To Break an Empire

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ISBN: 979-8-23038-877-7
Published: 14th February 2025
Publisher: Intellign LLC 1st Edition

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Dedication

For the oppressed, the weary, and the defiant.
For those who dream of a world without chains.
For the ones who rise against the darkness, even when hope seems lost.
For the shattered kingdoms, the broken cities, and the resilient hearts.
For those who rebuild from the ashes, stronger and more determined.
For the ones who refuse to be silenced, who rise again and again.
May this story remind you that even empires can crumble, and freedom can bloom from the ashes.
May it be a testament to the enduring spirit of those who fight for freedom, no matter the cost.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I have to thank God. Thank you for guiding me through the challenges and celebrating the victories, for the unwavering strength, and for always watching over me.
My deepest gratitude goes to my first editor, thank you for your sharp eye and insightful feedback.
To my amazing family and friends, thank you for being the constant source of love and inspiration in my life. Mom and Dad, thank you for your unconditional support, for believing in me even when I doubted myself, and for the guidance. You both have an incredible gift for seeing potential where others can't. Kristen K., thank you for always being there to lend an ear. Karen Hutchinson, Elissa A., Nadja Maller, and Cele Bisguier, thank you for your friendship, encouragement, and for making this journey so much more enjoyable.
And finally, to the readers, thank you for embarking on this journey with me. I hope “To Break an Empire” resonates with you, challenges you, and stays with you long after you turn the final page. May this story ignite a fire within you and remind you that even in the darkest of times, hope and resilience can prevail. I'd love to hear your thoughts – feel free to connect with me on @lord.ish_ or leave a review!

Introduction: The Shadow and the Lion

“May God bless you, Omezarr, our Empire, my home, my love,” the letter began, “You may not understand the weight of this name, the blood and tears that have been shed to forge this nation. We were once a small people, clinging to a sliver of land, rich in resources that drew the covetous eyes of the world. The great powers, blinded by greed, descended upon us, a ravenous horde seeking to devour our wealth and extinguish our spirit.”
Lordes traced the faded ink with his fingertip. The letter continued, describing a war that had nearly wiped Omezarr off the map. A war unlike any the world had ever seen. A war where the enemy unleashed a silent, insidious weapon – a plague of biological origin. Cities fell, not to swords and spears, but to fever and despair. The once-vibrant city of Alamo was reduced to a ghost town, its streets choked with the dust of shattered buildings. Over eighty percent of the population perished, their bodies succumbing to the invisible enemy.
“We lost,” the letter continued, “We lost so much. Our cities were reduced to rubble, our land scarred and broken. But we did not surrender. We endured. We rebuilt. We learned from our losses, honing our skills, strengthening our resolve. And from the ashes of defeat, we rose. We rose stronger, more united, more determined than ever before. The treaty that followed, banning these weapons of mass destruction, was a victory for humanity, a testament to our resilience. But the scars remained, a constant reminder of the horrors we had endured.”

Lordes sat alone beneath the skeletal remains of a burnt-out tree, the flickering candlelight casting eerie shadows across his face. In his hand, he held a worn, leather-bound journal, its pages filled with faded ink. The letter had been written by his grandfather, a revered figure in Omezarr’s history.

Closing the journal, Lordes felt the weight of history settle upon his shoulders. He was not just fighting for freedom; he was fighting to uphold the legacy of his ancestors, to ensure that the sacrifices made by those who came before him would not be in vain…

Lordes was not born into greatness. He entered the world frail and unremarkable, a shadow among shadows, destined to be overlooked. His father, a man of few words but unyielding expectations, saw in his son not promise but potential wasted. Determined to mold the boy into something greater, his father began a merciless regimen of training, pushing Lordes far beyond the limits of his body and mind.

The days were grueling. Lordes toiled under the punishing sun, his muscles burning with exertion as his father's commands echoed in his ears. Nights offered no reprieve, as he faced endless mental trials designed to strip away self-doubt and instill unshakable focus. What began as resentment and despair within the boy slowly transformed into defiance, then into determination. He refused to be broken. Driven by a desperate need to earn his father's respect and prove his worth, Lordes endured.

