

Dark Days

Part one

Reign of the Vampire

BY WILLIAM R DANIELS

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Long before the lands had names and deserts were charted, in a time when myth was truth and warriors perished under the rule of tyrants. A great dragon reared its head from the pits of hell with an insatiable thirst for the blood of man. It was in the time of 1405 that a warrior on the battle ground amidst seventy former slaves waited for the cries of war. He is Vor, born in captivity but now stands with sword in hand facing his former master's horde; the hardship of his youth forged a corded veined mass of brown muscle that had felt the heat of freedom from an unmerciful sun. His brown eyes peers over the yellow vastness of rippling sands and high dunes that stretches out far beyond his sight. The moon itself hid behind dark clouds as the masses of seventy two barbarian clans join the slaves to fight for a humanity that would never know the truth of what evil was out there.

Vor's thoughts drifted to his family hidden miles behind them in the town of Namadia within a church. There were plenty of doubts about the church's ability to protect anybody, much less a God who has never been seen. He had no belief in God or Gods, only that steel sharpened and tempered by flame can split flesh. Both man and beast had felt the bite of his blade, that was forged with every aspect of the handle molded and chiseled into intricate shapes of two jaded dragons wrapped around a serpent's neck. It carried no guard, nor did Vor ever do a lot of blocking. Testing the firmness of his grip, he held the three foot blade out flicking his wrist with a sharp forward twist. Thirty six distinctively designed switch blades slid out from all sides of the main blade creating a branch of wavy daggers. Rolling his shoulders back and tensing the muscles in his neck it became nonexistent. Like most he kept his dark brown hair long hanging just below the shoulders. Unlike most he wore no armor, feeling relaxed and unrestrained in dark robes that seemed to twist into pants and wrapping around his knees then tuck into soft soled animal skinned boots that held remnants of dark fur. With a backwards twirl of his wrist the

sword reverted back to its single bladed position. The men standing around him flinched at the sound of the blades switching back to their folds.

Far behind Vor, the clan elders sat on their horses watching the warriors fall into lines. A thousand flames illuminated the night in a wicked display of unison breaking the darkness with silhouettes of shadows dancing on the sands as torches were lit. Vor narrowing his eyes hoping to see the inbound enemy, instead his reward is a massive dark cloud of sand and dust beyond the dunes. A thousand foot falls and hoof beats thundering the ground shifted the sands into small avalanches. Vor clenched his sword tighter as the shimmer of red eyes reflecting the fires lining up across the sandy horizon gave promise of a fight.

The ground shook under his feet as a massive horde of undead march over the dunes announcing their presence with snarls and shrills of hunger that pierced the hearts of the bravest of men. Though he could barely see them in the darkness with the exception of those burning eyes, Vor knew what lay just beyond the front lines of the vampiric horde, and then.....

And then the sands no more than forty paces away from the front line, stood up with yellow grains descending back to the ground uncovering beastly things that stared at them through yellow green slits for eyes. Small snouts that were no more than a half inch from the face carried two rows of serrated teeth. Vor could not tell if it was armor they wore or their own skin that was hard and scale like along their barrel chests and forearms. The creatures had begun their howls at the mortals slinging saliva from mouth than fading into rumbling growls of anticipation. These shameless creatures were the Dark Lords ghouls, and they would devour anything including their own. Vor having never encountered them during his years as a slave only heard rumors about such beasts. Yet he could see the chaos they would bring, some carried large swords and battle axes while others seemed to prefer the use of their talon like claws to rip one to shreds. Vor ignored their inhuman growls that seemed to affect many others physiologically forcing some to flee to the back lines.

The man next to Vor dampened the ground with urine as a whimper escaped his lips. The rest of the undead horde marched down the dunes with the sound of their armor clanging until stopping just behind the ghouls. Their armor reflecting the light of the torches gave view of demonic helmets and chrome plates attached to chain mail. Fangs glinted as they snarled at the mortals. Their patience tested having to wait for Vlad's call to war.

On Vor's side came the shout for archers to string bows and prepare to fire a flamed volley into the front lines. Stepping away from the soiled man and crossing over to where one of the torch bearers stood along the second line, his heart stopped as a feeling averted his eyes back to the dunes above the undead horde. A shadowy figure rode a horse amongst the enemy, carrying no flag and wore no armor that Vor could make out from his distance. Yet he knew who it was, as a child he took many beatings and lashings from this beast, even watched as he parents were put on chopping blocks and made into brew.

Galloping in from behind the undead army was a tall lean man on horseback, long black hair draped over his shoulders and down to his mid back. There was sin in his eyes as black pupils with yellow rings surrounded red dots that enhanced the paleness of his face, giving it a sick glow. This man appeared to be no more than in his late twenties, yet he was hundreds of years old. A black cloak of animal fur flowed from his broad shoulders and over the hind quarters of his horse giving the glint of a red in-lining. This was the Great Dragon dressed eloquent for battle with silk shirt untied at the chest and rolled up sleeves. Soft cotton pants that only royalty would wear were tucked into gold tipped boots that came to a sharp bladed point. His features were elf like in origin with ears that came to a slight point beneath his hair.

Trotting his horse through the lines he could hear the grinding of teeth as the scent of man filled their nostrils, driving all into blood frenzy. He was pleased by the presentation before him, all of those slaves that sought out freedom and stole from him stood defiant against him once again for the last time. Following their foolish slave king out into the desert on the whim of a prophecy that was a fabrication of desperate minds. They deserved to be slaughtered, tortured, eaten; yes he would dine on flesh by the end of this night. Vlad's thoughts were malicious and unwavering. It matter not the armada of mortals that were gathered, trying to protect their pathetic town and families. It was unfortunate for the slaves that one of their own had betrayed them for immortality. Now he had the location of their town and that retched slave king. It was time for Vor to rejoin his kin in shackles or grace his throne with his head on a pike. He would spill entrails to the sands this night as his army would move like sharpened steel through flesh. Thousands would die, perhaps by the end of his life time; he would be responsible for billions of deaths. For now though he relished the idea of this night being the beginning of suffering for the supposed young king of slaves. Of course there were other ambitions for this night, something valuable stolen from him that brought his hatred to a sharp focus on the slave king?

Vor felt eyes boring into him; checking his armaments he felt the apprehension among the ranks rising to a considerable point of panic. He prepared for blood when the elders called for war, a battle axe was slung across his back and many other unseen blades were sheathed and hidden beneath the fold of his robes. Positioning one's self within the second line, he rolled the sleeves up to mid forearm; a row of silver polished daggers became visible on both arms, each containing a set of three. The warrior closest stole a glance. In turn Vor cut his eyes over to the former slave in reply with a slight grin. "No worries, if your gods abandoned you, I will bring promise of blade baring throat." His voice was gravel.

The former slave felt intent of words. On the other side of this, Vor looking at the warrior felt pity knowing the man would die. Bending down to the sands he took a handful watching it drizzle from the bottom of his fist. The wind moved against them, not a good sign for the archers. Knowing there was little more to be learned or prepare for, Vor stood to his full height, eyes focused on the enemy ahead. The sound of a horn blared from unseen direction demanding for the four archers around each torch to aim high into the air with hopes of striking down most of the front line.

Vor knew that the torches would not last the night; eventually they would lose light and then the battle. He advanced through the lines wanting to reach the front so he could see the enemy better; the torches had made the night air bright with flickering embers. On advance he spied the enemy and felt so nauseated he had to spit. Even more so looking at the reptilian like ghouls holding what appeared to be massive wolves with spiked collars and long chains. The beasts were handed down from the rear of the horde to the front lines, what Vor did not see, was the soldiers lock the chains onto the collars of the ghouls so there would be no separation of the two. Their maws were huge with fanged teeth that gnashing together with yellow tinted saliva running from exposed blackened gums.

The winds grew silent; rolling sands slowed their scattering pace before growing calm and still. Silence chilled the air with nervous barbarians and former slaves breathing heavy with puffs of their breaths visible before them. Vor knew that Vlad was mounted on horseback somewhere behind the undead and so begun his slow walk from the second line to the front line, sword in hand readying for chaos.

Piercing wails screeched through the air as the ghouls begun their charge sprinting behind the massive devil hounds. Then the entire legion of undead became unleashed. The men shook as the wails crept up their backs in a violent spasm of terror. Many warriors around Vor and throughout fell to the ground curling themselves up into fetal positions chanting prayers of mercy as if they had truly found a God. With a grunt of disgust and a single crack of his thick neck Vor turned to face the incoming horde the only way he knew how; with remorseless ferocity. The front lines from both sides advanced all at once, steady then it turned into a full on charge and when the two lines met, a shower of blood sprayed into the second line covering Vor in crimson. Over five hundred fell to slaughter within seconds. The barbarians charging lost all sense of themselves swinging blind at the enemy in bellowing rages. Vor Kept his wits, staying calm his eyes scoping out the field around him. He spied the devil dogs sprinting through the battle pulling the chain taut behind them and nearly dragging the ghouls to their knees. The proof of those chains proved too late for one to realize that they had blades covering the entire length. Bellies were sliced open, arms and hands fell to the sands and when these beasts leapt the chain would send heads rolling from shoulders. The devil dogs themselves used their huge maws to rip legs from knees and hips while the ghouls attack anything closest to them. It mattered not on who it was, human or vampire or even one of their own, their near sightedness could not distinguish anyone.

Watching the massive beasts cut through the first line, Vor lowered his stance and turned his body to the side giving the dogs little to attack. The ghouls attached to them barely maintained themselves the devil hounds were enormous with thick manes of fur surrounding their necks; they stood chest high with bodies as thick as a bears. As if a silent command had gone out that no one could hear or see, the dogs set their sights on Vor. Circling the huge warrior they gnashed their teeth as blood and left over gore hung from their lower jaws. One of the beasts leapt for Vor's back, not expecting for the warrior to turn with a foot striking with deadly purpose. The heel of his boot crunched into jaw, splintering teeth and nearly popping an eye from its socket.

The devil dog spiraled into a back flip and half before landing hard on its side sliding. Whimpering it scampered to its feet backing away and rolling its crushed snout over and through the sand as it tried to gain its vision back. The ghoul attached stumbled forward swinging its axe at Vor. Its arm and axe went into the air as Vor's blade sliced through scale and splintered bone. Vor screamed a war cry for every strike and releasing that inner core of strength.

Looking down at the fallen devil dog, blood streamed heavy from its ears and snout, Vor brought a foot down on its neck sending its body into violent shakes. The one armed ghoul exploding with energy using its claws tearing across Vor's back and ripping a portion of his robe away. Vor spun with the attack, bringing his blade around sliding it across scaled face, and then back opposite belly and with a roll over his wrist the sword was inverted in grip as he stepped back and into the ghoul's space. The tip of his sword punctured through sternum and pushed the ghoul's heart out its armpit. The second attack even swifter as another devil dog went for his throat by charging in close and leaping into his chest barely giving Vor enough time to free his sword. The savage warrior merely grunted in anticipation of the attack, his left hand swiped wide catching the beast by the front of its neck. It hung in mid air struggling to bite flesh. Its eyes bulged as Vor's hand squeezed raising the devil dog high into the air and with a whipping motion of his arm snapped its neck. Through all of this Vor had begun his pace forward never faltering his step as he broke its neck than tossing it into the ghoul it was dragging, his sword hand preparing for the incoming ghoul. The ghoul looked down at the body that was flung at him with a puzzled expression; it never looked up again as Vor's sword tip struck beneath nose and out the back of its skull.

Behind Vor, men battled and perished as the sands became moist with their blood, so much so that it no longer absorbed but rather forced the blood to gather in small and large pools. Vor stepped through several puddles with it splashing up his leg, he ignored this not caring what he stepped in. Walking over a body that had lost its legs and head Vor wondered whether it was man or beast. The vampires looked too much like them unless you were close enough to them. Such thoughts fled from mind as he stepped back into the fray of battle, striking at the closest to him. His blade bit into flesh then broke through bone; the hit sent the vamp rolling with a five inch wound opened up in its chest. Looking away from his kill Vor could hear the foot falls of undead heading into the field. The distraction allowed for one of the vamps to tackle him at the waist nearly picking him up off the ground. Vor reacted with little thought, bringing a knee under the creatures chin feeling the jaw sliding to the side as fang was expelled or swallowed. The vamp released Vor's waist falling to the side as the warrior walked onward with no care of finishing. A blade sliced through the air as the vamp's howl alerted Vor; he ducked the horizontal swipe and spun onto one knee swinging his own blade in a horizontal arch. Its steel ran its length over the belly of his attacker. Entrails begun to slip through damaged armor as Vor kicked the vamp out of his way.

The realism of this nightmare pressed on him as the scenes of war slowed before his eyes. Around him the battle had taken terrible turns as men were put to their knees and beheaded.

Several roamed the grounds with incoherent mutterings while frantic searching the sands for lost limbs or holding their guts. His adrenaline brought a ringing to his ears as his eyes averted to the west looking for the dune where the elders had stood shouting orders. Their horses stood with no riders as four shadows of beasts with long scraggly hair danced with excitement holding up four severed heads. Vor was too far away to see any real detail, but the outline was enough. His sword flashed and two fell as he continued to fight against the waves of mounting undead that charged him. Having hacked and sliced his way across the field he found himself in need of being with his family, which meant he had to find a way to get to them. The betrayal of his thoughts cost as a sting of pain sliced down his back. The sword that struck out against his flesh came back looking for the side of his head. Moving quick under the blade opposite of its direction he bore his full weight against his blade sending it across the armored torso of his attacker. Sparks between steeled armor and blade sounded out, the vamp brought his blade down as Vor parried it away from his head with an overhead block. Using his back leg Vor kicks the vamps left leg out sending the vamp to its back. With a twirl Vor grips his sword like a club and swings like trying to hit a rock from the sand, his blade crushes into chin and sends pieces of brain and bone along with its helmet skittering across the sand.

