

FREE CHAPTER SAMPLE



Oblivion's Doom

The Archon Reckoning — Book One

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Chapter One: Oblivion's Doom

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Chapter One — Oblivion's Doom

Oblivion's Doom stretched for nearly thirty miles from its pointed forward crown to the final blade of its aft engines. Its hull resembled the blackened skeleton of some extinct celestial beast. Towers rose from its back like serrated vertebrae. Weapons apertures remained concealed beneath overlapping plates of irradiated metal. Vast hangars housed fleets capable of invading entire worlds, though the ship had rarely needed to deploy them against Earth.

Human beings were far easier to conquer from within.

There were no banners upon the vessel.

No windows.

No insignia visible from the exterior.

Its name had been carved into the primary structural spine in a language that could not be spoken with a mortal tongue. The symbols did not merely describe oblivion. They contained a mathematical instruction for producing it.

Deep within the ship, beyond labyrinths of sealed corridors and abandoned crew stations, Arch King Omnidemonical sat alone in the central command chamber.

He occupied the captain's throne as though the entire vessel had grown around him.

At more than fifteen feet tall, the Arch King possessed proportions that no human skeleton could have supported. His shoulders were broad enough to block a corridor. His arms ended in black, jointed claws capable of crushing reinforced alloy. The radioactive transformation of his ancestors had stripped his flesh of its former radiance, leaving his body dark, hard and almost mineral in appearance.

Two immense horns extended from his skull.

They curved upward before sweeping back, each one sharpened to a point harder than diamond. Veins of faint green radiation glowed beneath their surfaces, illuminating the ridges of his face whenever the chamber lights dimmed.

Omnidemonical preferred darkness.

It prevented lesser beings from examining him too closely.

Before his throne stood an observation table made from a single circular slab of black metal. Above it hovered his most prized possession: an ancient device called the Eye of Horus.

It did not resemble the painted human symbol that had survived upon the walls of Egyptian tombs. Those primitive images were imperfect memories—fragments of something once witnessed and later transformed into religion.

The true Eye possessed no fixed form.

It was composed of a highly radioactive liquid metal harvested from the Trihercarnium Reach, a region buried within one of the oldest and darkest layers of the multiverse. The substance flowed through the air without spilling, continually reshaping itself into concentric rings, spirals and narrow blades.

At the Eye's center floated a black pupil surrounded by a rotating corona of pale gold.

The Arch King adjusted the device through thought alone.

The pupil widened.

Stars passed through its depths.

The observation chamber filled with projections of distant galaxies, each one reduced to a glittering particle inside the Eye's unfathomable field. Omnidemonical pushed deeper. Galactic clusters became constellations. Constellations became systems. Systems became worlds.

The Eye entered the Sol system.

Eight planets appeared around the central star-reactor. The image accelerated toward the third world and penetrated the planet's atmosphere without resistance.

Clouds separated.

Oceans expanded beneath him.

Cities emerged.

The Arch King leaned forward, resting one claw against the arm of his throne.

"Find him."

The Eye required no spoken command, but Omnidemonical enjoyed hearing his own authority echoed through the empty chamber.

The projection raced across the planet's surface. Continents rolled beneath it. Night swallowed day and released it again. Satellites crossed the upper atmosphere, unaware that something far older and more advanced had passed through their detection fields.

The Eye descended over North America.

Roads appeared.

Then houses.

Then trees stripped bare by winter.

The magnification continued until a solitary human figure came into view.

The Observer.

Omnidemonical's claws tightened.

Of all the billions living upon Earth, this one had become an intolerable anomaly.

The Archons' stated objective was simple: preserve the continued ignorance and servitude of humanity while extracting the emotional and psychic energy produced by that captivity. Fear, grief, rage, pain, anguish and desperation flowed through the human world in quantities vast enough to nourish entire civilizations of unseen predators.

The humans occasionally called such entities demons.

Some called them aliens.

Others dismissed them as superstition, trauma, madness or primitive mythology.

Every explanation served the Archons equally well.

Truth became harmless once humanity had been trained to ridicule anyone who approached it.

The prime directive forbade direct physical intervention except under extreme circumstances. Open conquest created resistance. Resistance created unity. Unity encouraged human beings to look beyond the divisions manufactured for them.

Subtlety was more efficient.

A false memory placed inside the proper mind could destroy a family.

A rumor introduced at the correct moment could become public certainty.

A manufactured enemy could redirect the anger of an entire nation.

The Archons created illusions, misconceptions and carefully structured contradictions. They filled human institutions with wheels, cogs and reservoirs of deception, then persuaded humanity to operate the machine themselves.

One person hurt another.

The injured person spread that pain to someone else.

Governments weaponized fear.

Religions weaponized guilt.

Markets weaponized desperation.

Families weaponized love.

The Archons rarely needed to touch anything.

Human beings completed the work for them.

