrying the baggage train of the Riven Queen's army. After Klatu, my legion are known as survivors, so it was only fitting that we were given this task. We hit them where we can. With all the forces that King Torne and Maladon have amassed, we do not have a fifth of her number, nor the deathless things that answer her call. We do what we can to slow them, but when we encounter one of the Sarathi, we have no choice but to run. And we cannot face the powers of the Riven Queen in open battle.*

*Maladon is working on something that he says will turn the tide. But we must buy him time. That is all we ever do, is it not? Buy just one more day.*

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Day of the Fourth Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*The countryside is a barren wasteland. The Riven Queen's forces have stripped it bare. They leave nothing behind but ash and ruin. I do not know what will be left of this world once this war is over, what the Riven Queen thinks she will hold in her talons even if she gets what she wants. The only*

*thing she leaves in her wake are the Fallons. They stud the earth like the bones of the people who once were. The Riven Queen's vanguard has reached Junath, but the king has laid in supplies enough to last for years. It gives me pleasure to imagine the horde at his walls starving.*

*12<sup>th</sup> Day of the Fourth Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*I can barely stand to write the words.*

*Junath was broken in less than a day.*

*There is nothing on earth that can stand against the Riven Queen's power. I can see the glow of the city burning from twenty miles away. I dread to think how thousands burn with it. We pray that some of the city's defenders, at least, managed to flee through the Gate of Stars.*

*Kymiah. I will not write her name again.*

*17<sup>th</sup> Day of the Fourth Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*The fires raged over Junath for five days. There is only smoke there now. I mean that completely. The city is gone. All of it. There are less than two-hundred of us now, what with the constant skirmishes we've been forced to engage in to keep this vigil.*

*We have seen no sign of survivors. The Riven Queen does not permit escape.*

*31<sup>st</sup> Day of the Fourth Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*I trusted a dream once before, and I was right to do so a second time. Those of us who remain have gathered at Solemn Hill. There are barely five thousand men here, but somehow Maladon escaped Junath's destruction. King Torne was not so lucky. We have sent out riders, begging every man and woman capable of bearing arms to join us.*

*It will not be enough. Before she took Junath, the city's sorcerers unleashed their most forbidden powers. They brought down meteors, desecration waves, and tried to lock her in a starlight paradox. She shrugged them off like they were nothing. She cannot be stopped. She cannot be killed. A million men could not oppose her.*

*51<sup>st</sup> Day of the Fourth Season, the Second Year of the Wishing Star*

*When I look around our council of war, I see more faces never touched by a razor than beards. I swear on my ancestors that I will not let them die.*

*There is good in these people. These last ten-thousand. We have planted our banners at Solemn Hill and by God, we will not go quietly.*

*Last night I heard Maladon laughing, alone in his tent. I deduced he was insane months ago, and it should not give me hope, but it does.*

*1<sup>st</sup> Day of the First Season, the Third Year of the Wishing Star*

*She is coming, and she brings everything against us. For two days the ground has been shaking. It is the footfalls of her army.*

*But this is our time. Maladon let me into a secret, something I cannot write for fear that this journal be read by spies. We are but ten-thousand tired, hungry souls, but even the Riven Queen cannot see all ends. A reckoning is coming.*

*4<sup>th</sup> Day of the First Season, the Third Year of the Wishing Star*

*These words do not seem real, even as I prepare to write them.*

*The Riven Queen is dead.*

*After all these years of fighting, all the retreats, the death and the bodies of friends turning to mould in the mud, it seems too small a thing. But she is gone, and her armies turned on each other the moment she did.*

*It was not us, but her own Sarathi that undid her in the end, betrayed by the same dread lieutenants that have levelled our cities and driven us to the brink of extinction. Maladon gave them that old lance I hauled out of the dark all those months ago, and somehow it did what all our sorcerers could not. I always wondered why he risked battle against Kalass to save a handful of old soldiers, and now I suppose I know.*

*I am going to get drunk. Very, very drunk. I wish my love was here to see the day.*

*12<sup>th</sup> Day of the First Season, the Third Year of the Wishing Star*

*It was supposed to be over. With the Riven Queen destroyed and her armies scattered, we should have had peace. We deserved peace.*

*But something is wrong in the world. Torments and abominations are rising, and the stories grow more terrifying with every day that passes. The Riven Queen may be dead, but she bore the power of the Night Below. It is spreading, throughout the land. I had thought that there was nothing left to destroy. After all we have suffered, we have become the implement of our own destruction.*

*29<sup>th</sup> Day of the First Season, the Third Year of the Wishing Star*

*There is still life here. As winter leaves us, there is new growth on the trees. At least, those that have not been corrupted by the Night Below. The Akhal Forest is said to have gone. I had hoped to see it again, before I die.*

*Maladon has gathered what remains of the nobility in the ruins of once mighty Junath. Last night he told me that the Night Below can be contained. He looked desperate. But these are desperate times.*

*33<sup>rd</sup> Day of the First Season, the Third Year of the Wishing Star*

*Maladon emerged from beneath the great seal for the fourth time, and again, he emerged alone.*

*The surviving noblemen were few enough, and those that desired the crown have grown quiet. He has answered no questions about the fate of those brave men who have tried to claim it. When he asked for another volunteer, this time none came forward.*

*40<sup>th</sup> Day of the First Season, the Third Year of the Wishing Star*

*I am not worthy of the way they look at me. Their eyes so full of hope. I feel their dreams, resting upon my shoulders.*

*I was born the son of a cooper. I killed my first man at fifteen. I have shivered in the ice plains of the north, and I have sired no children. And tonight I will go beneath the great seal and attempt to take a kingdom for my own.*

*I am afraid. Eleven have gone before me. But I have gone through too much, seen too much, not to try.*

*I no longer track the days. Time means nothing to me now.*

*It writhes within my mind. I feel it, all of it, pulsing. Trying to escape.*

*I have controlled it. Driven it down. But it eats at me. They look to me to solve their disputes, to lead them as a king. A Viejan never leaves my side. I would rather die than feel it creeping through my brain, through my thoughts. But they will not let me. The Crown will not release me, and neither will they.*

*I am the son of a cooper.*

*I am the king.*

*I am the Night Below.*