Age of Accountability

Very good, my boy! Very good! The large man thought to himself as he looked out through the open window. He patted his belly with thick, chubby hands in pleasure and self-satisfaction.

Yes, he thought. The time will come and I will be the ruler. But, I could not let such a thing interfere with my modesty, no! Still, it will be very nice to watch the world from a ruler’s perspective!

As he mulled that thought in his mind, the curled smile bore the cheeks more thickly and pronounced. He stood feeling the afternoon heat of the day as it pounded its heavy rays on his face. The morning’s services had come and gone so quickly; yet, the time was well spent. With my profound eloquence, I was able to convince those pesty Disseli¹, that the reason the Renewal² failed was because those of the perturbing Bloodline³. It was really quite easy as a matter of fact, he thought letting himself think back to his emotionally stirring speach. The hatred for the Bloodline has been always easy to foster—they being so aloof, so selfish of their abilities. Still, time will come that the Bloodline will be controlled by our ranks, and their children would be ours!

He let his hands drop behind his back as he stood as straight as he could (considering his stout size that was a barely noticeable feat). Then I . . . oh, yes, I will be ruler of this poor, misguided world. His thoughts were interrupted by the door creaking open. He turned to see an Omsel⁴ wearing what seemed to be more than twenty pounds of clothing enter the room and fall to his face in obeisence. The fluidity clearly marked a well-practiced servilitude that made the high priest smile inwardly.

"What is it! You know this is my meditation hour! I do not like to be disturbed!" The high priest barked at the intruder. His angry eyes glared unseen by the prostrated priest.

"Dem-Omsel⁵ Donsolh! Your speech was supremely influential upon the Disseli and the Omseli alike! Your eloquence resounded from valley to hill, from vale to mountain!"

Standard introduction, Donsolh thought to himself—but, there was something else, or there better be . . . "What is it!"

"It's that boy again, Holy One! Kemdarl!"

Upon hearing his son's name, the high priest's voice changed slightly. "Kemdarl? What did he do this time?" He could not help the fact that the only one to succeed himself was a wayward Dissel or Lesser Follower. For the longest time, he has tried to teach his son the importance of learning the Idom Ira⁶, the True Way. But, Kemdarl simply refuses to read it. Many times, he has been advised to renounce his own son for another successor. That advise obviously came from those that have never had a son.

Hearing the voice change, the prostrated priest paused for a moment but did not look up. "Kemdarl was not at the Gathering to hear your address."

Minor infractio. Normally that would have been handled by forcing the offender to fast for two days in penence. "Is that the reason you interrupt my meditation?"

"No, your Emminance. One of the Omsel noticed his absence and formed a silent search to recover the youth. We finally found him in the Centrals’ behind closed doors. He was reading the Unomo-Dor⁷!"

This time, Donsolh was not able to contain his dismay. Reading the Unomo-Dor, the
Book of the Chosen? Under law, this was treason--punishable by eternal banishment or death. The thought made his heart sicken, and he felt weak. My own son! Where have I gone wrong?

Quickly, he caught himself--it is not good for the high priest to show weakness in front of any other. Remembering the fact that a search team was formed, he turned back on the priest. "Who organized that outragous search without informing me first?"

"But, your Holiness, your son was found reading the forbidden text, nevertheless!"
"Do not connect me with that rebel!" He growled forcefully. "Bring the prisoner to me--immediately! Otherwise, I will act out my anger on you instead!"

The priest jumped to his feet, glanced at the High Priest who had turned away, and ran out the door with volumous black robes flowing behind him. The door shut slowly by invisible hands, and the High Priest was left by himself again. He walked over to his ornate chair and assumed a ponderous posture, his hand cupping his mouth.

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The Omsel ducked out of the room quickly because he did not want to be the receiver of the Dem-Omsel's wrath. He had heard about what the High Priest has done for insulent behavior--and, he did not want to be anywhere near when his ire was unleased. On the other side of the door he saw two guards. Turning to one he said with out stopping, "Fetch the prisoner! And do it quickly!" Without looking to see if the guard had left, he turned the corner away from the door as it shut behind him. So swift was his pace that he almost plowed right into another Omsel waiting there.