Blocking another attack that was low, Vor sends a fist into the vamps mouth, turning it into a bloodied mush. More approached from behind, his peripheral caught two rushing in from his right. Snapping his left foot out, he kicks the vamp with the mush mouth down onto his back. The battle swayed in the direction of the undead as they started focusing more on him. This meant that his chances of reaching his family were descending. Three more joined the fray against him; he blocked high as another grabbed him from behind with a bear hug. Vor's elbow found the nose of that one sending him staggering back with dark liquid pouring from between its fingers as it held a nose nearly torn from its face. Vor ducked forward evading another high attack and blocked an incoming mace from the side. The chain of the mace wrapped around the blade with intention of disarming. Vor ignored the ball and chain as he brought his blade forward in a parry against a lance sending the mace wielding vamp flying through the air refusing to release its weapon. They all came at once surrounding him in a circle, he defended himself with astonished skill but it mattered little, their attacks opened small cuts and deep wounds on his arms, chest and back. He pushed beyond mentally from the pain and damage his body had sustained. Forcing up the last reserves of his strength he became savage and relentless against his attackers.

The vamp wielding the mace felt his shoulders dislocate as he fought to keep grip on his weapon. Growling, Vor struck out against two vamps and much to their dismay. Vor's sword expanded out with jagged blades forming a branch of sharp steel cutting through the chain wrapped around it and with a seventy five degree angled slice, cut through the lance and blade of the two vamps. Blocking was not enough as the branch crashed through their weapons and across a stomach and then chest, sending entrails and blood into a different battle. The one that had the mace sat up from the sand when his head popped up from his shoulders bringing him eye level with Vor. His

eyes for the first three seconds realized that it traveled on a strange falling arch before hitting the sands with a thud and rolling.

Vor dive rolled forward as the two attackers from behind chased, coming up on his feet like a tiger coiled to ravage its prey, he held his sword to the far right of his body as his left hand rested on the sand, waiting on the balls of his feet. Patience rewarded as one approached swinging his blade wide from the side. Vor stepped within the beast's arms with his left hand gripping the vamps wrist, holding the blade at bay. With a twirl and upwards flash the complete left side of the vamps body fell away and then upon release the right side crumpled to the bloody sands. The vamp following his comrade stopped in his tracks and tried to turn and run when he fell to the ground and started scrambling backwards from the approaching man beast that stalked toward him. The sword still branched out in Vor's hand gave the fallen vamp an inkling of what was about to happen, it wouldn't just slice; it would rip chunks of meat and bone from his body. Vor stood at the vamps feet and let out a rumbling scream of rage that died into a growl. The vamp on the ground soiled himself before darkness claimed him. Vor stomped right on by looking for a fight.

Atop the dunes viewing his men slaughtering the barbarian dogs, Vlad sat on his horse somewhat amused with the battle. This was the army those old men and that damned king of slaves, Vor, could bring against him. Vlad could care less that Vor had amassed an army; purpose alone brought him here to obliterate the last of those that opposed him. Of course the scrolls of Abraith hidden in the town of Namadia would bring purpose to close. Now was the time to ride around this battle and set the town of Namadia to blaze. With a single nudge of his boot and the click of his tongue his horse swayed to the right before heading off, followed by two of the high guards that stayed at Vlad's sides always.

The high guards were positions held by only the most loyal and greatest of warriors of the clan. Only two ever filled this position no more, no less. Their job was to ensure that all of Vlad's desires and wants would be carried out and done; of course they did this without want for themselves. All memory of mortal life long gone replaced by instinct and gratitude for Vlad's blessing. It being a rather lengthy process of torture and surrendering oneself to dying. Which was how the ghouls were created, accidently but rather impressive none the less. They were somehow stuck between the transformations of man and vampire having not completely surrendered themselves and thus were made into ghouls.

Gallop atop the dune and making their way around, Vlad awed at the sight of so many corpses littering the way and how so many still fought against them. However his eyes spied quite the anomaly amidst this crowd and a twinge of fear crept up his spine. Pushing the thought away and maintaining his powerful presence among his own he continued on not giving thought to the slave king.

Vor's left eye twitched unwillingly as the feeling of godless eyes crossed over him, forcing his gaze to the dunes ahead. He saw nothing as a slight nick of a blade was felt on the back of his thigh. His reaction was instantaneous as he rolled away from the group of vamps that attempted to sneak up on him. Rolling to his feet and facing them, he counted six and knew that he might not live through this one. He was tired and fatigued, the sword in his hand felt twenty pounds heavier and the wounds on his body were starting to take a toll. Shaking his head and clearing the blood and sand from his eyes he scowled at them as grit drifted from the stubble on his chin. He stepped back into a long wide stance as he pulled the battle axe from his back sheath and brought it to position behind his left thigh and his sword positioning to the front with the point touching the sand. The battle axe was forged by his hands with a heart shaped double blade that weighed close to twenty pounds with a short handle that made it easy to wield one handed. His chest heaved with great breathes of exasperation causing more sand to descend from his body. The torches surrounding the battle were starting to dim as the winds of the desert and blown sand snuffs' them out. The rescinding fire shadowed the faces of his enemy as he charged into the six swinging the axe and parrying with sword. Entrails left bellies as blood rained from cut flesh as Vor danced with a bladed frenzy as bodies fell wreathing in their immortal agony. A dagger stabbed into the back of his right shoulder and protruded from the front. He spins and instinctively ramming the serpent head of his sword handle into the attacker's chest, cracking through the thin armor. The female vamp stumbled as Vor spun with his axe sweeping her from behind her feet into the air as the branch of steel blades cleave her raggedly in half before she hits the ground.

A cool breeze passed through making Vor sticky and wet; looking down at the back of his hands and arms he could no longer tell where he was injured. His shredded robe and arms were caked in blood and sand only the white of his good eye was visible of the man beneath the gore. Something slammed into the back of his head giving him the feeling that teeth were about to leave his mouth as blood spit from swollen dry lips. He fell forward struggling to shake off the bright flashes beneath his eye lids. The heaviness of iron in his mouth forced him to spit, it came out as drool and saliva mixed with blood and ran down his chin. His vision cleared presenting a new sight he did not welcome. A vampire garbed in gladiator wear in a bronze skirt and sandals towered over him at seven feet with sausage size fingers that could curl up not into fists but boulders. This explained the dull thudding of pain in his ears, along with a slight vibration of something knocked loose. His legs and arms were the size of tree trunks with a neck that was swallowed into tensed muscle, its face distorted with rows of sharpened teeth exposed from pulled back lips. Vor narrowed his one eye trying to clear the double vision and hoped that he had only one of these beasts to deal with.

The giant wore a chromed horned helmet that covered most of his face with a demonic snout of a bat, blood and some pieces of flesh could be seen clinging to the horns. A couple of barbarians that had been stalking the beast took advantage as it focused on Vor. Clumsy with their plan they leapt. A blade impaled the beast's forearm; the man refused to release his sword and hung



suspended in air. Raised eye level the beast reached out and gripped the man's throat, crushing his neck with several pops being heard. The man was a corpse upon release. The other two stabbed and sliced with their blades as the beast caught one blade in the palm of his hand, yanking it out of the man's grip and tossing it beyond sight. The man turned to run and felt the last remnants of life exit with a single breath as he came eye to eye with another vamp. The blade twisted into his heart before being pulled out slow and methodical.

Vor stood in time to see the final man being slammed into the ground by the back of his head. The beast brought a foot down several times on the head smashing it beneath the sand hiding the fact that it was crushed as blood welled around the beasts' foot. Winded and strained, Vor tried to gather his strength. He had lost the battle axe when the beasts' fists rocked his head. At least he still had his sword still branched out with its deadly flora of blades. The beast seemed to admire the weapon as it tilted its huge head to the side in admiration. Then it moved with a blur that kicked up sand. Vor felt a foot strike the sword from his hand as an iron grip lifted him up by the throat. His feet left the ground bringing him eye level with the beast. Gripping the vamps forearm he brought his feet up and kicked out with legs, pushing off the abdominal section and twisting against the things massive thumb. He managed to free himself falling onto his back. Sitting up rubbing his bruised neck with a hand he stood to face the vampire whom was already atop him. Four knuckles slammed into the side of his face splitting his cheek, and then crashed down again sending him to a knee. This time he could feel the blood leave his mouth followed by several teeth. It became obvious the beast's size deceived the eyes; it did nothing to slow the Vamp. The beast's boulder size fists landed another three times before sending Vor sprawled to the sand face first. Looking down at the unmoving warrior, the beast nodded its head knowing that nothing has ever survived the onslaught of his fists. Turning to leave, a single word spoken out from behind him brings a cold chill down his spine.

## **NAMADIA**

Their dark silhouettes appeared at the front gates leading into the town of Namadia, Three on horseback while five others stood behind a cloaked figure that kept his head down and covered by hood. The tallest figure looked up into the skies and smiled with a silent chortle as rolling clouds passed overhead.

“A Godless night.” The clouds looked full and dark that would surely be followed by a heavy rain that happened once maybe twice in a single year. This would not only keep the sun's rays at bay but also provide more time within the town to search for the scroll.

A harsh voice gave reply back to his lord, “Ma Lord, the church is there.” Pointing to the left side of town just beyond the gates where a large fountain sat spewing strings of water high up into the air.

Vlad dismounted as did his high guardsmen following his every step. His boots crunched the gravel underneath until he came upon the pebbled path leading up to the church steps. Here he stopped and measured his surroundings. Men and women wondered the streets this early morn completely oblivious that hell had walked into their town. Ah, something that would definitely have to change as he motioned for the five standing at the gates to come forward.

“Kill them all.”

The cloaked man nodded his head. “A victory well earned Ma Lord.”

“Krolan, remember the promise made and purpose.”

“Ma Lord.” Krolan hissed bowing and walking away at the same time as the four vamps that stood with him now followed to the church steps. The dark army surrounding the town started scaling the walls trapping all inside. Somewhere to his left a distinct voice rang out about her baby being eaten, Krolan paid no mind to the chaos as men fought hopelessly to protect their families; he focused on the final act of his betrayal. Walking up the steps and motioning with his hand for the vamps to open the doors he stopped and waited patiently as they complied in silence.

## **BATTLE**

“No.” A whispered grunt of defiance halted the giant vamp in his tracks. His head turned ever so slight to the side, his mind reeling in dismay as Vor lifted himself up from the sands visibly in pain and very slow as blood dripped from all edges of his body.

“No.” More guttural sounding as Vor lifted himself up onto his knees. Crimson streamed from his left eye as red spittle drooled from split lips crusted with sand. Hair hung in strangled mats of dried gore. Pain coursed through his body as cramps racked his legs behind the knees. The dagger still lodged in his shoulder was the numbness spot on his body. The giant vamp turned with brow furrowed and fangs bared through pulled backed lips. Removing his helmet and dropping it to the sands he watched as the warrior rose from knees to one foot at a time and then with a massive intake of air, Vor stood. Fists clinched, he used a forearm to clear the blood from his one good eye that was barely open the other swollen shut with a slight reddish bulge.

Looking through strands of his blood matted hair and screaming through the pain of his joints, he charged the beast with a fury of knuckles.

The vamp brought a clawed hand up the front of Vor's robe ripping the front to shreds and exposing a broad chest sheeted with blood. Pushing forward Vor slammed his left fist across the beast's jaw, breaking two of his small knuckles. The exchange and onslaught of fists brought howls of rage from both opponents. Vor's hits broke a nose at the bridge, realistically he did little damage to the giant as most of his hits were only able to reach the vamps lower jaw and chin, unless he lunged and was lucky enough not to get caught in mid air. A solid hit forces his body to spin as a massive hand grabs him by the back of the neck. His feet leave the ground as he slams face first into the sand, once, darkness crept into the sides of his vision, twice, his jaw slid slack and broken, thrice, he turns his head and feels wetness going down his throat, he tastes blood.

The vamp steps back out of breath soaking in the sight of Vor's body spread out with a collective pool of blood forming around his head. The ex-slave stirred once again and rose up on his hands and knees, spitting blood from his mouth along with bits of tooth. Vor stood with his back facing his opponent, fists clinched tight he turns with a growl, his legs pushing his body into a short distant sprint. Being but a foot away from connecting a downward punch to the surprised face of the beast; two arrows poked against his left shoulder blade. The beast seeing his chance as the warrior stumbled forward, caught Vor's wrist and snagged the back of his pants. He lifted the warrior overhead; his limp body sagged as both arms hung lifeless. The giant swung Vor's body down until ribs snapped over a knee. The warrior let out a yelp as his body was shoved from the knee and onto the sands, breaking the arrow quivers that jutted out of his back. The seven foot giant spit blood and mucus onto Vor's back as the final insult and then takes his leave heading back into fray of battle.

