

Nothing had ever covered the sky. These terrifying clouds were from books: the tomes of portent; apocalyptica. Borrada tweaked the horse's mane for speed, but the rocksand ascent was engineered for the hooves of goats, not horses.

Thunder bubbled through his hollows. His heart shook on its chassis and his chemicals rushed. Night dethroned day but the swelter did not moderate. Borrada looked continually upwards. The fire still burned and turned the sky's angry greys to hopeless blacks. A moving dot was maybe Lorelei or maybe not, but he wished it; he wished for her to rest until he caught up. What would he say? His mouth was filled with fields of unspoken words, now matured; now ripe for harvest but likely no easier on her digestion: 'I care for you'; 'I care about you'; and love? That was not even a word of his own choosing.

Embers tapped his face. He flinched at a spike of sudden pressure in his ears. And he knew he was sought in another realm: the spiritual; sought by a tennanter; a possessor.

He stopped by a rockpile mapped by a crescent – a pauper's grave for a simple peasant. It was one of the many they buried on Carrauntoohil as though being close to the sarcophagii of the Fallen Emperors would lend ceremony to such poor funerals; as though those people were any less worthy than those supposed holy. Kotaom would be equality. But he knew that the Kingdom of the Animal of Man would not surface without him. And with his ears pinged, and the tennanter nearing, he plunged his hand down through the dust grave until he felt the pauper's skull, still leathery fleshed.