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Casey, Damien (author) Zorn, The Fall of Shakul Amir

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Casey, Damien M (author) The Fall of Shakul Amir

The Fall of Shakul Amir

The pages that follow are drawn from the Ancient Scrolls — sacred records preserved within the Great Hall of the longhouse in Sharitar, the Medulkhan capital, and consulted only in times of unrest.

They recount fallen empires, forbidden sorcery, and the tragic metamorphosis of a once-noble soul. Long before the present age of tribal conflict and awakening powers, these events reshaped the destiny of Sharquill Jeron in ways not yet fully understood. It was in seeking answers for the imprisoned Rocklord, Lord Oberon, that Zorn and Skoll first turned to these forgotten testimonies.

What they uncovered would challenge everything they believed about power, loyalty and the unseen forces guiding their world. Proceed with care.....

The dual suns set low over the horizon as they had done for millions of years. Extinct volcanoes, forgotten relics of ages long since passed, stretched into the sky, painted with memories of blood-red hues, silent sentinels in testament to the ravages the planet had endured. This was a world of silent attrition, a world of survival, conquest and eternal conflict.

To the north, the beautiful, tropics of the Okapi Forests remained serene and tranquil unchanged by the ravages of time, a supreme environment flushed with growth and evergreen splendour. Life abounded. Towering trees pointed their branches towards the sky, covered in long, flowering tendrils of vines in their never-ending search for light. Massive trees, fallen in defiance of time and energy, bridged the many precipices and chasms of doom that awaited exploration. This was a world of pristine evolution. Torrential rains covered the lands in blankets of white-washed water that sprung eternally from the mountainsides and tumbled down into the unknown darkness below.

To the south of the Okapi forests, the wonderful Elves of the Khu Inith clans of Eshlon Valkarythe dwelled. Ruled by Queen Shelara, the elves of this royal protectorate lived in fear and retribution. Only through a tense negotiation with the Blizzard Wizards was Queen Shelara allowed to remain in governance. It was an eternal struggle between moral obligation and forced servitude. Time was her enemy, but strength of character remained her friend.

To the east, the mountains of the giant Rocklords' domain remained unconquered by foes who dared to oppose them. Within this sanctuary of rock and mineral, the mighty Rocklord, Lord Oberon, dwelled, protected by mystery, history and the savage bonds of sorcery that so assiduously incarcerated him. It was a glorious world encircled by a perilous mountain range inhabited by dragons untamed in spirit and purpose; an entirely isolated world chosen by sorcerers who condemned the spirit and lives of the Rocklords to an existence of perpetual entrapment.

Further south, the dreaded, Akoomian Fire-breathing Devils cast their flames over an ancient city buried in tradition, commerce and history. Half-cast brothers and sisters to their demonic cousins, the Blizzard Wizards, the Fire Devils sought acceptance over the millennia, yet equality was never realized. A tenuous agreement termed 'The Covenant of Valencia' was broken beyond political redemption and will and soaked in blood by the many battles that forged its existence. Only the savagery of wars would or could restore the balance. Despite the omnipresent, communal feelings of loss and aggression, Shakrel Akoom remained a wondrous place full of ancient, alien technology framed by soaring domes towering into the sky and grounded in historical architecture. Indeed, the archaic beauty belied the mood simmering silently within.

Across the vast, Southern Plains that bridged east to west, the southern, polar ice caps were home to the dreaded Blizzard Wizards and their menagerie of frost-breathing devil spawn. Imbued with a seismic sense of ancestral, genetic breeding rights, these arrogant half-cousins to the Fire-breathing Devils awoke from their temporary hibernation to cast Sharquill Jeron into an infinite world of irrepressible darkness and shadows. Paradoxically, their world gleamed and shimmered in crystalline valleys and mountains of minerals and ice, an eternal, permafrosted landscape shaped by countless sheets of glacial ice and snow. For two hundred years, they had stayed silent, but, now awakened from their slumber, the Lords of the League implemented a proliferation program destined for the annals of history. That kings, queens, sorcerers and now emperors should try to tame the lands and the wandering herds of gypsies and tribes gave rise to never-ending wars and conflicts. Sharquill Jeron trembled with a voice and energy heard from afar.

Nearby and due east, the beautiful swamps of the Everglades rose and fell in tidal subservience. Creatures of all persuasion hid among the crevices and waters, remnants of territories once

flushed with marine life. Further north to the interior lay the Great Plains, the deserts and northern prairies. This was the domain of the ferocious, Medul Khan warriors. Steeped in tradition and ancient value, the Medul Khan were a hierarchical force to be reckoned with. Proud, defiant humanoids, these tribal warriors followed in the traditions of their forebears, a hunting-gathering people versed in tradition and trained in Medul Khan warfare. At this point in time thirteen thousand years into the future, the Medul Khan were ruled by Barthuzza, a noble and spirited warrior of the Caragillian clan of Sharitar. Peace was sought, but never attained. Fighting amongst the clans was commonplace. Alliances were tested and broken. Confusion reigned.

Now, the time had come for Zorn, the magnificent, Medul Khan warrior and his father, Skoll, to investigate the possibilities for their freedom and understand history. Their quest was to uncover the truth why Lord Oberon, the mighty Rocklord, had suffered at the hands of the ancient sorcerers, a truth that began in the dense, canopied woods of the Okapi forests...

