

Lord Timotheus stared in awe. It didn't matter how many times he had been in the Great Bowman Hall – it impressed him. The Hall was the centerpiece in the House of Bowman. It was the gathering place for the Bowmanian Council, along with its two advisors: Senator Robberts and Mother Hedon.

The Hall was like those found in a great Cathedral. The building itself was built in ancient times. The structure was a few stories tall. The Hall filled those stories to the top. Gargantuan statues of the Bowman forefathers adorned the walls of the Great Hall – the latest addition being the late President F. McCree. McCree had been the first Bowmanian leader in eons to declare the need for armed forces within Bowmania. Prior to that, Bowmania had been a very peaceful society.

“Would you like some cookies?”

In the center of the Hall, there sat a large table. The table was shaped like a diamond, but with its points made into straight edges. It was also elongated. The table was built long ago using the finest marbled rock available. In recent years, a lacquered finish had been applied, making it seem even more impressive.

“Would you like some cookies?”

Seated around the table this morning were the Senior Council members Coa, Willard, and Jorne – all persons of the Bowman Clan. There were other non-Bowman members on the Council. However, they were not in attendance on this day. Senator Warrick Robberts was also absent, though he would be arriving shortly. The only other senior member who was there was...

“Timotheus! Mother Hedon has asked you a question.”

Timotheus snapped out of his stare and turned his head towards his mother. He noticed that she was giving him an impatient looking frown and pointing towards something else. He turned his head in the other direction.

“Excuse me dear, I just wanted to know if you wanted some of my cookies. You know I bake them fresh daily.”

Ah, Mother Hedon. She was always trying her best to fit in. She had once been married to the late President, and so she had remained as a special advisor to the Council. Timotheus could not remember her last name. He simply knew her as Mother Hedon – or Grandmother Hedon to some.

She was standing there holding a tray. He couldn't help but notice that the tray was shaking. Someone really needed to step in and tell her to sit and relax. But no, Mother Hedon would have none of that. She was a stubborn old mule. She'd be a workhorse until the day she died.

“Well dear?” asked Mother Hedon a bit more aggressively, though still polite.

“Sure,” began Timotheus. “I'll have some of your fine cookies. Just put the platter down and join us around the table.”

Mother Hedon obliged and took her seat at the south end of the table. The north end was reserved for the Senator. The Bowmans sat on the west side of the table, while all other Council members sat on the east. Being a member of the Bowman Clan, Lord Timotheus sat at the south half of the western side of the table. To his left sat Jorne, Willard, and Coa – his mother – in that order and at the north end of the table. They were meeting on this day to discuss the recent events near the Imperial River.

It was at this moment that Senator Robberts made his appearance. He strolled into the room, proudly sporting his signature purple robes with white trim. The Senator had

taken over the position after a year's vacancy. The former Senator had been relieved of his duties and deported from the country – the first deportation in 1000 years. The role of the Senator had also increased after the death of the country's last President. The Council had voted to remove the position for the time being. There were too many family implications to consider had they elected a new President. In previous years, there was also no "Mother" role. If you were to vaguely summarize the situation, you could almost get away with saying that the President position is now the Senator position and the Senator position is now the "Mother" position. Of course, you would then be wrong. But it would suit the intellectually challenged peons out there.

"So wha' did I miss?"

"Not a heck of a whole lot," Lord Timotheus replied. "You missed some Hedon cookies, but not much else."

"Actually, I have more. I always have more."

Timotheus, as well as the Senator, ignored Mother Hedon's rebuttal.

Before anyone else could bring up cookies, Coa butted in. "Lord Timotheus was just about to give his report. Isn't that right Timotheus?"

Timotheus noted the smug look upon his mother's face. He was well familiar with it, as were his other siblings. Nonetheless, he chose to avoid a snide remark in reply. He simply nodded his head *yes*.

"I read your report before your arrival." This time it was Jorne to speak. Jorne was the youngest of the Bowman children. He was often the liaison between the Council and the Bowman Defense Force. He also handled a lot of the paperwork involved in day-to-day work. In fact, he was the workhorse on the Council. He also raised and provided the horses that kept the BDF mounted for duty.

"As did I." It was now Willard's turn to speak. Willard was one of the middle children in the Bowman family. He was also one of the smartest. However, he was also by the book. Timotheus did not doubt that he would have the hardest time believing his accounts. Sure enough, Willard did not disappoint.

"Are we to believe that you are seriously proposing the idea that there are supernatural forces at play? I find the idea nothing more than fantasy. There is only science. Science is the law that governs our world – not to mention the universe. You also mention the notion of spirits. More nonsense."

"I would tend to side in the middle here." Coa was Timotheus' mother, but also the senior member on the Council. She was the second oldest of the Bowman children and oldest female. She tried her best to act the wisest of the Bowman clan, but she was really no wiser than the rest – certainly not those on the Council. They all had their strengths and weaknesses.

"That's really no surprise, Coa. He is your son after all."

"On the contrary, Willard. We disagree quite often. I simply believe that there is a spiritual world that exists on another plane other than our own. However, I do not buy into this other idea that portals and magic exist. So you see, I am split on the matter."

"All right, Coa, but would you also deny that you are wishful that your other son is still functioning on some level? As far as reality goes, he is as good as dead."

"Hey, hey, now...let's not go there." The Senator's interjection was well needed. "Let's hear what Jorne has to say. I believe he was the one who began the discussion."

"Very well...Jorne, what is your take?"

Timotheus noted the glare Willard sent towards his brother. It was demanding agreement. However, Jorne was quick to disappoint.

