

## CONJURERS of the CRYSTAL CITY Thousand Sons

Askuratu stared into the flat surface of the Crystal before him. Gloomy forms all around him chanted, some in ornate golden chains, others holding them. The light blue crystal in the center of the room stood much taller than the sorcerer, although it was the smallest crystal making up the glowing blue chamber. Every surface, the walls, ceiling, and floor, contained monolithic versions of the same undulating blue substance. Besides the hulking marine, only the huddled pile of psykers were present, emanating the energy needed to activate the room with each incantation. Encapsulated in his power armor, Askuratu was easily twice the size of the mass on the floor, containing probably no less than two dozen emaciated psychic slaves. A handful would have been enough; however, he had many to spare and could not afford for the ritual to fail.



The location of the Crystal City is unknown to all but the most trusted inner circle of Magnus the Red. Even the hundreds of Sorcerers plotting the overthrow of countless Imperial Worlds and the thousands of psykers who power its mysterious machinations, most unwillingly, know not where they are in time or space. It has been long suspected by the Inquisition that plots across the entire

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galaxy are orchestrated from some such corrupt location as world after world sees their best and brightest, their world leaders, succumb to similar patterns of corruption.

Askuratu reached into his satchel and produced a vial of pink powder. The crystal surfaces all around him began to pulsate more rapidly, seemingly sensing the presence of the substance. Removing the stopper, the sorcerer closed his eyes and waved the vial around his head, releasing the powder in wide arcs. It did not fall to the floor or even stay suspended in the air as a fine powder might. Instead, the powder immediately spread out in all directions, merging with the now rapidly pulsing crystal chamber. The crystals vibrated fast enough for an audible hum to rise up. The pitch increased rapidly as more and more of the powder embedded itself in the surrounding crystal. Some of the psykers writhed and clawed at their faces as the pitch became too much for their ears. However, none of them stopped chanting, fearing what would happen to them if they ceased much more than the pain currently enveloping them. Those holding the chains never flinched, having lost most of their senses through countless previous rituals before, along with the loss of anything resembling will.



The pitch transcended the audible range, and Askuratu once more opened his eyes. Instead of finding himself standing in the same crystal chamber, he was now lying on a soft bed being bombarded with natural light coming in through an open window, lined in white silk and flowers, the chamber made almost entirely of lacy white marble, but roughly the same size as where he stood moments before.



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Many forms moved about, human, although much more well fed and sun-kissed than the indiscernible pile of husks he had just left.

None of this was shocking to the sorcerer as he maintained his composure and took in the room around him. Likewise, his arrival had not caused any disturbance to the people moving about the room. As far as they were concerned, the figure laying on the bed was still the same small blonde female that had been there moments before . . . the same being that they knew very well and tended to on a regular basis . . . the same miraculous young girl that would be evaluated for sainthood today. It was a test he would have to help her pass if his plans to deliver this planet to Magnus were to proceed.

He did not dare to move the body he now coinhabited. In fact, he would only, like on so many other occasions, remain a passenger, going where she pleased, listening to her thoughts, and on occasion answering her desires with acts of magic and wonder that seemed to emanate from her own hands. His intent was to pass these acts off as miracles, to raise her to the point of worship, then use her status to eventually turn the planet against the Imperium, but the plans became accelerated and the young girl was noticed by the Ecclesiarchy. The algae nutrient processing plant explosion leveled an entire sector, roughly 3 million inhabitants and workers. Askuratu used the wonders of the warp to save her. She stumbled out days later with only sooty clothes. The girl could not explain it, only that she put her hands up and prayed to the God-Emperor. Those prayers had intensified since that event. They grated on his consciousness in a way that reminded him of the psychic slaves in the crystal chamber.

“If she only knew where her powers came from,” Askuratu grimaced, “words for the corpse-god would never cross her lips again!”

“Is everything alright, hon?” a plump elderly servant in plain white robes leaned towards the young girl. “You look as though you’re a bit uncomfortable. We can’t have that now, can we?” as the chamber maid continued to fluff the pillow behind her.

Askuratu tensed a little, and so did the girl. Just then, the sound of retro-thrusters from imperial transports pierced the tension and the door to the room swung open.

A gruff voice rang out from the hallway beyond, “It is time.”