

Prologue: Something Wicked This Way Comes.

Scene 1: The Seer

A cloaked figure emerged from the darkness and approached a lone solitary hut. The figure paused before the door for a moment, then entered. Inside was warm and pungent with the scent of alchemical ingredients. A cauldron bubbled in the middle of the room and a slender elderly figure, busy with some unseen task, had her back to the entrance. "Justinia," said the elderly figure without turning around. "It has been a long time. Too long."

Justinia removed her hood, "I know, Seska. I need your help."

The old witch turned with a strange object in her hand. It looked as if it squirmed a bit. "I see," sighed Seska as she threw the object into the brew. The liquid bubbled more violently and changed color. Seska muttered a few words and peered into the cauldron. She smiled and with a wave of her hand the bubbling ceased. Looking up from her work, "You know, it was over thirty years ago your mother stood in that very spot. She begged desperately for a child. For you."

Justinia nodded, "I know the story. I don't have much time, Seska." She could not hide her desperation. "I need to know..."

Seska interrupted, "She thought she was strong enough. I warned her that bringing life into this world 'unnaturally' would require a life, her life. She was so desperate that she ignored my warnings."

Justinia took a few steps towards Seska and pleaded, "...Please, Seska... no more stories..."

Seska smiled and continued with her narrative, "I appeared to her when you were born. She was barely alive, drawing her last breaths. That look in her eye. She could not speak, but I knew what she was pleading to me for. I could not give it to her. She had already made her choice. Justinia, *you* have a choice now. What will you do?"

"I don't know. I need to know what to do, Seska. I want ... more." Justinia began pacing as she spoke.

Smiling, Seska watched Justinia pace. "What more could you want? You come from a noble house. You have wealth that you could not spend in a lifetime... and... you are now a general of the Empire." Seska's smile disappeared. Justinia stopped pacing and turned toward Seska, "I was just ... How could you possibly...?"

"I am a seer, Justinia. I am always watching." Seska gently patted her cauldron, then turned away from Justinia, "Your father was not like your mother. He was ambitious ... and cruel. He took great pleasure in the suffering of others, especially those who *got in his way*."

The young general's demeanor became more cross. "I am not here to listen to your ranting, Witch. I need to know what to do next. I want to rule. I want more..."

"...Power," hissed Seska. Seska turned around angrily and faced Justinia, "I am not a source of *power*, Justinia. I do not care to involve myself in the politics of Cyrodiil. If you want to rule, do it yourself. Why don't you murder a king somewhere? Isn't that how you became a general?"

Justinia's hand was already on the hilt of her sword, "Mind your attitude, Witch."

Seeing the young general's hand on her sword, Seska leaned forward. "Just try it, peck."

Drawing her sword and with a yell, Justinia lunged forward to strike the old witch. Seska lifted one hand. Justinia rose off the ground and could not move. With a simple gesture of her other hand, Seska flung Justinia's sword towards the ground, burying it almost to the hilt. "You dare to try to harm me?!" Seska's rage was now apparent. "For lesser things I have killed others!"

The short silence that followed as these two women faced each other unnerved Justinia. She actually feared for her life but had no power to plead for it.

Seska then glanced at the cauldron and smirked. "You want to know your future? Then let us see what it has to offer." Leaving Justinia suspended, Seska tossed a few objects into her cauldron and uttered unintelligible words as she did so. The cauldron bubbled, began to glow, and changed colors. As Seska peered into the cauldron, she was emotionless, but her eyes glistened and blinked. It was clear she was seeing something. "Beware of your quest for power, Justinia." The old witch paused for a moment, as if to take in more of the scenes that flashed before her. "Your quest will take you to a dark land, a land of fire and ash. It is there that an artifact blessed by Time will be hidden, an object of great power. There shall be bloodshed and, ultimately, betrayal. Betrayal shall lead you to dark paths and eventually to your fall. And great shall that fall be, Justinia." Seska looked up grimly as the vision faded. "There. Now you know." With a slight gesture of her hand, she released Justinia, who fell hard to the ground. "Now go and never return."

The young woman rose to her feet, "Your riddles mean nothing to me, Witch! You will speak plainly to me!"

"I did, Justinia," scowled the old witch, "I said... GO!" Seska's voice echoed with ethereal power, then all went dark.

Justinia found herself waking up on her back and gasping for breath. Looking around, Seska's hut had disappeared. "Fool of an old witch! I should have never trusted her. Betrayal? I see only her betrayal!" She hit the ground with her clenched fist in frustration.