Through every blistered hand, every aching muscle, and every faltering step, Lordes learned. He discovered the strength hidden within him—not just in his fists, but in his heart and mind. He mastered the art of balance, learning to move with a grace that betrayed his once-clumsy form. He turned his frustration into fuel, his failures into lessons. Slowly but surely, the shadow grew substance.

But his growth came at a price. Lordes bore the weight of isolation, his relentless quest for perfection leaving him estranged from his peers. He became consumed by the need to meet expectations, often at the expense of his own happiness. Yet, he pressed on, convinced that triumph was worth the cost.

And triumph he did. The boy who had once been weak and unnoticed was now a warrior forged in the crucible of hardship. Years of discipline shaped him into a soldier of unmatched skill and resolve. He fought with the calculated grace of a panther and the unrelenting ferocity of a lion. Lordes came to understand that the lion within him was not born, but forged—a product of struggle and survival.

Now a soldier in the Emperor's army, Lordes carried his hard-won lessons like armor: resilience, discipline, and an unwavering belief in his ability to endure. He knew his worth was not proven in fleeting victories but in moments of darkness, when the weight of the world threatened to crush him.

As the shadows of the Empire stretched long and the drums of war grew deafening, Lordes stood ready. His past had prepared him for this—his greatest trial yet. For he was no longer just a shadow. He was a lion, forged in fire, and unafraid of the darkness ahead.

The Art of Breaking an Empire (A Manuscript)
(Collected Lessons from the Fall of Omezarr)

I. War and Strategy

- *“We lost so much. Our cities were reduced to rubble, our land scarred and broken. But we did not surrender. We endured. We rebuilt. We learned from our losses, honing our skills, strengthening our resolve. And from the ashes of defeat, we rose. We rose stronger, more united, more determined than ever before.”*
- *"They say only the blessed and the foolish show mercy during wars."*
- *"Humanity, boy, is a fragile flower in the tempest of war. It withers easily, trampled underfoot by the iron boots of necessity."*
- *"Mercy, in war, is a weakness. A chink in your armor that your enemy will gladly exploit.”*
- *"War, for all its horror, had taught me this: energy was a weapon, a shield, and a guiding force. To wield it was to grow, to endure, to become something greater than the storm around me.”*
- *"Mercy, in war, was not a simple, unwavering virtue. It was a complex tapestry woven from courage, wisdom, and a deep understanding of the human condition."*
- *"Battles were not won through reckless fury or blind ambition. They were won by those who could channel their energy like an archer pulling a bowstring, knowing when to draw back and when to release."*
- *“The fight ahead isn’t just for freedom,”*
- *“It’s for the soul of a broken world. And the heroes we once looked to—they won’t save us. It’s up to us to destroy the lies and rebuild the world they broke.”*

II. Power and Tyranny

- *"An empire built on fear may command obedience, but it can never command loyalty."*
- *"The illusion of invincibility is the first crack in any throne."*
- *"Control is not unity. Obedience is not devotion."*
- *"True power is not in ruling over bodies, but in conquering minds."*

- *"No empire built on silence and fear can stand forever."*
- *"The deeper the foundation of lies, the harder the collapse."*
- *"Corruption was not a flaw of the Empire. It was its foundation."*
- *"Scarcity was not failure—it was design. Hunger was the quietest weapon."*
- *"The Empire did not demand loyalty. It demanded submission—and submission cannot endure."*
- *"When greed becomes governance, collapse is inevitable."*
- *"Power was measured by the depth of one's foundations, the weight of their influence sinking beneath the waves, with opulence flowing freely through networks hidden from the common eye."*
- *"The deeper the roots, the higher the crest of their wave, a living symbol of their rank in the Empire's cruel and unyielding order."*

