

# **Guardian of the Dawn**

**Kormak Saga, prequel**

**by William King, 1959–**

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“Open the door,” Kormak yelled. Blood seeped through his shirt, the wound in his side hurt, and he was dizzy from all the witchroot he had chewed for the pain. He needed to get inside soon. It was almost twilight and this, of all nights, was no time to be abroad.

He glanced back towards the darkening woods. At least there was no sign of his pursuers on the road. They were most likely safe indoors, hiding behind Elder signs, praying to the Sun to keep them safe from the terrors of the dark.

“Go away!” The voice from within was deep and rough, the accent that of a peasant farmer.

“You would turn away a fellow man on the night of the full moon?” Kormak said. “The Holy Sun will turn his face from your crops. Your cattle will be barren.”

“How do I know you are a man? It is twilight and we have had trouble with the Children of the Moon.” That would certainly explain the suspicion in the man's voice, Kormak thought. This land was close to the marches of the world where the Old Ones still disputed the borders with men.

“If I were a moondog would I be able to stand on the Elder Sign worked on your doorstone?” Kormak asked. It was just as well they could not see his blood dripping onto the crude five-pointed star. It was the worst of omens.

“He does not sound like one of them, father,” said another voice, lighter and less gruff than the first. There was a sound of cuffing and a cry of pain.

“What would you know about such things, boy? They can sound like anything they want.”

“Are you going to open this door or must I kick it in?” Kormak felt ashamed at making the threat but he needed to get inside to have a look at his wound. He needed to get his horse into a protected stable too. It must be rested, if tomorrow he was to outdistance the men who wanted to hang him for the murder of the Mayor of Sturmgarde.

“Recite the Sun's Prayer!” shouted the man. It was an old superstition that the Moon's children could not recite those words. Kormak had reason to know it was not true but now did not seem the time to share that knowledge. He spoke the words he had learned as a small child over thirty years ago.

The door swung open.

“Get in quickly,” said a voice. Kormak debated a moment whether he should draw his sword. The people inside might be armed and inclined to mischief. On the other hand, he saw no need to frighten them any more than he was going to. No lowlander was ever thrilled to see a dark-haired highlander come through his door, especially at twilight. Memories of the old wars were long.

He stepped into the gloomy fire-lit interior. Straw covered the floor. He ducked his head to avoid low beams. The place smelled of the pigs and dogs and humans who huddled there.

Kormak saw a man of medium height, middle aged, burly and yellow bearded. Behind the farmer was a woman, plump, face weather-lined. There was a boy, not past his thirteenth year, presumably the one who had spoken, and a girl, maybe five years younger, most likely his sister. Beside the window was another man, in his twenties, the eldest son or perhaps the wife's younger brother. He held a pitchfork in his hand and he looked nervous enough to use it. The man who had opened the door had a heavy club. Kormak moved to give himself a clear space in case of trouble.

“Easy,” he said. “I mean you no harm. The Holy Sun smile upon you.” He ducked his head and made the Solar sign, keeping his eye on the men the whole time, not wanting to take a blow as he bowed.

The men relaxed a little. They had feared a monster. They had found a big man, garbed like every other landless mercenary, a sword on his back, blood seeping through a dirty linen shirt and dripping from the thick leather jerkin. “See to my horse and I will pay you copper.” He pulled a coin from his flat purse, letting them see how empty it was. No sense in giving them reason to murder him in the night.

The oldest of the men nodded to the boy. "Do it. We will keep an eye on the stranger."

The boy headed through the door, torn by curiosity about what would happen next, a desire to stay and help his father in case of trouble, and fear of going out into the gathering gloom.

"Do it!" the father said. The boy jumped to obey.

"You are bleeding," said girl. She sounded concerned.

"Bandits on the road," Kormak lied, too smoothly for his own liking. He had become too well practiced at lying. "I took a wound but managed to cut my way free. My horse all but foundered carrying me here."

"You look more like a bandit than their victim," said the eldest son, half-defiant, half-afraid, from his place of safety by the window.

"I am a soldier," said Kormak, hiding the greater lie in the lesser truth. In one sense he was a soldier. He just fought in a different war from the one these people would think of.

"A lot of you on the road these days," said the farmer. "Now that the wars in the East have ended. Sometimes I wonder if it had not been better if the orcs had overrun us. They could not commit more robberies or killings than our own so-called defenders."