Mounting her horse, Justinia raced back to the keep. She had plans to make, power to seize, and a traitor to find.

Scene 2: The Speech

The entire Sixth Legion was gathered in the courtyard. General Justinia Arius stepped into view from a balcony of the keep. The sun reflected brightly upon her armor, giving her an almost holy look. The general looked out upon her troops. They stood at attention, but she knew they were becoming demoralized. She needed them to follow her. She needed them to do anything for her. Her plans would be for nothing; she would be nothing without the backing of this legion. She began her speech:

"This war has ravaged our beloved country for several years now. Many of you struggle to remember a time of peace. I know I do.

"Our beloved Empire has lost its emperor. The Empress Regent cares more about her title and her family's power than the good people of Cyrodill. As a result, we have enemies carving up our beautiful land, stealing our resources, burning villages, and slaughtering men, women, and children!

"We have had success. General Crassus led us to victory over our enemies, the Ebonheart Pact! We have freed the Cheydinhal foothills from the tyranny of the Pact, and the people enjoy some safety and peace! Despite our honorable victory, the pact crept from the shadows and murdered our beloved general! An act of absolute cowardice!"

The legion began getting into the emotion of the moment, talking amongst themselves briefly in agreement.

General Arius raised her hand for silence, then continued, "Shall we allow our audacious enemies to violate with impunity the territory of the Empire? Will you permit these 'alliances,' like the Pact, to remain, which have carried terror into your families? You will not! We shall go our way into battle. And we shall be accompanied by the spirit of millions of our martyrs, our ancestors, our murdered fathers and butchered mothers, and our gods. And in this battle we shall break the enemy and bring salvation to our people, tried in the furnace of persecution, thirsting only for freedom, for righteousness, and for justice. Who is with me?"

The legion shouted that they were with the general. Justinia raised her hands, signaling to the legion to let her continue.

“Your words encourage me. They give me strength. The path you have chosen for the present is full of hazards, as all paths are, but it is the one most consistent with your character and courage as Imperials. The cost of freedom is always high, but we of Cyrodiil have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender or submission. Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right; not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom. The Divines willing, that goal will be achieved!”

The legion could not hold back and cheered at General Arius’ words. She feigned a smile as she looked out to the cheering legion. She remembered the words of Seska, “Betrayal shall lead to your fall, and great shall that fall be, Justinia.” Was that traitor in the crowd at this moment? She drew her sword and raised it high above her head. The legion followed suit until every sword was raised.

The general extended her sword out towards the legion like a queen extending her scepter towards her court. “Now. I, General Justinia Arius, shall rename this Sixth Legion. You are now part of a divinely appointed cause, and that is what your name shall be: The Divine Legion!”

The newly named Divine Legion cheered again. Justinia smiled. Who would dare to defy, let alone betray her?

Scene 3: The Village

The townspeople lined the street cheering as the Divine Legion made its way to the townsquare, led by General Arius on horseback. It had been several weeks since her speech and the renaming of the legion. They had many victories, and this town was yet another that had been “liberated.”

A little girl suddenly ran into the street, and Justinia halted her legion. Justinia dismounted and approached the little girl as a frantic and embarrassed mother ran to her child. “I am sorry, General. My daughter was very excited that you were coming. She just HAD to see you,” the mother spoke with a disapproving look toward her child. Justinia raised her hand to calm the mother and then knelt before the child. “What is your name?” The crowd had gone silent by now.

“My name is Lucretia,” said a small innocent voice.

“Well, Lucretia, I am pleased to meet you. What brings you here?” The general smiled as she spoke. She saw an opportunity.

“I wanted to see you. I want to be just like you.” Lucretia smiled broadly.

Justinia gave a gentle smile. "I see." The general stood and unlatched her belt, which held a scabbard carrying her dagger, then knelt before Lucretia. "I have something for you. Will you swear by your house that you will protect your town from the evil that besets this land?"

The wide-eyed child said exuberantly, "Yes! Yes! I will!" Justinia then placed the scabbard into the child's waiting hands. Lucretia, in her excitement, pulled the blade out swiftly, barely missing Justinia's face. The crowd gasped.

"Save your excitement for the enemy, child," Justinia said with a chuckle. The crowd laughed and then cheered.