Yet the Observer refused to behave as expected.

He had suffered.

He had been isolated, discredited, tempted, condemned and stripped of nearly every form of worldly stability. By every reasonable calculation, he should have abandoned his search for meaning long ago.

Instead, adversity appeared to sharpen him.

One sign caused him to notice.

A second made him question.

A third persuaded him that coincidence was no longer a sufficient explanation.

The Arch King despised this quality.

Ninety-nine percent of humanity presented no immediate threat. They might rebel against a politician, a religion, a company or another group of human beings, but they seldom questioned the invisible architecture guiding all of them.

The Observer did.

He possessed no army and commanded no nation, yet he represented something more dangerous than conventional power.

He might make others look.

Omnidemonical removed a small container from beside his throne.

It was carved from a piece of crystallized bone and sealed beneath a rotating magnetic clasp. He opened it with one claw, revealing a dark paste glittering with metallic dust.

Uranium-238.

The Arch King scooped a portion of the radioactive salve and rubbed it into the base of his left horn. The substance restored its ominous glow and strengthened the molecular lattice surrounding a series of small fractures.

He had been grinding the horn against the side of his throne without realizing it.

The Eye showed the Observer moving beneath a cold Earth sky.

Omnidemonical pressed harder.

The horn scraped across the metal armrest.

A thin line of radioactive dust fell to the floor.

“What are you?” the Arch King muttered.

The Observer paused within the projection.

For one unsettling instant, the human appeared to look directly upward—not toward the sky above him, but through the Eye itself.

Omnidemonical stopped grinding his horn.

The image distorted.

A ripple passed through the liquid-metal rings.

Then the Observer continued walking.

The Arch King relaxed slightly.

“A coincidence.”

“Of course,” said a voice immediately behind him. “Humanity’s favorite explanation for everything it is too frightened to understand.”

Omnidemonical erupted from his throne.

Had he possessed ordinary skin, he would have jumped out of it.

Instead, all fifteen feet of him shot upward with such force that both of his diamond-tipped horns struck the ceiling. The points penetrated the upper hull of the command chamber and buried themselves nearly three feet into the armored plating.

His body stopped.

His legs continued swinging beneath him.

For several seconds, the most feared Archon in the surrounding galaxies hung suspended from the ceiling by his own horns.

The Eye of Horus rotated toward him.

Dr. Daedric Doom stood behind the vacant throne.

He had appeared without sound, flash or warning.

The doctor folded his hands behind his back and looked upward.

“In all *Oblivion’s Doom* and damnation,” he said, “please do not tell me you are sitting alone in the dark again, plotting against the Observer.”

Omnidemonical growled.

The sound shook dust from the ceiling.

Doom studied the throne's damaged armrest.

"You were practically grinding your horn into powder. What is the point of applying the salve if you intend to leave yourself no horn upon which to use it?"

"Release me."

"I merely thought you might appreciate someone bringing the matter to your attention."

"Release me, Doctor."

Doom tilted his head.

"From the Observer?"

"From the ceiling!"

"Ah. Yes. That."

The Arch King twisted, but the movement drove his horns deeper into the plating.

"How dare you appear behind me while I am meditating?" Omnidemonical roared. "You diabolical son of a wretch! How many times must I command you not to do such vile things?"

Doom glanced toward the Eye.

"My apologies, sir. I assumed you might have sensed my arrival. Perhaps you were too focused on the Observer."

"What?"

The Arch King's body swung toward him.

"Blast the Observer! You speak as though that insignificant human holds power over me."

"I did not say that."

"You implied it."

"I merely observed that you have damaged your throne, nearly destroyed your own horn and impaled yourself upon the command chamber ceiling while thinking about him."

Omnidemonical's eyes burned brighter.

Doom cleared his throat.

"Entirely unrelated events, I am sure."

“You test the limits of my mercy.”

“I was not aware we had located them.”

The Arch King pulled so violently that a section of the ceiling bent around his horns.

“Unless you prefer the dark void of space,” Omnidemonical hissed, “you will silence yourself and get me down.”

Doom stepped beneath him and examined the angle of penetration.

“I would gladly assist, sir. However, considering your current position, the threat of throwing me into space seems somewhat far-fetched.”

The chamber became perfectly still.

Even the Eye of Horus ceased rotating.

Doom looked up into the Arch King’s face.

“Until I free you, naturally.”

“You will watch your tongue, Doctor.”

“I am watching it as closely as I can.”

“I can always make another clone of you.”

Doom’s expression changed by only the smallest degree.

The Arch King saw it.

He smiled.

“If your insolence becomes too inconvenient, I will dispose of this body and awaken another. Though I admit I would hate to reintegrate your memory banks. The process takes time, and the earlier versions of you were considerably less entertaining.”

Doom kept his voice measured.

“Calm yourself, sir. I was only jesting. Must you always be so serious?”