Zorn looked skyward. The rusty, red hues of the suns setting over the brow of the hill gave him some comfort. It had been a long journey north looking for the legendary Oracle, and he was worried about his mother and Kye back home. However, as luck would have it, the Oracle discovered their campsite only a few hours walk from his hovel in the hills. Soon Zorn, Skoll and Bolshkar, the ferocious warrior bear, were ensconced inside his primitive surroundings as the stale stench of rotting animal parts and various concoctions of potions saturated the air. Zorn was eager to know of the equally legendary Lord Benedict Oculus, a human wizard credited with inventing the miraculous 'pure essence' of time, a powerful time-traveling fuel. However, he need not have worried. Lord Oculus' telepathy was well attuned to the Medul Khan warriors' senses.

I'm sorry, Zorn, but believe me when I tell you that to meddle with the future can have dire consequences. The best answer I can

give you is to study the Ancient Scrolls. You will find your answers in the book of Zharabastion.

Having sought for information to release the mighty Lord Oberon from his incarceration, Zorn pressed for more answers, but without explanation the Earthly wizard quickly departed. Skoll felt some relief.

“Well, I suppose we’ll just venture home and study the Ancient Scrolls like Lord Oculus suggested. At least now we know what to look for.”

The Oracle thought he understood Lord Oculus’ intentions.

“I’m afraid I can’t be of any more assistance. I’m sure Benedict had his reasons to withhold information. Actually, I believe he was trying to protect you.”

Zorn appeared slightly frustrated, but nevertheless satisfied.

“Why should he care? He has no place in this world. If the rumors about him are true, then he only serves himself.”

“I can assure you that he does care. I’ve had many discussions with him. He knows only too well what it’s like to be subservient to the obsessive compulsions of wizards seeking power.”

“Then I will trust his judgement. Come, Zorn. We have work to do,” said Skoll.

After refreshing themselves and partaking in a healthy meal, Zorn, Skoll and Bolshkar departed the Oracle’s humble abode and travelled the dangerous journey all the way back to Sharitar. It was a long, arduous journey filled with moments of anticipation, tiredness and expectation of more discovery in the future. Unfortunately, a brief encounter with a wandering tribe of Farensuilian elves in the twilight hours caused a short, but uncomfortable delay from their travels when they attacked without provocation. Ever the protective spirit, Bolshkar leapt to the defenses of his master as he growled his mighty call to battle and slashed his paws with reckless abandon. Needless to say that the elves departed without offering as much as a whimper.

In the silence that followed, Zorn again gazed skyward. This was the second time they had been attacked. Was this simply divine intervention...or were there darker forces at play?

Within hours of their arrival and an emotional reunion with his family, Skoll and Zorn ventured to the Great Hall of the longhouse where the sacred Ancient Scrolls were housed. Old man Jelko, a legendary, Medulkhan warrior of years past, was assigned as the Keeper of the Scrolls who carefully unbound a portion before he released them into Skoll's serviceable care. After studiously reading and comprehending many of the laws and sacred rites of the Scrolls, Zorn stumbled across a chapter covered in dust whose historical words remained deeply buried in mystery and silence. It was a chapter on the final days of the great and distant emperor, Emperor Krillyon, as witnessed on the ancient planet of Shakul Amir by the primeval scribe, Kheti Taftani. With eyes glowing with apprehension and wonderment, Skoll and Zorn read the mystical words of the story.....

‘On the final dawn of Shakul Amir, the skies did not burn — they dimmed. A hush fell across the crystal towers and obsidian plains as though the planet itself had begun to hold its breath. Deep within the Imperial Sanctum, beneath vaulted domes etched with the lineage of emperors, four ancient stones pulsed with a fading light — the last living heartbeat of a dying world. And upon the fingers of Lord Zhar, the appointed guardian, that light trembled between salvation and exile. Despite Lord Zhar's unblemished record in service to his emperor, he was the chosen one, chosen to fulfil a destiny that no other Shakrelian lord could be trusted with. It was a difficult situation for Lord Zhar to contemplate. He had only ever wished to serve his people. However, serving the emperor and the high lords of the Shakrelian Legislative Assembly without question or reservation remained his highest and most noble duty.

All the while, unbeknown to everyone, judgement day had arrived. After many, long days, months and years of autocratic governance and battles inside the halls of the mighty, Shakrelian Legislative Assembly and on the battlefields, finally the time had arrived. In a sad and lonely world, Emperor Krillyon, Princess Jessalyn, the emperor's courtiers and the members of the Shakrelian Legislative Assembly were escorted to the Imperial Senate where Lord Vulchary, the imperious, Zhojenian leader, together with a gathering of his senior military staff were waiting. Everyone remained stony-faced as silence was brought to bear.

Amid the sagging eyes and sombre mood of the gathering Lord Vulchary stepped forward and intoned the charges of high treason against the Zhojenian people. Fear was omnipresent. The punishment was death if found guilty. It was succinct, direct and entirely expected. The Shakrelian High Command, these woeful, imperious dominators of destruction and persecutors of iron rule across countless eons, stood there motionless while the Zhojen rejoiced in their satisfaction to all and sundry. The weighted hand of justice had come at last, but not without a heavy cost.