III. War and Resistance

- *"Victory is not won on the battlefield, but in the hearts of the oppressed."*
- *"War does not forge heroes; it unmasks them."*
- *"Mercy in war is not weakness. It is the last rebellion of a human soul."*
- *"The first weapon of resistance is memory. The second is courage."*
- *"Even in chains, a defiant heart remains unconquered."*
- *"A conquered army that remains defiant is the most dangerous enemy."*
- *"Fear could chain the body, but not the spirit. And when the people had nothing left to lose, they would rise."*
- *"An empire built on fear could never endure."*
- *"Beware of the hero who no longer serves the people,"*
- *"Beware of the leader who fears his own shadow. They will bring ruin not only to themselves but to all who follow them."*
- *"True control was not fear—it was willing submission. And in that, the Empire had already failed."*

IV. Hope and Rebellion

- *"A spark of truth can ignite a wildfire no empire can contain."*
- *"In the end, fear only delays collapse. It never prevents it."*
- *"The soul of a nation is not found in its rulers, but in its people."*
- *"The future belongs to those who dare to remember what the world tried to forget."*
- *"When people have nothing left to lose, they remember how to fight."*

V. Trust and Betrayal

- *"Trust, once broken, cannot be rebuilt with force."*
- *"Neighbors became informants. Children became executioners. Trust itself became treason."*
- *"The greatest casualty of tyranny is not truth—it is trust."*

V. Morality and Justification

- *"Was violence ever justified?"*
- *"Is the cost of freedom worth the bloodshed?"*

Chapter 1: The War, the Fool, the Blessed, and God

The old man, his face etched with the lines of a thousand battles and a thousand sorrows, leaned closer, his voice a rasping whisper against the wind. His gaze, distant yet piercing, was fixed on the horizon where the setting sun painted the clouds in hues of blood orange. The soft wind, laden with the smell of gunpowder and earth, whipped through the cracked branches of the gnarled tree under which we sought refuge. The camp was quiet tonight—almost unnaturally so—as if the world was holding its breath before the storm broke once more.

"They say," the old man began, his voice rough as if each word had been dragged through years of dust and blood, "they say only the blessed and the foolish show mercy during wars."

I, a young soldier, fresh from the academy and brimming with youthful idealism, scoffed. It was the kind of thing I had expected him to say—a grizzled veteran hardened by too many years in the field. "Mercy is a virtue, sir," I said, standing a little straighter, as though the very words could solidify my convictions. "A testament to our humanity. In this madness, it's the only thing that keeps us from becoming monsters."

The old man chuckled, a dry, brittle sound that seemed to echo in the stillness of the night. "Humanity, boy," he rasped, his voice lowering with the weight of experience, "is a fragile flower in the tempest of war. It withers easily, trampled underfoot by the iron boots of necessity." His gaze hardened as he looked at me, his weathered eyes narrowing, as if piercing through the very core of my youthful naivety. "Mercy, in war, is a weakness. A chink in your armor that your enemy will gladly exploit."

I felt the blood rush to my face. I had always been taught—by my instructors, by my parents—that mercy was the highest form of virtue. It was what set us apart from the barbarism we fought against. It was the reason we were soldiers, not butchers. But this old man, whose entire life seemed to have been one long, unbroken chain of conflict, was telling me something else. Something unsettling.

I argued, of course, citing ancient philosophers and the teachings of the Church—those timeless pillars that had always guided my moral compass. "Mercy is an act of strength, not weakness," I insisted, my voice firmer than I felt. "It takes courage to show compassion, especially when others would not. It's what makes us human. It's what keeps us from descending into savagery."

The old man merely shook his head, his movements slow but deliberate, as though he were giving me a chance to understand before he delivered his final words. "Humanity, boy," he repeated, his voice as hard as the steel of his rifle, "is a fragile thing in this world. A fleeting whisper in the chaos of battle. War doesn’t care for your ideals or your principles. War doesn't listen to philosophers or holy men. It listens to the sound of

boots marching, of orders given, of lives lost. The only thing that matters, in the end, is survival. And that—" he paused, his eyes narrowing as he met my gaze—"is where mercy becomes a dangerous game."

His words had a chilling logic to them, one that began to burrow deep within me. In the face of the enemy, when survival hung in the balance, could there truly be room for compassion? I had watched men fall in battle, some in agony, others in a swift and brutal silence. I had seen villages burned to the ground, homes turned into ash, families torn apart. And in all that devastation, where did mercy fit?