"Idiot! You knew that I was here!" The second Omsel chided. "Did you tell him? What was his reaction?"

"Why did you make me face that man?! He's incredible! And powerful! If he ever found out what we did to his son, we would probably be banished to the very place that Gall was sent to!"

"Will you be quiet!" The second Omsel shushed. "There is no reason to lose your head--otherwise, we will lose our heads. Do you understand? Good. Now lead the way--there is much to be done."

As they turned another corner the first Omsel let out a slight gasp and collapsed in a pile of robes. A short handle protruded his back with blood-wetness sweltering around the wound. Haplessly, he tried to grasp the assaulting blade. Soon, the only indication that he was still alive was a soft breath hushing in the stone-cold corridors.

"You must understand the importance of this mission," the second told the dying mass. "We are about to have a new high priest, and he will be me! We can't have everyone being alerted to our actions by hysterical thinking and actions. Say hello to old Gactom, will you?" He reached down with a short needle and pricked the twitching finger. Within seconds, the dying man's pallor greyed. With a quick turn, the second Omsel light-footed away.

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Donsolh was not given much time to think before his son arrived. The door swung open, and four guards marched in. In the midst of them stood a young man about average height with a unkempt beard and mussed hair. His clothing was ragged and a little dirty, and his hands were tied behind his back. Other than the hands, everything else was typical for a Dissel--they were required until they attain the honor of Omsel to be

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humbled by attire and responsibility. The whole sight that his own son was a lowly Dissel left the High Priest feeling empty.

"Release him," Donsolh said breaking the silence. "And, leave us." The guards acted quickly and were soon gone.

Father and son looked at each other in silence. The son's stance was hardly defiant, which made the decision so much more difficult for the old priest. Why can't he be like any other rebel? He thought to himself. Why can't he denounce all that we represent and make the verdict easier and less painful for me?

"Father?" Kemdarl began.

"Silence! You were not asked to speak!" The High Priest barked at the young man dropping his hand from his mouth. He sat there a minute longer studying the defendant and finally began: "Kemdarl, what you have done is worthy of death. There is no repentance for what you did, and you leave me no choice but to sentence you."

The young man's eyes started to fill with tears and he fell to his knees. Bowing his head, he quietly began to sob. "I'm sorry--really, I am."

Donsolh stood and walked over to his weeping son. "I will not have you killed, but you cannot remain here any longer. Also, remember you will be branded and any Follower finding you has the responsibility to kill you or die himself. I am sorry too, my son; but, you have left me no other choice." Carefully, the High Priest lifted the sobbing Dessil and embraced him. "You were always different; you never wanted to be a Omsel because of the things they had to do, yet you know all if not more than they do. This knowledge will help you defend yourself. I understand why you wanted to be with your friends, but whatever brought you to this awful state I don't know--I hope it was not your friends. No? Good. Otherwise, they will meet the same fate as you are facing. Now, tell your father why you did it." He guided his son over to a chair and sat him there. Sitting himself down, he waited patiently for a response.

Choking back the tears, Kemdarl looked up with blood-shot eyes and noticeable shame. "I wanted to know what was so evil about a single book. I could not understand how a book be evil and forbidden. Also, how am I supposed to know my enemy--those who follow the forbidden book--if I don't understand the way they think."

"I understand your problem. The book itself is not evil, but the teachings within are. And your concern about our enemy is understandable, but you have come to the wrong conclusion--you cannot understand your enemy by studying their books. The reason is that the teachings are pleasing to the mind that they begin to replace the good you already know. In order to understand your enemy, you must understand yourself."

The young man thought for a minute, then asked: "Father, why did you blame the Chosen for what happened at the Renewal? They didn't do it, did they?"

Donsolh was taken aback. Did he know about the farce? "How did you learn about this? You were not at my address."

"No, but this was." He held up a small blackish-green disk. "With this stone, I can hear anything I want."

"Where did you get it?" Donsolh asked talking it from the hand and fumbling with it in his fingers.

