

# PATH OF THE SAVIOUR

SEMITA SALVATORIS

BOOK ONE OF THE GAIA TRILOGY

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# D.R.ELLIS

# PROLOGUE

*Sanctum*  
*Dreadnoque*  
*Deathspire Valley*

Dominating and suppressing large black mountains flanked the small band of bedraggled warriors as they crept along the mountain pass. The sun was cowering behind the thick opaque blanket of night sky, not even the moon dared shine too bright. The tips of the towering subjugating rocks either side of the small military troupe were shrouded in grey clouds full of promise for rain and misery. The ground was still wet from the previous assault by the elements and the boots of the soldiers were soaked through, their footsteps squelching in protest with each forward movement; they were voicing the unspoken grievances of the boot wearers into the dark and treacherous terrain. The news of the loss of the battle they were sent to win would not go down well with their leader, however, to *not* report the result would be just as risky when the information finally reached their master. The most forward member of their group came to a sudden halt. Those following, with their heads bowed in submission, collided into one another.

“Why’ve you stopped?” snarled one of the hooded members towards the back. “Keep going before the rain returns.”

His protest was met with a sequence of groans of agreement.

“I don’t wanna go any further into this hellhole,” the male leader replied, spitting on the floor to reinforce his point.

“You think *we* do?” asked another. This time the voice was that of a woman, one of the three that made up their eight-person team. She marched forwards and smashed through the arm of the previous leader, almost knocking the fatigued and beaten soldier to the floor. The retinue continued on their way and almost immediately the originally threatening clouds began their barrage.

The rain fell in stair rods, battering the already downhearted walkers. There was no cover between the mountains so they had no choice but to walk headlong into the wet abyss before them.

It wasn't much longer before one of the group collapsed to the floor in a coughing fit. His allies watched idly as a woman near the back crouched to help. The little care she could offer was unable to stop the convulsing warrior as he coughed up blood until lying still in a pool of bloodied water. The woman closed the deceased man's eyes and motioned the others to continue their journey. This wasn't the first they had lost to the damp and the cold.

The group wished to travel as fast as they could but the low morale and poor physical state of the travellers meant they could only trudge through the mountain pass. All were soaked through to their skins, armour becoming heavy and many were beginning to stumble before having to grit their teeth and pull themselves to their feet again.

"I'm not going any further!" one of the fallen men for the fifth time shouted when he finally regained his feet. "Why should we always be the ones to march up and down Sanctum, going from region to region, doing *her* dirty work when she's so powerful herself? I'm done. *She* can do it herself; if she wants access to this 'other world' so much then she can damn well—"

The man was stopped mid-rant by a hand round his throat. The aggressor squeezed until the indignant warrior's face became purple, then he released his grip. The release didn't signal the end of the violence, however. When the colour returned to the face of the soldier and he had finished wheezing, the attacker came again. This time he lifted the man by his arms and threw him into the mountainside. The others were trying to pull him away from his prey now, but the eyes of the aggressor were flaming with hate and malice; he easily brushed aside those trying to stop him. The boots of the man throwing his comrade around like a rag doll were thundering against the ground sending up water with each heavy step. He grabbed his quarry and bashed his head against the hard, cold rock. The target's cranium caved in like a crushed watermelon and his eyes bloodied from the impact. The deathly blow was not enough for the enraged brute who continued to smash the head of his opponent off the jagged stones until it was pulp-like in his huge hands. The lifeless body was left twitching on the floor, blood

seeping from his mortal wounds mixing with the rain as it fell.

"Does anyone else have an issue with our mission?" the huge man growled to all those staring at the destruction before them. The silent reply was a resounding 'No' from those asked. The huge man wiped his bloody hands on his armour and picked off a coarse black hair that was stuck to his palm with bodily fluids.