It was always the same, Kormak thought. When the threat was there, people cheered and threw roses and called you a hero. When the threat was gone, they forgot and called you a bandit. "You know nothing of orcs if you can say that," said Kormak.

"And you do?" said the younger man. There was the sneer again, but there something else there as well. Fear, most likely. Or perhaps envy. Many a boy had left his farm to go fight in the wars, but many had stayed behind and doubted their courage ever since.

"I do. If the greenskins were here, they would not leave your house standing, they would burn it..."

"Men would do the same, and they would do worse to our women..."

"Aye, cruel men might. But they would not take you for their herds."

"Dead is dead," said the eldest man. "Does not matter how it happens."

You've never seen an orc herd, Kormak was about to say, but the will to argue spilled out of him. Why should he inflict tales of such horrors on these people? They had troubles enough of their own. They lived with fear all their lives, saw the barons take more than their share of crops in taxes, and were unable to raise their voice in protest. They had lived in terror of bandits, and of the Children of the Moon coming by night. Why add to the burden of their fears?

"You're right," Kormak said. "And I would be a fool to argue."

That took them off guard. He suspected they were not used to politeness from the likes of him. "May I take a seat by your fire, I must see to my wound."

The old man nodded. Kormak went to the fire and opened his shirt. He propped his scabbard against the hearth, making sure the blade was in easy reach and everybody knew it. The poultice he had bandaged in place earlier, before the pursuit had become obvious, formed a bloody crust. He chipped it away with his knife. The wound wept a little blood but looked clean and shallow.

He took the needle and the catgut from his pouch and began heating the point in the fire. When it was red hot he let it cool. If he had wine he would have set the needle in it but he did not. The family watched him silently, fascinated by the action.

He pinched torn flesh together with thumb and forefinger and set to work. The needle goes in, he told himself, gritting his teeth. The needle comes out. It took him some time to finish but was easier than he had thought. The bitter witchroot he had chewed earlier was still in his system.

At least he had done something right today, he thought, and slumped wearily in the chair, stretching out his long legs. Things had gone very wrong back in Sturmgarde.

“That hurt like a bishop’s stomach after a banquet,” Kormak said.

The woman took the hint. She ladled out some broth into a wooden bowl from the cauldron on the fire and brought it over. He watched her warily, in case she suddenly cast its scalding contents into his face. He had seen men die from making simpler mistakes than letting their guard down with people like these. He did not intend that it should happen to him.

She made no sudden moves and presented the bowl to him with a small curtsy. He accepted it with thanks, and his shame grew when she returned with a small loaf. He had forced his way into these people’s home, and made them fear him, and they were treating him with more courtesy than he had any right to expect.

How had it come to this, he wondered? These were the people he was supposed to protect.

Then again, when he had taken his vows he had never expected to be hunted for murder either. Life had seemed so much simpler when he was a lad. He had thought he was going to be a hero. He had been a fool then, just like he had been a fool today when he had almost been killed performing what should have been a routine execution.

That thought brought the guilt back. Killing the man had been only right. The Mayor of Sturmgarde had sold his soul to the Shadow, and unleashed monsters by night to slay his enemies and secure his wealth. The townsfolk had not known it, of course, for he had been clever and hid his evil well. The man was powerful, and had rich friends in very high places and the Order's position in the King's favor was precarious enough these days so the judgment had to be passed in secret.

It should have been a simple, clean kill but he had made the mistake of taking his eyes off the Mayor when the eight year old had wandered into the room to show her father her new doll and found him standing with a stranger’s blade at her father’s throat. The look on her face, the sheer horror of it, had frozen Kormak for a second.

The mayor’s knife buried itself in Kormak’s side then. If it had gone in a quarter of an inch higher the rib would not have deflected it, and he would have died instead of the mayor. It was not a mistake he would have made ten years ago. He was getting soft.

The city watch had come bursting through the door in answer to the man’s terrified screams, but by then Kormak had spoken the sentence and done his job

despite the little girls howled protests from the cupboard in which he had locked her.

He had thrown the mayor's severed head at the guard and cut through them while they were distracted. A dive through the window and into the cobbled streets and he was racing through the town gates while the alarm bell was still being rung. He had thought he had made a clean getaway till he heard the pounding of hooves on the road behind him later that day and known that he must flee.

