

# Retribution

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An Animosity 2: Sands of War fluff piece.

As the Sands of War fall through the hour glass, the Araby Reclamation Pact moves closer and closer to victory. However, these dark times call for dark deeds, and a commander must know when to uphold honour, and when to take Retribution.

[contains slight unnecessary violence, but you all like that don't you]

Baluin

looked out across the sandy wastes. There was emptiness, quiet. A barren stretch of land sweltering under the hot sun. The natives said that life existed throughout the desert, that it thrived even. The Bretonnian lord saw no life here, only death. Death stalked the dunes and pillars of this land, death rode the hot wind, and death rained down from the desiccating sun. He had come to hate this land.

Baluin

turned away from the bluff, and the wind whipped his flowing cape across the front of his tabard. Gritty particles of sand clung to the fabric, reflecting the sun's light. He had long since become accustomed to the feeling of it, and barely squinted as it stung at his eyes. As he neared the bottom of the cliff, the city of Al Hadok stood in full view before him. It was a magnificent sight, a marvel of ancient Old World and Arabian architecture blended together. He still wore the laurel crown he had been presented with when the Pact forces entered the city.

Gawain

stood uneasily at the foot of the outcropping, watching his lord descend. As Baluin approached, he bowed low before he nervously began to talk. 'My lord, a letter has arrived from Sir Cai.'

Baluin

grabbed the note from his adjutant. Gawain was a good soldier, but fretted too much at times. Baluin had often told him to put his faith in the Lady, and trust she would see things through. As he began to read through the note, he felt his anger rising once more. The horrid scene at Cophers was described in chilling detail. The message on the walls was reprinted in the note as well. Baluin stood, shaking with anger, as the message finished. For a long moment, he did not move. Quietly tucked the note into a pouch at his side, and began to move purposefully towards the city.

As he

reached to palace that had been vacated for his senior staff, Baluin waved Gawain forward once more. In a quiet voice, he asked 'Is the room prepared?' A silent nod from Gawain told Baluin all he needed to know, and he continued deep into the depths of the palace. Through dark hallways and twisting staircases he descended, until at last he reached a heavy iron door. Two massive guards stood to each side of the entrance, quiet but alert. He cast a meaningful look at Gawain, who stopped following him and stood instead by the door.

Baluin

entered swiftly and looked around. It was a tiny cell. There was no light, for they were deep underground, except for the small lantern one of the guards had lit in advance of his arrival. The thick stone walls were stained and cracked, but he knew they were meters thick. This was a room built for secrets. Nothing, not even sound, was getting in or out. In the very center of the room a figure was seated in a chair. He was bound and gagged, and tied tightly in place. His relaxed muscles told Baluin that the figure was sleeping. A heavy backhand from the Bretonnian's mailed gauntlet jerked the figure awake, before Baluin ripped off his blindfold.

The weak

and frightened eyes of the Arabian looked up at him. The man had once been a caliph, a powerful lord who stood in council with Haseem, though Baluin could be bothered to recall his name. He was said to have been close to the serpent, to have been a confidante and even a friend. Nevertheless, when the Palace was overrun, Haseem had left the man squirming, caught under a piece of fallen debris. Baluin's troops had dug him out after five days of digging, and carried him off the field. Since then, he had been bound and blindfolded deep below the city of Al Hadok.

Baluin

struck him again for good measure before removing the gag as well. He walked around behind the chair, and the man squirmed desperately around trying to bring him back into view. With one hand, Baluin reached out and grabbed the

shoulder of the prisoner. 'I am going to ask you one question, scum.' The pressure excerpted on his shoulder began to increase. 'You are going to answer my question. You are going to answer not for the sake of your life, which is already lost.' The pressure continued to build. 'You are not going to answer for the sake of your lord, who has already abandoned you to your fate.' A faint creaking sound came from man's shoulder. 'You are not going to answer for your vain and distant gods, for I could not care less what they have to say. You are going to answer for the people of Cophers, the people of Martek, the people of Mezdah, and the thousands of others that have died because of the actions you chose to support. When you sided with those murderers, you became responsible for every single death by their hands. Every death, you will pay for. Every death will be accounted for in pain and blood.' The creaking increased, and then a sudden snap sounded through the room. The man did not make a sound, for the shock of it has stolen his breath. His collarbone, weak from the weeks of war, entrapment, and then emprisonment, had snapped under the pressure. His clavicle, running from his shoulder to the top of his sternum, poked through his ruptured skin like a root breaking from the ground.

