

Crown the Villain

Volume I:
Haunting Scars

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Map of Alataria



Author's Note

The character segments in this series don't necessarily happen in a chronological order in accordance with their order of appearance. Some of them may happen at the same time as others, as well as before or after.

In addition, the segments can also take place over a period of minutes, hours, days and even weeks, and the amount of time that goes by between each segment of a character can also be minutes, hours, days or weeks.

Prologue

Complete silence wrapped around the woman as she stood on the edge of the Maroon Bridge, looking down at Lake Wheel below. She thought of the popular nickname this lake has. The Wailing Lake. They named it so due to the many suicide attempts that had been made at this lake. People like to say that if you visit the lake at night and listen very closely, you can hear the wailing of all the dead who found their demise in these waters. All was silent around her... and yet she couldn't hear anything... no wailing of the dead... only her own. Harsh winds blew at her, as if some force was trying to push her and make her join the dead in the lake. And although she was intending to do just that... she wanted a few more minutes in the blissful silence.

A minute later she could hear something. She looked at the road behind her and noticed a headlight coming her way. As the headlight came closer and closer she could identify its engine sound. It was a motorcycle. She hoped he would just drive past her, not even caring if he notices her or not, as long as he moves on and leaves her alone. Her hope was unfulfilled, as every other one she had in her life before. The motorcycle came to a halt in the middle of the bridge, and the driver took his helmet off and left it on the handlebar. He looked to be about 30 years old. Not more than 35, she guessed. He had long black hair, reaching down almost to his shoulders, and he wore a black leather coat. At first she feared it was a member

of Harley Nation, the notorious biker gang, but a second later she realized it didn't matter. There was nothing he could do to harm her, as she was standing on the edge of her wishful death. The man approached the railing on the edge of the road and leaned his hands on it. His eyes had a dreary appearance. He took out a cigarette pack from his pocket and lit one with his lighter.

When he looked at her he noticed how stricken with anxiety she appeared. He could see in her face that she was lost, as he knew that feeling all too well. "Don't worry, I won't try to stop you," he said, inhaling the smoke from his cigarette. "I was once on a similar spot, on a similar edge, ready to jump just like you," he blew the smoke away, into the thin night air.

"What stopped you?" she opened her mouth.

"Something... it doesn't really matter. If you had that something you'd be getting off that ledge too by now." He looked so serious and ominous, as if he stopped only to watch the dreadful show of her taking the leap.

"I see... well, you're probably right, since I have nothing left in this world," she said.

"Which one did it? Lady Dread? Men of Midas?" he knew there was death of a loved one involved.

"Ferals," she responded.

"Oh..." he knew that was probably the worst one of them.

"My husband and only boy." Tears started streaming down her face. *If it's Ferals that killed them, it must have been a very brutal kind of death.* The man thought to himself. "I'm very sorry," he said.

"Do you want to know how they died?" she asked.

"No," he answered decisively. "My nights are already packed with nightmares. I think I'll pass on the chance to have some more." A few moments of silence passed as he finished his cigarette. "Well, it's getting late. I better be off now." He got on his bike and took one last look at the poor woman. She gazed at the starry sky, taking one last glance at the mesmerizing view. *The only beautiful thing left in this place is the night sky.* He said to himself. As he began driving away, just as

he started accelerating, he managed to catch in the corner of his eye the horrible picture of the woman casting herself into the darkness below.



Edward

Commotion and rumble dominated inside the courthouse at Morth City, as the man charged with first-degree murder entered the halls dressed in an orange uniform and handcuffs. It was Charles Blackburn, ringleader of Code Sanguinary, also known as the Deserter General. Blackburn had white hair covering his head, and a thick white beard upon his old, wrinkly face. His dark blue eyes looked tired and restless as he was dragged to the table beside his attorney. Officer Edward Elwin, who was sitting among the crowd, was overjoyed to see the wretched criminal come to justice.

