

## Untitled

## Chapter 4

Kronax wakes up to the smell of breakfast being made. He takes a deep breath and coughs on the exhale. A thumping noise is heard as two voices penetrate the heavy wooden door, growing closer and closer. Smiling, he sits up in bed and waves his hand, lighting up the nearby candles.

"Come and get me, my little warriors!" he growls.

Suddenly, two pale-skinned little boys bust through the door. The first is the older of the two, bald-headed, and bears a stick as a weapon. The younger boy has a short patch of jet-black hair and is both shorter and skinnier than his older brother. The two boys jump towards their father at the same time, but Kronax channels his powers and suspends them both in mid-air. The older boy wriggles around trying to force himself free while his brother remains calm. The younger boy's eyes begin to glow a deep violet, and he manages to free himself from his father's magic grip. He plops down onto the bed, surprised with himself and confident, he charges at his father again.

Kronax simply extends his arm and pushes his younger son back to the end of the bed. They both laugh and repeat the process while the older son still fumbles around in the air helplessly.

"Montioch, my son. You're quite the little sorcerer, aren't you?" Kronax teases.

"I've been practicing!" Montioch replies, gleefully.

"Hey! One of you let me down, right now!" yells the older son.

Kronax waves his hand and his older son falls onto the bed next to Montioch.

"Kolix, if you wish to be a powerful warrior, you must be prepared for anything," says Kronax.

"But fighting magic is impossible!" Kolix replies.

"Just because something is difficult does not mean it is impossible," says Kronax, picking Kolix up again with his magic.

Kolix flails around again to no avail. After a minute or so, he gives up and looks at his father as though he's failed him. Kronax points at Kolix's stick, still grasped tightly in his right hand.

"A good warrior never lets go of his weapon. Show me what a great warrior would do," says Kronax.

Kolix thinks for a moment. He looks at his stick and then at his father. At this point, Montioch began to play-fight with his father again. Right as Kronax pushes Montioch away, Kolix understands his father's advice and throws his stick like a spear, right into Kronax's chest. Kolix falls back onto the bed as his father lets out a playful roar.

"By the gods! I've been bested by a child. Vanquished by my own son! Please! Have mercy!" he teases.

Kolix picks up his stick again and the three begin to play-fight once more. They are interrupted by a voice in the doorway. "Breakfast is ready my brave warriors," says a woman in the doorway.

Montioch and Kolix quickly retreat out of the bedroom and into the kitchen; Montioch coughs violently on his way to the kitchen. Their mother remains in the doorway fidgeting her apron and staring at Kronax. He simply smiles and pats the spot on the bed next to him. She laughs and turns to leave.

"Ilia," says Kronax. Ilia turns around and looks at him expectantly. "I need you to fetch my ritual garments," he continues.

"At once. Is there anything else?" she replies.

"No, that will be all," he says, getting out of bed and fixing his long, black hair.

Ilia looks to the floor for a moment. Kronax notices her hesitation and walks over to her and grabs her hands.

"There is something on your mind," he says.

"It's just..." she hesitates. "Montioch wants to go with you to the ritual ceremony so badly."

"Absolutely not."

"But-"

"Speak no more of this. If anyone sees one of his coughing fits, he will be killed. Is that what you want?!" says Kronax, raising his voice.

"Isn't there some spell you can cast to heal him?" Ilia says as she tears up.

"I am still searching the archives. So far, my spells can only heal simple wounds. I will find a solution, Ilia."

Kronax places his hands on her bald, white head and kisses her forehead. He walks past her and into the kitchen. He sits down at the table and grabs a mutton leg. As he eats, Ilia walks back into the room with Kronax's garments. He wolfs down the rest of his breakfast and dresses first in his warrior's garbs, a brown wool shirt and shorts. Ilia opens the ritual robe and helps Kronax into it. The black robe, accented in gold, fits snugly when buttoned. Kronax sits back down and pours a cup of wine while Ilia puts his boots on for him.

