

KARL 1

Three men stood beneath a great oak branch, hands bound and nooses pulled tight around their necks. The branches connected to a mighty tree, old as the mountains themselves. The men were all silent, as were the other corpses gently swinging in the morning breeze. The air was still cold from the dew, not yet banished by the still rising sun.

“If you have anything left to say, now would be the time.” Karl Klug, Lord of the Wald said as he eyed them with disgust from the back of his chestnut horse destrier. He sat tall in the saddle, his close cropped brown hair and clean shaven face a far cry from the ragged appearance of the condemned. His heavy, black, woolen cloak was pulled tight, the hood up to block out the wind. Under the cloak he wore a simple brown doublet, with a crest bearing the black tree on a green field that was the sigil of his house. Karl always made sure to represent House Klug when acting as Lord, as was his duty.

These men were thieves, rapists, and murderers. They attacked travelers on the roads of the Wald, and it was Karl’s duty, as Duke of the Wald and Lawspeaker to the King, to keep those roads safe. The law demanded only one punishment for their transgressions. Their fate would serve as a warning to other would-be bandits.

The first man, a stern face and hard eyes, said nothing, but spat on the ground. The second man, fat and whimpering, managed to speak out in between choked sobs “Please m’lord. Mercy! They made me do it!”

The last man, a boy no older than fifteen, barked at him to be quiet. “We’re done for Ozzy. Go to the Wainman with some dignity, would you?” *Such bravery in one so young. What could he have become if he followed a different path?*

With that, Karl nodded to Jorivs, his household Resolver, who pulled hard on the ropes, them each one by one into the air, sending them kicking and choking into the Beyond. The second one, Ozzy, screamed and begged for his mother before the rope cut him off. Jorivs tied the final line off to a stake, while Wolter, his barber-surgeon companion, scribbled something down in a book. “They go to their doom in all different spirits, yet they all dance the hangman’s jig just the same.” He said as he turned a page.

“Amazing the lessons they teach at Spierpont.” Jorvis chuckled as the last pair of legs stopped kicking. “Shame Lemba couldn’t join us.”

“The Elf has seen his fair share of death. Let him enjoy his peace.”

“I only jest, my lord.” Jorvis said as he took a sip from his canteen. He motioned for Wolter to take a drink, but the older man was too busy furiously scribbling in his notebook to notice.

Karl looked to the east. The dawn was still cresting the horizon. “I’m off to the woods. I will not be disturbed.” *Matilda and the children will still be sleeping. Best not to wake them with my return.*

His pages nodded and replied in unison “Yes my lord.” By Karl’s standing order, Jorvis was peeling the boots of the dead men, better they should shoe a pauper than rot on the condemned. Wolter sketched the hanging men in his book, taking special care to note the lolling tongues and soiled breeches. Jorvis had the boots in a loose pile when he pulled a knife and a small pouch from his belt. “The eyes, my lord?”

He nodded grimly. “Hain will have his due.” Jorvis took a small stool and set to work, all six organs removed in a few quick flashes of the blade. Jorvis placed the grim package in its usual place on Baldur, Karl’s horse. With the bloody sack tied to his saddle, Karl rode off towards the thick forest nearby, a page in tow to hold his horse.

The page started to speak, and then stopped himself. He was a small boy, ten or eleven at the most. He had been to several executions before and not once had he been troubled by the sight of death.

Karl noticed the indecisive boy and helped him along.

“Something bothering you, Wiglaf?”

“The” came a squeak. Wiglaf cleared his throat and tried again. “The Resolver grumbles, lord. He grumbles that it would be easier to take the eyes before hanging the condemned.” He said meekly

“I know he grumbles. I know. But this is the way things are to be done. Taking their eyes before they hang is not the punishment for their crime. These men had their trial, and I sentenced them to die, not to be tortured. Do you understand, Wiglaf?”

“Aye, my lord. I understand.” Wiglaf nodded.

Wiglaf. So eager to learn but so nervous to offend. I’ll talk to his father the next time we meet.

This was the first time in months he had a chance to take in the forest. The influx in banditry in the past year had been a great source of woe not only to Karl, but to the Waldish

people as a whole. They had enough to be fearful of without their fellow man adding to their problems. It had kept Karl up many nights, as he racked his brain trying to figure out the cause.