It was all thanks to Roycen McAllister, who served as an inside informant in Code Sanguinary, and supplied the incriminating footage of Blackburn beating and eventually killing a man with his bare hands. The victim was Serik Sanders, a member of the Justicars that was caught by Blackburn's men. Blackburn gave him the personal treatment in an attempt to squeeze out any information he may have had regarding the Justicars' headquarters location, a detail that is currently hidden from all the mob gangs in Alataria, and even the police force. Upon realizing the man was of no value to him, Blackburn put a bullet through Serik's forehead.

Since the trial was held behind closed doors, its contents forbidden to be documented by the media, a mass of reporters and journalists waited eagerly outside the room's large wooden

doors for the a statement about the verdict of the case. Edward could hear the flock through the doors, talking amongst themselves, probably placing bets on what Blackburn's sentence would be.

After a call for order and a few formal introductions that fired off the trial, Judge Hicken addressed Blackburn. "You are charged with the first-degree murder of Serik Sanders. How do you plea?"

"Not guilty." Blackburn didn't show any sign of hesitation as he declared his innocence. His voice was rough and old. A few whispers were heard among the crowd inside the room as a result.

The first person to testify was Vernes Price, the officer who led the case against Blackburn. Vernes was about 40 years old. *A grumpy old asshole with a receding hairline.* Edward summarized the man in his head. As Vernes took to the stand and spoke about how his informant had worn a hidden camera and managed to take footage of the heinous crime, Edward noticed Blackburn's eyes squinting with anger. *I hope you rot in prison.* He thought. *People like Blackburn belong behind bars.* He hoped that others like Reus Mallistrom and Sunyula Trife would follow Blackburn to the courthouse, but he feared that was too much of a demand. The difference between Blackburn and those two was that they were smart enough to buy almost half of the police force in bribes, while Blackburn was unwilling to do such a thing on a base of principals. Blackburn was a respected general of the Alatarian army once, but after the events of the Tearful Rebellion he resented the government so much that he became a deserter, and formed Code Sanguinary with fellow deserter soldiers who agreed with his cause. That was why he was named the Deserter General.

In a country like Alataria, it's often hard to get criminals locked up. Not only do a lot of them manage to keep themselves under the police's radar by slipping the right amount of cash into the right pockets, but inventions like the gloves-shoes-mask set also known as Elastics, a recently popular means of leaving no trace of DNA at crime scenes,

had made it very difficult to get incriminating evidence. Blackburn, however loyal to his values, also made a target out of himself when he refused to play the game of bribes. That's why it was necessary to bring him down using an inside informant, who could supply evidence by video. Roycen McAllister was hoping to catch one of the organization's gun trades as well, but he was considered too much of a tenderfoot to be present at those trades, and with the Chief of Police breathing down his neck, they had to settle for a murder charge. *Blackburn deserves to be prosecuted for so much more, but then again I guess when it comes to justice in Alataria, you have to take what you can.*

While Vernes mumbled on and on, another officer walked through the entrance doors and made his way in a hurry to the prosecutor's table. The officer looked very nervous. Edward wondered what caused it. With Vernes's rambling in the background, the nervous officer whispered something into the state attorney's ear, which made the attorney's eyes widen in shock. "Your honor, I have to ask for a private audience in your office right now." The attorney rose to his feet and made his request. Judge Hicken looked at him with a narrow eye. "Sit down, we're in the middle of a witness statement," he scolded him.

"Your honor, I have to insist," the attorney said. Judge Hicken made a long, grumpy sigh. "This better be good. The trial will resume in 5 minutes." Hicken banged his gavel and got up from his high chair. He walked through his office door which stood right beside his high station, with the two lawyers from each side of the trial following at his tail.