After he is completely dressed, Ilia places a golden necklace over the robe and Kronax's eyes begin to glow purple. He kisses Ilia and his two boys before heading out the door. The candlelit interior of the wooden shack of a house is now replaced with the gray-lit skies. Kronax takes a deep breath before choking on the polluted air and coughing. He turns and faces the street towards the ceremony grounds, visible in the distance on top of a hill, and huffs before embarking on the long walk. After a few moments, he passes a bar to his left. Even early in the morning, patrons sit at the tables outside and drink. Three men sit at the closest table, all pale-skinned and bald, they bear the same simple warrior's garbs. As Kronax walks by, one of them stands up, raises his drink, and shouts, "Long live the Nomaga!" at him.

Kronax stops to give the customary reply, "Hail Emperor Glaskor," beats his chest twice with his right hand, and raises a fist into the air before moving on. He walks another few minutes simply observing the world around him. There is a screech that steals him from his observation as a pterodactyl flies through the sky, rider on back, and a few smaller beasts behind it. Kronax stopped to watch it fly further away, the powerful whooshes of its wings growing quieter until the regular sounds of the marketplace resume.

Stray dogs rifle through the trash of nearby vendors as the clang of a blacksmith's hammer is heard in the background. Kronax walks through the remainder of the market and

ascends the hill towards the palace. He looks down into the distance and sees a textile factory spewing smoke into the air. He almost reaches his destination before a child is thrown into the street in front of him. The child is huddled over and covers his left eye, crying. Another boy runs over out of the alleyway and laughs at him. Kronax picks the wounded child up and stands him upright.

"Stop that this instant! You are a warrior of the Nomaga. We do not cry!" he yells.

"My eye..." the child whimpers.

"Let me have a look at it," Kronax says, dropping down to one knee and inspecting the child's eye.

The child reveals his eye to show it has been pierced by something sharp. Kronax channels his powers and places his hand over the child's eye. The wounds seals itself under the palm of his hand.

"Let this be a lesson to you both. You must be held responsible for your actions. I *can* heal your eye completely, child, but I will not. Suffering makes us more powerful. You boys will not make the same mistake again," he says sternly.

The two children run along into the alley and disappear. Kronax walks another few minutes, kicking the dirt as he goes until he approaches the front gates of the compound surrounding the Emperor's palace. There is a line of attendees, but Kronax simply bypasses them and walks through the stone archway. He continues through the open field towards the giant stone palace. The meeting of the Elder's of Sorcery will start soon. He is running a bit late today, so he rushes to his chambers for the necessary documents.

The very second he makes it through his chamber door, he is accosted by his assistant, Taloth. He begins to speak, but Kronax walks past him and closes the door behind him. His office is dark and gloomy, and the gray light from the window hardly helps at all. Kronax waves his hand and the candles light along each wall, illuminating the cold, stone interior. He scans through his personal library for a moment before sitting down at his desk. There is a small stack of papers on a thick wooden table for today's meeting. Kronax looks over them briefly before there is a knock on the heavy wooden door. Taloth barges in before Kronax has the chance to respond.

"Excuse the interruption, master. The Elders have requested your presence in the council chambers," he says, nervously breaking eye contact.

Kronax says nothing in return and simply gets up and walks to the chambers. He walks through the doorway and sees the eight Elders circled around a stone table, a darkened throne behind it. He takes the open seat in front of him.

"Kronax! How nice of you to join us!" one of the Elders exclaims.

"My apologies, Elder," he replies.

"This reflects poorly on junior members, you know this?" another Elder asks.

"Oh please!" exclaims another Elder, "Like you've never had too much to drink the night before our ritual!"

The council breaks into laughter before calming down and getting on to business. The Elders shuffle through papers before one of them breaks the silence.

"More children have been growing sick as of late. There are some who would blame the fumes of the coal fires. They have petitioned for an investigation," one of them says.

"Children must be getting weaker, have we ever lost so many at such a rate?" another asks.

"Not since the last plague," another adds.

"Perhaps we should relocate the coal-fire industry somewhere away from the cities," Kronax suggests.

"For what? So these inferior children can grow into sickly warriors?" One of the Elders responds.