With heads bowed down, they were led away while the Zhojen rejoiced in the verdict. Emperor Krillyon appeared empty of spirit, drained of feeling and broken in heart and mind as both a Shakrelian lord and master. Indeed, he felt the entire weight of the demise of his people upon his wearied shoulders. To that end, he tried valiantly, as a last reprieve, to plead for his daughter's life and safety. However, in consideration of the long suffering the Zhojen had endured, those pleas fell on deaf ears. General Korzak, a hugely important, military strategist of the time, gathered his intelligence together with Lord Vulchary as they tried to rid the scourge of the Shakrelian menace from the planet. Resistance was still felt in the western extremities particularly in Kalvinthsakoy where heavy bombardments of huge, ear-splitting, fissured bombs and gigantic, Zhojenian automotons reduced Shakrelian cities to piles of rubble. Yet, deluded by fanciful notions of victory, some

patriotic, Shakrelian warriors still managed to hold their positions. Despite all the hoopla and premature, triumphant celebration two brigades of the fifth division of the Shakrelian Imperial Infantry headed due south. They had unfinished business with the all-conquering Zhojenian army.

Tírat-Ór, the mighty, ancient Shakrelian stronghold and glittering city had fallen. Only days before that thought seemed a remote impossibility, but now it was a triumphant, Zhojenian reality. Even in the throes of death and disaster that Shakrelian never-say-die attitude of defiance and arrogance smouldered in the minds of generals and colonels like the musty stench of death that surrounded them. The Shakrelian High Command was in tatters: emotionally, geopolitically, culturally and militarily, yet with a last, communal vestige of strength, the final bastion of the Imperial Army set off towards Tír-Arsa, the ancient Zhojenian capital, with the single-minded determination to blow the Halls of Justice to hell. This last gasp offensive was commanded by General Jellon, a hard-core, hard-nosed Shakrelian commander if ever there was one. Now, with one, last, military card to play, General Jellon summoned his courage and remaining regiment before they set off on the long journey north to attack a triumphant foe with the two, remaining sonic blasters possessed within their arsenal. Still, full of hope and courage, the Shakrelian Imperial Army turned around and headed for Tír-Arsa. It was a seismic shift in their military strategy and totally unexpected. After hours of a grinding march, General Korg, an imperious, Shakrelian senator and officer, stationed his soldiers in the forest fringes abutting Tír-Arsa while the two, massive sonic blaster cannons were mobilized and put in place. In the dead silence of the night, the monstrous cannons boomed their sonic waves upon an unprotected city. Pandemonium ensued. Woooooosh- kabooooom! A giant, pulsing wave of sound energy crashed into Tír-Arsa bringing with it a catastrophic field of devastation. Eye witnesses reported that alien people were burnt to a crisp where they fell while the flames of hell engulfed

them in misery and turmoil. Powered by the magical stones' awesome energy, there was only enough reserve for two more strikes. Of course, this drastic last-minute attack brought a swift reply from Lord Vulchary whose message was just as devastating, cruel and uncompromising.'

Skoll and Zorn tried to absorb the magnitude of the words on the Scrolls. Truly, they were astounding and explained many things.

"I thought *we* were aggressive, but these ancient warriors left nothing to chance. To have that mighty power at their disposal must have been invigorating. I'm beginning to understand where we obtained the technology for our armor and magical shields. I believe our arsenal of weaponry originated from these catastrophic times," said Skoll.

"I agree. The ancient Medulkh never had weaponry like that at their disposal. It poses the question, Father: what is power without control? Look at what they did. They destroyed one another and then brought their tyranny to our shores. There is nothing to celebrate here, Father. They were a menace then as they are now."

"Zorn, this was a time when their planet was most divided. I'm beginning to understand how their alien weaponry combined with their arrogance and lust for power caused such a monumental catastrophe."

They read on....

'The attack on Tír-Arsa was sustained with military efficiency and control, but even *that* final effort could not prevent the Zhojen from utterly overwhelming all opposition in the Shakrelian capital. In the darkness amid the fire, dust and ashes, a reciprocal reckoning of military strength ensued, with neither side prepared to yield.

With a final ultimatum ignored for the release of the lords of the High Command, General Jellon ordered another strike on the defenseless, Zhojenian city. This time the energy force was

increased as the strike pummelled into Tír-Arsa with the force of two atomic bombs. A windswept shell of Tír-Arsa remained whose blackened core reeked of death and destruction. Moments later, thousands of wizard spear strikes blasted their fire into Tírat-Ór laying to waste an already devastated city. Fear was an omnipresent feeling as both sides contemplated the futility of their quest, yet that Shakrelian pride would not relent.

Now, the tide of the war had turned yet again as the silent flames of hell burnt both cities to a cinder. Sadly, this conflict seemed to have no end, with total destruction and annihilation as the only plausible destination. The faint pulse of life struggled on as the reality of armageddon edged slowly forward, a ticking time bomb grinding its way towards total, planetary extinction.'

Both Skoll and Zorn realized that the tyranny of the wizards was at play here and the pattern of their indomitable thirst for power was all too clear to see. Skoll inhaled a deep breath and then sighed.

"They were all fools. So many lives were lost. Did history teach them nothing? Now, I feel more depressed than ever. We're going down the same path, Zorn. The same steps towards extinction that the Shakrel took all those years ago."