The sound was but a faint echo in his left ear, a horrible drip of something wet slamming onto stone. His one eye spasms open just a crack as his body forces an intake of air, causing the smashed ribs to move with a life of their own. Pain seared through his body in horrible waves of heat that nearly takes him back into unconsciousness. His good eye lolled back into his head as nausea presses his stomach. Knowing that death was but a single breath away he grits his teeth and forces himself to stay conscious. The dripping sound became more coherent to his ears as he realized blood poured from his nostrils and onto the only damn slab of rock in the entire desert. Bringing his knees in and pushing up with his palms, Vor painfully brings his body up until he was able to sit back on his knees. He coughed bits of blood into the air as a strange gurgle of liquid filled his throat. He could feel himself bleeding internal as crimson regurgitated from his mouth. Specs of sand and blood laden saliva drooled from his chin and onto his shredded chest. Slowing his breathing the heart beat in his ears begun to fade away along with the haze that lifted from his good eye that was nearly closed.

The front of his robe rested in shredded strips around his waist as the back of his hands busted and bleeding touched the sand. A man to the right of him rolled over screaming for his dad and God; part of his head missing just above the right brow giving view of yellowish sandy fluid leaking from his exposed brain. Everywhere screams of men echoed in the moonless night as their severed limbs and organs blessed the ground in a utopia of gore. Vor felt the pain ebb as his body goes into shock replacing it with a new feeling of heaviness. Across the way a man whom Vor had known most of his life crawled on his knees.

Hedeon tries to stand with an arm outstretched in the air reaching for nothing, and his other lay across a bloody midsection. His chin chattered with indistinct words as blood continuously poured from his mouth. Vor remembered the day Hedeon joined the clan; he brought a daughter that was the age of Vor's own son, along with two older brothers.

Vor felt his shoulders slump forward as his one eye closes, he breathes out slow trying to calm the irrationality of his thoughts, as he spied the reason of Hedeon's struggle to stand. Each time the warrior fought to his feet using his free arm for balance he would immediately fall back to his knees, as his one foot would continuously step on his large intestine that was on the ground and ran between his legs and several feet behind him in the sands. Vor forced himself up on unsteady legs and retrieves his sword as the decision of what must be done became his most forward thought. With no strength left in his arms the sword was dragged through the sand as he forced himself toward Hedeon. The sword nearly flew from his hand as he twisted the handle to retract the branch of blades back to their resting position.

Seeing his friend staggering his way toward him, he stops and sits up on his knees arms outstretched exposing his bare chest. The remaining guts rolled out from his abdomen. "Vor....."

Feet away, he replies. "May your gods find you upon journey." Then falling to his knees and looking Hedeon in the eyes the tip of his sword pressed against his friend's sternum. Placing his right hand on Hedeon's left shoulder he leaned in pushing the blade in as fast as he could, piercing the heart. Hedeon didn't even feel the slide of the blade after the initial pinch of the tip entering. Falling forward his forehead touched Vor's as the life lifted from his eyes and the last breath whispered out through parched lips. No matter the damage to Vor's eyes, tears streamed down his filth ridden face, slow he pulls the sword out of his friend's body. Falling to the side he rolls over onto his back as the darkness once again graces his consciousness.

**NAMADIA**

Namadia sat in the middle of an unnamed desert and was rather huge compared to most towns built within the sands. Thousands of caravans cross Namadia's road leading to the gate which always was open. Just inside these gates was a church that looked quite ordinary and plain, with the exception of a beautiful villa built into its front path. A fountain spewed strings of water as peacock roamed the area giving it that harmonizing feel. Beyond the fountain were marbled steps leading up to the double doors made of a light wood. Inside the church a woman cried and held her child close to the chest as several priests accompanied her with words of encouragement.

"He will return for you, no fret child. God intends for his return." A priest wearing gold robes garbed with green scribes down the front with embroidered gold leaves made comment.

Sobbing.

Another spoke. "You are protected here within the church; God will allow nothing evil here." She did not share his confidence, her son Valice watched the priests with curiosity that could only belong to a child of five.

The sound of horses galloping into the town caught everyone's attention. One of the priests quick to go to the doors and lowered the sliding lock across them. "Perhaps it is them returning?" He patted the cross bar, "But it's better to have this down regardless, eh."

Men begun shouting from across the way, "It's them; gather your arms close the gates." Then came silence followed by steel twanging against steel and screams, so many screams as men fought for their lives. The priests helped the woman from her seat, child still tucked into arms with head laid on her shoulder.

"Go to the altar, it opens to the catacombs, we can hide there." They said pulling her toward the heavy stone altar that was covered by a red silk cloth. The doors rattled as someone tried to push the doors inward. The priests glanced back as a loud bang startled all them, scrambling faster toward the altar they ran up the wooden steps.

The church doors cracked inward as a wooden bar locking it from the inside splintered in half by a war hammer slamming unmercifully against it. Inside a woman cradling her son close looked on terror in her eyes. The priests ran at them like fools desperately trying to ward off evil spirits with prayers to their gods and saints, waving crucifix's while tossing holy water at the beasts.

Krolan walked through the massacre and toward the woman and child, his cloak whipping behind him in some invisible wind, her eyes widened recognizing the voice, "Krolan."

"Marian!" He sounded happy, elated to see her. "You sow bitch of a cur...I have waited so so long for this moment." Krolan had his long brown hair pulled back into a single tail, tied with a leather strap. His thin frame and sunken cheeks and pocked face always made Marian uncomfortable.

“I am surprised that coward of a brother of mine is not here to protect his family, but, it does give way for past failings to be corrected.” Pulling his hands out from under his cloak a curved jeweled dagger glinted from the torch light and candles surrounding the interior of the church.

“No,” Marian was backed away with Valice behind her. Pews were to the left and right of them giving no maneuvering room. “Not my son!”

Krolan used his free hand to throw back his hood revealing his thin face and beady dark eyes. His cheeks had been scarred and pocked from an out of control fire as a child. One he himself had started it was one of the many quiet and unknown attempts to kill his little brother, Vor. “Oh no, you betrayed the heart long ago, now I return with purpose.”

Marian held no weapon at hand just a fleeting hope that Vor would be charging into the church to save them. She stumbled back pushing Valice away as she glanced down at what bumped her foot, a head ripped from someone’s shoulders rolled on the ground. The vamp that threw this sat in one of the pews picking his teeth with a finger bone. His face distorted by pulled back thick red lips revealing serrated teeth with strings of meat hanging from between them. She felt nauseas as Valice started whimpering.

“The scrolls, Marian...Or he will die slowly. Just give me the scrolls.” Krolan smiled as he closed the distance and she raised her arm above in defense.

Outside the church a terrible wail echoed from its doors followed by the screams of a child and then silence as Krolan stumbled slight of balance to the entrance with blood dripping from his left hand. “Ma’ lord, the scrolls...” Gasping for breath... “Rest beneath in the catacombs.”

## **BATTLE**

Though death was present in the darkness behind his eyes so was the voice of his wife, beckoning him into consciousness. “VOR!” A swollen eye cracks open stung by blood rolling into it. Ignoring every injury and twinge of pain he awakes with a great intake of air, and then gasps as he scrambles up with new found adrenaline coursing through his body. Looking around, he knew all was lost. Thousands of bodies covered the desert sands, horses wondered around master-less. Strings of gore lay over severed pieces of body and armor, pools of blood created rivers connecting the dead and dying. The world spun in his head, as the dark seemed to fall onto him with a rush of vertigo. Shaking his head and frantic he had begun trying to secure a horse. Removing his arms from torn sleeves and ripping the remainder of his robe from his torso revealed deep gashes and shredded skin caked with sand. Stumbling from horse to horse making

clicking noises with his parched tongue he failed more times than he could count, and tripped over as many bodies.

Finally able to grab a reign he pulled himself up into the saddle and took reign of the horse. Immediately the horse went into a full sprint as Vor held tight with the reins wrapped around both wrists. His eye closed with a will of its own as he slumped forward onto the horse's mane causing it to slow into a gallop.

The moment he woke he slid from the horse and hit the ground with a resounding thud. A great roar fell upon his ears as he stood before the gates of Namadia, burning bright great bellows of fire screaming against a light rain. Shuffling in a daze he passed a man tied to a support post of a house trying to talk with his chest and ribs spread open, he could only make a smacking noise with his lips. Vor did nothing as the fire crept down the house toward the man.

There stood a fountain one would usually walk past if heading into the church and would often stop at to admire the architecture, now a massacre littered with priestly bodies and dark murky water that spewed from the top as if raining blood. Looking on down the trail he saw much of the same and so moved with haste to the church. Besides he had no need to go deep into town; instead he forced aching legs up the Church steps avoiding as many bodies as he could. Reaching the door he noticed a human heart tacked to it, the aroma of the dead wafted through the air with the smell of decay as he turned into the busted doorway. Walking through he noticed several legs swaying from ropes attached to the burning rafters of the church, priests stripped naked with their abdominals sliced so their intestines would rope out onto the ground in a blood ridden heap.

Lying on her side with back facing the entrance was Marian, Vor sprinted calling her name, falling to his knees and rolling her. Pale dead eyes fell upon his face, her chest gashed open by blade revealed a missing heart. The veins in his neck strained as a wail escaped his broken body, holding her head tight to his sternum. There was no word that came from his lips only rage and hatred. A shuffled sound from behind the busted alter caught his attention; with much ease he lays his wife's head to the ground. Rising he could hear someone pulling themselves across the floor. With caution he starts forward between the pews and the hung priests and as he cleared passed them he saw.....His breath left him as Valice his son reached out with bloody fingers, a dagger in the mid of his Back and pulls forward barely uttering a faint word of despair. "Father....."

## **Chapter Two**

### **Namadia**

Vor's heart dropped to his stomach at the sight of his son pulling along the floor with bloody fingertips and ripped nails. Stumbling forward he falls to hands and knees, crimson spewed from

mouth to stone floor giving way to abstract of death on its cold surface. Using the pews he barely stood hunched over and staggering to his son. He went from pew to pew until falling to broken knee and winching he reached out to touch the dagger handle that protruded from his sons back. A swirl of red breezed before him as a brown wrapped boot caught him under chin forcing him away. Falling to back and breathe leaving chest he could only lay there in defeat. He could hear Valice call out for him under strained breath and could imagine his hand reaching out to be saved. Vor rolled to his side only to find those swirls of red floating about his face. Grunting and raising up on forearms and straining through burning muscle and the great need for his body to lie down and die he stood holding broken ribs that felt protruding against his palm. Through strings of matted hair he looks up into his attackers' hidden face shrouded with crimson hood. The clapping of hands from behind averted his stance away from the red cloaked figure. His blood showered the ground with droplets of bright red as he turned. His one eye red with hatred as he found his once master standing before him and over his son with foot on back.

“I am overjoyed that you arrived.” Vlad’s small red and yellow pupils surround by a black iris bore into the slave king. He stopped clapping those long slender fingers and claws to cradle his left fist in the other. “I thought one was truly fucked out there.”

“No.” Vor barely stood on his own, his stance wide and knees bent low with stooped back and ragged breath. He looked ravaged and mauled fifty times over with blood and grit covering his body and torn robes that hung to his knees with strips dragging the floor behind him.

“No?” Amusement shown in Vlad’s face. “Ahh, maybe understanding is missed by so short of a conversation. Please allow me to set my words to purpose.” He used a finger to wipe something from his eye, and then pointing to Valice whimpering on the ground beneath his foot. “The boy, the scroll, his life, my purpose. My patience is strained.” His voice became darker as he finished with a look of contempt shadowing his face.

Vor held a breath of pain as he stepped an unbalanced step forward. “My life for his.”

“A choice? Are you so far gone that you do not see what is before you? You have lost.” Vlad looked mystified. “A wife slain by your failure, thousands lay dead upon your word of victory, and now your son bares tears beneath my boot nearly absent of life.” He reached down grabbing the handle of the dagger and begins a slow pull. Valice cries out as arms and hands tense against the cold stone floor. His legs kick as the feel of blade slides from flesh.

Vor surges with strength and tries charging forward only to be thwarted by a single hand yanking him back by his hair. He falls to ground hard sitting on ass with palms on ground. His good eye harden with blood lust and hatred, he fights to stand again but finds himself enveloped by crimson robes and a sheath pulled taunt to his throat. The high guard held him in place without effort. Vor’s hands reach out as he struggles against the sword cover on his throat.



Vlad pulls the dagger out from the boy's back, "His life hastens to end now." Wiping the blade with his hand, Valice's blood collects between his thumb and forefinger which he brings to mouth and sucks. "Mmmmm. Tastes dreadful, much like your mother did." His voice rumbled under whisper.

Vor's mind spun out of control as he twisted around in the high guards grip and pushes the vamp back a foot with both hands while yelling. Sheath and sword clatter behind him, he falls back to the ground where he heard the noise and rolls backwards grabbing sheath as he comes to feet in a low wide stance. He did not see Vlad hold a hand up gesturing for the high guard to exit, but was confused as the robed figured turned stiff like and left without word.

"I can save him Vor. All it takes is your word." After thought "And the scroll of course."

The warrior spun pulling sword from sheath, "No, Not the likes of you." He advances with caution as Vlad steps over his son's prone body and down the steps.

"No not like me. Still mortal and grievance wound will heal but only once can this happen." Arms gesturing from self to Valice.

Vor falters a step and regains poise as he charges with sword pulled back for strike. It cleaves the air at a downward angle and finds nothing and changes direction for an abdominal slice. Again finds nothing. Vlad weaves his head under the blade sidestepping and avoiding the strike. He barely moved at all as he unarmed Vor of his sheath with one hand and rams it into the front of his right shoulder pushing the dagger an injury sustained earlier out its entrance point. Vor howls crumpling to his knees. Vlad kneels with his forehead resting upon Vor's and gripping sword by its blade pulls it from the limp hand of the fallen warrior.