He had built roads, sick houses, held fairs, endorsed the Bard's college, done all in his power to keep the people happy and content and quiet, and yet, there were some who still turned to crime. *Why? No. Not now. Not here.* Karl decided that he needed to rest his mind from constant affairs of state, and allow himself to relax before he made his offering.

They reached a clearing, and Karl dismounted. "Hitch up Baldur and rub him down. Have something to eat from my pack if you get hungry. I don't know how long I'll be gone this time." The page nodded. *Wiglaf, a good lad, if a bit timid at times.* Weather had concealed his typical path into the great forest, but muscle memory lead his way.

He enjoyed his solitary walks in the woods, it gave him a chance to forget the woes of rulership, the frustrations of fatherhood, and the horrible curse that befell his bloodline. Now that things had quieted down with the bandits, Karl hoped he might have more time to be a husband to his wife, Matilda, and a father to their children. His three children, though nearly adults themselves, still tended to make a commotion. *What they need is a firm hand. Their mother will spoil them rotten if she has her way.* Karl laughed to himself. *She always gets her way.*

His feet knew where he was going, even if his mind did not. He always returned to the same place, no matter what direction he turned. *Are the woods themselves magic, or just the creatures that inhabit it?* He wondered as he found the well worn dirt path covered by a tunnel of tree limbs. *The branches must have kept this clear from storms after all.*

Few who entered the Wald came back alive, save for the Elves and their slaves, who usually came out in one piece. Most who walked too far past the tree line simply vanished. There were rumors, of course. Even his own grandfather had claimed that he was, in fact, the same Helm Klug that had vanished without a trace in the winter of 542. He had fallen through a tree hollow and into the myth shrouded realm of Cunnan, where time flows differently, or so the stories go. As such, though ninety-five years had passed from the time of the vanishing, Helm had only aged ten years or so.

Karl's realm was a dangerous one, even without the recent rise of the highwaymen. To an outsider, walking alone in the duchy of the Wald was like strolling past a dark alley with coins jingling loudly. To Karl Klug, Lord of the Wald, it was like walking into his own bedroom. He had grown up here, he knew that danger lurked behind every tree, above every branch, and below every root. Not once had he seen anything like what Grandfather Helm had rambled about. No fairies or witches or traces of Hain. Still, one had to tread carefully here. Even Karl would not

dare to venture in some parts of the forest, for an ancient force still had power in the dark parts of Bordrim.

I hope Hain will be pleased with my tribute. To survive here, one had to know when to fight, when to run, and when to submit. *Some might call that heretical, going against the word of the church,* But that was not something he wished to think about now, not when he was trying to be at peace.

The fresh air cleared his head and refreshed his spirit. Karl took a long, deep breath filling his lungs with the cold morning damp. He knew he would not be disturbed here, as none but the Duke of the Wald may travel to this part of the woodland.

He had been Duke ever since the death of his father when he was just four years old, though he had not ruled in his own right until he was fourteen. In that time, he had learned much from his regents, and his mother, who was far more capable than many made her out to be. She had taught him that most men, however pure their intentions may seem, nearly always had some ulterior motive that they wished to advance. Karl remembered that as his most valuable lesson, and it had assisted him greatly as he came of age. *My father's sycophants did not last long when I ruled in my own right.*

The sound of rushing water came to his ear as he walked by the River Cember where his father had drowned. He used to intentionally go out of his way to avoid being near it, but now he barely gave it a second glance. *I used to be so afraid of the water, until I understood why Father died. But by then, Mother had the Court Elf Lembe throw me in Sillac Pond. How I thrashed! It didn't seem so scary after that. Fate is far more terrifying than any danger and far more comforting than any joy. Once you have been through the worst, everything else can be done with ease.*

Karl heard a branch snap in the trees to his right, and his hand slipped to the silver coated dagger at his hip. He stood still as the trees around him, slowly moving his eyes from right to left as he looked for the source of the noise. *Funny. I was afraid of harmless water for so many years when there were very real threats all around me the entire time. As long as I stay on the path, no beast would dare harm me.*

There were no further noises, and judging by the humming of insects and the singing of birds, there was no real threat. *Probably a stag or maybe one of Grandfather Helm's Fae creature having a laugh at my expense.* He continued walking for some time, climbing up small, rolling hills and ducking under fallen tree trunks, before reaching a final, gentle incline which led to Hidden Hill. That was where they found his older brother, Jasper, hanging from the tree at the top. That was the day his father had told him about the curse that stalked their family.