“I tend to think that we must believe Timotheus’ report. He is not known to lie.”

“I knew it! It figures that you would side with the youngster. All right, I’ve got to go.”

“Sit down Willard, you ain’t goin’ nowhere.” Again the Senator came down on Willard. “Now people, let’s say we move this along in a civil manner.”

This was how Council meetings usually went. There were always disagreements between the senior members. It is why the junior members were often asked not to attend – at least not until major issues were moved forward. It’s also why other family members were not on the Council. Some refused to be. Some were barred.

Timotheus went over his report with the Council, filling in any details that were missing from the written version and explaining those that they found confusing. The entire process took just over an hour. When all was said and done, he began to rise.

“Timotheus...please, sit.”

Lord Timotheus eyed his mother carefully. What more could be said? He hesitated, but after studying the looks on the faces of the Council members, he decided he needed to sit back down.

Coa resumed her speech. “This may come as a shock to you, but we believe we know who is behind these attacks.”

It was a shock. In fact, Timotheus was utterly stunned. Not only because the Council already had an idea as to the source of the attack, but also because they waited until now to bring it up. Why go through all those details at all? He didn’t see the relevance they had with this news. Surely nothing he said could confirm to them the source.

“May I ask why you chose to wait until now to bring this up?”

“You may ask, but we will not give you an answer,” Coa responded. “The Council has certain procedures to follow.”

“Screw procedures...this was a waste of my time!”

“It is the way it works. It is the way we do things.”

At this, Timotheus was reminded why he had no interest in politics. He’d much rather be out in the field – where the action was. Bureaucracy was inefficient and ineffectual. Were those the same thing? It didn’t matter. It was a complete waste of time.

His mother continued. “You must realize this. We cannot properly run a country by doing things in haste.”

“No one said anything about being hasty. My point is that you all read my report – surely you didn’t require further explanation to tell me who you think is behind this?”

“Perhaps not, but protocol is...”

“It’s bullshit.” It was not Timotheus who spoke. Rather, it was the Senator himself. “I happen to agree with Timotheus. We could be out enjoying the day right now. We could be smoking some meats on the fire pit and drinking some ale. Why drag this out?”

“Could we have cookies and milk instead?”

“Sure Mother Hedon, whatever you fancy.”

Mother Hedon smiled at the Senator’s reply.

“Enough of this. Warrick, you know damn well that we must follow protocols. It was the will of our father and it was the will of our forefathers before that. We will not let Bowmania fall to shambles because certain people want to rush things.”

Lord Timotheus realized his mother was pissed. Not only was she pissed at the Senator, but she was pissed at her husband as well. Some had objected to the marrying of a Council member to the Senator. However, by a narrow vote, victory had been acquired by the two. They were both allowed to keep their positions on the Council.

This time, it was Timotheus to interject. “Please, mother calm down. Senator, sir, I appreciate your support. However, it would be best if we drop the subject for now.” Not only was it best for his mother’s temper to cool down, but it would also prevent more time from being wasted.

“A’ight, let’s get this shindig rolling again.”

Timotheus could only shake his head. His stepfather was certainly anything but formal. “Anyway, can we please have a name?”

Willard resumed the talks. “We firmly believe that our former Senator Czo is behind the attacks.”

Czo? That jokester? Sure, he was a little weird and he had gotten himself exiled, but he was not the violent type. As far as Timotheus was aware, even though he was exiled, he had left on good terms. It was true that he wanted to have more control within the government, but Timotheus was sure that was greatly exaggerated. It stemmed from a long running joke. Maybe it wasn’t a joke after all?

“Excuse me for my ignorance, but why would Czo have any interest in attacking our country? The last I heard, he and Aunt Geneveve were enjoying their new lands quite well. I heard they were undergoing some vast breakthroughs in scientific technology.”

Frankfurt Czo had come to Bowmania from some unknown country years back. He had charmed Timotheus’ Aunt Geneveve and they were soon wed. Shortly before they had been exiled – or rather, *he* had been exiled, Geneveve had given birth to twin sons. Their names were Samson and Jansen. The deportation took place nearly fifteen years ago. In fact, the twins’ birthday was approaching.

“Timotheus...you had best prepare yourself for a long history lesson,” said Willard.

“However, we will wait until tomorrow,” continued Coa.

“As for today, we will simply show you this,” Jorne finished and handed Timotheus a parchment.

It read as follows:

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

*It is time we rejoice. A new era has befallen our humbled lands. We need to embrace this as one. There is no need for our triangle of nations to be separatists any longer. If we are to seek global power and ultimately, unity, we must act now. We cannot linger nor hesitate. We cannot continue on the paths we are on now. I foresee a threat rising from the East. We must unite. We must become a super power. It cannot and should not be avoided. I promise you, I have discovered new powers and resources that can benefit us all. I simply need the manpower to make it happen. I will give you one month to make a decision. Heed my warning.*

*Your loving neighbor to the East*

Timotheus stopped to consider the possibilities. There were really only two. Either the Council was right and it was Frankfurt Czo, or the Council erred and it was Queen Jewels. Honestly, Queen Jewels did not make any sense. She had formed a kingdom that followed some strict rules, but she was not the type to make threats to her neighbors.

On the other hand, Frankfurt Czo did have a reason. It just didn't fit his personality. Something must have changed over the past fifteen years.

“How long ago did you receive this?”

“It came by carrier pigeon about a month before the attack.”

Well the timing certainly fit. Timotheus would need this history lesson to decide if the person fit.