"I learned about some magic in the old books in the library. So I decided to try it. You know how much I hate going to those addresses--with all those people chearing and
screaming like they were mad."

Nodding affirmative with a wry smile, he diverted the comment asking, "Where are those books? And, how much have you read of them?"

"I read most of them, but they're gone now." He said with a shrug.

"What do you mean they're **gone**? They simply couldn't have vanished."

"No, one day I went back to read more, but they were gone. Somebody must have taken them. That was why I began reading the forbidden book. I found it on the table, and there really wasn't anything else to read."

"But, how did you get it? We don't keep it in the library in the first place. There is only one copy here, and that is in my personal library." He said getting up and walking over to a bookcase filled with oddly sized tomes. Looking around, he reached out and pulled a short book. Suddenly, the bookself vanished revealing a small passageway. Beckoning to his son to follow, he began to walk down the passage.

Kemdarl was a little hesitant for a moment, but curiosity quickly got the best of him. They walked together for a little ways, before the side walls disappeared leaving a large open room with a hard polished rock floor. In the middle of the room, stood two short pillars, each having a large book.

"This is the only copy we have," Donsolh said motioning to the tome on the left. His voice sounded strange like he was further away than just a few feet.

"After the others disappeared, a book like this was on the table when I entered the library. The name was not on the cover, but I knew what it was; because, I learned about it in my classes."

"You actually went to your classes?" He responded teasing.

"Well, . . ." He shrugged feeling a little more at ease.

"Well, okay. Now I bet your wondering why I have taken you back here." Donsolh said, his tone changing serious again. "If you were to leave this place any other way, you would be killed on sight. So this is where your banishment begins. You go in any direction from this point, and you will appear anywhere in the world. Beware, there are many dangers; and, you will be all alone. From this point, you are no longer my son."

Donsolh reached up with his hand, he placed his palm on the young man's forehead. The change in tone and that fact that a spell was being cast upon his condemned soul made Kemdarl fear for his life. But he was already caught in the web of the spell, so he couldn't move. Finally, the spell ended, yet he was still immobile. Donsolh embraced the stiff figure for the last time, and said: "Always remember that I love you--I cannot help this simple fact of life." Turned and left him standing in the spacious, dark room.

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"What happened to Jiml?" The old man asked plainly as the Omsel entered the room. The question echoed hollowly against the worn slatted wood floor. The room was about the size of a modest study with a small library of diversely shaped books. The were a few chairs around a large wooden table. The old man sat at the head with four cloaked Omseli sat at the broad sides.

"He didn't make it. Don't worry--everything went fine," the man who just entered the room said. Looking at the four cloaked figures sitting with the old man, he tried to recognize them from their forms because their faces were covered. And, judging by the tension, he felt like he should have listened in to whatever discussion they were having.

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The old man sat shortly at the table—no doubt being a little shorter while standing and was many years older, but the old man was one of the most powerful Omsel—not someone to take lightly.

"Asel, if you killed him, and they find the body, we will be suspect being that we are the politically more extreme of the organization," the old man said leveling a gaze on the new comer.

_The organization was the old man's way of describing the Followers_, Asel thought to himself. _He really did not consider their cult as anything more than an organization to deal with. Well if he was considering to become the new high priest, he'll have to deal with me! Normally one would suspend nothing but kindness from such an old man—he seemed that way. But, unfortunately for most, they find that was simply a façade. Fortunately, I am well aware of that old man's demeanor._

"No such thing happened! How could you suspect me of such a terrible act? I have been loyal to your efforts from the very beginning," Asel defended himself with well practiced shock.

"Only so long as it has been a service to you. You are far too extreme," the old man snapped with a snarl. "What is the status of the brat?"

"He has been destroyed, I'm sure of it. He won't be in our way any longer," he said sweeping his hand dramatically.

"Are you absolutely sure? Not only are you extreme, but you are also a terrible liar! Find the body--now!" The old man growled thrusting his finger out pointing at the door.