"The scroll, Vor, and I will save your son."

Breathing deep with tears stinging both eyes one shut the other nearly there; Vor looks into the eyes of his devil. "A tomb marked with the name of the first prophet of God." His words trembling under labored breathe.

Vlad rocks his forehead back and forth with Vor's as a smile glinting fang from blood red lips. "Now, was that so hard? I wondered when cock would leave ass."

"My son..."

"Of course." Vlad stands leaving the fallen warrior on the ground. Walking over to the boy he grabs Valice by the back of the neck and lifts him from ground effortlessly. "I gave promise that if such a day came. Much like this, Godless and all." Vlad smiled large "I would give you pain." He pushed his mouth onto the side of Valice's neck biting deep. Blood ran in streams down his pale chin and flowed to the floor. He could hear Vor scream as if his soul was in aflame; it gave flavor to the moment. Pulling his grimaced lips and fang from the boy's neck he hands the limp

body to another in red robes just emerging from the catacombs below the church. The high guard cradles the lifeless body as if holding a baby and stood behind its master patiently.

“No, what have you done????!” Vor surges forward crying out in sobs.

Vlad pulls a parchment from the high guard’s clawed hand. “Prophet?” He chortled. “Christians and their Gods,” Tucking the parchment into a pouch inside the lining of his fur cloak. “I smell death already set upon you, so. A fair trade, much like you did as a child. Lose the father gain the son.” Walking by Vor’s sobbing now prone body bleeding out and falling into darkness, Vlad gave a slight nudge with gold tipped boot. The High guard follows in silence with Valice limp in his arms.

### **The Palace**

Beneath the sands of the desert are the carved out caverns’ of halls and rooms lined with marble and brim stone. It went deep for miles and miles a hidden fortress thousands of years old created by the unknown of their kind. Now inhabited by the last reigning Dark Lord. Vlad sat in his throne room upon a chair made of bone and gold wire to hold it all together. The armrests were polished and shaped skulls with dark leather cushion sat atop for comfort. Ribs protruded from several chest cavities making up the back of the throne also cushioned much like the armrests. Hundreds of skulls made up the base of the throne. He sat leaning and resting on an armrest while staring at the scroll in his lap unopened.

Next to the chair was a chain attached to a stud near the Dark Lords feet, this chain ran the length of several feet ending at the collar strapped around a child’s neck. Being stripped of clothes with exception of loin cloth covering privates he sat in silence not whimpering or uttering a single noise of life. The red welts on his back and front of his shoulders and abdomen were testament to lessons well received. He moved when he was told to and ate only when given food and drink, which was sometimes forgotten. Occasionally his hazel eyes stole a fleeting glance to see who walked past and sat in awe that people like him slaved for the vampires. He learned to recognize them by the clothes or lack of clothes they wore. Only the vamps seemed to be fully dressed for occasions yet presented.

He sat on his knees with hands clasped in his lap and head lowered; tears ran like sweat from cheek to chin. They were silent and relentless, nonstop as images of his mother screaming at him as her throat is ripped out by clawed hands. A voice soft and even toned grabbed his attention. “My Lord, I have received news of your findings.”

The boy could not take his eyes off her; she stood straight with a hand resting on sword hilt at her waist. Her features were sharp much like the Dark Lords, eery in similarities. He had to look

between the two. Her eyes a phosphorous hazel with blue highlights averted to him. He adjusted his gaze away staring at his hands.

Loreena itched the smallest smirk at the corner of her mouth. Long dark red hair pulled taut into a tail hung just behind her neckline. Her dress was casual with pants and shirt but yet a smoky gray in color. Dark gauntlets covered the tops of her hands with half inch spikes going midway up from knuckle to forearm. "I also hear that a child has been tendered under your care." She spoke choosing her words.

Vlad smiled wide with eyes half closed as he stared at his cousin. "A tender that bears no gift to you and any other." His hand reaching down grabbing the boy by the top of his head and yanking him to his feet. The boy winched in pain as several of hairs were ripped from scalp. The woman walked with grace and poise the softest of steps, eyes of the guards and high guards regarded her sensuality with hard stares. She looked warrior like to the boy as he scrunched his head into his shoulders like an injured pup submitting to a harsh touch. She knelt down to meet his eyes and when he did not look up she took a finger to raise his vision to her. "So sad, no mother, no father, yet I see vengeance in your eyes. Do you know the cost of such a thing?"

Passed her full dark red lips were the glint of upper and lower fang, and her eyes astounding him and perhaps mesmerized his gaze. Her voice was soft like his mothers and comforting, he allowed a single muffled sob part his lips as his body shook under the restraint of not allowing it to burst out of him. Loreena did not push for an answer as she stood and faced her cousin.

"What is intent? To keep him sniveling and scared, always chained to your side? Or do greater plans have yet to grace ones ears, for if so spoken I assure you they will be well received."

Vlad raised a brow; a finger rubbed the side of his chin in thought. "Your motherly endeavors amuse me to no end. However for now until days past when I am at comfort, he will be reserved for trophy purpose of victory well won."

Loreena unlike most did not bow her head or look away from his eyes as he spoke to her from his throne of bone. In turn she looked to him straight on with no fear. "Well. When ones amusement has been well fed, I assume that his place is to be found among the slaves?"

Vlad sat back with both hands resting on bone. "We'll see." He spotted a lone slender figure wrapped in robes and hood enters the room behind Loreena. "Krolan, I see the evening has done well to bring things to full circle."

Krolan walked forward removing hood to shoulder and revealing his thin pocked face and dark eyes with permanent shadow. "Ma Lord." He said in an accented drawl.

Loreena back hands him and kicks behind his right knee bringing him down hard with her hand forcing his head to the floor. "You will approach your lord low and groveling like the shit you are." She took notice of the boy flinching at the sight of this thing beneath her hand. Her nose

twitched as she looked up to her cousin while still holding Krolan in place with one hand. “You give audience to this ...thing?” Surprise crept into her voice as she releases Krolan of her grip. The man stayed on both knees with head still touching the floor near her boots.

Vlad gazed over his throne room and took in its rich design of dark marble columns’ and blackened brim stone floor chipped smooth and even by slaves. Curtains’ of violets and crimson hid most of the walls surrounding the large room and some even covered the entry ways leading deeper into the caverns’. Statues stood erected around the room of demons and gods, most of them near bathing pools reserved for Vlad only. Behind his throne lying on large feathered pillows were three women, vampires laying nude and giggling into each other’s ears’. Vlad listened to them as his gaze finally settled on Loreena. Leaning forward with a stern expression, “Do not think me absent of mind, and treat me with such ill manner that I might forget with whom you are for the briefest of seconds.”

This time she gave him a slight angled nod of her head and the turned about face and left with another word. Krolan slowly stood his head still bowed with his eyes boring into the child. “Ma Lord, I hope all is well with your victory.” Fear trembled his voice.

Vlad stood from his throne leaving his fur cloak draped over the seat; he dressed comfortable and quite casual. A dark red pull over tunic with an embroidered phoenix crest upon its front and black silk and cotton pants. No boots, he chose to go barefoot in his throne room, always fascinated by the way the floor felt under his skin. “Gratitude has yet to be received, without your betrayal your brother may yet live and I would be without this.” Holding the scroll briefly to eye level.

“Ma Lord, I do not try to seek gratitude or favor, I just wish to serve you.”

“Ah, but not as a man...you wish to become a beast.” Vlad walked around him looking up and down. “You would serve me without question.”

“I would Ma Lord.”

“That was not a question.” Tapping Krolan on the back of his head with the scroll, he came to a stop in front of the man and pointed with the scroll to one of the hidden doors behind drapes.

“Ma Lord..? I thought...”

“No, my cousin was right. You are a shit trying to stick cock in ass for elevation of title and rank among your own. You failed and came to me like a dripping cunt with enticement.” Sneering at the clearly shaken Krolan. “My gratitude lies beyond there.” He said no more as he continued to give that unnerving stare at the man waiting for him to understand that it was time to leave. An inch from rubbing his nose against the mans brow he let a low growl rumbled from his throat.

Krolan left trying not to run and doubly trying not to slip over his cloak as his feet hastened for the doorway. The Dark Lord turned his head slowly watching the shit leave and then turned his attention on the boy. He stormed to the boy grabbing the chain and yanking him to his feet and then off the ground. He hung by the collar as Vlad touched his nose to the boys screaming in his face with spittle striking over the boy's young face.

“I hate and despise the very presence of you, my soul rages to devour your insides and feast upon your blood you sticking shit of a dog!” Releasing the chain he exited the throne room in a worked up rage, pushing all out of his way as he stormed down the hall until reaching his chamber door. Upon his hand touching handle a thought sent a wave of ecstasy and release of tension, he smiled.

The child screams' echoed the room with the beast in his face, his little hands desperately holding tight to the devils wrists as his flailed about and piss puddles the floor beneath him. Now he lay in that puddle curled up with knees touching chest and arms hiding his face from the hell around him. The women behind the throne cooed at him throwing out soft enticements of comfort and going home then they would break out in laughter. He ignored them for the most part and mainly scared that if he looked over that would prove to be an invitation to approach him. The man from earlier howled in pain from the door he had passed through making the boy hug his knees closer, he closed his eyes as the coldness of the floor sunk into his body.

### **Namadia**

Valice sat on his knees next to his father, his eyes peering out from the church to the road where a woman screams for her child. She wails in despair with her hands cradled to her chest as she ran from small body to small body turning each one over. His mind froze into the last hours of his mothers life as he watched her die under the same knife that was used to inflict now healed injury to himself. He looked at his hands setting atop his legs, covered in the blood of his mother and father, crying his body drew numbness and trembles in terror. When they came into the church he laid across his father and if they noticed the crawl marks in blood they would have known that he pulled himself along the floor from one body to the other. They surrounded his fathers body by the dozens, while the healers worked on his broken form. They slid his body out of the church leaving a wide blood trail from the doorway and down the steps. Now he lay upon cobble stone next to the fountain that still spewed blood mixed water from its top. The bodies had been removed from the water and that was all they could do for the time as they used it to bath Vor's wounds.

The man shouting our instructions to the other healers was Asad. A rather tall man with a slender build and a small belly created from too much mead. He also was one of the slaves that Vor helped escape the caverns' and now showed his appreciation this day by trying to save the life of his savior. His head shaved nearly bald and covered with a slight graying in color of the stubble

that grew on his head and face. His almond eyes looked at Vor who slept with shallow breath barely escaping his lips.

“Now is not the time to die my friend. Nerian? I need fire stoked nearby and several bottles of mead .”

Nerian looked at his brother, both had similar features except for the scar that ran over Nerian’s left eye and down to his chin and onto his chest. It showed through his desert tan as dark brown in color. And much like his brother Asad, he pulled the top of his brown robes off so it hung around his legs bunched up. “I don’t think celebrating is due here.”

Asad didn’t look up as he made feeling known at such a gist, “Fucking mongrel.”

Nerian stood setting mind to purpose but not without having the last word. “Same mother ya cunt.”

Gripping the scabbard that protruded from Vor’s shoulder Asad instructed the others to lift him up to a sitting position. He took many deep breaths. “Lucky he’s sleeping. I need blade to fire and someone to burn the wound closed on his back.” Vor’s chin dropped to his chest like a child’s doll, his mouth slightly open with red drool salivating from his bottom lip

“Fire’s ready, as is steel, white hot.” He looked at Vor’s unconscious state. “Glad he’s slep’n.”

“yeah just get the blade ready. When I pull this out he might wake, be fast closing that wound.” Asad knelt over Vor’s right leg and put a foot against the fountain for leverage and pushing off. Again he took three deep hastened breaths of panic and pushed with his foot and pulled with all his strength with both hands around the scabbard, yelling “Now!”

Vor’s good eye opens as he howls in pain making Asad flinch at the flailing of hands in air balled into fists. Nerian started yelling along with Vor as he put the blade flat against the exit wound. Flesh sizzles and smoke rose from around the point of the sword. Everyone else jumped their nerves still on end from the slaughter of their town, especially since half the town’s dead still laid in the streets and houses around them.

“The Gods” Nerian wide eyed gently lays Vor back down with help from two others.

“No.” Vor’s said with a forced cough and painful intake of air. “No Gods.” His eye closes again as

Asad places a hand on his chest feeling his body shake and tremble. Looking up at his brother and the crowd around them, “He fights still, his body wants to die but I don’t think he will let it. Not yet.”

Nerian holds a bottle of mead up trying to hand it to his brother, “Now we drink.”

“Wash his wounds with the mead; I will be back with supplies for sewing the rest of his wounds shut.” Asad gave his brother a stern stare while wiping his hands on the folds of his robes.

“Should have brought two flasks instead of one eh?”

### **The Palace**

The child heard the click of his shackle around his neck unlock and fall to the floor. A pudgy white man with neat trimmed hair of brown looked as if he didn't belong on this side of the world. He wore beggar clothes a pull over that should have been white was covered in filth and his pants had so many holes in them you could no longer tell what color they were supposed to be. “Oy , you best be min'n me or I'll kill you myself.”

The boy furrowed his brow taking notice of the lack of fang this man had. “You're not a...” Pointing at the man's mouth. Who in turn slapped his hand down hard.

“Not a what? Let me tell ya somethin' I'm charge of makin slaves mind themselves.” He held up a black leathered whip. “I don't care if your bludy baby child mother with no legs or a dick hair that's gone astray, I will beat you like I hate you.” He gritted his teeth on that last part shaking his head side to side, His blue eyes as kind as they seemed showed intent of malice.

