

∞ LIMITS @ INFINITY ∞

THE SERVANT OF DEATH

BY
J. C. BELL

Copyright @ J.C. Bell, 2014
All rights reserved

INTRO

The beginning of the Age of Death —

So close now . . . the young man thought, intricate wisps of blue flame drifting from his fingertips.

He sat at a rectangular desk of black stone. A lone glow-globe hovered over him, casting the room in a stale, yellow light. Upon the desk, a small, fur-covered mammal frantically clawed at a cage made of silver bars. Its red eyes alighted on the man's oncoming threads of energy, further triggering the animal's sense of fear to the point it began gnawing on the bars with its large front teeth.

Its efforts would be to no avail — even once the experiment was underway. It would bite and claw with all its might, but nevertheless, the man was confident the silver bars would hold . . . it was perhaps the only element that would do so. He discovered the secret to containing his creations, and it existed in the molecular structure of silver. Even the strength of the Oneness paled in comparison — a lesson the young man had learned the hard way. He failed to realize the effectiveness of his own experimentations, and more than once, the infected creatures threatened to escape their confines. It was but one of the many problems he had to overcome. In order to avoid a full-scale outbreak, it became necessary to eliminate such threats. That became his second problem — their destruction. Technically, once the infection set in they were already dead. The difficult part was convincing their infected cells of this fact. Transforming the Oneness into actual fire proved an adequate solution to that problem. Likewise, silver also functioned well in this regard.

Thankfully, after all was said and done, containment had been sustained. Whether or not the virus was lethal to a humanoid host had yet to be determined — there was much more trial and error to go before he dared to make that assessment. Regardless, He worked under the assumption the virus was anything but safe — as it proved itself to be, one experiment after another. Thus far, only one of the animals lived beyond the 'impregnation' stage for longer than a standard day.

Out of curiosity, he had yet to discard that creature, his greatest 'success'. He kept it close, tucked away in the corner of the room bound in a similar cage of silver — which was in turn encased in an even larger cage of silver -- the young man wasn't taking any chances with that one. The creature had survived for months, and in theory, could possibly exist for all time. Its cellular death had entirely ceased, while cellular division only occurred during trauma — to replace permanently lost cells. All virus infected cells, though essentially dead, continued to function as dictated by the genetic material of the virus. It was rotting, to be sure, the horrid stench was a clear indication of its continued decay. However, the virus kept it animated, fooling the cells into thinking they were yet living no matter how foul its flesh and organs became. As far as the young man could tell, the being required no sustenance to continue its existence. It had a rather voracious appetite for meat; the rarer the meat, the more voracious. Yet it could live for weeks without eating a single morsel. The young man surmised, that most likely, the brunt of the energy it needed to function was derived mainly from the virus itself — an entity born of pure energy. The act of feeding almost seemed a remnant of an instinct it once possessed, an instinct now warped into a gluttonous replica of what it used to be.

Behind him, the creature curled into a ball in the darkest corner of the cage, constantly wheezing as if every breath was its last. All of its hair was long since shed, revealing white flesh riddled with throbbing black veins. Even the red of its eyes had clouded over, covered with a glossy layer of black. The creature's skin hugged its bones, stretched tight like a drum, making the creature skeletal in appearance.

Throughout the day it remained motionless, dead by all accounts except for its labored breathing. Yet, should the young man draw near, it would spring into action, howling and thrashing as it threw itself against the silver bars in a frenzy. The man didn't doubt that given the opportunity, it would feed from him, biting his flesh with as much abandon as it did the bloodied chunks of meat he tossed into the cage.

But it wouldn't bite the silver bars – not after its first attempt to do so had nearly set its mouth on fire. As long as the double layer of silver remained between him and the beast, he was confident he wouldn't become its next feast.

Despite its appearance, and demeanor, the young man *did* consider the creature a success. It was as close to immortality as any Makii had yet to come. Quite possibly the creature would live forever . . . even so, he couldn't deny that its existence was nothing to be admired. No, not yet. But he was close now, so close . . .

Soon -- perhaps even with his current attempt -- the young man would finally find an immortality worthy of the Antevictus.

Concentrating to his utmost, he forged ahead, hoping to at last achieve such a level of success. The man's flames met the cage and melted through. Next, they took hold of the creature. As if calmed by their delicate touch, the animal grew still. The tendrils of flame washed over its flesh, then slowly began to sink in. As they did so, the man developed a sense of the animal, both mental and physical. Though it possessed mainly base emotions, considering its limited intellect, it was surprisingly resilient and adaptable to adversity. Its survival instinct was incredibly strong. As for its physical, cellular structure, it was essentially similar to higher forms of warm-blooded creatures, making the animal a perfect subject for experimentation. Another blessing of the breed was their high rate of birth; to reach this stage of success, the young man had "literally" burned through hundreds of them.