Asel waited for a second in defiance, then turned and walked out. When the door closed, the old man lowered his extended arm and while watching the door, said to his companions without looking at them: "He is far too impetuous for our use any longer. Find the brat's body." When he said that two of the Omsel left the room leaving the old man and the two behind. He continued, more to himself: "I know Donsolh all too well this many years—it is unlikely that he will summarily kill his son. He loves him, and that is his weakness. We must destroy Donsolh before he names his successor."

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"I am very sorry to hear about your son, Your Highness," the head instructor began with a polite bow.

"What he did was wrong; he had to be punished," Donsolh said without emotion without looking up from his writings. He was sitting behind his desk studying some papers that were scattered haphazardly across his desk. Normally he would keep everything as neat as possible, but today for some reason the desire to be organized was simply not there. The head instructor was one of the few people he trusted, still the fact that his son was still alive he could not divulge—not even to this man, his most trusted friend.

"But, Sire—uh, Your Worship," he amended upon seeing the glance from the High Priest, "to have your own son killed for a minor infraction—that's incredible, inhuman! What's worse is the fact that you are taking the whole situation as if it were some pesky mut that was killed for vomiting on the floor!" That got the full attention of the High Priest; he looked up at the raving man in front of him wondering how far it would take him. "Have you no feelings on the fact that you killed your only son?!" By this point, the head instructor was pounding his fist on the table scattering the already well-messed
The High Priest didn't say anything. He just sat there and looked at the head instructor. Soon the raving man stopped the pounding, looked at his hand, looked back up at the High Priest, got a look of dread in his eyes, and finally bowed his head and began to weep.

"I know how you feel--he was my son, after all. I understand that you were close--if not closer--to him than I was. But, you understand that what he did was wrong, and by the law, he had to be punished. Now, go and rest my good . . ."

"I say that the law be damned!" The head instructor exclaimed and stormed out of the room with his arm swinging angrily.

"I wish I could say that too," Donsolh said quietly in the empty room as the doors closed. "I wished I could say that too!"

He sat there quietly and thought back to when they first met. The head instructor was about the same age as he was, but certainly was able to bear the years more graciously. They met when the head instructor felt it necessary to talk to him about this incredibly brilliant student he had--only to find out that the student was the son of the High Priest.

"But, wasn't he in the priest's school?" Was the question by the head instructor. He was naturally surprised, because normally the high priests automatically place their sons in priest's school skipping the preliminary schooling.

"I feel that my son should have no more preferential treatment--just because he was my son. He should learn the hard way--like I had to."

The shock that elicited from the school master quickly resolved into profound respect. Every once in a while, the head instructor sent a message expressing current status of the prize pupil. Later, a message told that he (the head instructor) had started teaching Kemdarl personally, because quote: "the excellerated learning capabilities this incredible young man demonstrates is hindered by slower, more common pupils in the classes."

The pride Donsolh felt then felt bitter now. How could he tell that the sole reason for the secrecy was so that Kemdarl would be able to leave without being noticed. Oh, yes, he knew about the plots against his life--who wouldn't? And, he will do as he must to try to fend off the threats. But one day he knew that he would slip, and they would win. That itself would have to remain secret so that the assassination will be more flagrant.

Still, his son's personal instructor did deserve to know. That way the instructor would be more content with the result. Unfortunately, the whole reason the Renewal was set up was to spark new interest in the cult. So little has been done toward gaining control of other lands in the last few decades, that the Followers have become restless--seeking ways to gain more power within the cult itself. Hence the need to protect his son. It was only convenient that Kemdarl chose to provide himself a way of escape through banishment. Either way, his son's life had to come first--Kemdarl must survive.

As he was sitting there thinking at his desk, the door opened revealing a guard. The guards were token only--supposedly, the building was secure enough to really not need them. But somehow, having them there was a little comforting. The guard stepped aside revealing Dovan the chancellor.

Dovan was a tall thin old man with long boney fingers. Even though he always given sound advice, Donsolh had a hard time trusting him. There was something about him that
seemed wrong—nothing tangible, just a feeling.

"I would like to express my deepest sympathy to you, sir, for your son's behaviour," the chancellor said as walked toward the disorganized desk. "I would like to discuss with you some urgent matters concerning announcement of the successor. Now that your son is . . ."