The child held his arms in tight over his naked chest and shuttered. The pudgy man sniffed, ‘You fuk'n stink, oh no I put ya with the rest ya'll be spreading disease and what not's. I don't like what not's.’ The boy on the verge of tears again noticed that the pudgy man who knelt to his eye level had not been kneeling at all, he had been standing. He had never seen such.

“What are you?” It came out soft and barely audible.

The man looked at the boy and took a deep breath and poked out his bottom lip in a frown, Va could hear him breathe through his nose. “I'm fuk'n short. Now let's go boy.”

Slapping the boy upside the head. He followed not paying to mind that he obeyed but rather cause there was no where else for him to go. The women behind him cooed at his back.

“Pay no thought to em boy, ya aint not'n but a meal to em.” The man had a wobble as he walked his arms swinging wider than they should as if he compensated for balance.”By da way, this is his throne room. Ya aint sposed to be here at any time unless ya bringn food to em. And mainly ya tha food.”

The boy let his eyes wonder, marveling at the large marble columns that held the ceiling in place under maybe hundreds of thousands of pounds of sand. Of course He knew nothing of sand and weight only that he had never seen things this big in his life. Going through the huge double doors made of some type of steel which in fact being iron; covered in carved décor of men

fighting dragons and devils he took pause to look at it more closely until the short man bumped his chest with the rolled up whip.

“Boy!”

He snapped to and followed out into a long marble corridor filled with vampires and people bustling about. Men held fine silver trays with various thin flakes of meat that looked raw. The women held bowls of water with cloth draped over their arms. Some walked around nearly naked while others were bare of clothes showing assets that seemed to please the vamps as they touched or caressed this person or that. Mostly the vamps wore pants or tunics while others had robes or cloaks wrapped around them, however the one thing all the vamps had in common, they looked wealthy. He watched as a vampire goes over to one of the slaves dipping his hands into the bowl and splashes his face. Dressed in fine robes of mixed colors that ended at his sleeves and was held in hand. He looked over at the child as he wiped his face and returned the cloth.

“What is this?”

“Not for you Remora, Vlad was clear on purpose for da boy.” He said positioning himself between the two.

The vampire smiled with a kind look, his eyes sparkled with blackness as they looked the boy over with a growl of hunger escaping his throat. His smile seemed to make his head look bigger or face wider, the boy was astonished at how big his lips spread, which gave weird appearance to a nearly balding monk like black hair. He crossed his arms over chest looking down at the short man with a raised brow. “Now little cock, you keep bleeding your tongue at me and bad things might happen.”

“No No.” He shook his head vigorously, “Vlad himself gave purpose ta da boy.”

“Why little cock do you think I have ill intent for the child?”

The short man stood straighter then the boy thought possible. “Remora we all know what ya do to da little ones. Touch dis one and ya cock might be well fed to da boars.” He pushed passed Remora with a shove of his shoulder, grabbing the boy by the wrist forcing him to come along. Remora stepped aside for the child and watched with acute interest as the two walked with haste down the corridor.

“Stay away from dat one, ther’ are worse thangs than death in dis place boy.”

The boy walked close behind, “Your name is cock?”

“No.” Reaching the end of the corridor or what seemed to be the end, opened up into a huge square room which had never been touched by sculptors, only the sand was absent but the floor was made of crushed rock. The boy stepped in with a slight winch of pain as something cut into the bottom of his foot. The short man forced the boy to face him.



“There ar rules.” Putting a fat finger in the boys face. “First, take care of ya self. Water is provided for bath from underground river. Food is placed once a day over there.” Pointing at the center of the room. “Ya get there fast nuff ya might eat.” The boy watched the slaves, hundreds of them roamed about as if living normal lives, some even laughed while others played games or worked on things. Children dozens of them ran about playing. “Also, ya here. Yar alone like many children, not my concern.” The boy looked at the mans eyes.

Was it bewilderment of his new home that by standards of his former life was filled with horrors. “Where do I go?” His bottom lip trembles as fear chilled his body forcing him to hold his arms over stomach.

The short man nodded his head in the direction of the room. “Da fed’n pits r over there the bred’n pits there.’ He pointed and without so much as a bye or so long or good luck the man left back down the corridor vanishing into the crowd. He felt exposed and abandoned as he walked the edge of the room until he found a small alcove of rock that was big enough for him to sit in. His back still hurt from being beat by a horse reign, he whimpers in pain and sob’s in despair as he buried knees to chest and cries himself to sleep in the dark.

Vlad removes his shirt tossing it to ground which immediately became picked up by a woman slave dressed in silken wraps hiding most of her private parts with a bare peek of a nipple struggling to slip out from underneath the light blue fabric. Long black hair graced her shoulders accenting her Asian features.

“Chu.” He spoke to her which he often did but not out of affection, he didn’t even think of her as an equal. “You are treated well?”

She bows her head and knees with a pained expression of she didn’t want to die, “Yes My Lord I am honored to be your servant.”

Vlad walked over to her kneeling and looked down at the back of her head. He hovered a clawed hand over her with thought of blood. It shook ever so slight until balling into a fist. “Indeed.” He turned removing the ties of his pants allowing them to slide down to his feet until he stood bare. “How old do you think I am?” His back to her. “Come, stand and look upon me, question deserves response.”

She stood slow still holding his shirt in hand. Her eyes looked at his naked form as he turned slow with arms outstretched. “You look young My Lord.” She looked back to ground as her eyes crossed over his toned chest and hard stomach, and then further until she could not bare to look anymore.

Vlad fell back onto his silken sheets of black, his cock erect. “Come, give well deserved fuck from trying day.” Her eyes tear up as she hesitantly moves to him and removes her robes by a

single snap at the shoulder. Standing at his feet naked she screams as he sits up with a wide smile with rows of fang and growls yanking her to the bed by her hair.

Loreena pauses outside her cousins door as the screams grab her attention.

“Finding you curious is a delight in itself.”

She looked up and found Remora standing with smirk on face and glass of wine in hand. She hated the vamp even though he was her cousins confident. Placing hand over hilt of sword, “And what calls your presence here?” Just talking to him put a bad taste in her mouth.

“Ah.” Taking a sip of wine. “Hmm, well the two slaves I had became obsolete, I believe the word is.” He winked at her.

The screams of pain echoed from behind the door as something ran up to it yelling, “No, No no..” Slams against it. Loreena and Remora look at the door at the sound of something being slapped and then falling to the ground.

“Ah! The sound of one clawing at a stone floor, brings memories to light.” Remora smiled with intent to annoy and held his glass up for a toast and a nod of the head before taking a sip.

“Wait...the two slaves you had were mother and daughter? Umm..Cora and Lisia.” She touched her lips with a knuckle and closed hand. “I take meaning that they are dead.”

“Any ways, one must inquire about the young boy that was in the corridor.” Waving her question off as if it meant nothing to him.

Loreena knew avoidance well enough to know this vamp had done something to those two. She steps forward bring toe to his foot and hand to her hilt once again and looks him in the eyes. Her other hand reaches up and grabs his balls hard until he drops his wine glass and lifts up on his toes. “You keep this thing away from him or I will replace your everyday ramming of ass with cock with my blade.”

He stammers gritting his teeth and brows furrowed deep. “Of course.” She held on longer until eyes watered a single tear.

“Good.” She said right before the chamber doors opened revealing a partial naked Vlad wearing an open robe revealing all. Blood covered him from head to toe and still dripped from his chin. He leans on the open doors. ‘Loreena.. ahhh, Remora come, and shut the doors we have much to discuss.” He mentioned not the flustered look on the vamps face as he turns away waving for Remora to join him.

Remora looks to Loreena with a scowl, “Well received.”

She smiles back tapping hilt with finger. “It will be.”

Remora shuts the door hiding Loreena's gaze. "My Lord." He turns in a very feminine curtsy of sorts. "How can I serve you." He pretends not to notice the remnants of a servant girl painting the floor. An arm sat on the edge of his canvas bed the rest of the girl was scattered everywhere else. He steps over what appears to be parts of an organ of sorts in its gray consistency of an intestine.

Vlad goes to his table sat across the room on the far wall opposite bed. He picks up the scroll smearing blood on its roll. "Do you know what this is?"

"It is the scroll of Abraith." Remora knew Vlad could be volatile using caution of things said.

"Yes, it is." Approaching Remora in manner better suited for a lion. "This is Gods blood being spilt on this world."

"My Lord, if I may ask to purpose of such a thing. If one believes in a God, how do you make God bleed and why?"

Vlad grabs the front of Remora's robes and brings him closure with little effort, his lips nearly touching an ear as he whispers. "God took my heart, now I take his." Releasing the vamp and takes several steps back. with finger to lips. "A secret not known nor is to be ushered out of your lips."

"I am honored by this My Lord."

Chortling Vlad slaps the side of the vamps arm. "That is shit. Come have seat and bare mind to future endeavors." He hands the scroll to Remora. "Tuck it away, your purpose will be known shortly." Remora puts the scroll into the folds of his robes over his chest and takes seat at the table.

### **Chapter Three**

It is the children that live with the sins of the father

Twenty years from the day a young Valice saw his mother's heart ripped from her chest and staked to the door. He stood before an opponent of incredible skill wielding a sword. Both held wooden swords carved from a tree that was well of a thousand miles away, made by a grandfather Valice never knew. They were the very same set of swords that his father Vor trained with in his youth against his brother Krolan.

Matong, the opponent and best friend stood tall and broad in the chest, His square jaw twitched with muscle matching the rest of his body equally. He wore heavy braids across the back of his tanned shoulders. Scars across his body marked the many battles he had seen as they did across the body of Valice.

Valice however was considerably smaller than his opponent and most of the village. Having obtained his mothers thin framed body and shortness, he stood at five foot eight with a well toned body. His hair cut short and slicked back with sweat causing it to spike. Then there were the two black dragons entwining themselves up his spine with one clawed leg extended out across both shoulders forming a cross, a tattoo given to him on his sixteenth birthday by his father.

Matong stood with wooden sword in a sheathing position at the left hip, his right hand resting on the handle patiently waiting for the attack. His legs spread wide into a deep stance with his right foot back and front knee bent slightly. A stance learned from watching others train considering he had been without father and mother long parted some twenty years ago.

Matong held his sword in what would appear to the average eye as if he were about to spring forward with a thrust as he crouched low gazing into Valice's eyes. It has been many times that this scenario had played out with Valice as the victor. Every time doing the same set of movements that torments Matong even in his sleep. Also, there were those cold emerald eyes that captivated most of the women in the village. They were a distraction not so much as the color but the emotion behind them with their glowing glints that Matong swears he sees.

Vor stepped from his tent smiling recognizing Matong's stance and position of the blade. If played right, Matong could very well lower the guard of his opponent and execute a beheading with a simple twirl that would raise his blade just beneath Valice's chin.

A breeze so gentle passed between the combatants causing a miniature whirl wind of sand that dissipated only seconds after forming. Valice could only smile as the coolness brushed by his face. Anticipation was a mistake in every battle, so instead of counting on the same techniques he focused on change.

Matong finally moved thrusting his sword tip forward using it as a faint to lower his opponents guard so he could step to the side with a twirl and slice at throat level. Watching for Valice's reaction and realizing his mistake, his faint was not near quick enough.

Falling down to his left knee on the ground Valice's sword is pulled by the right hand faster than Matong anticipated. Striking the thrust before it moved into the faint and pushing the blade to Matong's right shoulder with half rising arch movement that ended with a slight but powerful double tap of his sword. Matong's desperation forced him to swing out with a left hook. Stepping past with his right foot and under the left arm, Valice rose up from behind gripping Matong's braided hair in his left hand, and reversing the blade into place against Matong's throat just below the Adams apple. Matong dropped his sword awed by the speed and fluid motion of Valice, once again defeated.

Laughter walked up on the two as Valice released his friend to greet his father with a nod.

“Father.”

The smile in the old mans eyes wrinkled them at the sides always so happy with his son. “I see Matong has given one another win”

“Shit, ass is handed back as casual as it was taken.” Matong huffed. “The day will come.” Reaching for his practice sword feeling frustrated.

“Were not done are we?” Valice poked at his friends aggravation.

Matong walked up to Valice and placing a hand on his shoulder. “Valice, for a tiny shit as you are, your sword is quick but I fear you tongue is quicker.” Shaking his head then looking into those emerald eyes sternly. “Of course that might not be a feat your wife would show gratitude for.” Words that forced Valice to reflect a sharp glare at his friend.

Vor patted his sons back with one of his huge hands suppressing laughter. “Leave purpose of tongue to wives that care to hear and focus on steel while out here. “all gave a short laugh before parting separate ways with Vor going with his son.

“Valice.”

“Hmm?”

"You remember anything of that night in the Church?"

“I do.” Valice replies his voice nowhere as deep as the other men. So much of his mother was in him. Often he could tell that his father remembered her when eyes wondered over face.

Approaching Vor’s tent they went in to sit by a fire and drink some mead that the village women had prepared. “I have trained you well, you can kill one those beasts as easy as a man.”

Valice looked into the base of the fire as he sipped his brew in silence.

“You were five then, I remember finding you with a dagger thrust into your back.” His son looked up into his eyes. “If you had been any other boy, you would have long been dead.” “But you were not, you were mine and he knew it.”

“Who?” Taking sip and unsure on were conversation headed but wishing the point would hurry and arrive.