"I sense it too, Father. It makes our discovery of these pages all the more urgent. It's fascinating and historically interesting, but we still don't have an answer for Lord Oberon's incarceration. Hmmm. I'm trying to put every piece of the puzzle together. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but we've determined that Lord Zol was given the sacred duty of finding the Oracle. If you think about it Lord Zol must have stayed in space for thousands of years to finally recognize his opportunity, and I know for a fact that the Oracle has the pure essence in his possession. It's actually quite amazing given that Lord Kruval was given the same duty thousands of years ago when his quest for obtaining the 'pure essence' was for exactly the same reason. We also know that Lord Zhar departed his planet before it exploded. I thought that was

myth, but we've discovered *that* truth as well. It only deepens the mystery. Father, I understand all these historical facts, and the only conclusion I can make is that we must ask the Oracle to help us."

"Zorn, you know he won't part with that magical substance and it's not our place to ask him. You heard yourself Lord Occulus' thoughts. The answer is in this blasted book somewhere."

Although they felt tired and somewhat defeated, they ploughed on as Zorn read aloud....

'The planet was literally on its last legs. Although the Zhojen remained triumphant in victory, it had come at a huge cost. Senseless seemed to be the most apt descriptor. A black futility swept across the lands, larger than the life that had sustained it. A dogmatic, residual feeling of a slow, permanent death. The stench of betrayal, cowardice and misunderstanding remained like a vile odour still faintly traceable on the breeze. It was attuned to the senses as any fragrant odour of malice. Beneath the surface, the planet's pulsing life force felt the strain, the continual vibrations of massive conflict and the deadly consequences of poisonous, alien technology. Time ticked on albeit at a deathly pace.

All the while, it was reported that Lord Vulchary felt mixed emotions, but mostly unimaginable frustration and fury. It was a life-long obsession to seek justice for his people, a process that would never yield again to Shakrelian dominance. Had logical reason prevailed, the Shakrel's grievous injustices upon Lord Vulchary's people might have been mitigated and at best — avoided. However, consistent with Shakrelian philosophy and cultural norms, it was reported that the hostages' freedom was denied. No. The Shakrel were guilty of sins against the common people and they deserved to be punished no matter the consequences. Stoically and stubbornly, Lord Vulchary refused to entertain any other train of thought as the hours of the night ticked by and morning approached.

All the while, Astilbe and Personas, the twin suns of Shakul-Amir, arose over the horizon as they had done for six billion years.

Was this a cosmic sign? A sign of determined survival? The time for the High Command's executions had arrived. In silence and bound in chains, Emperor Krillyon and his closest advisors were escorted to the remaining rubble of a wall still left standing after many months of bombardment. It was a poignant reminder of the devastation his imperious policies caused the Zhojen and rule of law that accompanied it.

In a final observation of the emperor's mood and temperament, it was thought that his face and mood was as dark as the ashes that floated in the air around him. Lord Xahl, Lord Zol and Lady Zundrick, the three imperious Lords of the Assembly, were then led towards the firing squad. It was a long, lonely walk in single file to the brow of the hill where the Zhojenian soldiers awaited them. Silently and belligerently, they walked towards the rising suns as time marched forward towards their finality. After being given the last rights, they were lined up before the soldiers took aim with their laser guns when...boooooooooom!!

Totally unexpectedly, a huge artillery shell blasted into the line of the soldiers executing their duty. Eyewitnesses then heard these immortal words: "Save the emperor!"

All of a sudden, what appeared to be a routine execution turned into a frenzied battle zone as lasers and cannon fire pierced the air. Hundreds of Shakrelian infantry then charged out of the forest fringe who peppered the opposing Zhojen with sonic and laser blasts. Within a few minutes, the Zhojen retreated as the advancing soldiers defended their own. It was reported that the emperor's eyes grew wide with pride and relief.'

Skoll and Zorn were amazed of not only the factual recordings of that fateful day, but the unusual turn of events.

"It was always my understanding that Emperor Krillyon died. I know for a fact that Lord Zhar came to our planet after he visited that distant planet of Earth. The Scrolls haven't explained that yet."

“Read on, Father. I’m sure we’ll get to that. What amazes me is that this account is so accurate and factual, and I believe everything I’m reading. The Shakrel were just as arrogant and superior then as they are now. Some things are just cast in stone.”

Skoll and Zorn then took it in turns to read aloud....

‘Smashing and crashing, the huge, Zhojenian automatons thundered towards Tírat-Ór. It was a frightening noise to witness made more frightening by the thousands of alien soldiers who trailed in the mighty machines’ wake. A perfectly cloudless sky suffered the saturation of heavy artillery fire as the Shakrelian defense blasted the incoming tide of the Zhojenian attack. The sounds of war were horrific when the sonic blasters and quasar beams lit-up the sky in a blazing trail of fury. Still, General Korzak, an imperious, Zhojenian commander, was not satisfied. In control of the massive Deathship, nothing was left to chance as the fires of armageddon were released upon a hapless and hopeless enemy in the heart of Tírat-Ór.’