The old man, sensing my unease, placed a weathered hand on my shoulder. The touch was unexpectedly gentle, yet the strength in his grip was unmistakable. "Do not misunderstand me, boy," he said softly, his voice dropping to a near-whisper, as though he were sharing a secret that could shatter everything I believed. "I am not advocating for cruelty. But understand this: mercy, in war, is a calculated risk. A gamble. You must weigh the cost of compassion against the cost of its absence. And sometimes," he added, his voice hardening as he spoke, "sometimes the cost of mercy is too high."

His words haunted me long after he had spoken them. They clung to my thoughts, like a constant undercurrent to the chaos of the war that was engulfing our land. I began to see the enemy not as faceless automatons, but as men—fathers, brothers, sons—just like me. Men driven by fear, desperation, and the will to survive, fighting for their families, their homes, their very lives. How different were they from us, really?

And yet, the old man's words echoed in my mind: only the blessed and the foolish show mercy during wars. Was I blessed, or was I foolish? Was I strong enough to hold onto my humanity in the face of the enemy, or would I be broken by the weight of the suffering I witnessed?

The war raged on, a monstrous beast consuming everything in its path. The nights grew colder, and the days longer. We marched through endless fields, across barren wastelands, our boots sinking into the blood-soaked earth of battlefields that never seemed to end. In the stillness of the night, when the sounds of artillery and rifle fire faded into distant echoes, I would find myself questioning the very nature of the conflict we were embroiled in. What were we truly fighting for? Victory? Glory? Or was it merely the survival of those who still had the strength to fight?

And as I navigated the moral gray areas of war—the decisions to kill, to wound, to spare—I began to understand the profound truth in the old man's words. Mercy, in war, was not a simple, unwavering virtue. It was a complex tapestry woven from courage, wisdom, and a deep understanding of the human condition. Mercy was not something to be given lightly. It was not an act of charity—it was a risk. A choice that could save a life one moment, only to cost another the next.

One night, after a skirmish on the outskirts of a burning village, I stood alone beside a wounded enemy soldier, his face covered in dirt and blood, his hand reaching toward me, his eyes wide with pleading. In that moment, I saw not a foe, but a man, desperate for life. The old man's words echoed in my ears. I had the power to offer him mercy—to spare him and, perhaps, save his life. But I also knew that mercy would not be without consequence. If I spared him, would it cost me the lives of my comrades tomorrow? Would his people return to fight us with the same fury that we had just unleashed on them?

I hesitated, the weight of my decision pressing down on me like a physical force. Time seemed to stretch, each second feeling like an eternity. I remembered the old man's warning: mercy was a gamble. A dangerous one.

And then, in that moment of uncertainty, I made my choice. I gave him mercy, my hand offering him water and a chance to live. The old man would have called it foolish. And maybe it was. But in that instant, I felt something within me stir—a fleeting sense of hope, perhaps—that maybe, just maybe, mercy could still find a place in this hellish war.

The following days proved the cost of that mercy. The enemy returned, fiercer than before. But the memory of that moment stayed with me, a reminder that humanity, no matter how fragile, could still survive, even in the midst of the darkest storm.

The war continued, as brutal and unforgiving as ever. And with each battle, I grew a little older, a little wiser, a little more uncertain of the path I was walking. War had a way of shaping its participants, not into the heroes or villains of old tales, but into something more complex—figures forged in fire, yet scarred by its touch. But one thing remained clear: mercy, in the end, was not about saving others—it was about saving oneself.

Growth in war was not simply about strength or skill—it was about understanding. Battles were not won through reckless fury or blind ambition. They were won by those who could channel their energy like an archer pulling a bowstring, knowing when to draw back and when to release. Each step I took in this endless conflict taught me the same lesson: power without control was as dangerous to its wielder as it was to the enemy.

I began to see the battlefield as more than a place of violence. It was a living, breathing thing, a storm of shifting energies. To survive it, one could not fight against the current; one had to flow with it, turning chaos into momentum and opposition into opportunity. It wasn't the strongest who endured—it was the adaptable, the patient, the deliberate.