"Dovan, I appreciate your concern but this can wait until tomorrow morning can't it? I have had a very distressing day, if you haven't noticed," the High Priest responded with a tired sigh.

"I apologize for my conduct. We will then discuss succession tomorrow directly after breakfast. Will that be sufficient?" The tone in that apology was hardly gracious and made Donsolh look carefully at the chancellor. "By no disrespect, Sire!" he quickly amended.

"Of course," he smiled plastically. "If you were to imply that I withheld the offender solely because he is my son, you will have to call counsel to verify it. That will delay your knowing by several weeks--is that what you want? No? I thought so. The boy's body was incinerated, and his remains will be delivered to you by the evening."

Dovan lifted his chin slightly and carefully considered Donsolh. Donsolh is a powerful ruler and wizard—not a man to take lightly. "Well, on that I will have to rely. I will await the urn." He paused a few more minutes considering what else to say. After noticeable wait, he quickly excused himself and rushed out of the room.

Just a matter of time, Donsolh considered. I will not be able to hold back the tides of treason. I hope that my son will be wise--wiser than I have been. He sat pensively down at the ornate desk. Looking over the pile of notes and penciled scratchings, he thought about his son and his fate.

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It seemed like several hours passed before Kemdarl was able to move again. Slowly he felt the sensation creep back through his extremities, and soon the stiffness settled in. Instinctively, he reached up and felt his forehead wondering if the mark was tangible. His hands felt mushy and tingled as he probed for any sign—nothing. Dropping his hand, he looked around and found the hallway leading into the sanctum was no longer visible. Once again, the two tomes on the pedestals came into view. For a moment, he wanted to take them with him—even the accursed Unomo-Dor, the book that banished him. There was something about that book felt differently from reading the Idom Ira—something . . . different. He just could not put his finger on it.

He walked over to the books and picked them up. Each of them weighed about thirty pounds to Kemdarl, and the two combined took all the effort he could muster. After a couple minutes, he concluded that there was no way to carry either of them—much the less carry both. They would be a hindrance for his travel.

Running his hand over the forbidden tome, he earnestly tried to think of a way to carry it with him. The very book that brought him all this anguish became a fascination. What could this book possibly contain that is so dangerous to me? Now that I am already banished, what else could it do? With cautious regard, he opened the book. The beautiful scrollings and workmanship immediately captured his eye. He began to read. The feeling returned. The words rang closely and harmonically in his heart. He read on. Nothing else mattered; his surroundings vanished like a whispered dream. He felt the
book come alive and take hold of him—still, he was unafraid, calm. Minutes later, he stood there staring at the backside of the closed book knowing that he did not turn the pages but aware of every verse within. He looked at the Idom Ira. It looked wretched and loathing—something that was contrary to all that he felt true. Why he considered taking it along puzzled him.

Stepping back, he turned about to face his choice of exits. Unfortunately, he could not remember what direction was south outside. So, he concluded, I just have to guess, and began walking toward what appeared to be the wall. Before reaching it, he felt something pulling him. He began to accelerate. Losing his balance, he fell.
1. **Disseli (or Dissel for singular)** is the name for the Lesser Followers of Gall.

2. **The Renewal:**
   *An attempt to bring back the great Gall from banishment.*

3. **The Bloodline:**
   *This refers to an unusual breed of man that has all the abilities of the Chosen. They are basically the guardians of the world.*

4. **Omsel:**
   The Omsel is the name for the Greater Followers. These are they who are able to wield great sorcery (spell magic).

5. **Dem-Omsel:**
   The high priest over the Followers.

6. **Idom Ira:**
   The religious text of the Followers. It has other names like the **True Way** by the Followers and the **Death Tome** by (almost) everyone else.

7. **Centrals:**
   The center courtyard of studying cells. Used to be used by the old Followers, they now have fallen into disuse and disrepair.

8. **Unomo-Dor:**
   This is the primary text of the Chosen. It has other names like the Idom Ira: Book of Peace by the Chosen and Pages of Blasphemy by the Followers.