He sent his power deeper into the core of the creature, making his threads of energy even thinner – so thin the blue filaments became invisible to the unaided eye. He guided them to the animal's reproductive organs, then focused them on one single cell – an unfertilized egg in her womb. His goal was to fertilize it, but not with spermatozoa as the Maker intended. Today *he* was playing the Maker, creating his own diminutive life-form that he would unleash upon the animal's unused ovum. Depending on how he crafted his virus, the union could have incredible results. His virus was born of the Oneness, and as such, the qualities it bestowed could often be considered powers in their own right; great strength, increased speed, heightened senses, and of course, immortality. To combine all of these beneficial traits into a single specimen, that was the young man's goal. To do so would make the Makii gods, not just in name, but in truth.

. . . *so close* . . .

He pressed on. He flames merged into a pattern so intricate it appeared a jumble. But to the young man it was perfect – hopefully so.

He stepped back, wiping the sweat from his brow, then using the dampness to slick back his long black hair.

The creature squirmed, then entered a fit of seizures. Every muscle in its body tensed to the breaking point, and meanwhile it shrieked, a shrill high-pitched cry of utter pain.

In the corner of the room, the ‘successful’ experiment joined its cry, the young man didn’t dare take his eyes from the creature in front of him, but at his back, the sound of flesh and bone smashing against the silver cage was a distraction he could hardly ignore.

As if it wailed away its soul, there was a final cry, then the new experiment was silenced.

Afterwards, thrumming his fingers on the table in nervous anticipation, the man watched and waited. Time passed . . . and the creature remained lifelessly still.

That’s unfortunate, the man thought, halting his rhythm with a final rap of his knuckles. *Oh well then . . . try, try again . . .*

His Oneness went out once more, this time to burn the creature to ash, but before it reached the animal the creature stirred . . .

It dove at the cage, latching onto the bars with its sharp, long front teeth. Wisps of smoke rose from its mouth as its teeth burned, but still it bore down. Even after its teeth became melted nubs, it continued to chew . . . and stare at the young man with its beady red eyes – which were slowly being covered with a blackish tint.

Blood frothed from its mouth like spittle. To the man’s horror, he noticed the cage bar was bending, flexing outward as the creature continued to push and gnaw on it with bloody gums. The amount of smoke rising from the cage greatly increased, caused not only by the creature’s burning flesh, but from the silver bars as well. Its blood, like acid, was deteriorating the silver.

Now that, is truly unfortunate.

From his feet to the top of his head, the man’s body suddenly ignited in a pyre of crackling blue flames. The flames left him in a torrent, engulfing the infected animal. He *tuned* his power to actual fire, hoping to incinerate the creature instantaneously. But surprisingly, as the flames washed over the animal, it squirmed, shrieked and burned . . . but it didn’t die. His power encompassed the cage as well, the heat of which melted the silver bars faster than it did the creature’s flesh.

Imorbis, you fool, he inwardly cursed. He had no intention of being the first humanoid test subject of his virus, so he summoned as much Oneness as his body could hold. Never in his life had he held as much. The table began to crumble, the cage became a pool of liquid silver, the glow-globe burst into crystalline shards. Even the walls and floor of reinforced tungsten began to show hairline cracks. Still the animal lived . . . and it jumped at Imorbis.

Every bit of Oneness he could hold, he focused on the animal. He stumbled backward to avoid the creature, tripping over his own feet in his desperation to escape its bloody, wide-open maw. Still pouring energy at the animal, he fell backwards, landing with a thud on the hard floor. The animal flew over him, then with a loud “pop”, it exploded in a burst of bloody pieces – several of which fell on Imorbis to quickly burn their way into his black cloak. Luckily, the majority splattered against the back wall, burning deep holes in the ultra-dense, bi-metal structure.

Imorbis rolled over, untangling himself from his cloak as he did so. He leapt to his feet, leaving his cloak a now smoldering pile of rags on the floor. In the corner of the room, his ‘success’ howled louder than ever before. If he had the strength, he would have instantly sent his Oneness out and destroyed that one as well. He studied the marred wall speckled with chunks of burning flesh, and wondered if maybe it was time to rethink his experiments – or at the least, rethink their method of containment.