The youngest boy returned and moved over to a place by the fire, kneeling, warming his hands though it was not cold outside. His sister hunkered down beside him, hands on his shoulder, looking up at Kormak with big wide eyes. They were both blonde like their parents, their hair rough cut. Their eyes were blue and innocent.

"My father says you are a soldier," said the boy. "You must have seen many wars."

Only one, Kormak wanted to say, and all the other wars you have ever heard of are merely part of it. Instead he said; "Yes. I have seen wars."

"Have you killed anybody?" asked the girl.

"I have killed too many." He was going to say too many to count but somehow the words would not come out properly. The witchroot must be getting to him.

"Have you ever killed an orc?" asked the boy.

Kormak nodded.

"He would tell you he had killed anything you ask," said the eldest son. The sneer was there still, the fear too.

"I have killed a full grown Tyrant," Kormak said. "I slew it at the field of Aeanar while men around me fled in terror, and crows feasted on the eyes of the fallen."

The witchroot must have been stronger than he thought or he was more tired and slipped into a waking dream. For a moment he was back on the trampled field, dancing over the corpses, the dwarf-forged blade singing in his hand. The great orc, half again his height and many times his weight loomed over him, the scimitar of black iron, large enough to hew through a tree, poised to strike down on the neck of the fallen king.

Perhaps that day, he had been the man the boy he had once been had thought he was going to be. Perhaps, but by then he no longer believed in honor or wanted to be a hero. He had seen too much corruption and too much treachery and too much death.

He shook his head and concentrated on drinking the soup right from the bowl. It was hot, and full of potatoes and carrots, with some meat and some fat to add taste.

"Good," he said to the wife of the house, hoping she would offer him more. She did not, so he began wiping the bowl with a chunk of bread.

"Could you kill a troll," said the girl. There was an odd note of hope in her voice.

"Gerda," said the woman. "It is best not to speak of such things lest the Children of the Moon hear you."

"I was only asking, mother, and if this man could save me..."

Kormak's heart sank. He had been half expecting this ever since he had heard the father's words at the door. He did not want to go out into the night and face the monsters once more, but he had sworn an oath long ago, when he was still a

boy and had wanted to be a hero. They had put a bright sword in his hand that day, and told him that he was one, and for a brief shining instant he had believed it was true. There were times when he thought he had lived his whole life in the long shadow cast by that one incandescent moment.

“Save you from what?” he asked.

“Something out there in the dark,” said the mother. “It took some of our cattle and we can hear it prowling in the night. Sometimes it calls to us. Telling us to send Gerda out. It says if we send her it will leave and let the rest of us live.”

Kormak stared into the fire, thinking of the other eight year old he had seen today. She had seen a monster. He kept his mouth firmly shut.

“How old are you, soldier?” The farmer asked.

“Thirty five. I will retire in seven years.”

“What?”

“Nothing.” Kormak regretted his words immediately. Less than one in ten of his order lived through the long years of their term, and most of those were the crippled veterans who taught the next generation. The odds against his own survival were long and grew longer every year. Most likely he would never see the cloisters of Mount Aethelas again. So many of his oath year were already gone. Maera with her golden hair and lovely smile. Grim Solian. Snub nosed Rurik who had wanted so hard to be brave and had been right till the end...

And those were just the ones he knew about, for he had been sent to reclaim their swords, to take up their burdens, to kill the things that had killed them.

“You must be good with that blade.”

“I am.” And why should he not be? He had paid with his whole life to be good with it.

“Could you defeat a troll?” Kormak considered the matter. Trolls were among the toughest of the Moon’s Children. Some were tall as a house and could kill a bull with a single blow of their fist. Their skin was as hard as stone.

“I don’t know.”

“Most men would simply say no.”

“I am not most men.” The farmer looked thoughtful.

“I heard a tale once—of an order of knights sworn to oppose the Shadow. It was the mark of their order that they carried a dwarf-forged blade—on their backs to symbolise the burden of their oaths. They were supposed to have the Dragon tattooed over their hearts as well.”

So he had seen the tattoo when he was looking at the wound. Kormak cursed the fact he had adjusted his sword belt so that the scabbard hung from his shoulder, but then, after all these years he never felt comfortably carrying it in any other way. An unspoken question hung in the air but did not hang for long.

“Do you carry a dwarf-forged blade, warrior?”