He made his way up the slope, as he had countless times before. The top of the hill was clear, save for one tree, planted by Karl's grandfather Helm upon regaining control of the Wald after decades of Gaunt rule. His family adopted that tree, and made it part of their heraldry. A great black tree, sounded by the green of the forest.

The air seemed to resist being pulled into his lungs now. He had to unclench his teeth, relax his shoulders. He looked down at his fingers. He had scraped away the flesh near the nails on his thumbs and middle digits. *How long have I been at it this time? It is difficult to relax when I am surrounded by some many painful reminders of the past. No matter how deep in this forest I walk, I cannot escape the memories that tears at me.*

He kept his eyes low. Karl enjoyed seeing the blooming flowers and vibrant weeds that grew along the path he always walked. One particular group of plants caught his eye. A clover patch. The old folks said that in every clover patch, there was one particularly special sprout. And so Karl made a point to look over each and every patch he saw, even if only a passing glance.

What's this? He said to the tiny green sprout as he crouched down for a closer look. A clover with four leaves. *Lucky, lucky.* Karl smiled as he plucked the clover and put it in his coin purse. *And a good omen too. I know Otto will love this.*

Karl continued up the path, and sat beneath the great black tree, looking out onto the castle that stood proud below in the clearing. Grey Hallow, it was called, and it was among the oldest in Bordrim, predating even the great fortresses of the Empire that many great houses now called their own. With two rings of thick, tall walls and towers covering every angle of approach, no enemy had ever successfully stormed the walls. *Though a knife in the back is sometimes better than a ram at the gate, as history has proved.*

Karl grabbed the now wet sack that Jorvis had provided. He quickly found a small knothole and stuffed the grisly offering side. The Dule clasped his hands together and bowed his head. "Haim, please take this offering that we may know quiet peace." He sighed. Was Haim even real? Or just another story to make obedient children?

As Karl reclined in the unearthed roots of the black oak, he smiled. *Real or not, offerings to Haim aren't all terrible.* This was the tree that he had married Matilda under, after he came back from the Siege of Hammerring, the last remaining Imperial stronghold in Bordrim. He had made a fortune by securing the ransoms of important Imperials, bringing House Klug from the embarrassment of near bankruptcy to extreme wealth in a single day. He had spent coins like a drunken gambler blessed with immovable luck that night, and from then on men had begun to

say he was the richest man in the kingdom. *I don't know about any of that. But riches aren't just measured in gold.* Karl thought as he ran his fingers along the black bark of the tree.

Searching through the leather pack he took from his saddle, Karl grabbed the cloth that held the dried venison and cheese he had carried along for his breakfast. *The castle will just be coming to life now.* He thought as the sun began to climb higher in the sky. After he had broken his fast, he pulled a quill, a tightly sealed ink pot, and a piece of parchment from his sack. He began to write.

“Your smile, a joy
Your laugh, a pleasure.
When we are together,
Troubles are light as a feather.”

Karl would have a servant hide that among Matilda's things, where she would discover it later. Even after fifteen years of marriage, Karl loved to create these little surprises for his wife, just as she loved finding his cumbersome gifts and clumsy poetry.

A long, steady drumming sounded over the tops of the trees, booming from the direction of Grey Hallow, but far beyond. In the west, birds squaked and scattered to the wind. By the cadence of their beat, Karl knew it was the Elves, come to pay their respects and receive letters of safe passage as required by the Pact. *A little earlier than expected. No matter. I prefer early to late. No doubt my Chamberlain, Aldred, will have everything prepared.* Karl sprang to his feet, dusted off his trousers, and rolled the dried parchment. He followed the path back to the castle at a quick pace, humming a song his Bard had sung the previous night while they slept under the stars.

The day had well and truly begun upon his return. Servants wearing the green and black of his house dashed about as their duties required. Men stood guard wearing the Great Black Tree of the Klugs on their livery. The halls were alive with chatter and the scuffing of feet. Karl knew a long line of petitioners awaited him in his hall, but everyone knew that an audience with elves took precedence over the squabbles of men. They had all heard the drums, and they would be pressed together like bees in a hive just for a glimpse of the pointy eared outlanders. Every year, young elves embarked on a great journey that they called *THING* or “The

Taste” in the Imperial tongue. They spent anywhere from one to one hundred years living among the mortals, learning their ways and customs. Some spent the rest of their millennia-long lives among the mortals, watching dynasties rise and fall, technological marvels stun the world, and should they be unfortunate enough to make friends or find lovers, they witness death on a scale previously unimaginable.