The company arrived at their destination a short while later, the pace having somewhat quickened after the vicious assault – no one wishing to risk getting on the monstrosity's bad side. Despite being the end of their horror-fuelled journey the mood of the group didn't improve. Their terminus was Deathspire, the base of their ruler. The tower was carved from the mountain and stretched three hundred metres into the dark night sky, the top not visible from the ground in such torrid conditions, thinning to a needlepoint at its apex. A sculptured body impaled through the abdomen sat atop the mighty tower. The length of the structure was covered in sharp jagged rocks that made it impossible to climb without becoming impaled or dying a death by a thousand cuts. The three men and three women left of their force were faced with great iron doors at the entrance to the tower. The doors were inlaid with serpentine shapes and a large metallic snake head protruded from each of the doors. Water slowly dripped from the exposed fangs of the snakes looking venom-like from the beasts' mouths as if to warn of the dangers of entering. Nevertheless, they hadn't come this far to turn back now and so they used their combined strength to push one of the giant doors open and begin their ascent. The door squealed and moaned as a final warning to those about to enter, but the warriors paid it no mind. They were faced with a giant spiral staircase lined with torches in the wall; it was the final obstacle before coming face to face with their master. Their legs were already weary from the long walk and so the staircase was a huge ask, however, no one complained in fear of what the brute in their company may do. Some steps were cracked despite the building not being very old and many torches had extinguished leaving large parts of the climb in complete darkness. The tower had many different levels, each with even more locked doors; a shriek emanating from behind each one. The scream was sometimes that of a woman, high-pitched and shrill

and other times a man, low and torturous. Different sounds and pleas but always a scream. They were crawling rather than walking by the time they reached the peak of the building and their whole bodies ached from head to toe. The six of them were unaware of what they were about to face, none had been permitted to see the leader of their faction before; normally messages were to be passed on to war chiefs. The brute led the way with the others following close behind. He led them through the first open door they had come across in the tower, the brightest place they had seen since entering the cursed region of Dreadnoque. The light reflected from the room's many torches and made the group's eyes squint as they entered. When they finally adjusted to the brightness they saw a figure sitting cross-legged on the floor in the centre of the room. The door slammed behind them then they heard the bolt slide across, sealing them in. One of the women turned to look but there was no one there. The door had been locked from the outside. When she turned again to face the figure, she saw that it had risen to a standing position. A sudden violent gust of wind plunged the room into absolute darkness. Shivering, she pulled her clothing tight to her body as she realised the warmth of the room fled with the light. The drenched attire only served to increase the shivering, however, and the drips from her nose marked the beginnings of a likely terminal chill. A voice came from the darkness: demonic, feminine, full of hate and dripping with a thirst for power.

"You've failed in your mission again." The statement echoed around the stone room.

One of the men began to reply with, "They have it too well-guarded, there's no—"

"SILENCE!" came the order from the shadow. "I've lost patience with your futile attempts." Then the door could be heard unlocking again before suddenly crashing open.

"Screamers!" cried one of the women as she went to draw her weapon. The action to protect herself was not quick enough, however, as the weary woman was crashed to the floor under the force of her charging opponent. Her throat was ripped out with blade-like claws and her final shriek filled the chamber. The others leapt into action. They managed to draw their weapons despite their fear and hacked

at the assaulting forces. When they felled one of the evil creatures it screamed as it died. They couldn't see the number of their foe through the darkness but for every one they killed it seemed to be replaced by two more screeching and howling enemies. The brute was leading the defence, his great two-handed claymore sword sweeping backwards and forwards, wiping out the approaching evil. He was calling to his comrades, they replied how their defence was progressing but after a short time they were not responding to his calls and screamers were closing in from all angles. The brute's claymore was ripped from his hands and he felt his arm get cut by one of the blades from the dark. He fell to his knees but still managed to break the neck of another opponent that charged him. The cuts were becoming more frequent now as the screamers found gaps in his armour and buried him under the sheer volume of their numbers. He was not going to give in that easily. He exploded outwards and sent the smaller enemies flying away from him. He used the moment's respite to try to find his claymore but was unable to locate it in the dark. Nevertheless, he did find a corpse of one of the screamers. Fumbling in the blackness he situated the hand tipped with the sharp blade-like claw at the end and tried to rip it from the beast's arm. There was a crack as the wrist bone snapped off under the brute's superhuman strength. Wielding the fiendish hand, he used the blade to cut his way through a further eight approaching screamers desperate for his blood. The carnage was immense and the brute was beginning to tire and become overwhelmed when the voice returned.

"Stop," he thought he heard it whisper, the soft voice somehow cutting through the blood-curdling cries of the beasts. Suddenly the screamers that had pinned him down and were moments ago trying to kill him jumped up and retreated into the night. The light returned to the room and the figure with the demonic voice was above him. "You're still useful," she said with a slight reptilian hiss. "What's your name?"