Baluin

walked around the chair, and stood facing to man. He leaned in close, almost whispering, and asked 'Where is your caliph?'

A look of

crazed defiance spread across the man's face. He managed to get the words 'You shall neverâ?' out of clenched teeth before a heavy kick smashed into his chest. He was knocked backwards, and the chair fell over onto its back. Baluin walked around to its side, and looked down. The man struggled fiercely, but was unable to get even the lightest amount of freedom with the ropes. Baluin looked down, and then sneered angrily. He raised a foot above the man's head. 'Bad answer' he muttered under his breath. With a slow, deliberate motion, he brought the heavy steel spur of his mailed boot down into the eye of the prone figure. As he pressed down, he turned his foot back and forth, gouging out the wound.

A little

over an hour later, Baluin emerged from the room. His heavy gauntlets were covered in blood, and smears stained the front of his tabard. He left large, wet foot prints in his tracks. Gawain looked up fitfully, and fell into step beside his master, handing him a small towel. Baluin handed back a large sack that contained a suspiciously round, wet object inside.

'Take that

to contact, and see that he passes it on to the Caliph's forces.' Baluin said as he idly cleaned his forearms and hands.

'Yes,  
milord. The three caliphs who turned themselves over are waiting to see you in  
the audience chamber.'

'Very well,  
I'll see them immediately. You see to that parcel first, then meet me there.'

As Baluin  
strode off, Gawain looked inside the sack. The head of the man, badly beaten  
and with one of its eyes gouged out, sat in the bag. A note had been fixed to  
the forehead by a heavy nail. It read simply.

Caliph Haseem

It's over. You are  
next.

Baluin sat  
in the large throne that dominated the audience hall. It was an impressive  
piece of art, carved with dragons adorning the handles and misty elemental  
creatures about it's head. It had been recovered from the ruins of the Palace,  
and now served as Baluin's audience throne.

The three  
caliphs that stood before him looked fearfully up at him. He had not bothered  
to change his armour or tabard, and was still smeared with dried blood. He  
looked down at the men with a mixture of anger and amusement.

'We've come to take your offer of amnesty, good lord. We have turned what remains of our men over to your garrison. We ask only your good graces now,' said the foremost of them.

Baluin leaned forward. He smiled at them, the way a god would smile as it gathered a handful of lightning. 'Of course. My steward will see you off.'

The men smiled in relief as they hurried out of the hall. 'Put them on the ship with the other,' Baluin said to his steward as the man followed after the departing nobles. Many lesser Caliphs had turned themselves in, having heard about his offer to Haseem. A great shipload of them would leave this evening, destined for Tilea.

Baluin waved a hand forward, and a figure detached itself from the walls. He wore a long crimson coat over a fine chainmail shirt, and an elegant rapier hung at one said. 'See to it that they don't make it out of the gulf, Rackham.'

'Aye, my lord,' the figure said, and slip once more into the shadows behind the throne.

'Gawain!' called out Baluin, and the knight hurried up to stand beside him. 'Jean has landed, yes? Then tell Admiral Hawke to take control of the fleet. Have Jean and Arwen meet me in the courtyard in an hour. We ride for Maharek before dawn.'

Baluin thought about the city. The new port had been destroyed, but they would be rebuilt soon. The dry docks, however, remained, along with his new prize. There was still work to be done. There was still one last city to conquer, and a few more scores to settle.