Kormak knew he could simply say no. The moment would pass. These people would most likely be safe anyway behind the Elder Signs on their walls. They would never give up their daughter to make the thing in the darkness go away, would they?

And he was tired, weary from the wound. More than that. If truth be told he was tired of fighting, of killing. Mortally tired. If he said nothing, he could stay here by the fire for the night, and quietly slip away in the morning. Nobody would be any

the wiser except himself. For a moment that he wanted to do that more than anything in the world but the oath held him, the words of a boy stronger than the fear and weariness of a man. "I do."

"Then I ask of you this boon- protect us from the terrors of the night. Watch over while we sleep. Guard us, the children of the Sun, from the children of the Moon."

All their eyes were locked on him. Fear and hope shone in them. The words were spoken according to the rite. He could not refuse. He gave the ritual reply.

"I will guard you," he said. "This trust I will keep or this burden die carrying. Should I fail my brothers will take it up. On this I give my word."

He finished bandaging his wound and, weary though he was, picked up his sword once more. "I cannot stay to ward you so I will rid you of the monster this night."

As soon as he stepped into the wood Kormak knew there was something wrong. The quiet was menacing. He felt the presence of something other. By an effort of will he kept his hand away from the hilt of the broadsword. He wished he was wearing his mail of truesilver, which would burn the Old Ones with its touch.

Might as well wish for the sun, he thought and it was just past midnight. The full moon beamed down through the trees. He thought he saw the cold glitter of tiny beady eyes. He heard the sound of small things moving away through the underbrush but when he turned, there was nothing there. Mice, he told himself, but he knew they were not. Something stirred in the branches overhead and that was not an owl. This whole wood stank of the Old Ones. It had their signs all over it.

A dead tree stood, half-toppled, nearby. One branch pointed back along the path towards the farm, to safety. Go, it seemed to say. Flee while you can.

He strode deeper into the woods. With every step the feeling of menace increased. With every step he sensed hostile eyes upon him from the dark. At last, he found what he wanted. He came to the clearing, saw the symbol the moonchild had carved on the tree stump. He stood in the middle of the glade and shouted: "Speak. I know you are there."

Kormak held himself absolutely still. Something massive closed with him, coming through the trees, something pale and chill as the moon, mostly obscured by the branches of the trees. Were those teeth? Was that an eye? By the Sun, he thought, the thing was huge.

"You should not have come here, daychild." It was not remotely like a human voice. It was too low and too powerful, and its tones were too strange. There was a hunger in it. It was the voice of a great predator. If a lion could speak, thought Kormak, it would have a voice like that.

"You have broken the Law," said Kormak.

"It has been a long time since one of your kind has remembered the Law. Who are you to speak of it?"

"You know who I am. You know why I have come here."

"Where is your mail of true silver? Where is your white horse? Where is your lance with its dragon pennon fluttering in the breeze?"

"I left them behind. I thought I would give you a sporting chance."

“You stand there wounded with that accursed sword on your back, daychild, and you do not draw it, although I stand close enough to reach down and tear out your heart. Are you really that good?” There was amusement and contempt in the voice.

“If I draw this blade, I must kill you. I thought it better to give you warning first.” A roaring sound emerged from the blackness, the thunder of a pride of lions who have heard prey. It took Kormak a moment to realize it was laughter. Sniggers and shrieks echoed it all the way back through the forest. The laughter was horrible, the mirth of things old and cold and deadly. Were there really so many there, Kormak wondered?

“I ask you again, are you really that good with the blade?”

“There is only way you will find out. Do you wish to test me?”

“I know that sword, daychild. I know what it is. Do you?”

“Yes.”

“So if I kill you there will be one less Guardian of the Dawn.”

“If you kill me, two more like me will come. If you kill them, four. If you kill them, twice as many again. And on and on until you are dead. The Order is a great machine. Behind it stand all the Armies of the Morning. But first you will have to kill me and I am not a little girl.”

“Let us talk while I make up my mind about killing you.” Kormak stood ready. He recalled Master Ibrahim’s words. Show no fear, no weakness. The Children of the Moon will respect that.

“By all means. We have all night.”

“I remember that blade,” said the leonine voice. “Areon the Bold carried it at Brightmere.”

A faint shock passed through Kormak’s mind. Areon had been in his grave for a thousand years.