The brute struggled to his feet and looked upon his master for the first time. A robe draped her body to hide her features. "Gregorius," he snarled, unimpressed she had tried to kill him. He wasn't stupid enough to try to attack, though; he knew even he was no match for her.

“Well Gregorius, it’s time you returned to the war, I think.”

He could see a smile under the hood. A killer smile full of pointy snake-like teeth.

“Take these,” she motioned to the remaining screamers whom he had not killed. “They won’t try to hurt you now. Go cause some pain to the rebels.”

Rather reluctantly, Gregorius took the screamers and left the room to undertake his mission. He would have been killed there and then if he refused.

When the brute left, the robed figure signalled her war chiefs to reveal themselves from the shadows. Out of the wings emerged a huge man that would have made the large Gregorius look small. His master had previously tried to bind him to a bear, enabling him to transform between the two, but the magic failed leaving him extremely hairy arms and brute strength. The brown-skinned man wore a white turban covered in bloodstains and a dirty vest which left his hairy arms exposed. The man wielded a long cleaver the size of a sword. Beside him scuttled a small woman with a shaved head. She was slight of build and walked slightly bent over. Despite the difference in appearance and size, the woman was no less deadly, as many had found out to their peril.

“Butcher. Amazon. Thanks for coming,” the cloaked female said as means of introduction.

The small woman with the shaved head bowed down and said, “It’s an honour to be in your presence, master.”

“Rise, Amazon, I think of you more as a friend than a subject.” Again, her pointy-toothed smile protruded from her hood. “I’ve invited you both here today in the hope I can finally open up a rift between our world and theirs for you to start the retrieval of the artefacts.”

Butcher scoffed, “Another one of these... The only way to reach the other world is through Magellan Castle. You know that, why waste your time?”

“Because you can’t get access to the castle! Every time you try you *fail*.” Her hood slipped from her head through her anger and revealed her dark green eyes and long black hair. Her skin was becoming scaly, and the beginnings of a tattoo could be seen on her neck of a snake

which coiled round her back and abdomen. She used to be beautiful but magic and power had led her down a path that brought her to her looks now. She calmed herself and continued: “I’ll use Gaia to create the portal. I won’t be able to hold it open for long so you two must be ready to enter with no questions asked. I’m sending these with you.”

Fifty screamers hobbled into the room and sat breathing heavily, awaiting command.

“Your primary objective is retrieval of the artefacts, however, there are those loyal to Tombstone out there, they just don’t know it yet. Find them and convince them of their allegiance.”

Butcher cracked his fingers together and smiled alongside Amazon at the violence associated with their brand of convincing.

“Butcher is to take test subjects; I want to see if I can create the same bestial humanoids on their world as I’ve managed here. When you have them ready, I’ll know, then I’ll attempt the transformation across worlds. Keep record of my progress.”

Butcher grunted in agreement, he never was one for data collection, more debt collection.

“Finally, Amazon, when you’ve convinced some of the pathetic vermin to join our cause ensure they start spreading the word of my coming. I want them to have an army of their own when I get there.”

Once convinced her war chiefs understood their mission, she pulled out what appeared to be a glowing rock from her robe and closed her eyes, beginning to mutter an incantation. The rock glowed and her eyes shot open. They were no longer green but completely black.

A searing bright light made Butcher and Amazon shield their faces whilst the screamers lived up to their name. Butcher braved a look at great risk to his vision. “Unbelievable,” he growled in his deep, gruff voice.

The portal was open.

“Quick! You know your mission,” demanded the sorceress, her voice higher pitched and more pained than normal.

Without further instruction, Amazon leapt through the portal and Butcher followed with the screamers in tow. The last screamer didn’t make it before the vortex closed, the body having been separated from the legs and the beast’s disjointed parts dropped to the ground with a thud.

The conjurer collapsed in an exhausted pile on the floor. She would be unable to open it for so long again, but if her plan was executed correctly, she wouldn't have to. Whilst looking at the legs of the unlucky screamer beside her, a grin played across her exhausted face, then the smile became a small chuckle before erupting into a full murderous laugh. "I've done it! The downfall of Earth begins today."