Skoll and Zorn felt mystified and amazed by such reckless action. It was hard for them to understand that thousands of years ago life was so technologically advanced and yet so brutal. It was a blessing in disguise that only the fractured remains of such cruel cultures remained to the present day. The magical shields, armor and weaponry survived this autocratic armageddon whilst the Medulkh’s own culture seemed to have gone full circle; a step back as it were to the ancient ways of their forebears, a blended union of the ancient and futuristic.

“I thought *we* were savages, but these ancients killed without a second thought. We must learn the lessons of history, Zorn. We must find a way to preserve our own.”

“I agree, Father. The answer must be here somewhere, but where?”

Zorn continued.....

‘Long was this night of terror and intimidation. With resounding enthusiasm, General Korzak’s soldiers released their living torment in a hell’s fire display of unwanton vengeance upon their Shakrelian foe. Cries rang out into the middle of the night as limbs were slashed and bodies slaughtered. Trails of blood soaked the city’s streets as the death count climbed. Nothing it seemed would stop the Zhojenian advance, that Tírat-Ór would fall completely before the night’s end.

Having been saved from death’s calling, Emperor Krillyon was escorted to his bunker deep within the Shakrelian capital. It was here, in the final hours of his reign, that it was thought that he commanded Lord Zhar to protect his daughter, Princess Jessalyn, and authorized him to travel to the distant planet of Earth with the four stones of power, a genetically-coded, magnificently powerful force of life-maintaining energy, to be worn as four rings on his right hand. History suggests that Lord Zhar followed the emperor’s command without question’.

Skoll interjected.

“I know this to be true. My father always told me that Lord Zhar came to Sharquill Jeron to protect us, although I don’t know why. Sometimes it’s hard to separate fact from fiction, Zorn, but I do know that he defeated Parathos and confiscated his powerful stone.”

Zorn read on....

‘Confusion abounded. Amid the tyranny, the terror and the telepathy, only the closest advisors remained near the emperor: Lord Zoren Xahl, Lord Jarius Zol and Lady Xandra Zundrick, a few personal guards of the High Command and a certain historical figure by the name of Lord Griswald Halifax, later indoctrinated into the annals of history as Elchorn of Halifax. It remains unclear why an Earthly representative of the ancient order of Omniachian druids should be present on this dreaded day, but it is thought that he travelled to Tírat-Ór to offer advice to the emperor on the

theories of ‘Molecular Synthesis’, a time-travelling theory and information regarding the ‘pure essence’, a time-travelling potion invented by the legendary, Earthly wizard, Lord Benedict Occulus. If all factual accounts of this encounter are indeed accurate, it would explain how the emperor designated the use of the ‘pure essence’ to facilitate time-travel for the chosen few. To this day, it remains the only plausible theory that saved Lord Xahl, Lord Zol and Lady Zundrick from an unknown fate. Eye witness accounts testify to the fact that Lord Zol was given the duty to find the mythical Oracle, believed to be a distant figure in the future whose prophecied encounter with the Earthly wizard would change the course of history.

Finally, as the death knell tolled, Emperor Krillyon executed his duties as testified by witnesses at the time when he opened the glass vial Lord Halifax gifted him whose swirling, magical, golden dust sent Lord Xahl on a time-defying, never-ending, cosmic journey into space who was now trapped inside a bubble of infinite, spiritual unrest. Lord Zol’s physical body was also dematerialized, but his soul remained intact as he, too, traveled the boundless plains of space in search of the Oracle of Sharquill Jeron.’

Zorn was gobsmacked.

“It all makes sense, Father. The Oracle is mentioned here. That tells me that all these theories are true and time-travel was initiated by *that* human sorcerer whoever he was. Hmmm. It has been foretold that this wizard shall send a witch to me in the future. No doubt she shall try to win my allegiance, but I shall negate anything that she offers me.”

“Hmmm. Well, judging by the accuracy of the words of the Scrolls, you had better be on your guard, Zorn. I understand that this human wizard’s sorcery is thought to be most persuasive.”

“I’ve dealt with the wizards of this planet since they’ve awoken from their slumber, Father. Why should *he* be any different? They all seem to be tarred with the same, demonic brush if you ask me.”

“I wouldn’t disagree.”

Skoll glanced down at the Scrolls once more before he found an accompanying document. A relatively new scribe had penned his thoughts some two hundred years later. As recorded by Kane Hadjeput, Skoll continued when he read aloud....

‘No recorded account has ever revealed the fate of Lady Zundrick, the faithful Lords of the League Commander, but it is thought she still wanders through the paranormal planes of space trapped in a spiritual time capsule. Infrequent, telepathic communications have been recorded of Lord Zol making conversations with ancient, human wizards and sorcerers. Though the communications were recorded, the identity of the wizards could not be uncovered. However, the legendary Elchorn of Halifax, who was known to visualize the past, the present and the future through an ungodly, Earthly device labelled ‘The Eye of Oculus’, was identified. This validation gives credence to the belief that he was actually present by the side of the Shakrelian emperor before his untimely death further giving credence to the fact that Emperor Krillyon did, in fact, issue his last will and testament. This miraculous set of circumstances set off a series of events that remains unclear, however, factual evidence suggests that Lord Kruval, an imperious, Shakrelian senator, was assigned the task to find this mystical wizard and convince him to use the ‘pure essence’ to bring back those faithful, Shakrelian lords from the brink of extinction. To this present day, it is not known if the wizard and the excommunicated Shakrelian lords crossed paths.’