What's going on? What could the officer possibly tell the state attorney that would cause him to make such a fuss? Tumult was dominating the room once more, as the crowd around Edward was wondering the same question that he was. Edward saw the nervous officer whispering in Vernes's ear, as Vernes mingled within the sitting crowd. He noticed Vernes's eyes widening the same way the state attorney's had. He wouldn't let his curiosity settle. He had to find out what was going on.

"Vernes!" Edward called as he got up from his seat and made his way to the grumpy old cop. "What's going on?" he asked once he reached him.

Vernes looked grumpier than ever, letting off a tired sigh before opening his mouth. "The key evidence that we were supposed to show now... it's missing. Someone replaced the flash drive that had the original footage file on it with a different one in the evidence room at the station."

"What?!" Edward was shocked. "How could this happen?" *Code Sanguinary don't work with cops out of principal, everybody knows that. They couldn't have a bought off the cop taking care of this, so... who did this?*

"I don't know." Vernes sounded defeated. Edward knew what his tone meant. It meant the one thing Edward feared. And then Vernes confirmed his suspicions. "This trial is lost. Blackburn gets to go free." *No... this can't be happening... we finally have a high ranked criminal before a judge and now he gets to walk out of it?*

"Does Dillard know about this?" Edward asked.

"Probably."

The judge returned from his private session with the lawyers, and as soon as everyone in the room returned to their proper seats, he read his announcement with the strike of his gavel. "Due to... unforeseen difficulties, this courthouse will resume Mr. Blackburn's trial on this day, next week, at 12 PM." The commotion returned at full upon hearing his decision, and Judge Hicken had to knock his gavel multiple times to restore order. *He's giving the police a week to find the missing evidence. If no one finds it during this time... Blackburn walks free.* Edward looked at Blackburn, who sat beside his attorney at the defense table, trying to spot any sign of gloating on the ringleader's part. Blackburn's face was devoid of any emotion. You couldn't tell if he was happy or sad about everything that had just occurred. *Did he plan this? Did he see this coming?* The questions burned in his mind.

Once everyone dispersed out of the hall, the reporters who were nested outside charged at the attorneys of both sides with

microphones and cameras. Questions regarding the trial's outcome were soon all that Edward could hear, and so he sought to get away from the crowd. As he glanced back, he noticed the shocked expressions on their faces, as one of the attorneys announced that the trial has been pushed back by a week, with no verdict delivered. When he was asked why that was, he simply thanked the reports and stormed away, leaving them in a cloud of bafflement. *They were told not to let the media know about the missing evidence... this must be Dillard, our dear Chief of Police, trying to prevent APD from looking like a bunch of morons.*

Edward caught up with Vernes as he saw him pacing away in haste. "Vernes." He grabbed his arm. "Please tell me you're going to do something about this. I mean, this is your case, you ran it—"

"Look, kid, I don't know what to tell you. If the evidence is gone, then it's gone. Besides, I didn't even want the damn case. It was fucking Dillard who dropped this on me."

"Are you kidding me? It's bad enough we only charged him with a fucking murder when we KNOW this guy is responsible for so much more, now you want—"

"Look, if you care about this so much, why don't you just take the fucking case?" Vernes stormed off, refusing to continue the conversation. *Fucking coward. If you think I'm just going to sit quiet you're wrong, you grumpy old fuck. I'm going to get that evidence. Whatever it takes.*



The day felt slow and boring. Edrimer Frye was sitting at the clerk desk in the convenience store. It wasn't the most fulfilling job in the world, but it was peaceful and quiet. And that's all Edrimer wanted. Peace and quiet. Upon his right arm there was a tattoo he had gotten years ago of a symbol originally known as a Koru. It was shaped as spiraling thick lines, twisting and curling all over his arm, reaching from his shoulder almost to his palm. Koru originally symbolized growth, strength and peace, but during the Tearful Rebellion of 2031, the rebels adopted the spiraling shape as their symbol of a peaceful, quiet life, meaning it represented the very thing the Alatarian citizens wished to achieve during that uprising. That is why Edrimer wore that symbol with pride, for that was all he ever wanted in this world.

