

The wizard exhaled a sigh of equal parts contempt and contentment as he gently folded the broadsheet and placed it on his desk. The headline was in bold, black ink and plainly visible: "Rabblrouser Resolved!" His fingers traced the letters as he considered his next words.

"Ambassador Firefinger, I require your assistance." His voice boomed through the richly appointed room.

A few moments later, a rail-thin man scurried into the room. His robes held the scent of stale embers and bore more than a few scorch marks at the hems. His grin contained a disturbing number of teeth for a man of his stature. "My lord?"

"Ambassador. Our core issue with the Enclave appears to have resolved itself, and for this I am glad. Tanner's words will no longer wheedle into our good name, and for this I commend your efforts. Please be sure to provide bonuses for all involved; their efforts upheld the mission of the Red Wizards and drove home our point as intended.

However.

I am concerned that despite the gnome's passing, his allies seem to have grown in number. This creature's elimination may not have been the surgical strike that we intended, for even this morning I received another communication from Zulkir Szass Tam. He desires to visit our fine city, and despite my counter-arguments he still presses for a firmer resolution to the matter-at-hand. This... 'Red War', as they called it."

The wizard let these words hang in the air for a moment. The promise of a visit from Szass Tam was more of a threat than it was a reward, for both men knew that the lich would simply follow his own desires regardless of what they told him.

"I believe that we are united in our pursuit of a more robust Mulmaster. The so-called 'City of Danger' represents a significant opportunity for us, and our research is not yet complete. Szass Tam must be delayed as long as possible while we investigate the treasures that have begun to arrive. From Almorel, from the Glacier of the White Wyrn, from the Moonsea itself these trinkets have been recovered; we need to be careful in how we utilize their benefits lest we fall prey to our pride and thirst for knowledge."

The ambassador clutched at a sliver of dark, jagged crystal that hung from a cord around his neck. "Zulkir Ma, I understand the premise that you speak of. Mulmaster must be preserved in its current state, lest we lose our progress with the crystals. What would you have me do?"

The zulkir held his words for a long moment, then quietly said "I have faith in you, ambassador. I trust that you will be appropriately creative with the resources that you have at your disposal."

As the zulkir rose and started for the exit, a sound began to emerge. Ambient, it was more felt than heard - not unlike a heartbeat, the rhythmic thumping was as much a participant in the conversation as it was an idle observer. The ambassador nodded curtly, tightening his grip on the sliver, and followed the zulkir out and into the city.