With every skirmish, I learned to read the rhythm of war: how an enemy's confidence could be baited into overextension, how exhaustion could turn discipline into disorder, how the smallest crack in an army's resolve could shatter an entire front. The more I studied the currents of battle, the more I realized that victory came not from overpowering an opponent, but from guiding them to defeat with the precision of a blade striking its mark.

But growth wasn't just about tactics—it was also about restraint. The energy that drove me to fight could just as easily consume me if I let it. I had seen men lost to their own rage, burning through their strength in a single blaze of fury, only to collapse when the enemy's second wave came. Others clung too tightly to caution, their energy smothered by fear, leaving them too slow to seize the moment when it arrived. Both extremes led to ruin. The path forward required balance—a harmony of action and restraint, passion and calculation.

I carried these lessons with me, carving them into my mind as deeply as the scars across my skin. Growth wasn't something that happened in the quiet moments between battles—it happened in the heart of the storm, where every decision carried the weight of life and death. And though the path I walked was uncertain, I knew this: war wasn't simply about destruction. It was about transformation. Those who survived were not the same as those who began.

In the end, I understood why mercy mattered—not because it was a sign of weakness, but because it was the ultimate act of control. Mercy was choosing to preserve your humanity when the world sought to strip it away. It was a reminder that even in the darkest moments, there was a part of me that could still choose, that could still rise above the chaos.

War, for all its horror, had taught me this: energy was a weapon, a shield, and a guiding force. To wield it was to grow, to endure, to become something greater than the storm around me.

Chapter 2: The Anatomy of Tyranny

The war raged on, a monstrous beast consuming everything in its path, its hunger relentless, its destruction indiscriminate. What had begun as a crusade for justice and order had devolved into a blood-soaked charnel house. Victories no longer brought hope—only a temporary delay before the next wave of suffering. Lordes, once a soldier who believed in the righteousness of his cause, now found himself drowning in a tide of disillusionment, clinging to fading ideals in a sea of betrayal.

Omezarr, once a symbol of order, prosperity, and justice, had morphed into something grotesque, a bloated, festering carcass propped up by fear, lies, and oppression. The cities, which had once hummed with the pulse of vibrant life, now languished under a suffocating weight. The Empire was no longer a dream—it was a machine, engineered to crush resistance and feed endlessly on its own people.

Omezarr was a nation divided—not just by wealth, but by water.

The elite floated above the suffering, literally and metaphorically, in colossal artificial islands that shimmered like mirages upon the ocean's surface. Towers of glass and gold rose from these metropolises, monuments to excess and indifference. Bridges of reinforced steel and magnetized transit lanes kept them connected, ensuring the privileged could traverse their domain without soiling themselves with the reality below. Beneath the floating cities, massive turbines churned, feeding power into their paradise with the ceaseless hunger of the tides.

On the mainland, the Imperial Sector cast a darker shadow. Skyscrapers of black steel and glass towered above the lesser districts, their walls etched with the Emperor’s decrees, his words etched into the bones of the city itself. This was the domain of enforcers, bureaucrats, and those whose loyalty was repaid with fleeting comfort. The streets gleamed under artificial sunlight, their cleanliness a hollow mask over the rot festering in the gutters. High-speed rails whisked the chosen few above the streets, never letting them see the broken faces of those who labored below.

Beneath the gleaming facades, in the endless maze of the Outer Sectors, the truth festered. Buildings sagged under the weight of generations, their walls covered in peeling propaganda posters that warned against rebellion. The roads were cracked, littered with the remnants of protests long silenced. Streetlights flickered erratically, some left broken for years, as if to remind the people that they were not worth the effort of repair.

Surveillance drones buzzed overhead like mechanical carrion birds, scanning faces, logging movements, feeding endless streams of data to a machine that demanded absolute control.
No shadow, no corner, no thought was ever truly private.

Even the sky was stolen.

The Imperial Watchtower pierced the clouds, its floodlights bathing the night in sterile daylight.
It was said that nothing in Omezarr happened unseen—and in that, there was no lie.