“Hmmm. The records are unclear, but what is clear is that a mighty sorcerer has been tampering with the universe,” said Zorn.

“I agree. This story hasn’t ended yet, and I’ll bet that this wizard, whoever he is, is still plotting his worst all these years later.”

“As I said, this is all very interesting, but I still don’t know how to honour my promise to Lord Oberon.”

Zorn persisted and read on....

‘Finally the time arrived when the pressure of the Zhojenian attack fractured Emperor Krillyon’s world as death stared everyone in the face. He was left with no choice, but to accept their fate when an Earthly wizard appeared in a sparkling, whirling portal. Elchorn of Halifax, a masterly wizard and servant to an unknown sorcerer on Earth, appeared before them who offered Emperor Krillyon the life-saving ‘pure essence’. After thoughtful consideration and in noble recognition of his duties, it is thought that Emperor Krillyon sent Lord Zhar on his wayward journey to Earth while the lords of the Legislative Assembly vanished into the cosmic haze under the power of the ‘pure essence’s’ keeping. At that juncture, in the inner suburbs of Tírat-Ór, the Zhojenian Imperial Army had completely surrounded and overtaken the Imperial Palace. It was reported that Lord Vulchary was seething with rage at the incompetence of his soldiers.

The order had been given when, hours later, the Zhojen mercilessly attacked the Imperial Palace reducing it to rubble and ash within hours. It was terrifying for all of the aristocratic Shakrel who, for the moment, were safely ensconced within the emperor’s bunker, a specially designed fortress stationed one mile from the palace. According to witnesses who documented the last will and testimony of the emperor, his words were full of compassion and understanding for his people. There are those who said that he wished that he had ruled differently, that he wished that his sins should be forgiven and peace should come to the planet. Final admissions of impropriety and guilt were said to a hushed gathering who understood that death was calling.

Concurrently, telepathic records inscribed by virtuous courtiers in service to the Zhojen indicated no thoughts of leniency occupied the minds of Lord Vulchary and General Korzak who were tightening the screws on their advance. Now, throwing caution to the wind, Lord Vulchary ordered an all-out offensive when the massive, Zhojenian automatons thundered into the Shakrelian

heartland. Everywhere the smell of death and decay hung in the air as war's putrid stench permeated the Shakrelian capital.

Relentlessly, they pounded their way towards Emperor Krillyon's bunker.

"Hmmm. I'm starting to believe in justice, Zorn. Even all those years ago, there was a price to be paid for tyranny," said Skoll.

"I'll remember that when I'm being blasted by the wizards' frosty breath. I agree with you, Father. If you live by the sword, then you die by the sword."

Zorn continued to read aloud....

'Artillery shells bombarded the palace and all the surrounds of Tírat-Ór's vast metropolis until, finally, the moment came.

As witnessed, recorded and verified by reliable doctrine through the ages, Emperor Krillyon sat stony-faced within the deep confines of his bunker. He had thought deeply about his decision when, in the midst of the carnage and turmoil, he made his announcement. In a time-honoured, recorded document of his statement, Emperor Krillyon made the following appointments: Lord Xahl, supreme commander of the Shakrel and guardian of the Shakrelian people, Lord Zol, appointed guardian of the people and Minister of Knowledge, Lord Kruval, Minister of Hibernation. Lord Novax, Propaganda Minister and Lord Ulzon, Princess Jessalyn's personal guardian.

After giving his last instructions, Emperor Krillyon opened the mystical glass vial Elchorn of Halifax gifted him when it was recorded that everyone vanished in a shimmering, golden haze, all except the emperor who awaited his fate.

Skoll was trying to understand the indiscriminate power of the pure essence.

"I'm not sure why he wasn't vaporized and sent whirling through the cosmic wormhole of time. Something must have determined his fate."

Zorn thought he had the answer.

“It’s simply destiny, Father. Destiny requires a certain energy. His fate had already been written in the Scrolls by the gods.”

Skoll continued to read aloud....

‘Having attended to his duty, Emperor Krillyon and his remaining courtiers awaited their final destiny. For hours did the Imperial Zhojenian Army mercilessly attack while the last regiments of the emperor’s soldiers fought with magnificent heroism and defiance. In a war that had spiralled out of control, Lord Vulchary sat atop the palace walls and looked out towards a city under siege apparently gloating in victory.

Recorded in ink on parched scrolls of recorded history, Lord Vulchary’s massive fleet of automatons thundered towards the ‘Great Disc of Parazhool’, a powerful, central, Shakrelian communications centre. Filled with superior, alien technology, the Disc of Parazhool was an explosive armageddon waiting to happen. After a sustained, heavy bombardment, the massive communications center exploded into an enormous mushroom cloud. Unfortunately, its premises were completely supplied with super-charged alien weaponry and highly explosive cylinders of molecular grade plutonium which upon ignition exploded into an exponential, atomic blast that shook the planet to its very core. Moments later, Shakul Amir exploded into a million, billion fragments and the planet was no more.”

It was a story that reaffirmed in Skoll’s mind the accuracy of his father’s teachings.

“Well, there it is in black and white. You were right, Father. Yet I must say that the hand of fate dealt to the Shakrel was righteously deserved. Hmmm... I wonder if destiny would sing a similar tune today.”

