

The Dread Lord of Essos

Chapter 69

Asshai was a dreadful place, Harry quickly discovered as he ventured further into the city. The air was crisp with an unnatural chill that didn't seem to overtly affect any of the permanent residents. Most people walked, though he spotted a palanquin carried on the broad shoulders of a dozen harassed-looking men. Harry couldn't see who was inside because the curtain of black silk was pulled tightly closed. Though no animals lived in the city, it somehow carried a faint smell of rot that never seemed to go away.

Melisandre had mentioned that no children lived in the city either. No reason was given, and Harry wasn't eager to ask. He just assumed that their underdeveloped bodies couldn't adapt to the foulness of the shadowlands. The river Ash was one good example of the toxic nature of these lands. During the day, it flowed through the city, black like a river of crude oil and fouled with the smell of dead fish. At night, it radiated a phosphorescent green light that bade people to stay away. It was only at night that the river's aquatic life could be seen. Blind fish, deformed and milky-pale in color, lived in the tainted water, and only the shadowbinders dared to eat its contaminated flesh. Harry hadn't asked Melisandre if she had ever tried it. Some things were best left unknown. He was told that the water was undrinkable, and after seeing the river for himself, he tended to agree. The residents of the cursed city got their drinkable water from traders.

Despite its outward offensiveness, the city was actually quite welcoming to those with strange or different beliefs and customs. The city was open to all practitioners of magic and worshippers of any faith. On his journey down the street, Harry had seen the statue of a pale child outside of a temple. It was one of the few statues not carved from the greasy black stone. The child's body was chiseled from white marble, though the black sword in its hand was carved from the black stone. Harry instantly knew the temple was for the worshippers of Bakkalon, also called the Pale Child. Bakkalon was a god of death worshipped in various places in Essos.

By the time Harry got even partway through the city, the daylight hours quickly faded. The walled city was enclosed by tall, jagged mountains on either side, which blocked nearly all of the fading sun's rays. Before he knew it, the streets had emptied, and looking around, he could see that most of the buildings' windows were dark or shaded. Only a handful were lit with candles or torches. Melisandre had explained that the most hardcore practitioners of dark magic preferred to work at night; thus, everyone else made themselves scarce. Harry had no fear of these people and continued exploring.

An hour later, it was getting difficult to see. The sun was completely hidden behind the mountains, and any remaining light was absorbed by the oily black stones. Still, he continued forward. He eventually came upon a grand temple that reached fifty feet in height. Two ornately carved columns as thick as tree trunks stretched upward to the apex of the floor, where they

held up an overhang. Resting atop that overhang were five braziers that suddenly burst into flame.

The temple itself was tiered, with each story a bit smaller than the one below it. Harry remembered that the Mayans from his original planet had built similar-style temples. The temple's double doors were wide open, and Harry could see light from within. Suddenly, a scream from within the temple pierced the night sky. A few seconds later, a young man stripped to the waist ran out in a panic, his chains jangling with every step. His bare feet were shackled at the ankles, and his dirty trousers were ripped at the knees. If Harry had to guess, he would say the young man was probably in his early twenties. He was very skinny and obviously malnourished. His hair was shaggy and unkept, and his face was covered in a dark, thick beard. The young man looked over his shoulder in terror and tripped as he reached the road. He hit the stone road roughly and wheezed painfully. Four dark-robed men came flooding out of the temple, heading straight for him. Their faces were covered with dark cowls, giving them a menacing look. They grabbed an arm or leg each and lifted the young man up. He screamed in terror and thrashed violently, but it was no use. He didn't have the strength to break free of their grip. As they carried him back toward the temple, another robed individual stepped out and waited at the threshold. Harry saw that his dark robe was stitched with gold threads, and on top of his head sat a helm with goat horns. He looked at the young man before turning his gaze to Harry. Harry stared back, unafraid of these dark priests. He turned his attention away from Harry and walked back into the temple. The four priests quickly followed, carrying the young man back inside. The double doors closed behind them, sealing the young man's fate. Harry didn't know what would happen to him, but he was sure it was nothing good.

Harry shook his head and continued further down the street. To his right was an empty, dark, and eerie bazaar. He cut across the street and entered it. His first thought was that it appeared to be abandoned. The few wooden stalls left behind were broken and rotted, and the tattered material covering the tops flapped in the icy breeze. Harry reached out with his godly senses and held out his hand. Several items flew toward him, ripped from between the uneven cobbled stones covering the ground. Before he could examine them, he heard a crunching sound coming from deeper inside the abandoned bazaar. Harry slipped them into his pocket and went to investigate.