"We might as well start allowing women to train as warriors!" yells one of them. The table erupts into laughter.

"Those fumes make us stronger! I vote we ignore their petition and condemn those weaklings who proposed it!" exclaims an Elder, as he interrupts the rest of them.

The Elders, minus Kronax, all vote to approve the resolution. Silence takes the room again.

"The youth today have been rather disruptive. Barfights and murders are on the rise," an Elder begins.

"We have conquered many," Kronax starts, "our youth have nobody to focus their bloodthirst upon but our own."

"This is true. The issue will become worse before long," another Elder says.

"Does anybody propose a solution?" one of them asks.

The council falls into silence. They decide to reflect upon the matter before bringing it up at the next meeting. The Elders continue the meeting, and address a number of smaller issues. After the council meeting ends, a metallic banging sound comes from the darkened throne. A figure steps down, accompanied by two armored guards, into the light and addresses the Elders.

"Well done Elders, that was a productive meeting. I'd like to speak with you Kronax," he says in his gravelly voice.

The council quickly shuffles out while Emperor Glaskor takes a seat opposite of Kronax. "You're very promising, you know that?" he says.

"Of course, my liege, thank you," Kronax replies.

"It has come to my attention that one of your children has grown sickly."

Kronax freezes in his seat, his ghostly white skin flushes red. "Emperor, I-"

Glaskor raises his hand, "I'm well aware of how heartbreaking this must be, but we have thousands of years of tradition behind us. *We do not ignore it.* If your child's condition does not improve within the week, you must fulfil your duty."

Kronax says nothing as his eyes fixate on the table in front of him. The Emperor gets up from his seat and walks over next to Kronax and grabs his shoulder.

"You are now part of the ruling class. We have an obligation to follow tradition. There has not been an insurrection in our society in over 200 years. The masses must know we stand by tradition at all costs," he pauses for a moment, "Remember Kronax, the Emperor has eyes everywhere," he continues, in a lower voice.

Emperor Glaskor makes a signal to his guards and they leave the room. Kronax slowly gets up and follows. The Emperor, the Elders, and Kronax all move to the ceremony grounds. The open field in front of the palace is now filled with warriors chanting, drinking, and fighting. Emperor Glaskor takes his spot on the balcony above the crowd. He begins to give a speech, but Kronax spaces out. He hears all of it but listens to nothing. All he can focus on is his son, Montioch. How would he save him? Could he go through with murdering his own child?

A strong gust of wind blows through the field and catches Kronax's attention. Emperor Glaskor has finished his speech and raises their sacred stone idol. As the ceremony ends and the crowd roars in celebration a thundering boom is heard and a rift begins to form below the balcony. Purple specks pop and fizzle as it stabilizes in to an oval shape. The Emperor, Kronax, and the Elders rush down to the portal to investigate. Taloth rushes up the stairs and takes his place next to Kronax. The warriors all inspect the portal.

The Emperor turns to Kronax and says, "Find out what is on the other side of that portal."

Kronax looks at the Emperor skeptically before approaching the portal. He reaches out his hand to test it before stopping himself. Taloth stands just behind him, watching in suspense. Kronax turns around, flicks his wrist, and picks Taloth up with his powers. He flicks his wrist again and throws Taloth through the portal and the Emperor laughs.

"Nicely done," Glaskor says.

A few moment pass before Taloth comes running through, "My lord, elders, there is another world on the other side. It is filled with strange men, but they are weak! They screamed at the very sight of my presence!" he yells excitedly.

Emperor Glaskor turns to address the Elders, "It appears as though our prayers have been answered. Kronax! You will lead our army, today glory will be yours!" Glaskor then turns to address the crowd, "A gift from the gods! It is a sign! My warriors, we must fight!" the Emperor yells.

The warriors rush up the stairs and await the signal from Kronax. Kronax calmly walks through the portal, his vision fades for a moment to a swirl of violet as he passes through and opens his eyes in a new world. A crowd panics in front of him and he smiles as he raises his hand and conjures a fireball. He holds it for a moment before sending it through the portal. His warriors now rush through and begin their newest conquest. The first one in a generation.