Zorn’s mind, sharp and contemplative, lingered over the historical record.

“Father, if the planet shattered into a million, billion fragments and life as we know it ended, then who bore witness to it?”

Skoll halted, momentarily struck by the question.

“Hmmm. That is indeed a profound question, Zorn. I have no answer... save to suggest that some supernatural influence may have been at work here.”

“This is a different world in a different time, Father. I believe in justice, but I truly hope that Sharquill Jeron doesn't receive the same judgement. Khor knows that we don't deserve that. Well, it's been an interesting history lesson, but I still don't have an answer for Lord Oberon's freedom.”

Zorn and Skoll felt exhausted. For three hours they had scoured the Ancient Scrolls and learnt much, but Zorn felt frustrated by the missing links in the information. Then, as if by divine intervention, Zorn stumbled across an ancient paragraph inscribed on a dusty, old piece of parchment that drew his attention. Zorn blew off the dust and began to read...

‘It was recorded that in the reign of Emperor Krillyon, certain men of lowly station dared to reach beyond their place, and in consequence were transformed by a spell of enduring potency. Among them was Shirly Ghan Oberon, whose affections for the Emperor's daughter provoked a wrath that no mortal might withstand. By the cruel hand and will of the Emperor's sorcerers', the hapless servant and courtier and his innocent companions in crime were metamorphosed into stone-bound forms, a punishment not deserved, but to be bound eternally in damnation. Scholars differ as to the precise nature of the enchantment, yet it is certain that these Rocklords now inhabit realms far removed from the Emperor's court, a silent testament to pride, love and the inexorable hand of imperial decree.’

“I always believed that the Rocklords suffered at the hand of sorcery. Now, it's been confirmed,” said Zorn.

“They have endured wretched lives and deserve to be freed from their incarceration. No one should suffer on account of some misplaced misunderstanding,” said Skoll.

Zorn read aloud...

‘So it was that the house of Emperor Krillyon remained unattached to the house of Xahl through the fateful explosion that eliminated life on Shakul Amir and saved the emperor from the fury of the Zhojen and the compromised marriage of his daughter’.

“Well, well, well. According to this ancient text, I can only deduce that Emperor Krillyon’s daughter was to marry into the house of Xahl, or was she? But as I remember his fate, *that* mischievous lord was a tyrant who was cast into space for eternity.”

Zorn had a lightbulb moment.

“Of course...of course...Lord Xahl’s son is involved. He must be connected somehow to that freedom fighter the oracle told us about. What was his name? Sh...Sh...Shirlu something or other.”

“It’s just in the text you’ve read, Zorn. I believe the name you’re searching for, Zorn, is Shirlu Ghan Oberon,” said Skoll as he raised his eyebrows.

As yet, Zorn hadn’t put two and two together.

“Yes. Yes, that’s right, but how are they connected?”

Once again, Zorn and Skoll scanned the pages until *that* name reappeared in a small excerpt.

‘All seemed lost. From his stronghold outside the Shakrelian capital of Tírat-Ór, Lord Vulchary ordered the complete annihilation of Emperor Krillyon’s soldiers. It was reported that in his final days the emperor sought solace in the company of Lord Urloth Zhar and his best friend, Shirlu Ghan Oberon.’

Zorn’s incredible brain was hard at work when the penny finally dropped.

“By the Gods — Shirlu Ghan Oberon! Don’t tell me that this historical figure is Lord Oberon himself.”

Skoll had already put the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle together.
“The one and the same, Zorn.”

“Hmmm. Now, all the pieces of this puzzle are beginning to fit together. They *were* friends, Father. Lord Oberon and the emperor were friends.”

Zorn pointed to a word on the script that held his attention.

“Now, let me see – compromised?! Ha! I’m assuming that it was supposed to be an arranged marriage between Lord Xahl’s son and Princess Jessalyn. Yes, that would have brought the house of Xahl into Emperor Krillyon’s sphere. In those days, marriages were undertaken for wealthy possession and positions of power. That would have made sense at the time, but something happened – something unexpected. I mean according to this text, Shirlu Ghan Oberon was Lord Xahl’s son’s best friend. Of course! Shirlu was the son of a lowly courtier, and I’ll bet he loved the princess as much as she loved him. An illegitimate affair would have been a catastrophe for the royal court to handle. Ah, yes, it’s all beginning to make sense. Shirlu rebelled, and the emperor wanted him dead, but Princess Jessalyn probably pleaded for his life.’

“Don’t get ahead of yourself, Zorn. We don’t know all the facts yet.”

Skoll then read aloud....

‘Little did the emperor know that Shirlu Ghan Oberon, a friend and confidante, was involved in a love tryst with the emperor’s daughter. It remained a secret until the feisty Lord Xahl discovered the truth from his daughter who begged him to remain silent. But such was the disdain Lord Xahl felt for the attractive, young Shakrelian courtier, he advised the emperor who immediately threw himself into a rage. In a vile and puerile act of retribution, Emperor Krillyon enslaved Shirlu and through the evil sorcery of his wizards turned him into a monstrous mountain of moving rock who was banished from the kingdom for eternity. It is said that only the power of time manipulation can reverse the evil spell.’