The open-air bazaar was flanked by two buildings, one an old hall and the other an abandoned palace. As he got closer, he discovered the noise coming from the old hall. Wooden shutters had once likely covered the window holes, but they had long since rotted away, leaving them wide open. Harry quietly approached and looked in. It was so dark that he could see anything, but he could hear it moving. Waving his hand, he conjured a ball of light inside the room. What he saw was disturbing.

The head of a wretched, old crone snapped up and looked straight at him. In her hand was a human arm, and when she hissed angrily at him, Harry saw that her brown teeth had been filed down into points. She dropped the arm and lunged at him with a disturbing screech. Harry took a step back just before her clawed hand swiped at him through the open window. Harry caught

her arm at the wrist and, with a powerful tug, pulled her through the window. Her body shot forward, and she landed hard on the stone ground of the bazaar. Her body rolled a few feet before she righted herself into a pouncing position on her hands and feet with a quickness that was unnatural. The ball of light followed her and remained above her head.

Harry got a good look at the crone. The skin of her face was withered and tinged an unhealthy greenish gray. Her lips were black and so thin that they were almost non-existent. The tip of her long, crooked nose sloped downward, and her nostrils were abnormally large. They flared repeatedly as she sniffed the air. Black, beady eyes stared back at him, and the white parts were yellowed like an alcoholic's. The only normal part of her body was her hair. It was long, thick, and darker than the night sky. She looked enraged as she screeched again. She pounced at Harry, swiping at him again with her long, dirty nails. Harry stepped aside and let her pass by. Again she pounced, and Harry caught her by the hair and threw her toward the middle of the bazaar. Apparently, the light was bothering her. She looked up at it and shrieked in pain when it blinded her. She jumped straight up and slashed at it with her hand. As her hand passed through the light, she howled in agony and clutched her hand to her chest. Harry could see smoke coming from the wounded hand. With one last desperate effort, she jumped forward with both hands out in front of her like she was about to wring his neck. Harry's sword appeared in his hand, and stepping aside, he clobbered her over the back of the head with the flat side of his blade. The metal clanged loudly, and she hit the floor unconscious. Her body slid a few feet before coming to a rest. She didn't move.

He walked over to her and nudged her unconscious body with the toe of his boot. Nothing. He ignited the blade and was about to drive his sword through her head when another shriek cracked through the air. Harry looked toward the opposite end of the bazaar and found three more crones looking back at him. They all looked similar to the one at his feet. None of them appeared eager to approach him. One of them stepped forward and threw something to him. A metallic clang rang out as it bounced off the cobbled stones and came to rest a few feet away from him. Harry walked over and picked it up. It was a large skeleton key with some kind of symbol engraved on the head. The crone screeched again, and it looked like she was trying to shoo him away. Harry then realized she was trying to pay for the other crone's safety. It was a fair trade. After all, the other crone only attacked after he butted in to her business. Harry extinguished his sword before it vanished from his hand. He put the key into his pocket and left the crones in peace.

Wanting a safe place to examine the key, Harry concentrated on the drone watching over Melisandre and faded to him. When he appeared, the first thing he saw was a large temple built from the same stone as everything else in the city. The temple was several stories tall, and most of the windows were lit up. Harry walked over to the thick wooden door and used the metal knocker. After three loud thumps of metal on wood, Harry waited. It wasn't long before the door creaked open. An older bald man with a wicked scar going down his face and through his eye answered. The man was tall, lanky, and had flames tattooed all over his scalp. He turned his one good eye on Harry and examined him suspiciously. "Who do you seek?" he finally asked, his voice hoarse and croaky.

“The Red Priestess Melisandre,” Harry answered confidently. The man studied him again before closing the door. Harry sighed and quelled his urge to kick down the door and teach that priest a lesson for shutting the door in his face. He had a feeling it might upset Melisandre if he did. Instead, he chose to wait patiently. His patience eventually paid off, and Melisandre opened the door ten minutes later.

“My Lord ... Please come in and make yourself at home,” she said, ecstatic that he chose to visit the temple. Harry smiled at his beautiful partner and entered the temple. Inside, it was quite warm, which wasn't at all surprising. Dozens of lit torches lined the walls, bathing the room in light and warmth.

“I was hoping you could provide me with a warm bed,” Harry smiled at the woman. She smiled back and nodded.

“My bed is always open to you,” she assured him, hugging his arm. Her perky breasts pressed against his bicep. “As is my body,” she reminded him, her eyes heavy with lust. It seemed Melisandre hadn't been eager to go to bed alone. Harry chuckled at her words.

“I always find your forwardness refreshing,” he said with a smile as she led him down a long hallway. On each wall was a line of painted portraits, all of which seemed to be former priests. Melisandre saw him looking and smiled.

