

*Kaday*  
The Sea of Grass

by Tony Graham

In seven years there had been no word from his father. His uncles, aunts, cousins and even the Administrators were all pressing him to take power.

Saifa, his cousin, stood next to him before the doors to the Emperor's Table at the heart of Kinbornu, oldest and largest of cities in the Sea of Grass.

"To the north, Halani tax our merchants, raid our herds. They are choking the road to the Middle Kingdom. The Imperial Road! And the Emperor does nothing."

Saifa spared a challenging look at the two Imperial Guardsmen standing before the doors. The Guardsmen remained still as always, statues unless challenged.

"As the only one qualified to assume the mantle, you must do something, Idris. The people will follow no other."

Idris held up his hand, silencing his cousin. Idris was trained in the ways of the warrior. Mastery of the horse, the blade and the lance. His father, The Kaday, had not yet trained him in the ways of the statesman.

Idris stepped up to the doors. There had been no summons in seven years, never before had anyone attempted to enter without a summons. The Imperial Guardsmen made no move to stop him, and Idris entered into the hall. One of the Guardsmen stopped Saifa, denying him entrance, while the other closed the doors behind Idris.

Idris had been within the hall years earlier and had seen the Emperor's Table: a massive circular table with a hallow center, enclosed by seventeen chairs and one high seat for the Emperor. Runes were engraved into the surface of the polished wood before each chair. In the





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center of the table stood a miniature of the Imperial Island carved from obsidian. It was said that within the stronghold of all the Greater Houses was an exact duplicate of the Emperor's Table.

Idris found the rune of House Kaday, the rune of spirit mastery, the rune of his father, upon the table. He sat in the chair before it.

He nervously waited, unsure how the summoning worked. His eyes fell to the rune inlaid on the table before him, its ebony luster almost matching the dark skin of his sinewy hands. His finger, seemingly with a will of its own, began to trace the inlay. His eyes strayed to the other runes around the table until he found himself staring at the Island in the center. He regarded the obsidian stone, its slopes, the crevasse that ran down one edge of the mountain to the garden...

The room turned dark. Unseen winds moved through the room. Nameless forces buffeted him. He willed his gaze further north.

Snow-capped mountains appeared to his eyes. The Illuminated Peaks, Kingdom of House Ishi. He could see workers in the fields.

Far north to the Realm of Vakur, snow, frozen lakes, great halls at the end of long, narrow, steep-sided bays.

South, the dark, green-forested expanse of the High Hills to the byzantine cities, like gemstones on the shores of the Inner Sea. The Middle Kingdom.

A caravan moved south along the Imperial Road from the Inner Sea.

Further south along the Imperial Road. Warriors of the city-state of Halan waited in ambush for a caravan traveling north. North from the Sea of Grass. One of his caravans.

South, into the Sea of Grass. The vast steppes. The great herds of horse. Wild spirits of wind, earth, water. Storm spirits. Spirits unbound. A danger greater than the rebellious rulers of Halan.

Idris closed his eyes, emptied his lungs.

Once again, he sat at a great, rune-carved table in a dim room. He had not known if the Emperor's Table would work unless driven by the Emperor's Will, but it had. It had shown him the Empire, save the Imperial Island, leaving the fate of the Emperor, and Idris' father, a mystery.

What he had seen gave weight to the counsel of his family. He could be patient no





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longer.

Idris, son of the Kaday, Idris the warrior, Idris the master of horse, blade and lance must be put aside. Idris must be left behind in this hall. When he went forth from the Emperor's Table, he would be The Kaday.



Illustration *Idris Kaday* by Andy Underwood.

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