Lemba is due to return home by the end of the year. After seventy years of service to my family, he's earned his rest. Perhaps one of the newcomers would like a position at court. I would very much like to continue my lessons. Karl flexed his fingers at the mere thought of magic. Outlawed in most realms of men, Karl had insisted on instruction. The training was hard and the consequences if discovered by the Church would be dire, but in a land as dangerous as the Wald, every advantage counted.

The drums boomed, growing louder as the elves approached closer. *I must hurry. I cannot insult them by wearing the same clothes I just wore to an execution.* Karl jogged down the path from whence he came. Wiglaf was holding Baldur by his reigns, and he snapped to attention the moment he saw Karl approach. “The drums my lo-”

“I heard. Ride ahead and have your father prepare clothing for court.”

“Right away, my lord.” The page said as he galloped away. Karl followed at a quick but more relaxed pace. *No sense in appearing sweaty and exasperated for my guests.* He reasoned as he rode down the winding path.

His servants were waiting at the gate for him. They grabbed their reins from Baldur, and Karl climbed down from the horse. “Andred has selected your clothing, m’lord. Right this way, if you please.” Onna, the fat seamstress said and she beckoned him to follow. She led him to the laundry, where Karl pulled the dirty articles he had worn for the execution and picked up the courtly clothing she had laid out. He pulled the white linen tunic on first and fasted it was a leather belt inlaid with a large silver buckle. He slipped into brown wool trousers next and grabbed a pair of light leather boots. *While I won't appear filthy in front of my guests, high fashion is not something I care to waste my gold on.*

Karl sat in his finely carved chair on the dais at the end of the hall. It sat to the right of an identical, but smaller chair where his wife sat. She wore a black and green dress with a modestly cut v-neck which exposed her pale skin. Her golden hair lay in one long braid along her shoulder. and her piercing blue eyes smiled back at Karl's own green. This was the women

he had fallen in love with the moment he first spoke to her. She had been less convinced, at first. While he had been the highest born of her many suitors, he had not been her first choice.

"I thought you were boring!" She would tease him later. "You barely said a word the first three times we met."

"I was nervous." He would reply. "You captured my heart and my wits that day in High Hibaltia."

"Well, that wit is what won me. Perhaps I just borrowed it for a time." She smiled.
Cleverness, justness, kindness. These are the things that make me love you.

The couple held each other's hands as they looked over the court. The chamberlain, Aldred, was quickly giving some last minute instructions to his son and another page, and they immediately scrambled to their work. Guards stood firmly at attention in front of the doors, knowing that they would be facing a hallway full of eager onlookers at any moment.

Their three children stood to the side, talking amongst themselves. Grimbold was the oldest. *And doomed to die young, as my brother and uncle have.* He was tall, taller than Karl even. He had the arms of a blacksmith's apprentice and Karl's own brown curls. He shared his mother's sky blue eyes and slender nose, as well as her quick temper. *He'll want more responsibility soon. I've already denied him a squireship. Perhaps a minor position at court would assuage him.*

Next to Grimbold was Charlotte, their only daughter. She too had Karl's curly brown hair, but she wore it in a long braid, like her mother. She was just like Matilda, in fact. They were both skilled with numbers, and Charlotte's fascination with bards rivaled Matilda's own obsession. The two of them often pleaded with Karl to hire this performer or that one, and Duke Karl Klug, Lawspeaker of Bordrim, would not resist his girls, especially Charlotte. She had just turned fourteen, and would be expecting suitors soon. *I doubt any of them would be worthy of her. The two of us share a thin patience for stupidity and love makes fools of us all. Especially this false, courtly love the Pawley's have been peddling these last centuries.*

And then there was Otto, the youngest of the three. He stood in between his brother and sister, obviously uncomfortable and being talked over. Nervous and shy, Otto had trouble making friends with children his age. He got along well enough with Wiglaf, but the two never actively sought each other out for play. *Probably waiting for the other to make the first move.* Karl thought to himself.