“Mondros, the Fist of Fire,” she said, pointing to a lethal-looking man in red armor. “It has been over two hundred years since he last walked these halls. He was unpleasant to be around, but devout in his beliefs,” Melisandre explained.

“Do you have a portrait hanging on these walls?” Harry asked her, scanning the portraits.

“A portrait is only hung after the subject has joined our Lord in the Eternal Fire ... and even then, only the most devout followers earn the privilege,” a new female voice sang from behind. It was soft and melodic. They turned, and Melisandre smiled warmly at the newcomer.

The woman was pretty, he had to admit. However, in his opinion, she didn't compare to Melisandre. Her hair was styled similarly to Melisandre's, but dark in color. Her dress fit snugly to her chest and belly before flaring at the waist and ending at her ankles. It was a darker red than Melisandre's and not nearly as revealing, but the neckline was low-cut and showed off a decent amount of cleavage. The long sleeves fit tight to her upper arms and flared once they reached the elbow. She wore a pleasant, pretty smile on her face.

“My Lord, may I introduce the High Priestess Kinvara, the Flame of Truth, the Light of Wisdom, and First Servant of the Lord of Light,” Melisandre stated proudly.

"I will admit that the number of titles is a bit ostentatious, but they have been earned through many years of sacrifice and loyalty. So, I hold them with pride," Kinvara walked up to them with a slight smirk on her full lips. Her hips swayed from side to side, attempting to capture his attention.

"As well you should," Harry agreed as she came to a stop before them.

"You need not speak of your titles, for I have heard them all," she said with a knowing smile.

"Oh?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Indeed. I am the High Priestess of the Red Temple in Volantis and was there during its sacking. The peasants sing your praises while the old guard mutter curses under their breath. I have never met a man who is so equally loved and hated by the masses," she teased.

Harry chuckled and shook his head slightly. "You can't please everyone," he wisely stated.

"You certainly cannot," she answered, her eyes shimmering from the fiery chandeliers above. She joined his side and wrapped her arms around his free arm. Like Melisandre, she was pressing her breasts against him. "May I walk with you, Your Grace?" she asked sweetly.

"It would be my pleasure, and please, call me Harold," he told her as they turned and headed toward Melisandre's room.

"Of course, Harold. You may call me Kinvara," she said happily, squeezing his arm a little tighter.

"So, how is Volantis doing?" he asked her. "I haven't visited in quite a while."

"Much better than before," she truthfully told him. "Now the people have hope, and the peasants are free to worship. The Lord of Light has obtained many new followers in the city," she explained as the clicks of their boots echoed off the stone walls.

"I'm pleased to hear it," he said as Melisandre let go of his arm and opened a door at her left. Harry and Kinvara followed her in. Kinvara released his arm and closed the door behind them. The room was already filled with light, and Harry spotted the out-of-place mattress in the corner of the room. He looked at Melisandre with a smile.

"Before leaving the ship, I asked the crew to deliver my bed to the temple," she explained, not looking sheepish at all. "I hope you don't mind, My Lord."

"Have I ever?" he teased. Melisandre giggled and shook her head. Harry then reached into his pocket and pulled out the trinkets he had gathered during his exploration of the city. The first item was the broken tip of a dagger, about an inch long. He examined it under the light.

“Dragonsteel ... but poorly made. That’s probably why it broke,” he said, tossing it onto Melisandre’s table.

Next, he held up a coin to the light. “It’s old. I don’t recognize it,” he said.

“May I?” Kinvara asked politely. Harry handed her the coin. She examined it and smiled.

“I have not seen one of these in a very long time. It’s an old silver coin once used in Yi Ti. It was likely plundered from Yitish tradesmen by Shadowmen pillagers,” she said, handing it back to him. Harry then pulled out a gold ring. It wasn’t in the best shape. He didn’t see anything special about it. He handed it to Kinvara to see what she thought about it.

“It appears to be of Qaathi design, though I cannot be sure. The damage is severe,” she said, returning it to him. Harry tossed it on the table next to the dagger tip.

“What about this key?” he asked, pulling it out. The two women studied the design on the head closely. Neither knew anything about it, except that it was an old, outdated design. Harry sighed and returned it to his pocket.

The Dread Lord of Essos

Kinvara slinked up behind him and pressed herself against his back. He didn’t stiffen up, but remained calm. She smiled sweetly and rested her chin on his broad shoulder while her hands snaked around his waist.