Justinia stood and raised her hands. The crowd quieted. Placing her hand on Lucretia's shoulder Justinia spoke, "This child embodies all that is good in our country. She possesses the pure spirit of our people. She, and others like her, are our hope for the future. She already wishes to defend her people from the cruelty that has gripped our land. This town is now part of the Cheydinhal Protectorate, a haven which was formed to provide safety to good people like yourselves from the evils of invaders and self-serving traitors." Patting the shoulder of Lucretia, Justinia smiled down on her for a moment and then moved away to address the crowd again. "Lucretia is too young to defend her people, for now. But there are those among you who share her spirit and have the ability. I have lost many good legionnaires. Many here have lost blood defending the Protectorate. As your Protector-General, I ask you here today, who among you will join us and raise your sword against our enemies? Who among you will defend your children? Your people? Your liberty?"

One by one, men and women of the town stepped forward and said, "I will." Justinia smiled broadly. "I knew when I entered this town, it was filled with people of honor. We will remain here for the night; then we must take these volunteers to our training grounds. Use your time wisely." The volunteers turned to their families and embraced them, and the crowd congratulated them and dispersed.

Justinia mounted her horse and led her legion to where they would set up camp for the evening. That evening, the town held a celebration honoring those who would join the legion.

"Everything is proceeding as I would have it." A cruel smile appeared on Justinia's face, and then it disappeared as a voice in her head said, "Beware."

Scene 4: The Power

Justinia entered the laboratory accompanied by her guards. As they strode to the group of scholars in the center of the large and spacious room, the lab was filled with the smells of potions brewing and the voices of learned men and women. In the center of it was a huge machine, its origins unknown. The common man might suspect it was Dwemer in origin. A

Dunmer would think it was the work of the Clockwork God. At its base was a group of scholars conversing quietly. As she approached, they noticed her, and the room got quiet. The group deeply bowed. As they rose, all but one stepped back. She stopped before the unfortunate scholar, who now looked bewildered, that she chose to approach him. "Well?" she demanded. "Is it finished?"

"Uh, yes, Protector-General." He looked back to see his colleagues' abandonment of him and attempted to continue. "We just comp..."

Justinia could not take her eyes off the machine. Her eyes were wide with excitement. "Then use it! I am ready for the power it will bring me." A cruel smirk of pleasure appeared on Justinia's face.

"Well... uh... there is a problem." The scholar looked to his colleagues as if for some support, but they only gave him an encouraging grin and gestured for him to continue. "We don't have anything to power it."

Justinia's smile disappeared. "What?!"

The scholar's nervousness became more apparent as he spoke, "There... there was no apparent pow... power source when we found it. We had hoped..."

"YOU MEAN TO TELL ME YOU SPENT MONTHS BUILDING SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T WORK?!" Justinia's screaming voice echoed in the large room. Turning to her guards in disgust, she demanded, "Execute them."

Just as the scholars began to plead and grovel for their lives, a voice boomed from the shadows. "There is no need for executions today, Justinia. They are no use to me dead."

An old mage stepped out of the shadows and approached the group. He looked down at the groveling scholar next to him and gave him a kick, "Get up, you fool!"

Justinia smirked. "Lorgren Varro. Only you would be so bold as to defy me. Tell me your solution. If it pleases me, I *will* spare them." She glanced over at the frightened scholars.

Varro gave her a nod. "There is an artifact not far from the Protectorate and relatively isolated. It is an object of great power. Be warned, it is well protected."

Justinia smiled. "Not from me."

Scene 5: The Key to Power

Justinia stood looking out from the entrance of her tent. She could hear the rumble of large stones hitting a now-crumbling gate. It was music to her ears. The Gate of the Dragon's Maw stood between her and the key to glory and power. On the other side of the gate, in relative isolation lay a temple, the resting place of the Tear of Akatosh.

A voice spoke from within the tent, "Once the gate has fallen, the priests will not be able to repel us. Most of them are very old or very young anyway." Justinia smiled with cruel pleasure. As she turned to the source of the voice, her face softened. "I know. I only hope that they will comply with my demands. Any resistance from the priests would be... unfortunate."

"Indeed," said Prefect Surlus Paratus, her second-in-command. As she approached Surlus, she looked at the guards that were with them and made a small gesture with her head for them to leave. As the guards left, a soft, mischievous smile appeared on her face. "We have at least another hour before the gate falls." She leaned in and gave him a kiss.

Meanwhile, the priests at the temple were busy preparing to secure the Tear in their possession.

"Abbot Artorius, Abbot Artorius." A young novice ran up to the old abbot as he stood outside the temple. "The gate will fall soon! What are we to do?"

The old abbot paused for a moment. "You will gather the novices together and head northward. There is a pass leading out of this valley. You will be safe."