“Hmmm. Well, there it is in a nutshell. I understand now why Lord Oberon exists in his current form and why he pines for a release from his damnation, but I don’t understand why an Earthly wizard wouldn’t release him from his servitude,” said Zorn.

“No doubt he or she has his reasons. I..I can’t imagine what Lord Oberon has been through. It’s beyond comprehension.”

“Lord Oculus holds the key to this whole story, but he wouldn’t tell us. That means he’s either protecting himself or someone else. Who could it be, Father?”

Again, Zorn and Skoll read page after page before something caught Zorn’s eye.

‘It was recorded in the final years of Emperor Krillyon’s reign that the Lords of the Legislative Assembly grew restless concerning the time-traveling invention of the human druid known as Lord Oculus. Word had reached the citadel that he had perfected a refinement of substance capable of breaching the corridors of time itself. Envoys were dispatched across the void, bearing gifts and decrees, yet the druid denied audience and withheld the completed measure. In fact, he disappeared and was never seen again.

The Assembly was divided. Lord Zol counselled restraint, arguing that time, once pierced, could not be governed by decree. Lord Xahl, however, maintained that no dynasty could endure without dominion over its own future. Debate turned to demand, and demand to agitation. It is written that messages were sent not once, but thrice, and returned unanswered.

In the same season, disturbances were reported among the Zhojenian territories. Their resistance, long scattered and poorly armed, rose with sudden coordination and weapons of unfamiliar design. Chroniclers noted the presence of strategies beyond their custom, though no patron was named in the record. When the central communications bastion was struck, the chain of destruction travelled through conduits that laced the planetary

core. Whether this amplification was foreseen remains contested among scholars. The explosion that followed shattered Shakul Amir into uncountable fragments.

Before the final breach, Emperor Krillyon adorned Lord Zhar with the ancestral stones and decreed that the lineage must pass beyond the reach of Shakrelian ambition. Lord Zhar was exiled through the sanctioned breach, his charge unspoken in the public record.'

Zorn felt immeasurably better. His understanding of history's recordings gave him a new lease on life.

"It only reaffirms in my mind what I've always known, Father, That these brutes from history only ever considered themselves and no other."

"I'm with you, Zorn. It just makes our fight all the more urgent, doesn't it?"

Finally, Zorn read aloud the last excerpt from the book of Zharabastion as recorded by Hamzuk Zarchlune dated in the fifth cycle of the Moons of Astilbe.

'Let it be remembered: those who seek mastery of time invite the unraveling of kingdoms.

The fate of the severed relic was not recorded.

Though the official testimony records the fall of Shakul Amir as the tragic consequence of war and fractured ambition, certain later annotations speak in quieter tones of a guiding influence beyond the Zhojenian rebellion. It was observed that knowledge moved where it should not have moved, that stratagems emerged beyond the learning of their commanders, and that the hunger for the Pure Essence was not confined to kings or councils alone. Some chroniclers proposed the presence of an unseen sovereign of sorcery, one who coveted dominion over time itself and whose hand, if present, bore no seal. Yet no definitive proof was entered into the archives, and thus the architect—if architect there was—

remains unnamed, his shadow resting silently and stealthily between worlds waiting patiently for discovery.'

Having satisfied their curiosity, Zorn and Skoll handed the Ancient Scrolls back to old man Jelko who very carefully placed them back into archival care.

The truths uncovered within the Scrolls would soon shape the fate of the Medulkh and the destiny of Zorn in ways yet to unfold. From the shadows of the far reaches of the universe, unseen forces lingered, guiding events beyond comprehension, their presence felt but never fully revealed. The journey was only beginning, and the answers awaited in the trials yet to come.

Continue the journey in Book One of the Zorn Trilogy. For those who would follow the path of these chronicles, to study the deeds, trials, and legacies that arose from these events, the next volumes have been preserved under the title Zorn.

Final Annotation of the Fifth Archive



Concerning the principal location and era named within this testimony:

The planet Shakul Amir, as preserved in surviving fragments, existed as the center of the Shakrelian Dominion during the Late Obsidian Era. While temple records and oral lineages differ as to the precise duration of its dominion, its existence and influence are widely attested among the Chroniclers as historical in substance, if not in every surviving detail.

The figure known as Hamzuk Zarchlune is recognized by the Schopars of the Fifth Archive as the archivist responsible for recording and preserving this testimony. His diligence in compiling fragmentary records, oral testimonies, and transmitted lore has ensured that, even amidst uncertainty, the principal events and actors of this era remain accessible to subsequent generations.

Of the other named locations, dynasties, and figures referenced herein, the Schopars affirm that their inclusion rests upon careful collation of evidence and the measured interpretation of surviving lore. Where certainty could not be established, restraint and caution have been exercised.

Let it be known that this compilation claims not perfection of memory, but fidelity to the fragments entrusted to our keeping.
— Sealed in the Fifth Cycle of Astilbe, by the Hand of Hamzuk Zarchlune, Archivist of the Shakrelian Record.

*Thus concludes the preserved testimony of the
Fall of Shakul Amir, as entered into the
Book of Zharabastion.*

— Sealed in the Fifth Cycle of Astilbe
By the Hand of Hamzuk Zarchlune
Archivist of the Shakrelian Record

For those who should like to continue
the journey, click here.