“Vlad my former Master. He knew you were my son and used that against me.” Vor’s one good eye began to water as the other never truly healed and stayed closed. His face had scars etched into the wrinkles of age, his body showed a deeper rendering of the face as deep red indentions of stab wounds and missing chunks of muscle mass clawed from his flesh. Most of the scars were hidden from view on his face by thick and long beard of white and grey. ”I was his slave as my father was and my mother. Your mother was chosen by him to be wifed to me. And I loved

and love her like no other. A year later you were born and I knew we had to escape for your freedom.”

Valice looked to his father without word forming on his lips.

“Your mother died because I trusted God when I should have trusted my own instincts.” A tear fell down his leathery wrinkled and scarred cheek bone. “That is why you live now, your life for the life of God.”

Valice shook his head with doubt. “God? How could you even hurt God or a God? Perhaps there is piss in your mead father.” He teased lifting his own cup.

Vor replied in kind looking quite serious. “The scroll of Abraith, I stole it during my escape. I spent many childhood years hearing that Devil talk about it. I knew enough that if he ever learned what it contained, you and I would be gone. Every man and woman gone.”

Valice took a sip of his brew never taking his eyes off his father. “Words don’t kill.” He said inside his cup.

“I know, but when words form a map and he releases the beast. Blood will rain, and God will cry.” Vor gulped his mead down and wiped his white bearded mouth with a portion of his robe.

Valice chortled “Beast, a greater one than he. Why, why would Vlad release something that could destroy him?” Setting his cup down.

“He thinks he is a God, maybe he thinks he can control whatever comes out of that abyss.”

“Father, I have no interests in this or Vlad, we haven’t seen or heard anything in twenty years. I have regrets on mother and how she passed.” Standing to leave. “And with that being said I have a wife and a son waiting for me.” He seemed annoyed.

“Listen to me, he’s coming again, soon. He needs more than that damned scroll to find the map in the words And he’s coming for it and for you. Vor’s voice grew deep and stern. His blue eyes growing soft followed by voice. “Please, listen to an old man ramble.” He grabbed his son’s forearm.

“Taale’ awaits my return.” Ripping his arm from Vor’s grip and stepping through the flap of the tent. His father followed close behind.

“Fuck.” He muttered to himself watching Valice’s back walk off into the night and across the way. Saying a short curse Vor went back to his tent. He felt disturbed as if eyes were upon him as he entered Vor’s hand fell upon his sword as he sat returning to the fire and begun cleaning his blade.

Rael did his best to maintain pace with his father as they walked across flat lands of the desert. His hair the same dusty brown his father once had before trimming it. Rael's hair got to the point that it started curling in every direction uncontrollably. It had been more than once that his mother threatened to cut it back like his father's.

With a hand gently touching his son's small back, Valice smiled. "One day son you will be walking these sands' with your own children."

Rael glanced quickly behind him as he did every other minute watching the tents of the village get smaller and smaller. He was too young to mind his father's sincerity. "Grandfather told me he killed monsters' when he was little."

Valice looked down at his son if only for a second. "I don't believe your grandfather was ever little." A smile ever so small appeared.

"Have you battled?" Rael asked with acute attention to his father's answer.

"Only with other clans, but this is our way." Breathing deeply. "Times are peaceful now, son. There is no evil in this land." Waving a hand across the desert, the sun faded slowly behind some dunes giving off a red tint of light across the clouds.

"No monsters or beasts?" Rael asked with the utmost urgency in his voice. His father was often surprised on how smart his questions were.

"There are none that your father could not handle." He winked.

"You promise?"

Valice knelt down to his son's level. "Rael, I promise that no monster will harm you or mother. Not while I'm here to protect you both." Valice noticed the coming night. "Now run back to the village, your mother has supper waiting for us both. She might not be so mad if one of us is there on time." Patting his bottom and sending him on his way. Valice stood and watched his son's scrawny legs take him across the sands with his arms flailing.

Taking in a deep breath he allowed his father's words to soak in more than what they did earlier. The wind felt cool on his face as he closed his eyes and imagined his wife's hair running through his hand as he lifted it to the wind. Softness of her hair felt a lot like a breeze passing through his fingers mixing the scent of jasmine and rose oil up into the air.

The wind died slowly at his back as he headed home for the night unaware of the eyes that followed him.

Valice entering his tent immediately noticing that his wife and son were in the midst of a game. His wife exquisite with long black hair and almond shaped eyes that were brown and often reflected him looking at her. Skin a dark tan like their sons, curves graced her body beautifully it

being often he mentioned that to her. He was lucky enough to find a women shorter than he in this village. Her father was a tradesmen that joined the clan long ago when both Taale' and he were youths'.

Their son Rael was just as beautiful as his mother, five years old and knowing everything about anything. If not he always had a question that needed answered and was followed by another dozen questions. At five his son was like anybody else his age, obviously taking after his grandfather in build as he got older.

Joining the two whom were hiding rocks behind their backs in hand then bring them forth to guess which hand the rock was in. Valice tapped Taale's left hand repeated the same tap on his sons closed hand. Right about both as she looked up warmly with a smile leaning forward for a peck on the cheek.

“So what did the old man have to say? Did he tell you?” She asked. She was always happy with no worries.

He leaned back on his hands for support. “He did.”

“Well? You going to tell with that quick tongue of yours.”

Rael already had both hands out for another round. Tapping the left, once again correct

Valice spoke quietly. “He says that monsters' are real.”

She laughed slapping his arm. “Seriously, or is it one of those warrior talks. Oh great valiant warrior, off with you to battle never to be seen again.” She mocked.

“Craving ear in this damn village has found home.” His cheeks grew flush on her earlier comment.

“Oh, Valice you give thought were thought is not needed.” She turned away and looked back with amusement in her eyes. “I perfectly well know what your tongue can do.”

“Woman, child is present.”

Taale' laughed at her husbands fainted innocence and embarrassment.

The tent flap burst open as Matong poked his head in. “Were attacked, hurry!” He shouted.

Vor sprung from his tent as if he was twenty again, sword in right hand dagger blessed by monks in the left. The night air grew alive as shadow formed into shapes and the sands of the village boiled with life. Creatures erupted air born from the sands springing on warriors and villagers. Running in a full sprint toward his son's tent an interception from a familiar face halted him.



“Krolan?” It was a pale face with rather bright red lips fresh from a kill. A sword of Asian descent held tight in his left hand. A hood partially covered the top of his head running down to a full length cloak resting at his ankles.

“Aren’t you dead?” He stated through grinding teeth and stealing glance behind his brother at Valice’s tent. He saw Matong enter rather hurriedly. Krolan had long disappeared before the last battle leaving Vor to think him dead, but he was never forgotten. His presence here was a sign that Vlad wanted answers. “You know why I’m here. Hand it over and live to see your fledgling tomorrow.” Krolan demanded with an outstretched hand. His hand alone proved that this thing was not his brother anymore. Fingers thin to the bone and sharp claws, pale as ice.

“How?”

“I’ll let you in on a secret dear brother.” They circled each other. Only Vor stood in a fighting stance walking in a cross step. “I was long dead before that battle ever took place. As a matter of fact, I recall giving the location of the scroll to Vlad himself. Of course this was my just reward.” Krolan stretched his arms in presentation of himself with a wry grin and slight bow of his head. Vor remained silent not sure whether to be disgusted or worried on what else his brother had told Vlad.

The grin slowly turned to amusement as Krolan spoke his sudden urge of a thought. “Oh, by the way, that swine of a wife you had was my first kill. Ripped her fucking heart out and stuck it to the door.” The smile on his face grew watching the pained expression on Vor’s face. “Of course I made that thing of a son of yours watch. Poor thing fainted three times before I was able to give her a proper death. Alive and kicking.” He chortled then charged with his blade out his blade angled to cleave the head from Vor's shoulders.

The redness in Vor’s face reflected pure rage as he evaded the first attack and took notice that everyone in the village came under attack struggling to defend them and family as vampires threw torches on some of the tents. They were merciless as they glided through the air landing on victim after victim ripping throats with their teeth and claws. A child ran by arms held out screaming as something dark tackled him from behind and rolled with the child until blood flung to air.

Valice came out of his tent with Matong following close behind, both ducked as something flew overhead nearly hitting the two of them. Across the way he spotted his father engaging one of the creatures. Never since that night at the Church when his father was young had he seen him fight, yet somehow Vor moved with deadly accuracy as he parried his attackers blade with his own.

Vor focused on forcing the tip of a sword into the ground and stomping on the flat side of his enemy’s blade tearing the handle free from the creatures grasp. He spun his body backwards slicing with the dagger. His arm became snared by a clawed hand that pierced the flesh, in response he struck with free arm upper cutting Krolan's with the handle of his dagger.

Krolan held his chin falling back and stared wildly at his brother. "Arrh!" He screamed and charged both clawed hands shooting for Vor's neck, fangs bared readying rip his brothers throat out.

The handle of the dagger met its oppressor square in the mouth crunching tooth and fang before reversing into a slit throat with a simple motion of Vor's wrist. Falling back clutching his neck, Krolan felt his skin part into horizontal flaps as blood gushed through fingers. A small cloud of dust puffed off the ground as he fell back with the wound burning, tears of crimson welled in the corner of his eyes.

Valice was in a dead run with his sword an exact duplicate of his fathers still sheathed in its scabbard. On approach two menacing creatures with slobbering fangs slid into his path swinging their swords and steel whip wildly. Matong was close to his heel, moving to the side allowing the huge warrior to bring his own techniques into play.

Falling to one knee with a three foot slide in the sand Valice hooks his scabbard under the groin of the first one he came to. Using momentum he pushes the vamp forward throwing him off balance and face first to the ground. Unsheathing his blade with a metal twang as he stood he plunged its tip into the side of the struggling creature's neck twisting and tearing it free decapitating the beast.

The whip stung Matong across the cheek as the vampire he faced coiled it back for another strike. It moved to fast for the warrior to keep up with as the whip snapped its spear tip back in his direction drawing a red line across his cheek and arms. He stumbled forward caught by surprise of a hard thud from behind. With a glance he knew that he was trapped between three of the beasts. The two new ones held swords wet with gore, he cursed under breathe.

Vor towered over his brother kicking the sword away, "I do not have damndable answers for your Master, all I had was the scrolls." Spitting on his brothers face then turning and walks away to join his son in battle. Krolan was the last bit of family that Vor had left next to his son. Perhaps that was why he allowed him to live, much was to be explained after this battle and to Vor's regret his son would have to finally come to terms and understand it all.

He fought his way to Valice's side until he found himself in the midst of battle back to back with his son as the attacks came in multiples of five and ten, they parried most of them off with slashes and stabs. Both moved with deadly purpose that unnerved most of their attackers as blood flew to the right or misted in every direction.

Valice turned leaving his newest victim struggling to hold onto organs that threatened to leave his belly, an arm hit the ground at his feet as Vor parried and dismembered the sword arm of another assailant and turned to deflect yet another blow raising his blade over head. Valice struck out and spun sliding his razor edge along the vampire's side before thrusting upward under the left of its ribs piercing the heart.

Before dying the creature dropped its weapon and grabbed Valice's wrist keeping the blade from sliding out of his torso with the hope of a passing vampire to take advantage. Instead he found himself looking into a blood spattered face that carried a slight smirk.

Valice twirled his scabbard over his head until holding it like a dagger with the point aimed down from his hand. Bone along the side of the vampire's skull shattered as the wooden sheath penetrated and exited by his right ear. Valice pulled his sword from the body as it fell leaving the scabbard behind.

Turning away from the battle he noticed Matong struggling with two of his own, with a short flip and toss of his sword catching it at the tip of its blade. Valice sent it careening through the air with all his might covering the full distance of thirty feet and cracking into the chest of the two sworded vampire.

The creature felt his hands release the swords as his heart and left lung were pushed partially out of his back. His body traveled several feet in the air under the impact falling into a burning tent that enveloped the screaming body.

Matong took advantage of losing an opponent and snagged the whip with the base of his blade tearing the weapon from the vampire's hand. It stumbled forward desperately trying to hold on as Matong repositioned the blade and rammed into the creature's chest the follow through of the blade ripped out the left side making sure to take some of its spine.

Vor fell to knee as spear struck his thigh from behind pinning his leg to the ground. He grunted dropping his dagger, but managed to hold onto his sword. There were bright lights and flashes as a wooden handle struck the back of his head. His one eye already stinging from sweat fought back darkness as he fell tossing his blade out to the side unwillingly. His age being his most dangerous enemy having exhausted him of that youthful adrenaline and stamina.

If it not for Valice he would have died that very second as the vampire raised its sword preparing to take Vor's head. Unarmed from earlier Valice reached out with one hand catching the creature's left wrist stopping the blade halfway down its arc. Through gritted teeth and a blood soaked face Valice growled with an inner fury and reserved strength.

The creature slowly released its sword with a howl of pain as the grip on his wrist twisted and crushed the bone slowly. Valice lifted its arm extended to its side as his other hand shot around delivering a right hook to the chest.

Thudding loudly the vampire flew back three feet sliding in the sand. Trying to stand again he found Valice straddled atop wailing at his face with what felt like a thousand fists. The surrounding attack faded slowly as the vampire's backed away taking Krolan's body with them.

Standing up from the vampire's lifeless body Valice limps to his father's side. He brakes the back of the spear away from his father thigh before helping him up to his feet. "We shouldn't remove

that yet. "Come old man we have to get the rest of that out." The battle had aged his father severely making him look frail; his limbs sagged down with slumped shoulders of exhaustion.