The young novice shook his head. Tears began to form in his eyes. "We won't leave you." The old man held back his tears but held his arms out. The two embraced for a moment. "You must go. It would help me face what is coming with greater courage if I knew you all were safe. I will not be alone. The adepts have chosen to remain as well. Now go. Hurry. There isn't much time." The young novice let go and hurried to gather the others.

"The Tear is ready, Abbot," said a voice behind him.

"Good," he turned to the priest, "I appoint you, Adept Surlus, to be the keeper of the Tear. You are to take it through the mountains, away from here. Perhaps in the ash plains of our enemies, the Dark Elves, you will find sanctuary." The abbot turned to the direction of Morrowind.

Surlus was shocked. "But, Abbot, how am I to know where to go?"

Turning back to Surlus with gentle determination, "You will find a way because you have to. If this 'Protector-General,' as she calls herself, comes in possession of the Tear, it could be disastrous for all of Tamriel, not just our beloved Cyrodiil." The Abbot placed a hand on the shoulder of the Adept. "The Divines will protect and guide you. Now go. There is no more time."

Adept Servius was fitted with supplies and made his way towards the mountains with staff in hand.

With the young priests already heading toward the northern pass out of the valley and the adept entering the mountains, those who remained waited in the ramparts overlooking the entrance of the temple grounds. They waited for their destiny.

“Protector-General, the gate is open, and the road is clear. We are ready.” The legionnaire stood at attention outside Justinia’s tent as he spoke. She emerged, adjusting her belt.

“Good. We march to the temple. I just received word that these priests have allied themselves with the Pact. We must make haste to keep the Tear of Akatosh from our enemies. Rally the Legion!” Justinia headed for the horses.

Surius emerged as he was tightening his bracers. He paused for a moment. He looked at the ruined gate. Sighing, he followed Justinia. This was becoming a more and more common sight. Beauty reduced to ruins. The living become corpses. His heart desired peace.

A short time later, the thunder of a marching legion approached the defenseless temple. The legion split into two columns and surrounded the temple. There was no place to escape now. Justinia and Surius rode up to the entrance.

Justinia smiled up at the Abbot and those with him. Dismounting, she shouted up to the ramparts, “I am sure you have already figured out why I am here, Abbot. Don’t waste my time and give it to me.”

“There is nothing here you deserve, *Protector-General!*” The Abbot stood expressionless and unmoved.

Justinia drew her sword and pointed it towards the old man. “I grow tired of your arrogance, old man. You will take me to the chamber where you keep the Tear, or I will execute each of these priests one by one until I get what I want.”

The abbot and the other priests remained in the ramparts, silent.

Looking to her legion, Justinia yelled, “Behold! The face of treachery! Only traitors would be so defiant! Those who do not wish to help us in our cause are our enemies. Look long and hard at these traitors! They are the face of evil!”

The abbot broke his silence, knowing they would be his last words. “Shall I tell you what the real evil is? To cower before things that are evil! To surrender one’s freedom to those who are evil! We defy you! There is no suffering that you could place upon us that would make us bend to your will... USURPER!”

Surius looked down as his mind pondered for a moment on the words of the old abbot. Justinia looked up at the abbot in full rage. "Archers! Volley!"

In moments, the bodies of the abbot and those with him fell from the ramparts.

"I want this gate pulled down. NOW!" screamed Justinia to the Legion. Stomping over to Surius, "Fools. I might have spared them."

Surius looked at Justinia for a moment, then up where the priests once stood. "Yes... Fools."

When the gate opened, Justinia rushed in, leading a portion of her legion into the temple. Surius followed in but stopped and examined the bodies of the priests, which lined the wall. Each had several arrows in their body. He then thought he saw movement. Rushing over, he found one of them was still alive. The priest's breathing was ragged. He was dying. Sensing his presence, the priest reached out. Surius instinctively clasped his hand, "I am here... brother." Surius did not know why he said it, but he did.

"It is so dark... at least the Tear is not here... our hope now lies to the East..." The priest's grip loosened, and he passed away. Before Surius could react, he heard movement behind him and rose to his feet. Turning around, it was Justinia.

"So. They sent the Tear to the Dark Elves. We will need to get it back." A cruel smile spread across Justinia's face.

The Protector-General sent a missive throughout the Protectorate proclaiming that justice had been done to the traitors and that the Dark Elves had stolen a powerful artifact with the purpose of subjugating Cyrodill.

War was coming to Morrowind.