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A glare as bright as the heart of the sun blazed from the once dormant sphere. An Incanter, trying to enter the circle, was embraced by a wave of the animated flames and then fell back to his companions, a charred corpse.

From the sphere, a green radiance spread down Jaren's hands and arms. It covered his whole body like a soft, tingling fur as.

Recalling the spell that he had learned, he began speaking in the elvish tongue.

"Lav Shoon Mareev!"

As the last word was spoken, a shaft of light shot from the top of each blazing archway and met in the center, at his upraised hands. The sphere itself was now clear crystal and shining with the same radiance as all of the arches.

"Binlar Ruudh!"

The air vibrated with the words of the spell. The sphere began to dim and return to black. The air itself seemed to burn with a mystic energy that held everyone present locked in place. Issuing from the darkening crystal, a sable stain began to spread down the rays of brilliant light towards the large stones. Jaren's entire body stung with the power that was coming from the arches. He realized that the sphere was collecting the free-floating, mystical energies from all around the world and feeding them through his body back into the earth where they had come from.

Jaren's scream struck the humans and halvans like a thunderclap as they saw the black flames engulf his form. Then the crystal exploded

with a shock wave like an earthquake, knocking everyone to the ground. A relentless wind started blowing in towards the Conclave from all sides. Where Jaren had just been standing, an enflamed pillar of black stone now stood. On top of the pillar was the sphere, connecting all of the stone arches with glowing lines of ebony power. The arches also blazed with an eerie blackness that surrounded the stones like hungry flames. An occasional streak of searing white flashed from one of the arches to the center pillar and then down into the ground with a hiss.

Bahkar helped Kieran to his feet as the Incanter stopped and stared in disbelief at the enchanted stone circle.

"Wha'sa matta' with you?" Bahkar queried. "I know you've seen worse thin's than someone killin' 'imself."

A chill deep in his bones made it seem to Kieran like the stone circle was pulling in more than just wind. "Something is wrong."

"Wha'? Wha's gone wrong?" the Tracker looked closer at him, raising one eyebrow. "Di'ja hit yur head when ya fell? Ya sure ya don' need ta see a healer?"

"Something has gone very wrong," After looking around nervously he began the arcane ritual for the spell that would show him the direction of the nearest danger to his life. When he finished pulling the earth's energy up around himself for the spell, it was changed into a brilliant hiss of silver light that overwhelmed the ebony flames around the nearest arch. This flare then raced through the radiant web to the center pillar and down into the ground

leaving the flames dark.

Kieran called the rest of the Incanters to him. Encircling their leader, they all began casting. When each spell was attempted, another white flash lit the nearest stone of the Conclave. For several minutes, the Incanters tried unsuccessfully to cast spell after spell. After a desperate attempt at a joint spell casting, a wave of brilliant silver flashed over the whole Conclave and down the center pillar with a whine that rang in everyone's ears.

"The magic! It's gone!" Grabbing the short halvan by the front of his battle tunic, Kieran shouted, "Do you realize what that hell-spawned elf has done?! That thing up there is absorbing all of the world's magic!"

Baakar broke the mage's grip from his armor. The two glared at each other for a moment. The Tracker, shaking his head, turned and walked away. The other Incanters and Trackers clumped together in confused little bundles and headed back to their base camp.

Kieran searched each group as they passed, though none dared to meet his eyes. When they had all passed, he looked back at the flaming circle. His eyes widened. At the top of the newly formed pillar, Kieran noticed the dim silhouette of raven black stone fingers supporting the sphere as if offering it to the open sky.

Kieran realized that an age of the world had just ended and another had just begun. A low crackling hum emanated from the Conclave. Standing alone now, Kieran noticed that he could no longer hear the silence.



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