“He killed my brother Masarion with it.” A clue there, Kormak thought, although the conclusion it led him to was not a bright one. The thing out there was something infinitely worse than a Troll.

“I give you greetings then, Telurion,” he said.

“You know your history,” said the moonchild. “Perhaps you are what you say. Since you know my name, it is only polite for you to give me yours.”

“I am Kormak mak Kaine.”

“I have heard that name. They say you are the best to bear that blade since Areon. Myself, I do not see it.”

“They say you are not what your brother was so perhaps we will prove well matched.” Again that thunderous laughter rang out. It went on for a long time. He knew he was being tested and that the Old Ones did not judge as humans judge.

“I smell blood on your hands and I see men on your trail.”

How did he know that, Kormak wondered? The Sight was not known to be among Telurion’s gifts. Perhaps he would have something to add to the Records if he lived through this night.

“I killed a Son of the Shadow back in Sturmgarde.”

“And they hunt you for that? I would have thought they would be grateful.”



“Unfortunately, his fellow citizens were not aware of the nature of his crimes. The city guard found me as I passed sentence on him. I was not gentle with them as I made my departure.”

“You skulk in the dark and murder your own kind where once you would have rode openly forth to battle. Your order seems greatly diminished these days. Are you sure you are worthy to uphold the ancient Law?”

Kormak was no longer sure but he said: “To end the long wars between our peoples the Children of the Moon swore to keep to their lands and leave my people unmolested. Do you foreswear that oath?” Kormak steeled himself. Swift death could be the only outcome if the answer was the wrong one.

“Your people no longer respect the ancient borders.”

“And your people can and have punished them for their transgressions. As I will punish you for yours, for that is the task of my order. These are not your lands.”

“Who are you to speak to me of punishment, mortal? I was old when this land was young. I have lived ten thousand years and will live ten thousand more after you are gone.”

“Not unless you respect the Law.”

“Bearing that blade does not make you Areon. You must know how to use it as he did.”

“I can use it well enough. I ask again, do you foreswear the oath?”

The bushes bulged outwards as if displaced by a great weight. He waited for the monster to loom into view but it did not although it was closer now than before, still partially hidden by the leaves.

“I do not fear that blade.”

“You fled from it once. You abandoned your brother’s body on the field of Brightmere as you ran from its wielder. Will you leave these lands or must we fight?”

“I have always regretted leaving my brother behind that night. You mortals cannot understand how much I do. We attended the court of the Lady together before she turned her face from us. We roamed the Wildwood before the coming of the Elves and strode across the great ocean before ever the ships of your ancestors sailed it. We composed poems to the beauty of the Stormfangs before the Dwarves tunneled there, or the first citadel reared its dark towers over the deserts of ash. We fought in battles the like of which you will never see in this diminished age—when the Powers uprooted mountains and boiled lakes in their fury. All of that ended on Brightmere field.”

“I am sorry for your loss. Had your brother not chosen to steal the Sun King’s daughter perhaps you need not have suffered it.”

“I have long thought about that blade you bear, mortal. I have long considered what it means to my kind.”

“It means death.”

“I have lived long, mortal, and I have seen your kind drive my people into the wastes of this world. I am tired of running. I am tired of being driven forth by your sorcerers and your spells and your cold silver blades.”

“You have made your choice then and we must fight...”

For a long time there was no answer. Kormak raised his hand to the hilt of his sword. The silence deepened then it seemed like the night sighed. He sensed

another presence, heard words hissed in the Old Tongue so quickly that he could not make them out. What was being said there, he wondered. What news had been brought to Telurion?

“We will not fight tonight, mortal. I will leave these petty farmers you guard in peace.”

“You swear it in the name of the Lady and your hope of forgiveness?”

“I swear in the name of Our Lady of the Moon and my hope of her forgiveness that I will not trouble them for as long as they live.”

That was not an oath any of the Old Ones would foreswear but Kormak did not like the wording of it at all.

“Then go in peace, Child of the Moon.”

“We will meet again, you and I. That night I may not be so friendly.”

“Nor may I.”

“Go in peace, Guardian of the Dawn.”

Mocking laughter followed Kormak as he strode from the woods. He was certain he knew why. It took all his strength of will to keep him from running.

The farmhouse was silent. He could hear the neighing of many horses in the stable. He could smell something on the wind that he had smelled before. The stink of burning human flesh was not something he could ever forget.