The foul smell of cigarette smoke soon filled his nostrils and ruined his state of tranquility. His eyebrow twitched in frustration as he turned to the old man at his side. "You really got to stop smoking that shit, old man," he said to Zachary Ramos, the shop owner and his boss. "Why don't you mind your own fucking business and start cleaning this place?" old Zachary retaliated with utmost spike. Edrimer smiled and got to his feet. *I love that old man.* He thought. Even though the two hadn't always seen things eye to eye, Edrimer had great appreciation for his employer. He paid well and was never too

demanding of him. But more than that, the thing Edrimer appreciated most about the old man was that unlike many other OldGens, this one was not actually as grumpy, annoying or lecturing as most of them usually tended to be. *Such an idiotic term that we've invented... OldGens and NewGens...* Edrimer felt his teeth grinding as he contemplated the obnoxious way people nowadays differentiated people who were born before the 2000s and those who were born after. On top of being moronic, he felt like this issue also had a sad part to it. Usually, OldGens, who should be over 50 years old, bear names of the old generations, like David, James, Richard and so on. Since they were born in a time when crime and corruption weren't plaguing Alataria as much as they do now, they like to reflect on those days. *Sure, a time when groups like the Justicars weren't even necessary, and names like Sunyula Trife and Jegaar Hill didn't make kids and adults tremble alike might have been great, but I'm fed up with the stories.* NewGens, who were born after the 2000s, were introduced into the poor state of the country from the start. As the years passed and poverty and unemployment grew, so did the percentage of children born of rape and accidental pregnancies. Soon enough, the population saw a great increase in the number of children who were either abandoned by their parents for lack of financial ability to support them or simply lost them to the ever-growing criminal organizations. *No wonder studies show that the overall desire for raising a family in this country is dwindling further and further.*

"Well? Are you going to just sit there all day like that, or are you going to get off your lazy ass and clean this joint up?" Zachary scolded his employee. With a long sigh, Edrimer grabbed a broom that was leaning on the wall nearby and started sweeping lumps of dust from the floor. The store was quiet as a graveyard. Not a single customer was there. Only Edrimer and old Zachary.

After about 30 minutes of endless sweeping, Edrimer noticed two men approaching the store entrance from afar. *Well, at least these customers can provide me with an excuse to stop cleaning this place.* Edrimer couldn't really make out the

appearances of the two figures through the glass door from such a distance. He could only spot the black color of their clothes. A strange feeling suddenly overcame him. He wasn't sure where it came from, or what it meant, but his gut was surely trying to tell him something. He looked at old Zachary, who was still sitting at the corner of the store, smoking what could possibly be his tenth cigarette today. Once he shifted his gaze back to the two men, they were almost at the door. At such a distance he could make out a lot more of their appearance, and once he gave it effort, he finally realized what his subconscious had spotted a minute earlier. Now he could see it. The golden gloves, shoes and mask. By the time Edrimer opened his mouth to warn old Zachary, he was too late. The two Elastics-wearing members of Men of Midas walked in with guns drawn and pointed at Edrimer and Zachary. "Hands up!" one of them yelled. Edrimer raised his hands and, under the instruction of the other Man of Midas, placed himself beside his boss. *God damn it, I really wasn't planning on getting robbed today...* The light barely reflected off the rubber-leather hybrid material their Elastics were made of. *Men of Midas... greedy little bastards run by Reus fucking Mallistrom. All they care about is money. They even have a saying, which further proves how money hungry they are: a golden key can open any door. Money can get you anything and anywhere.* "Empty the register! Now!" the thug that was pointing his gun at Edrimer commanded. "Alright, alright, calm down," said Edrimer. "There's a safe in the back room with plenty of money, alright? Just please don't hurt us." Edrimer hoped he was looking sincere when he begged for his and Zachary's life. "Well, go on." The thug hurried him to the back room. Edrimer pulled a key out of his pocket and went ahead to open the back room door, which was located at the other end of the store. He entered the room with the two robbers following him.