She had been running the temple in Volantis, but had business here in Asshai that needed to be taken care of. She had been here for several months before the Lord of Light communed with her through the morning fire. He told her that Harold and Melisandre were on their way, and that she should offer her services to him, just as Melisandre had done. Kinvara obeyed without question and waited for their arrival. When he arrived, she was pleasantly surprised by how handsome he was. It was superficial and made no difference, but she was pleased nonetheless. Her hand crept down his stomach until she reached his groin. She squeezed his bulge, sending a clear message as to what she desired. Melisandre sat down on the bed and crossed one leg over the other, intent on watching the show she was putting on.

“I’ve come to offer you my services, My Lord,” she said, emphasizing the words my lord. “Will you accept me as you did Melisandre?” she asked cutely, massaging the bulge in his trousers. He looked at Melisandre, and she slowly nodded.

“Are you certain you wish to take this road?” he asked, his voice even. “I demand unwavering loyalty from my followers,” he told her. The Lord of Light would always be her number one priority, but he was the one to demand this of her.

"I am," she assured him, greedily groping his crotch. He then faced her and placed his palm on her chest. Suddenly, Kinvara felt power racing through her skin. It was difficult for her to describe. It was like stretching out a sore muscle. There was pain but also relief. Kinvara threw her head back and squealed as she felt her skin being pulled tight. Her spine twisted and popped, and her muscles tightened. The feeling of relief quickly ended, leaving only pain. Kinvara was no stranger to pain. She had lived with it for hundreds of years. She could take whatever he was doing to her. The pain suddenly became blinding, and she felt her vision going dark. Just when it became almost too much to bear, it ended. She dropped to her knees, breathing heavily. Melisandre joined her side, rubbing her back gently. Kinvara looked at her friend and blinked through the blurriness. Embarrassed to show weakness, she shakily pushed herself to her feet. Doing her best to stand proud alongside her fellow priestess, she waited for him to act. He snapped his fingers, and she felt her ruby-studded choker fall from her neck.

There was a moment of panic as it dropped to the ground with a clink. Kinvara was hundreds of years old. Without her glamor magic, he would see her for what she truly was ... a shriveled old hag without an ounce of appeal. She was about to reach down and pick it up when she saw her arms. Her skin was pale and smooth instead of wrinkled and blemished with age spots. She looked at Melisandre with confusion and wonder. Melisandre smiled and removed her choker as well. She remained young and beautiful. Melisandre then tugged down her dress, revealing her shapely nude body. She then began undressing Harold. Kinvara was too stunned to even move. She watched in a daze as his naked body was revealed. Melisandre's hand wrapped around his impressive girth, and she led him to the bed. She pushed him down onto his back where his long, thick cock stuck straight up in the air. Melisandre then came up to her, which snapped her out of her daze. "Are you ready to prove your worth to our Lord?" Melisandre asked her.

Kinvara nodded, and Melisandre slowly walked behind her. Harold watched her, his cock stiff and ready for action. Kinvara couldn't take her eyes off it. It had been a very long time since she allowed a man to touch her. A sensation she hadn't felt in a long time washed over her. Her pussy tingled, and she felt herself grow damp. Melisandre pushed her dress down over her shoulders. She pushed it even further until her bare breasts escaped the tight fabric. Much to her delight, they were big and very perky. They bounced around merrily for him. Her nipples were incredibly hard and stuck out a centimeter or so from her pink areolas. Her dress continued to be pushed down, and Kinvara pulled her arms from the sleeves. Melisandre then pushed her dress over her hips, and it cascaded down her curvy body and pooled around her ankles. She stepped out of the dress as Melisandre knelt down. Kinvara watched as Melisandre removed her boots and began kissing up the fronts of her smooth thighs. She gasped when she noticed that her pubic hair was gone. Her mound was completely smooth. Melisandre's lips found her smooth mound, and she could feel her warm breath tickling her clit.

Melisandre looked up at her, her eyes dancing in the candlelight. Her lips followed the center of her body, first reaching her belly button, and then the underside of her large breasts. When she wrapped her lips around one of her stiff nipples, Kinvara tilted her head back and moaned. It had been so long since she last had her nipples teased in such a manner. Melisandre let go of her nipple much too soon for her liking. She went behind Kinvara and cupped her big tits.

“Do they please you, My Lord?” Melisandre asked, displaying her tits by bouncing them around in her palms.

“They do,” he assured her, stroking his cock while studying Kinvara’s body. Kinvara’s cheeks began to heat up, and she was certain her lips were soaked with arousal. She could feel Melisandre’s hard nipples lightly brushing against the soft skin of her nude back. Melisandre then reached between her legs and ran her slender fingers along the length of her wet slit. Kinvara moaned, and her eyes fluttered from the touch.

“She’s ready for you, My Lord,” Melisandre told him while stroking her slit.

“Then bring her to me,” he commanded, and Kinvara swallowed loudly, ready for what was to come.