"Shit." He chuckled with a slight wench of pain in the back of his head.

Matong jogged to their sides breathing heavy covered in light bruising and cuts on his body. He growled. "What in fuck was that?"

"Vlad seeking what we do not have to give." Vor explained as he hobbled toward his tent.

Valice looked back at his own tent where his wife and son hid; the flap was open and smeared with blood. Releasing his father's arm he ran across the way sliding to a stop before going in.

A painful howl echoed the oasis as anguished sobs of distress followed, Vor instantly at the entrance tearing open the flaps. His son sobbed deep as his body crumpled no longer obtaining any strength. Vor reached down to pick his son up remembering the last time he had to do so.

### **Chapter Three**

Fear can only consume us when darkness eclipses the light

The infringement of dark days once again shadow the life of Vor and now his son, as did tragedy with the disappearance of his son's family. The village looked decimated with tents' and huts' burnt to the ground and bodies littering the sands. The short victory of chasing them off was an apparent attempt to learn the truth about the scrolls. So, another words not a victory at all. He knelt down next to a child who lay with his insides resting next to him in the sand. His eyes stared up at the starless sky, mouth agape and eyes wide in terror. Around him many looked for their dead or dying putting order of their families back together but not without the sting of tears and heartache.

Vampires and their fucking nature, men women and children disemboweled, decapitated and dismembered. They either need you to care for them during the blessed day or eat you during the damned night. He stood from the child's body and looked for his son whom after recent events may have gone mad. Valice throughout his life had been known to resort to extreme solutions when confronted with extreme situations. He found Valice in tent standing in a puddle of blood that could have been Taale's or Rael's, he didn't care as he prepared for war. Pulling on his father's spiked gloves and full armament.

His father approached silent from behind as the village still scurried with survivors dragging their dead away for a proper burial or cremation. "Valice, you cant do this on your own."

Valice kept his gaze down as he tied the daggers to his arm. “They fucked themselves this night, They took my son and wife. No bodies were found means they’re alive.” He held out his left hand. “Why now?”

“He wanted something that I cannot give.” Both father and son looked into each others eyes.

“What did he fucking want?” Valice roared in his father’s face hands balled into fists saliva thrown from enraged lips.

Vor took it unflinching. “Answers to the scrolls, answers I don’t know or have. I’m not sure anyone does, and I don’t know why he thinks I do?” He leaned on a table arms crossed in thought. “I cant stop your mind being set to such a purpose. And I cant give you anything to barter with but what I do know is that Vlad has become desperate....” He’s words halted as thought bore into mind.

“Shit echoes from mouth father. I have no time for such.” The temperament in his voice grew agitated.

“Belief or not, that fucking swine has your family, so you better pay well attention to what he believes.” “And now that he knows I live, well.” He smirked. “Well, we have a fight waiting for us, and I will not let you go alone on such a thing.” Placing a hand on his son’s shoulder.

Valice lowered his head in thought. Dressed in robes that mimicked the sands in color, the top covering only half his torso as one arm and partial chest lay bare of sleeve and cloth. Sword strapped to his back. Spiked gauntlets covered fists and forearms that wrapped tight to his elbow. Vor reached up and rubbed his sons short hair.

“I think I’ll do the same this fucking night and be rid of extra burden for journey.”

“You remember the way?” Valice asked while tightening the leather belt around his waist.

“I remember every shit I took from there till here, so I guess we just have to follow the smell.” He smirked at his son who in turn tried to privy his smile but failed “I know where it is, but there will be much grievance upon arrival day or night. Vlad has since taken to the dark arts and has started creating worse things than the undead.”

Valice looks around his home one last time with thought of wife and son torturing him “It matters not, they bleed they die.” Exiting the tent. “I will either have my family back or destroy every God forsaken beast or man on this land.”

Understanding the anguished expression on his sons face, Vor remained silent. His son always seemed to hang in a fragile balance of light and dark. “We need to gather as many men as we can.” Outside the tent he took notice of Matong far behind striding toward them.

“That’s fine, as long as purpose is known.” Vor stared at his sons back as he walked away shoulders drooped along with his head. It was sadness stress and the conceivable fact that a lot of blood was meant to be spilt in the near future. Not something Vor wanted, knowing the danger it would present to the village or now caravan. It now being time that they became nomadic never staying for more than a few nights per camp, not until they reach ocean, with the water at their back it gave only a few options of attack to fall upon them.

## Chapter Four

There can be no peace without the act of war

The eyes of thirty men squinted into the winds of the desert as sand tornadoes around them, draining them of energy and nourishment. It had been four days pass since their last meals and the water begun to run dry in the pouches tied to their sides. The weight of their weapons slowed their pace after the second day with many feeling the heat resonating from their blades slapping against their backs. Heads were wrapped in turbans with leather strips and slanted holes covering their eyes and mouth. If it wasn’t enough to be burned by the sun or blinded by the sun, suffocation was possible with the over consumption of sand. No one could tell anyone apart unless weapons indentified owners. Asad, Nerian, and Matong walked along the sides of Vor and Valice in silence. All focused on getting through the sand storm and into some type of shelter. It was Asad who raised a finger toward an alcove of rocks that was part of a steep cliff that appeared to be thirty or so feet high and fifteen feet wide, an odd shape but one created by the erosion of the winds and the cutting of the sands. Word passed back between each person slapping the other with open hand and pointing the way. The journey was hard as they followed Vor to the cliff wall, whom in turn retraced the steps of his youth and remembering a time when he carried his infant son in arm. Trudging the depthless of the sands, there were several times he helped his wife from sinking. Over seventy slaves followed with their families from the shit and piss of the pit which ultimately surfaced a mile out from the palace’s entrance. Everyone was covered in brown slime and blood laden piss, nobody looked human not even the children or Vor’s infant son.

Valice settled his weapons to the sand he could hear muffled laughter coming from his father and his friends Nerian and Asad. Not having to go far considering the shelter was tall but short in length he followed its wall to were they knelt.

Asad’s voice was distorted by his mask which was no different than anyone else’s’. “Fucking remember this place.”

“It was no small feat.” Nerian said slapping Vor on the back of his shoulder.

“Two handfuls’ of slaves fucking taking last stand against the horde.” Vor praised. “Wife sat here with infant in arms surrounded by others doing the same, pissing the sands in fear.”

“Marian was not without bite. One of the few that would take sword in hand.” Asad chortled.

“Yes, with baby in arms. She would fight to the death.” Vor’s head drooped and shoulders sagged with sigh. The shaking of his head was covered by the thickness of wrapped cloak around his neck like a scarf. Vor glanced at son’s approach. “Not much further to go, we should stay here for a day and recover.”

“How far?”

“Half a day or so.” Nerian pulled his leather bag of water from his hip. “Close enough to smell it when they shit.”

“Downwind.” Vor laughed as did the others around them who escaped the pits long ago. Obvious a joke shared between brothers of slave hood.

Valice grabbed his fathers shoulder with a firmness demanding attention. “What are we looking for?”

Vor plopped to the sands with grunt and back to the wall hands resting atop knees. “Small huts round on top made from clay and camel or horse shit, one or the other. The entrance is in the hut behind all the others.” He cleared his throat with a slight cough. “We go east of that, to were the..?” Unsure how to articulate into words of what they had to swim through.

“Where the vampires and slaves take fucking shits, vomit, throw their dead or whatever. We had to swim through it to get out now we have to do it again to get back in. Christ I fucking hate you right now.” Giving Valice a light punch on his arm. Valice strained to hear, the roar of the sand made all nearly deaf and the masks they wore did not help.

“A chasm of shit?” Valice was glad his face was hidden.

His father laughs and bounces his head between his shoulders looking down at the sands. “Oh it gets much worse from there.”

A night passed with the sands dying down but still stirred in the air not relieving them of their masks or turbans as they begun the trudge through the sands that splashed to their knees and hips. At times it felt as if they were sinking or being swallowed by the desert. They pushed on holding tight to sword straps and keeping their heads down. Sands cascaded over dunes as they approached the top of a particularly steep one, they fought against being sent back down to the bottom with each step. Upon reaching the top the sandy winds started to fade replacing what could have been a serene image of desert with...

“You know if this was part of the plan, it would have done well for someone to spill fucking word.” Nerian shouted over the winds.

Asad looked over shoulder to his brother.

With a slight sideways nod of his head, “Just saying, would have been will received.”

“He knew?” Vor stared at the man riding a dark steed covered in reds and gold’s.

“Matters not.”

“I hope balls are well clinched.” Nerian slapped Valice on back.

“Mine are.” Vor laughed under mask.

“How many are there?” Matong strained his eyes through the wind looking at the small platoon of vampires.

“Enough to keep us from the river of shit and piss, I hope?” Nerian long ago learned to place humor where fear became present.

“Valice.” Asad pulled sword from sheath and with a spin held the blade reverse with the curve going up the back of his arm.

The wind grew stronger around them as each person in their small group unsheathed weapons, their robes made whipping noises in the wind giving ambiance to the silence around them. Nobody said anything as the wind whistled over their blades.

The small horde of vampires marched following Vlad’s horse and than stopped no more than two hundred paces in front of them, all armed with weapons and armor. He sat tall and had long black hair that flowed over his square shoulders. His armor immensely decorated, with a velvet silk tunic that untied at the neck underneath, and cloak made of black animal furs. A face that pained Valice. His complexion almost transparent white and thin but appeared to be strong in jaw. Black cotton pants and expensive leather moccasin boots that were almost knee high finished off his attire. He rode out to the small group of men turning his horse to the side.

“You dogs know who I am.” He looked from Valice to Vor until his eyes settled on Matong. A dark clawed finger pointed at Vor who wielded battle-axes in both hands pulled from under a cloak that had long been tossed to the winds. “You there, I know your scent, Vor.”

Vor could feel the hatred rise up inside. He removed the lower part of his mask by pulling a knot and detaching it from eye part. His scarred chin shown through stubble from days travels. “You have my family.” His voice baritone and unflinching. “You have the scroll, what purpose drives you to my life?”



Vlad shook his head in a negative gesture as he smiled. "You are old and dying. You should have left your pup behind" "I need the scroll translated." Never having to raise his voice as it carried over the winds, a feat noticed by Valice who could hear everything the Dark Lord said.

"Then you are fucked for answers." Vor shouted over the winds that grew stronger with each passing second. "My family, or your head." He pointed an axe toward Vlad.

The winds slowed down to a breeze as Vlad reached down sliding his claws along the side of his horse's neck. Its black hide twitched at the touch of sharp nails drew blood. He headed back to his own small band of warriors and looked down at Remora who dressed well for battle. in dark leather armor that molded into muscular form.

"I want his son."

Remora bowed his head. "And the other?"

"If he lives, give reward for tasks rendered." Grabbing the reigns, he moved his horse around till once again he walked back through the front lines with the vampires closing back into ranks behind him

"Most of us will be long dead before the sun rises. Can you feel that, fear." Matong stuck his blade into the sand.

Valice moved his eyes to the side glimpsing Matong and unsheathing another sword from his back. "He knows you." Replied Valice.

"He knows us all." Matong turned looking at Valice with a curious expression just as a high shriek echoed through the night air. The sounds of the dead screaming and running toward the horde with their swords and maces above their heads.

Matong could feel the change in Valice's demeanor toward him, things had been to well keep for to long to give in now. Perhaps it a worry that would go away during battle. It had not been known where the first blow struck as it came from all around them. Betrayed by the winds of sand as they came from the ground the air above and from behind, crimson sprayed in all directions Vor struck the first one that leapt from the sands at him. Its skull splintered like wood as the axe blade struck its forehead and pushed through the back of its head. Leaning over to his left, another fell victim to an axe as he growled.

Nerian rose up from his knee and sprinted forward ducking under a blade and rising up behind the creature beheading it with a side slice. Another attacked from his left he parried sending the blow to the side with the curve from his scimitar. Spinning with the blade flowing overhead it found purpose across a vampire's eyes and cut the bridge of its nose in two. Stumbling back holding it holding clawed hands to face. Its back bumped into a blood drenched Valice who

turned on the blind creature and with a growl from deep down, split the thing in two from head to groin.

Valice felt the bite of steel on his bicep; stepping back and going with the blow he countered with his own driving the tip of the sword into the chest of vamp and with a quick jerk of his arms. Sent the blade straight up through the neck and out the top of its skull. The sword in his right hand twirled till he gripped it reverse thrusting it between his elbow and ribs stabbing the vamp that tried to creep up from behind. Spinning with both swords he went low cutting the inner thigh followed by the second blade slicing open the abdomen until he rose with an uppercut of both swords careening the vamp backwards with little left of its head. Another attacked from his side nicked his arms and thighs with a mace like club. Growling he struck the club splintering it off to the side with a sword while thrusting forward with the other impaling it through its forehead. Vor kicked the creature from Valice's sword tip with a smile painted across his blood-covered face, He gave a single nod before turning away. It could have been a way of saying bye, purpose had not set in Vor's mind as he fought to reach Vlad sitting on his steed.

“Valice!” Shouted Matong trying to draw his attention.

Asad watched as the two warriors ducked and slashed their way through the horde, stepping over fallen brothers that were rendered apart. A small curvy dagger hid behind Matong's back in hand as they advanced on each other slowly. Valice spun on one vamp with his blade sliding across its belly, emptying everything it held inside and then twirled his wrist and brought the blade down on its neck. Matong held a creature by the throat with one hand it looked as if the vamps eyes were going to pop from their sockets. Parrying a lance away from his body with his sword, Matong replied with an upward motion of his blade, the lance fell cleaved in two leaving the spearhead on the ground and the vamp with a very short stick. It turned to run as Matong struck the one he gripped at the throat with the handle of his sword. His face showered with more blood from the creature's nose and mouth, throwing it to the ground he knelt splitting the vamps skull with a final crack of the handle.

