

# The Path

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By Melissa Roddis

Arbane paused in her labours, her quill poised above the parchment. Outside the dome, a quiet had fallen. Within, the Farseer continued his impassioned monologue, while the rest of the gathered dignitaries listened with varying degrees of patience.

‘This course of action cannot be conscienced. There is too much at risk to wantonly embrace the cult of death. You have all witnessed the peril of this path in the destruction of Biel-Tan,’ the Farseer intoned, gravely.

Aware that she was falling behind, Arbane etched his words hastily onto her canvas, adding embellishments to her runes that best communicated the Farseer’s zeal. On her path as a runescribe she had captured the words of countless leaders and thinkers, each of them speaking at assemblies such as this. But never before had she felt so much portent in their words. She sensed that history was being written, and she was one of those tasked with writing it.

Still, despite the gravity of her duty, she found herself distracted. Her mind wandered to what was unfolding beyond the confines of the crystalline dome. The sensation of this troubled her deeply, as it was through unfettered thought and desire that one could so easily fall into depravity and madness. Never before had she been tempted from her path, and the thought of that fate made her scratch the words into her parchment with renewed determination.

As she wrote, a chill entered the chamber, and through the opaque crystal wall she saw the sky outside darken. Arbane shivered as if a cold hand had touched her. Something was coming.

Although she fought it, she felt compelled to go outside. It was as if another mind was guiding her, another’s thoughts divining her actions. The Farseer was still talking, but others in the gathering had noticed the change and were whispering amongst themselves. Arbane let the quill drop from her hand, the rune she was working on never to be completed.

Outside, the screeching of the Howling Banshees rent the air, followed quickly by the unmistakable sound of clashing blades and painful deaths. Whoops and cries cut through the Farseer’s speech, the warcry of

those who relish torment and destruction heralding the approach of something terrible.

Before she even knew what she was doing, Arbane had risen from where she knelt and taken a step towards the entranceway. Some of the others had also moved, among them Aspect Warriors who gathered their weapons to join the battle.

‘Stay inside, Arbane,’ one of the other runescribes said, taking her arm. ‘This is not your path.’

‘I have to go,’ she said, vaguely. She couldn’t explain that she was being impelled by a force greater than herself. She shook off her companion and stepped out into the darkness.

A whirl of activity played out before her, a cacophony of colours, sounds and smells. Aspect Warriors in their bright garments clashed with purple-hued beasts, lithe figures cut speeding Jetbikes from the air with long black talons, and the acrid stench of perfume blossomed across the battlefield as lofty, oiled creatures strode through the melee.

The figures fighting in the battle were hazy and nebulous. Arbane could pick out only colours and shapes. It was as if a veil hung between her and the battlefield, preventing her from seeing anything clearly.

She looked behind her and the dome, too, seemed to shimmer in and out of existence. Arbane felt that she was at the crossroads of two diverging futures. She could either go back, to the world she knew, or step forward into something else. Both paths were uncertain, but she felt drawn to the battle that was unfolding before her. Once more she sensed that history was being written, but now with swords instead of quills, and blood instead of ink.

While Arbane struggled to make out any particular details in the scene before her, she saw flashes of colour everywhere: the red, black and purple of the Ynnari; the crimson ribbons worn in honour of the god of death; the blazing phoenix sign carried aloft on richly decorated banners, and the fleshy pinks and lilacs of the Slaaneshi Daemons - the craven hedonites of She Who Thirsts.

The Aeldari had formed a perimeter to keep the Chaos forces at bay, but the line was buckling, worn down by the relentless Daemons who ignored even



grievous wounds in their desperation to join the fray. A group of pale-skinned beasts clad in dark leather straps were tearing their way through the battle line at a devastating pace, with pincer-claws raised and unnatural shrieks on their black lips.

As before, Arbane sensed a crux point in time, a moment where fate pivoted between hope and desolation. Once more she felt the influence of another mind working through her own, guiding her actions. She looked around and saw a dagger on the ground, no longer needed by the Ranger who lay lifeless beside it. She picked it up, feeling the weight of it in her hand. In this realm of uncertainty, it seemed to be the only thing that was real. She took one last look at the dome behind her, then stepped into the whirling tumult.

Blades wheeled all around and stray laser blasts scorched the air. She could smell burning flesh, the iron tang of blood, and the sickening perfume of the Daemons. Here was the madness she had feared would come for her if she abandoned her path, but she knew now that was not going to be her fate. She was driven by a new kind of clarity. She leapt at one of the lilac-skinned creatures that was carving its way through the Ynnari line, slashing and stabbing at the squirming form with her dagger. She knew nothing but the desire to protect her kin, and the future of her race. As the Daemon fell beneath her furious blows, it reached out an ebony claw and cut her throat with a single motion. The cut was so clean Arbane barely felt it, and as her vision faded she saw, with satisfaction, the creature lying dead beside her.

Death claimed her and she welcomed it, joining countless others. She could hear their thoughts now, and she understood. This had always been her path.

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Yvraine opened her eyes, the dream still vivid in her mind. It was one of many she had borne witness to of late, and she was sure it would not be the last. All over the galaxy the path of the Aeldari race was being decided by its members, those who chose to cling to the old ways, and those who were driven to join her cause. Fate hung in the balance, and its course could be altered by even the smallest of actions. Only one thing was certain.

Death would come for them all.