"Otto!" Karl yelled. The boy snapped nearly to attention. "Come here, lad. I have a surprise for you." The boy warily came before his parents.

“Close your eyes and stick out your hands, Otto.” Matilda gently urged.

Otto did as he was told. “Karl dug around in his coin purse and pulled out the clover and a gold coin. He placed the two in Otto’s open palm.

His eyes beamed just before the rest of his face lit up. “Is it real?” He asked as he squealed at his gift.

“Just found it this morning. I figured, with you as my son, I already have all the luck I need.” Otto grinned wide, his missing baby teeth apparent in his otherwise toothy smirk. “Now, with that coin, I want you to find a book that we can read together. Would you like that?”

“Yes, father! Yes, yes!” Otto exclaimed, almost shaking with excitement.

“Now get back to your place. The Elves will be here soon.:

“Yes, father!” Otto slipped the clover and coin into his own purse and hurried back to his siblings.

Matilda leaned over and kissed Karl on the forehead. “You’re a good man, Karl Klug.” His mind raced back to dawn, and the creaking of ropes. “I try to be, my love.” He kissed her forehead back. There was a commotion behind the doors to the hallway. It started as a low murmur, and then grew in size, becoming a roar of excitement.

Lemba, Karl’s tutor and resident Elf, took

The Elves had arrived.

Two figures, hooded in dark crimson cloaks, approached the dais. *Less than a quarter of what I was told to expect.* Behind them were six large, muscular, green skinned orcs bound together at wrist and ankle. *Less than a tenth of what I had prepared for.* Some Orcs had obviously suffered wounds in the recent past, black blood welling up through tightly wrapped bandages at shoulder, scalp, or thigh. Karl knew from past experience that were these wounds even a slight inconvenience to the Elves, the Orc would be killed with no more pity than lame donkey.

The two cloaked figures marched in a practiced cadence as they moved towards the Duke and Duchess. *They all move like that in this room. Is it tradition? Or something more calculated? Lemba, can you enlighten me?*

“In due time.” The elf’s voice answered in Karl’s mind. *“For now, let us see who has survived the journey.”*

Karl cast a quick and silent spell to identify the travelers, his only tell was a twitch of the nose, which may have been mistaken for an aborted sneeze.

Viksna and Piske Dun Beske, twin siblings of a prominent Orhani family. Lemba leaned and whispered into Karl's ear. "The youngest children of a powerful family of sorcerers. T

"Viksna and Piske you illuminate my land with your presence." Karl's voice boomed across the hall. It had been so long since he had shouted without magical amplification that he wondered if his throat could even yell anymore.

The two outsiders removed their hoods and stood with clasped hands and bowed heads. Their hair golden, their ears pointed, they were both of a similar height and build, shorter than most men in the room, and Karl could tell they were thin even under their robes.

"And you honor us with your hospitality, Lord Klug." The pair said in unison.

"You've arrived sooner than expected. Was your trip pleasant?"

"We ran into some trouble with monsters, I'm afraid." Piske said, matter of factly.

"They devoured quite a few of our slaves." Viksna added. And of course, the Shadow King must have his due. Our traveling companions were not to his liking. We two and The six Orcs you see behind us are all that is left, I'm afraid, out of the seventeen souls we departed with. *Ah, yes. The older races call Haim by his title and dare not refer to him by name. A superstitious bunch, the Elves.*

Three slaves for each of us is hardly fitting." Piske scoffed.

"A shame. I will see that they are tended to. And my servants shall make up for your deficit. See these creatures to their quarters." He ordered with a wave of his hand.

Guards cautiously herded the six chained beasts on the points of spears, but the broken creatures simply did as they were told and offered no resistance, not even a scowl. They were broken in mind and spirit, they simply existed to do as they were told. Even still, they looked as if they could crush a man's skull without much effort, and so the guards insisted on caution. *I cannot say I blame them.*

The instant their slaves were gone from the room, the elves both went down to one knee, each pulling a small bundle from their cloaks. In unison they spoke. "We have come to pay tribute to the Lord of the Wald. Bordermaster, River Watcher, Upholder of the Pact. We offer these small tokens to you, Great Lord."

