

Altir tried to shut his eyes, to hang limp in the blankfaces' grasp. Small and weak, they could bear his weight or restrain him only by clustering around him five or six at a time, and this made their touch the more horrible: a swarm of pale, damp, maggots wriggling against his skin.

"Open them," Verlorlorn said in his ear, and Verlorlorn's breath hissed with hunger so that Altir, in panic, opened his eyes.

They stood inside the Landscathe gates. The gates, tree-tall and made of iron, were swinging closed. No blankface stood near them. Altir could not see what made them move.

"Begin to learn," Verlorlorn said. His fingers brushed the back of Altir's neck.

Altir looked. Entwined with the tainted metal of the gates were cords of reddish white, like stripped sinews. They ended in black hornlike hooks. It was these cords that were pulling the gate closed.

He had thought some ugly carving crowned the gates. It moved now, pulsing, slick. In bloated folds, an eye opened, summer lupine blue. It saw him.

Altir screamed.