He moved closer to the door and heard the men inside. There were a lot of them. A quick glance at the stables told him at least ten, judging by the number of horses. His pursuers had been determined. They had ridden on even under the full moon's light. He supposed weight of numbers must have given them confidence.

Kormak slid closer to the door. They had left no sentries outside. No man wanted to wait out doors alone when the Children of the Moon were abroad.

Light shone through the door frame. They had kicked the door in. The farmer had not been as hospitable to a large group of armed men as he had been to Kormak and he had paid the price. High pitched near-hysterical laughter echoed within the cottage walls. He steeled himself and stepped through the door.

They were a group of rough looking men in the garb of the Sturmgarde city watch. Kormak recognized one of them, a brawny fellow with a bushy moustache and a bald head. He had a bandage tied round the bicep that Kormak had pinked earlier. In the gloom it took them some time to realize he was there.

The little girl was dead on the floor. Her mother lay close by, hands stretched out in death trying to reach her daughter. There was blood pooled in one of her eyes. It had overflowed and dribbled down onto the earthen floor. It was easy to see what had happened here. His experienced eye read the signs as if they were the pages of a book.

The guard had burst in. They had started to question the family. The farmers had not answered to their satisfaction. One of the intruders had seized the girl and threatened her. That was when the boy had run forward and got his brains smashed out by a panicky man.

Fear and anger had gotten out of hand, and there had been a bloodbath. The old farmer lay near his wife, a massive hole gaping in his chest. The eldest son lay sprawled near the fire. His face was burned. His pitchfork lay close at hand. He

must have taken half a dozen wounds and fallen into the fire. The guard had dragged him forth. That was what the smell of burning was.

It could have been worse, Kormak thought. When the stink had hit his nostrils, he had expected torture. The old man's words came back to him. Dead is dead. It does not matter how you got that way.

All this had happened when he had been standing in the wood debating with the moonchild. And Telurion had known. This was the news he had been brought. He had sworn his oath knowing that it was already past the point where he would ever have to keep it.

The city guards noticed him then. Their leader looked up from where he sprawled in the chair. "I knew they had hidden you somewhere," he said. "You were stupid to come out of hiding but no matter. We would have found you in the morning."

"You should not have come here," said Kormak. "You should not have done this."

"And you should not have killed our Mayor- he was a fat greedy bastard but we can't have people going around murdering whoever they like. It sets a bad example."

"One it seems you have followed."

The captain had the grace to look ashamed for a moment. "Things got out of hand."

He glanced at the rest of the guard and they too looked ashamed, and Kormak knew that their shame was his death warrant. They would not want to leave anyone alive who had witnessed this.

"Who killed the girl?" Kormak asked. "Who started this?"

"What does it matter?" asked the captain. He stood up and drew his sword from his scabbard. He was a big man and he wore chainmail.

"It matters to me."

"I did then, if it will make you happy. Consider your last request granted before we take you out and hang you. She gave us some cock and bull story about you going off to save her from monsters in the dark. She would not change even when I cut her."

Kormak looked at the small corpse. I am sorry, he thought. The monsters came from the dark and I could not save you. They came looking for me and I was not here so they killed you instead. The man with the wounded arm interrupted his train of thought.

"Hanging's too easy for this bastard. He almost killed me today. He should pay for that in blood."

"I was trying not to kill you," said Kormak softly.

They laughed as if he had made a joke. They were still laughing as the first of them died, still amazed by the speed with which the blade had appeared in Kormak's hand. He slashed the next nearest guard across the belly. Dwarf-forged steel ripped chainmail as if it were made of wool. A man's stomach opened. His entrails spilled forth.

They looked at him astonished, not quite understanding what was happening, that one man was attacking them all. Three more died before they could react, skull split, heart pierced, an arm severed at the elbow.

One guard brought a horse axe sweeping down towards Kormak's head. He took the man's hands off at the wrists, turning his head slightly to avoid the blood gushing from the stumps. He buried his blade up to its hilt in the captain's stomach, passing it right through his body, and then pulled it free twisting it on the way out. The captain fell to the ground screaming.

Kormak turned and saw the rest of the soldiers fleeing out into the night.

The full moon beamed down. When he heard the roaring of the Moon's Children, Kormak took a chair by the fire and waited, doing his best not to look at the corpses of the people he had failed to protect.

It took a long time for the screaming outside to stop.