Karl pushed up from his seat on the dais and walked towards the pair, gesturing them to stand. *This well rehearsed speech never fails to delight my courtiers.* “You have left your great capitol of Orhani to live amongst the lesser lived. You have endured freezing cold and driving rain. You have crossed river and mountain, field and fell, and traversed the Wald itself. You have fought beast and monster and seen many things that Man fears in his dreams. You have lost friends and companions along your way, and for that, you have our sympathy. However, all is not lost, and these deaths have not been in vain. You have proved yourselves worthy of fellowship through your very deeds. I bid you stand, as friends of Men.” The two figures stood, pulling back their hoods as the ritual demanded. They both looked as beautiful as painted godlings, young as if in their prime, though each must have seen a hundred years come and go.

The two approached, stepping slowly, deliberately, in unison to the dais where Karl sat. Piske stepped forward, leaving his sister still as a statue with her bundle still in her hands.

“For you, my lord. A gift.” He bowed and handed the package to Karl.

“Thank you, Piske.” Karl exchanged a rolled parchment for the gift. The container was small, and light. It could have been empty if Karl did not know better. He pulled the string holding everything together, and opened the paper wrapping. Inside was a ring, small and green, with all manner of beasts carved intricately on the sides.

“This is remarkable, Piske. You have my thanks.” Karl said as he turned the ring over in his hands. He spied an eagle, a fish, a rat, and a bear amongst the throng of creatures on the metal.

Piske looked to Lemba, eyes practically screaming for help. Lemba chuckled to himself for a moment and then cocked his head in Karl’s direction.

“May I approach, my lord?” the Elf asked in the elegant Elvish tongue, hands out stretched. Karl nodded his approval and he came forward. Piske leaned forward, taking the ring from the Lord’s hand and slipped the emerald ring onto his own left pointer finger.

“This ring is rather...peculiar, my lord. Observe.” The Elf cleared his throat and began to shout “Will one of you fellows come out? We’d like to make introductions.”

A heavy silence, followed by quiet, confused muttering amongst the onlookers. Then a shriek came from the rear of the crowd, growing louder and closer by the second.

That’s when it appeared before Karl’s eyes. It came forward at a run. Sharp claws, huge black eyes, and jagged yellow teeth.

“The ring summons rats?” Karl answered in Elvish in between laughs.

“Or maybe it makes the wearer forget his manners.” came a perfect Elvish reply from the rat. Karl’s eyes shot wide. *Bhalik’s Maw. Did that rodent just speak?* He regained his composure and looked around his court. Everyone was staring up at him. *Had they all heard too?*

“They can’t hear me, you big oaf. Only the ring bearer can.” Karl glanced at the green band around his finger. “My name is difficult to pronounce, but for the sake of simplicity, call me Ymaut. Piske tells me you have a rather large network of informants. How would you like to expand?”

“We’ll discuss another time. Thank you, Piske. You honor me.”

Piske bowed. “Of course, my lord. My sister has brought you a gift as well” gesturing to his companion. He stepped back to take her place, while Viksna approached, bowed and held out her tribute. The thing she brought was bigger and heavier than her brother’s gift. When Karl had finished unwrapping it, he understood why.

“A Grimoire.” he said quietly.

“May I approach, my lord?” Karl nodded absently as he flipped through the pages.

Viksna whispered. “I am told you enjoy practicing magic. I would be happy to teach you, if you’d like.”

“This is too much to trade for a mere letter of safe conduct. Anything in my power to give you is yours, if you but name it.”

Viksna thought for only a brief moment. “Should there be an opening for a position in your court that I may be suitable for, I would like to enter your service.”

Lemba is leaving my service, to return to Outland. If you would care to remain here and assume his role upon his departure, I would welcome the company.” Karl said as he struggled to tear his eyes away from the book. That will be all for today. My servants will show you to your chambers. Should you want for anything at all, you need only ask and it is yours.”

The two bowed low. “You honor us, my lord.” the two Elves said as one. As they slowly walked from the hall, Karl’s Chamberlain, Aldred, whispered in his ear. “My lord, Sir Vanya has come to charge Baron Stevers as an oathbreaker. *My duty calls.* Karl thought, the grimoire still open in his hand.

This idea came to me in college and I've sort of played around with it over the years. I would appreciate any constructive criticism, especially focused on the prose and characters. This would be the introductory chapter of one of the main characters, Karl Klug, who is a lord.