

# The Baron's Journal - Page 1

## Reyadh Rahaman

As I stepped through the rift, it sealed itself behind me. The first thing that I saw was the shore of the partially frozen, and very loud, Cocytus. The wails of the tormented souls rang out in a miserable and deafening chorus. Interlaced were the sounds of the cold eels ripping a few apart and feasting upon the wretched ones in a frenzy.

I inhaled deeply before letting out a relieved exhale, "Aaahhh, simply splendid." A jagged smile broke forth from my face as I savoured the sights and sounds of my cottage property. Not far from the shoreline, to the south of the lake, was my humble home away from home. Essentially a bunker made from charred bedrock that I personally hauled from another layer of hell, it was naught more than a rectangular prism of dark stone. From the outside, anyways.

I approached the only door, the only entrance and exit to my cottage, and ran my left hand across the sinuous pine wood. As I do so, I remembered carving the planks myself from the corpse of a rotted greatwood in the Seventh Circle, long ago. I reached for my key with my right hand, but smelled something approaching from behind. Something that was not a lost soul or a frigid river fiend.

Turning slowly, I spied the encroachment of a fellow demon. Though, of their intent I knew not. But, as they drew closer, they spoke. "Hail! Baron of Beholders," the red one said in greeting.

"Indeed." I responded simply while taking a few steps towards them, which made the visitor stop. "What business do you have on my property?"

"Don't remember me, eh? Well, no matter." They smiled wickedly. "Maybe this will remind you..." they continued before drawing a pulsating black orb from thin air.

"Oh, right, the void heart. Pass it here and then move on. I'm busy." I demanded of the lesser demon. As I glared at them I remembered that their name was Orothac, and that they were a lieutenant in Astraroth's army. Orothac was a bipedal-humanoid demon. They wore a simple skirt of beast hide plated with iron squares and nothing else. For one to travel in such attire in the Ninth Circle, they surely could not be as weak as many other mere lieutenants. This is something I had not realized on our first meeting, not so long ago, when he operated as a scout for a mutual raid conducted by my own and Astaroth's forces upon the treasure horde of an abyssal dragon. I had assumed that he was merely a disposable scout.

"I don't think so, Baron. The price has doubled." He smirked. His scaly, red skin cracked slightly as he flexed his muscular body. His beady, all-black eyes stared forward as his simple dual-slit nose sniffed the surroundings. His savage mouth opened to reveal outwardly curving teeth meant more for harm than consuming food. This was not only a breach to the contract I made with Astaroth himself, but a challenge.