Valice brought his blade overhead, blocking a down strike from an axe; this forced him to one knee. Looking at the vamps legs, his blade parried the axe to the side buying him time to swing his other blade around. The vampire fell back as his legs were cut off at the knees. He pushed on through the crowd not realizing he moved away from Matong.

Matong followed in close pursuit of his friend, hacking the arm off one and impaling another through its ribs. Dagger still hidden behind his back, he looked for an opening to hurl its blade into his friends back. None came. This becoming but a charade predestined with doom to come to a bloody end.

Nerian lost track on how many vampires had fallen to his blade as he kicked high with a roundhouse. Striking one in the nose, shattering bone. Spinning low and away he bore his curved blade across its belly and immediately flowed into a second strike that flew straight up

catching the vamp on the under part of its chin. Its jaw hung in half as dark blood poured from the wound. Nerian kicked another in the gut before dive rolling over the bent over creature. Coming up and spinning low on the ground swinging his left leg about in a sweeping motion that sent two vamps sprawling onto their backs. He leaned back with an arched back, avoiding a blade that swung from his left side. It passed over his face leaving him unscathed. The wind off the blade whistled by his eyes. Stepping back, he ducked low and weaves to the side away from his enemy that nearly beheaded him. He felt a prick on the back of his leg, which startled him enough to lose balance looking down. A vampire gripped his calf and tore with fang ripping a chunk of clothing and meat. He brought his blades down, severing the vamps head from its exposed neck. More importantly he saw the dagger Matong carried behind back while approaching Valice. He knew something felt wrong, Matong's battles just seemed short lived. Just enough to keep eyes from noticing. He knew something terrible was planned and about to happen, the smile on Matong's face told a story of betrayal. He fought his way yelling for Valice with warning.

Vor lay on his back rolling quickly to his left. A sword struck the ground missing him by inches and tossing sand into the air. Coming back up to his feet, he could see injured men lying on their sides with crimson rivers flowing from grievance wounds. The sword came at him again, this time from the side with blinding speed. Jumping back allowing the blade to cut into the front of his robes, he stepped forward jamming the creature's next strike with his left arm and stomping on the vamps foot so it could not move away. The axe in his right hand came around striking the side of its head. The blade lodged in the skull not killing the vamp, but knocking it to its knees. Even though it had not died, it would not get up for a long time with that injury. It would take a month before a wound like that could heal and not fully at that. Releasing the axe handle and leaving it stuck in the vamp, he threw the other one with all of his strength sending flying and spinning end over end at a creature that had leapt on Valice's back. The blade struck the vamp in the side of its body, pinning its right arm to its side almost completely severed off. It fell from Valice and hit the ground several feet away as Vor's son brought one of his blades around cleaving a vamp in half from the chest up.

Matong looked up from his battle and could see Vlad still sitting on his horse watching from atop a dune. However, the problem at hand is the fact that Vor had sent a spinning axe between he and Valice's back. Unintentionally halting his purpose. He felt quite weary as the muscles in his oak like arms pushed his blade through the midsection of a vampire. It fell in half with Matong stepping through ripping his blade out in time to parry a glancing downward blow to the side. He jammed his handle up into the creatures face as he stepped into its arms. The vamp fell back as one of its brethren charged Matong, who in turn ducked low jamming a shoulder into the creature's stomach and flipping it high over his head as he stood up howling. His braided hair flung blood into the air as they fell slapping his bare back. He crouched low to the ground growling at the ten or so vampires that surrounded him. They hissed at him with pulled back lips baring fang and weapons poised. Slowly they walked by him with caution and weary eyes

looking over his massive frame. Matong stayed crouched watching them pass and hoping it went unnoticed.

Valice could make out his father's form with ripped robes and swinging axes making its way to where Vlad sat in waiting. Deciding to join his father he sliced through a maze of vampires, he blocked, parried and struck out against his attackers. A vamp spun clearly around by a hard cut across the eyes another found the top of his head missing and knelt down on all fours trying to claim it. He noticed the impending darkness closing in as the thickness of sand in the air blocked the moonlight. The warning sound of a blade swinging his direction swished through the air of sand, he parried turning attack back to opponent. His blades cut through the darkness slicing away until the blades met meat and bone. Groans and screams of agony sounded out as flashes of pale faces of horror were shown behind the winds of sand. He spun high then low forming a figure eight with both blades crossing each other. A horse charged from behind, waiting till it bore near him, he spun low to the ground and to the side away from the hooves on one knee taking the horse out at the joints. Its front legs gone sent it crashing head first into the sand and throwing its rider. Valice haggard in breathe; felt his muscles beginning to ache, the split on his cheek still bled steady as did the nick on his thigh. Bending down into a low stance he blocked high and thrust forward with his other blade piercing the heart of his attacker. Releasing the sword he pulled a dagger from his belt with a flip catching it at the tip before sending it hurdling toward its promised destination. He could hear the grunt and a body fall as he pulled the sword from the vamp's chest knocking the sword from its hand and beheading it with both of his blades. Standing over the headless body he could hear steel on steel of men fighting. A charging howl came from his right, turning calmly Valice held out but one blade and waited before releasing his fury. Arms fell from its torso followed shortly by legs.

Vlad, smirked to himself as Remora stood next to his horse making sure that if any approached it would be short lived. A feeling of déjà vu haunted him, perhaps it being the sight of Vor ravaging any vampire that stood in front of him. He could tell warrior tired from age and became rather amused with the inevitable.

Valice stood against three, their blades moving with fluid strikes as did his matching their every attack, he blocked down and up in a half arc pushed to the right with the other blocking high before they crossed each other forming a figure eight weave, blades snapped a sword in half and another split at the handle along with some fingers following behind. Side stepping and blocking a blade down into the sand he now stood behind his aggressor ramming both blades side by side in together mid way down the back. The tips jutted out from the front of the vampire before they twisted sideways ripping out in opposite directions. The vampire's body fell in half as another vamp leapt high overhead. Valice rolled back and waited as the creature landed and pounced once again into the air with claws bearing down. Valice put his left shoulder into the throw as his blade left his hand, the creature struck in midair was thrown back several feet impaled at the forehead.

Vor's found himself with weapon as he dodged a thrust toward his stomach by leaping away and curling into a ball rolling. He came up by a rock nearly crashing into it. A hand steadied his body against the large rock as his chest heaved with exhaustion. Blood dripped from his face like sweat. His wounds were nothing major, mainly cuts and bruises a twisted ankle he continued to ignore. Sliding behind the rock he found himself hidden from the battle between two rocks that formed a small hole, he would use this space to rest, his heart racing as if it wanted out of his chest. He needed time to catch his breath his second wind given minutes after the battle began. He hoped that his son fared better than he. Valice and the remaining men found themselves being drawn together until they stood back to back in a small circle. Matong was the odd man out, no longer fighting just standing there watching amidst vampires.

Another shriek echoed through the air, halting the vampires and moving them all into a large circle herding the remaining warriors into the middle huddled together. Five out of thirty five stood with weapons still in hand, breathing hard and injured with wounds bleeding out. Matong, Valice Asad and Nerian stood among them as part of the five surrounded by twenty. It looked as if the battle had even taken a toll on the vampire horde for they were no longer a horde. Rather a small army with bodies littering the desert.

Matong spied Valice's back and decided it not the time. Asad felt himself being forced down to his knees next to Valice. Valice still fought to stand showing his defiance against Vlad's will. He glanced back over his shoulder at Matong as if he knew. Nerian purposely placed himself between Matong and Valice, there would be another time to lay the matter to rest, if they lived. Vlad dismounted from horse and walked toward the circle. carrying a black sack at his side dripping a trail of crimson on the sand. The winds slowed to an end as the sand storm became no more than a breeze, Vlad stepped up to Valice still struggling under hand.

"Where is your father?" He hissed at Valice. "Matters not, all good things. right." Dropping the sack at Valice's feet.

Asad reached down for it, Valice fell to knees grabbing his arm and shaking his head. "Are you sure?"

Valice gave a short nod to his friend and took his time allowing the Dark Lord to savior the moment unknowingly to him. Grabbing the sack by the bottom he looked at Asad, his breathe haggard and eyes already beginning to water. His injured body sagged almost pleading, fighting the urge to look.

Vlad laughed clapping his hands. "Well... dog?"

"Perhaps lack of victory has fucked ass worse than thought?" Remora smile with arms crossed over armor.

Vlad's young face smiled down at the beaten warrior, "Perhaps. Or fear is present. I have seen that happen." He mocked looking at Valice. "Beaten down to bare bones, loss of everything around you, internal suffering, self damnation..." "Vlad's young face, so fooling of the monster he truly is. "I have taken life from you with purpose of saving another. All I need is the way." His fangs gleaming as he spoke with wicked tongue. "Be not like your father, I can promise you great things. Give you great strengths." A clawed hand moved unseen until clasping Valice's throat. "Just give me the damned key" He spat snarling with fury at the warrior's resistance. Releasing the man, Vlad walked away his putrid eyes squinted.

Valice fell to his knees before the bag and grabbing the bottom again. Nerian rested a hand on his shoulder with a distressed look of concern. "Valice?" His voice stopping his friend's hand inches from the bag. "I have to know." looking up into Vlad's face.

Nerian inhaled deeply looking at the others until his eyes fell on Matong with a hard stare. Valice flipped it spilling its contents over the desert sand. His fingers soaked in blood from the bag, he could only stare at his hand avoiding the sound of a thud on the ground at his knees. Tears flowed down his cheeks as he swallowed and looked. He stared into the hollow eyes of his dead wife. His body began to shake, face turned red as his hands turned to fists, every muscle fiber in his body tensed as he howled in torment at the night sky.

Remora laughed clasping his hands together almost in glee of Valice's pain. "I love this. Gain, loss, betrayal." Looking at Matong.

Valice looked back at the thing standing behind Nerian and roared as his rage took over. He stood from the ground with his chest rising and falling with every breath, he felt sick to his stomach and dizzy. Asad reached out with a hand gripping his friend's shoulder firmly to steady him. Matong watched in silence as the vampires separated him from the rest.

Valice snapped his head in Matong's direction. "Why?"

Vlad smiled at the raging Valice. "Pathetic." He chimed to himself. "I have wasted enough time with you savages on this night. If it pleases you, I leave choice of joining my clan. I was quite amused at the beginning of the battle. You were so brave and very strategic. It almost seemed as if you were capable of thought."

His rage burst sending Valice on a charge toward the group of vampires in front of him. They held tight to his limbs as his struggles moved them all closer to Vlad. The others were stripped of their weapons, all except for Matong. Asad stepped away slowly from the traitor his eyes convicting Matong to Hell for his treachery. His lips silent in moving a whisper only for Matong's eyes.

"You're dead."

“I will take the boy off your hands Vlad, he might prove to be useful yet, well more than his father anyways.” Remora’s smile had purpose to eat at them all. His grin grew so wide that his eyes almost narrowed themselves gone. “After all, you are only mortal, soft of skin weak of will. Could prove amusing to break the child’s spirit.”

Vlad gestured with a hand, a crook smile etched across his face as he sent his army to secure the fallen warriors. Cold iron hands gripped them all by the back of their necks, lifting them onto their toes with ease. Vlad didn’t even look at the ones holding Valice down, as he gave a silent command for him to be released. They immediately backed away as their Lords’ voice whispered in the back of their minds. Still ignoring Valice, Vlad approached the three helpless warriors held at bay with their feet dangling above the ground. He came to Matong first whom had not been held in place like the others. He looked at the man before him and was pleased.

“A gesture of good faith. A value tendered at a young age brought to purpose by betraying the ones that took you in.” Reaching up with a clawed hand, Vlad caressed Matong’s left cheek. “Matong. A name chosen by me.” Vlad took his hand back with his pinky nail sliding across Matong's cheek. Skin split with the void filling with blood until traveling down the side of his face. With a flick of his tongue, the blood removed from nail.

“Sweet as lamb.” “Remora, take and give gratitude’s.”

The tears along his face dried but left open wounds stinging as he wiped his eyes with torn sleeve. He wanted to stare at the monster that killed his wife and took his son. He wanted to kill him, render him to pieces with his bare hands. And then the moment came, when Vlad’s back turned before him. He leapt with hands outstretched as if they had claws, in mind deciding that he would choose his own death, his way, fighting to the end. His hands came to a stop an inch away from there mark as a gasp of air forced its way from his mouth quickly followed by an internal gurgle and cough. Valice brought a hand to his lips, touching them they felt wet and warm. His fingertips came back bloodied. Stumbling back steps his knees gave way, his body tingled as coldness crept over his skin He went into shock as he stared up from his knees and looked the Devil right in the eyes. A pitted black they were. Valice found his hands grasping a handle that protruded from sternum, the blade punctured next to his spine.

Vlad knelt down beside the warrior displaying a smile. “Though a mortal wound I will not let you die this night.” Vlad used a thumb to wipe blood from the corner of Valice’s mouth. “The rest are mere cattle to my kind.” He laughed as Remora approached looking the men up and down with desire in his eyes.

Valice fell to his left side as darkness slid into the corners of his eyes, his breath lost to him. Taale’ stared back with her pale brown eyes facing him. Finally darkness blessed him.