The room was dark and barely visible, with a foul stench filling it. *Maybe I should have cleaned up THIS place instead.* He located the light switch and turned it on, revealing that the room was nothing more than 100 square feet, barely half of the

size of the main room they had just come from. A few metal shelves with cleaning supplies stood against the right wall, while the left one had a large, five foot tall steel safe standing against it. A security camera was watching the three overhead, and while the two criminals noticed that, they didn't care about it. *Another benefit of Elastics: keeping you safe from security footage.* After being pushed to get the matter over with one more time, Edrimer stood in front of the safe and started rotating its dial in the correct combination. *God, this better fucking work. I hope I'm not sweating or anything.* He finally opened the safe door, but as soon as the hinges' shriek was heard, old Zachary appeared at the door, pointing a shotgun at the two thugs. The muggers immediately raised their guns at the old man. "Put the shotgun down!" they yelled at him, but old Zachary was reluctant. *Great job, old man. Keep their eyes on you.*

There was a reason why Edrimer and Zachary were acting like that so far. In a place like Alataria, anticipating any kind of attack by a criminal organization was a common way of thinking. The Alatarian law predicted that in a case where one makes a potential attempt on someone's life, the right to self-defense can legally protect that someone for any lethal action he makes against the perpetrator, and acts like aiming a gun at someone is considered such a potential attempt, therefore legalizing anything that Edrimer or Zachary may do to the thugs at this point.

"I said drop the motherfucking gun!" the thug reiterated with his gruff voice.

The only thing separating Zachary's blood thirst and his trigger-happy finger was the fact that even with Zachary armed, it was still a case of two against one, and they both him and Edrimer knew that. For that reason they led them to the back room, for the vault contained their winning card. *They're both looking at Zachary. Excellent. Time to bend the law in our favor.* Edrimer quickly pulled out the electric shocker from inside the safe and stuck it to the arm of the thug that stood closer to him, sending waves of electricity through his body. The Man of Midas twitched and palpitated, losing control of his body and

letting off a shot without even intending. As soon as the shot was heard, the other thug turned his head to look at his associate for half a second. But half a second was all that Zachary needed, and he fired his mighty shotgun at him before he even had a chance to shift his gaze back. The bullets hit him all over the torso area, sending spatters of blood all over Zachary, and the man himself to the ground. Without wasting any time, he loaded the next shell into his weapon and quickly moved to the other guy, who by now had regained control over his body. Once he saw his friend's body lying on the ground, the golden thug tried raising his gun at the old killer, but before he could even bring his gun high enough he was put to death the same way his friend had been, painting the walls red.

Edrimer stood there beside the open safe with a fast beating heart and a body covered with various red dots of blood. He looked at Zachary without saying a word. He felt grateful that this plan had actually worked. *When the cops get here they're going to ask for the security footage, and as soon they see how they pulled on us, they'll know it was self-defense. The law sees that as an attempt on our lives.* Edrimer's heart was still racing, but before he had enough time to tone down his heartbeat, the two heard someone walking into the store. *Talk about timing.*

Edrimer volunteered to take care of whatever customer it was that had just entered, while Zachary watched over the back room. Once he returned to the store and looked upon the so-called customer, his heart dropped. It was another man, wearing golden gloves, shoes and mask. Another member of Men of Midas. A third robber. As soon as the two saw each other, the Man of Midas drew his pistol and pointed it at Edrimer. *I can't tell if I should laugh at this bitter joke or cry over my bitter fate.* Time stood still for a second for Edrimer. Everything was so quiet and he felt such a strong sense of melancholy in the air that he almost thought that this was the world's cruel way of giving him the peace and quiet he wanted. Perhaps more than ever, Edrimer hated Alataria for all its flaws, at that single, ever-lasting moment, where he stood at the mercy of a

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