“If you wish to play the part of a circus clown, I can send you down to Earth. Their kind seems strangely fond of them.”

“That will not be necessary.”

“No?”

“I find painted smiles disturbing.”

“At last, something upon which we agree.”

Doom approached the Arch King's left leg and placed both hands around the armored calf.

"Hold still."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Free you."

"Be careful with the horns."

"Of course."

"They are irreplaceable."

"Except through genetic reconstruction."

"Do not become technical with me."

Doom planted his feet against the floor.

Omnidemonical narrowed his eyes.

"Doctor—"

Doom pulled.

There came a deafening crack.

The Arch King fell.

His enormous body struck the command deck hard enough to fracture several floor panels. The throne slid backward. The Eye of Horus scattered into a cloud of liquid-metal fragments before reforming above the observation table.

Something smaller struck the floor beside Doom.

It rolled twice and stopped against his boot.

The doctor looked down.

The final four feet of Omnidemonical's left horn lay on the deck.

Its severed interior glowed with radioactive green light.

Doom stared at it.

The Arch King stared at it.

Neither spoke.

A small thread of irradiated vapor rose from the broken end still attached to Omnidemonical's skull.

Doom slowly lifted his gaze.

“What,” Omnidemonical whispered, “in Oblivion have you done?”

The whisper carried more danger than any scream.

“You were lodged rather firmly.”

“My horn.”

“Yes.”

“You broke my horn.”

“Technically, the ceiling broke it. I merely introduced sufficient downward force to complete the separation.”

Omnidemonical rose to his full height.

The command chamber darkened as his body blocked what little illumination remained.

Doom picked up the broken horn.

“You had better repair this,” the Arch King said. “I will be damned for eternity before I permit the Guild to see me in this condition.”

“The fracture is clean.”

“They will laugh at me for the next millennium.”

“It may not be quite that long.”

Omnidemonical took one step forward.

Doom reconsidered.

“It may be longer.”

The Arch King’s claws flexed.

“Repair it.”

“I can use the genetic reconstructor to rebind the molecular structure. The nerves may require recalibration, but—”

“I do not care how you do it.”

“Anesthesia?”

“No.”

“It will hurt.”

“I said no.”

Doom glanced at the burning stump.

“You may alter that decision.”

Omnidemonical bent close enough for his radioactive breath to wash across the doctor’s face.

“If you take pleasure in this, I will have you disassembled and distributed among separate galaxies.”

“Then I shall maintain the highest possible degree of professional misery.”

The Arch King straightened.

“Very well. Now speak.”

Doom remained beside him, still holding the severed horn.

“I beg your pardon?”

“You came here for a reason. You said you had something to tell me before you rudely interrupted my meditation, damaged my throne, buried my horns in the ceiling and mutilated the highest-ranking Archon aboard this vessel.”

“That is an imaginative reconstruction of events.”

“Speak.”

Doom’s sarcasm faded.

“I was sent with a private message from the homeworld.”

Omnidemonical’s anger narrowed into suspicion.

“From whom?”

“The Guild.”

The liquid rings of the Eye of Horus slowed.

Doom continued.

“They require you to contact them through a secured private channel. The transmission carries the highest urgency seal.”

“What do they want?”

“The message was addressed directly to you. I was not granted access to its contents.”

“You attempted to access it.”

“Naturally.”

“And?”

“The encryption attempted to erase me.”

Omnidemonical smiled faintly.

“So it has improved.”

“A comforting thought.”

The Arch King looked toward the Eye of Horus. The Observer remained visible within it, now walking beside a dark stretch of woodland on Earth.

The human seemed very small.

The threat surrounding him did not.

“Blast the Guild,” Omnidemonical said. “They can wait.”

“Their message states otherwise.”

“They always state otherwise.”

“They may continue trying to contact you.”

“Then disable the receiver.”

“They may interpret that as defiance.”

“They interpret breathing as defiance.”

“That is also true.”

Omnidemonical touched the fractured stump of his horn and pulled his claw away with a hiss.

“Contact them only after you repair this.”

Doom raised the severed horn.

“As you command.”

“I will be damned if they turn me into the centerpiece of their clown parade.”

“The Guild does not maintain a clown parade, to my knowledge.”

“They would create one for this.”

“Perhaps the horn could be incorporated into the festivities.”

Omnidemonical glared at him.

Doom’s expression became solemn.

“A moment of weakness. It will not happen again.”

“I hate clowns,” the Arch King muttered.

“I am aware.”

“And the circus.”

“Yes, sir.”

“It makes me sick.”

Doom turned toward the reconstruction chamber, carrying the broken horn beneath one arm.

Behind him, the Eye of Horus remained focused upon Earth.

Neither Archon noticed the human image stop walking.

The Observer slowly raised his head.

For a second time, he looked directly through the Eye.

This time, the Eye looked away first.

End of the free sample

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