The markets, once vibrant, were now silent tombs. Where once the laughter of merchants and the aroma of spices filled the air, there was now only the hollow clatter of rationed goods. Every stall government-approved, every merchant licensed by the state. The finest goods—silks, spices, technologies—never touched the hands of the common people. They were reserved for the Imperial Elite, ferried across glittering waters to their floating palaces, guarded by steel walls and automated turrets.

For the working class, survival was rationed. Each citizen was issued a consumption card—rice, synthetic protein, filtered water, and little else. Meat was a luxury glimpsed only during state holidays, awarded as a reward for obedience.

Scarcity was not a sign of failure—it was the system working as intended. An Empire that thrived not on trade, but on conquest, drained the life from every land it touched. Entire regions became extraction zones, their populations reduced to numbers, their histories erased.

Corruption wasn't a flaw of the system—it was the mortar that held the Empire together. Bribes dictated justice. Loyalty purchased monopolies. Even the Empire's soldiers, once proud and disciplined, were fed just enough to stand and march, but never enough to rebel.

For the common people, there was no way up—birth sealed fate. The caste system was absolute. If you were born into the working class, you stayed there. If you questioned your place, you disappeared.

Omezarr proclaimed itself eternal, but those beneath its boot saw the truth. Fear could chain the body, but not the spirit. And when the people had nothing left to lose, they would rise.

In the darkness of abandoned tunnels and forgotten alleys, the embers of resistance began to glow.

Even knowledge itself was rationed. Schools did not teach history, but obedience. Education was not about enlightenment, but submission. Children were taught the glory of Omezarr, the divine right of the Emperor, and the dangers of foreign influence. Rebellions were erased from history, wars rewritten to glorify conquest, and loyalty was instilled not just through lessons, but through fear. Students were trained to report disloyalty—even within their own families, ensuring that trust itself became a casualty of the Empire's control.

The Empire had perfected the art of isolation.

The people lived in fear not only of their rulers but of one another. Eyes that once looked for solidarity now only searched for threats. Neighbors no longer greeted one another with the warmth of friendship but with the cold caution of survival.

Hunger was the Empire's quietest weapon. The people were never starved enough to riot, but never fed enough to rise. Rations were calculated with precision—just enough to keep workers standing, soldiers marching, and dissenters too weak to fight. Even the military, once feared as an unbreakable force, was held in check through scarcity. Soldiers received just enough to keep them loyal, their wages a meager incentive to serve rather than rebel.

Yet even here, under the suffocating weight of tyranny, Lordes sensed it:
A hidden fire, smoldering beneath the ashes of despair.
Fear could silence voices, but it could not kill dreams.

True control was not fear—it was willing submission.
And in that, the Empire had already failed.

He remembered his father's words:
"Keep your eyes on what's important to you, and who is important to you."

The words had once been a guiding star.
Now, they were a question.
What was important?
The Emperor, a man who ruled by fear and deceit?
The Empire, a machine that devoured the very people it claimed to protect?

Lordes had once believed in order, in discipline, in the rule of law. Without them, he had seen what chaos could do. But belief had begun to crack, fissures forming under the relentless weight of cruelty.

The first crack had been small, barely noticeable, but once a foundation was compromised, collapse was inevitable. He had seen things—orders carried out in the name of peace, but executed with the precision of cruelty. Villages razed, their people marked as insurgents simply because they refused to give up their land. Soldiers following commands not to protect, but to suppress. His hands had been stained by duty, his conscience buried beneath the weight of justifications. This is war, he told himself. This is necessary.

But doubt was insidious. It grew, whispering questions he could no longer silence.

The second crack had come with Colonel Kwame's first message—the revelation that the Empire was not simply fighting enemies, but creating them. That it did not seek peace, only control. That the war in Africa, the one he had fought in, had been engineered, orchestrated like a grand performance to keep the machine of conquest running. Lordes had read the document with cold, shaking hands, and in that moment, he knew—he had not been a protector. He had been a tool. A weapon wielded by men who had no interest in justice, only power.