Not that he would quit his endeavors, after all, he was so close now . . . Imorbis just worried that perhaps he was getting too close . . .

Even if he wanted to quit, he couldn't. His project was not only sanctioned by the Antevictus, it was fervently supported. The Ancient Ones had a lot resting on him, him and his companions. It was fair to say their very lives were at stake.

Such was the mission of all Makii, as dictated by the Antevictus. The Antevictus were the most ancient of Makii, those that began, and finished the conquest of the universe. It was they who created the God Door, thus binding all the worlds as one – one Dominion. And throughout their Dominion, they were beheld as gods – perhaps the most powerful beings to ever exist in the universe. Because of them, the Age of War finally came to an end, and through their strength in the Oneness, peace was imposed throughout the entire universe.

The Antevictus were now decrepit shells of useless flesh. Only the Oneness kept them alive, but that's all it did. Their bodies were no longer theirs to control. Telepathically they dictated their will to their followers, meanwhile they sat on their royal thrones in pools of piss and watery feces. They were dying, these most powerful beings. It was their decree – their last dying command -- that those with the blood of Makii were to strive for immortality – by any means necessary.

Of all the Makii, Imorbis was the closest to a solution.

He couldn't stop, but he would have to start over, approach the problem in another way. Imorbis unstrapped the silver dagger from his waist and headed toward his 'success', which continued to thrash and howl in the corner of the room. As he passed the damaged wall, he noticed a glob of black blood carving a channel as it dripped to the floor.

Perhaps, he thought. I should first understand my error before I start anew.

Instead of killing the remaining creature, he used the knife to scrape the blood from the wall. He found a vial of thick crystal and deposited a drop of the viscous, black blood within. He set it aside on the burnt and cracked table, then began searching the room for something more secure to store it in. He eyed his personal locker, which had walls of synthetic plaz-steel. The locker was manufactured specifically to endure all manner of intrusion – Imorbis just hoped acid was listed among them.

Besides, he thought. One lonely drop, how much harm can come of it?

Worse case, the infection would spread, and encompass the few inhabitants of this world. Here it would remain, contained . . . Imorbis took a second to rethink that outcome. Would it be contained? What if the infection somehow made it through the God Door, into the inhabited worlds? He could barely conceive what sort of catastrophe that would unleash. His supposed 'cure' for death would become a plague.

Safety first, Imorbis pondered. Yes, that would be best.

He planned on storing it in the locker, then, when his power returned, he would delve the sample. If the cells remained whole, he could find his virus, and perhaps uncover its properties, good and bad.

He took up the knife again – he was still going to kill his 'success'. Not because he feared its escape, mainly he just wanted to silence the beast.

But once more, the being's life was spared, this time because there came a knock on his door.

It was a welcome coincidence that the creature grew silent with the sudden noise.

He pondered cleaning the room before greeting his visitor, but Imorbis recognized the presence, and knew he had nothing to hide.

With a flicker of blue flame, the door to his chamber dissolved, revealing a middle-aged man with a long, triangular beard.

“There was a surge of power . . .” the man declared. “I worried your experiments had finally gotten the best of you, Imorbis.”

“Despite appearances, Mastecus,” Imorbis replied. “My creation is not nearly as disastrous as your imp Galimoto,” he finished, grinning at the man.

He had to admit, the annoying red demon was instrumental in his own work. Mastecus had shared the secret of its creation with Imorbis, and though the familiar was not entirely ‘real’, the ability to simulate life with the Oneness took Imorbis’ experimentation to a whole other level. But unlike Mastecus’ creation, Galimoto, to create life with the Oneness, Imorbis dared not work on such a large scale – nor did he wish to bind his own life-force to his creation till the end of his days, as Mastecus had done. But with a minute, well-crafted virus, he believed even the largest of creatures could be changed. The possibilities were as endless as the genetic code itself. The next step in his experiments had been finding the right code . . . a process that involved endless trial, and constant error – of which, the latest error was yet displayed on his wall in a splatter of burning flesh.

But he *was* getting close . . .

“Dare I ask, Mastecus, where has your fiend run off to now?” Imorbis questioned. He had no love for the man’s familiar, but now and again the being proved a source of amusement – which typically came at the cost of its staunch master, Mastecus.

“Galimoto has been confined to my quarters by direct command of the Supremis,” Mastecus replied, his cheeks blushing.

Imorbis smiled at the man’s discomfort. Perhaps he offered it too often and too freely, but for reasons unknown to him, many were misled by that smile and thought it equated to kindness on Imorbis’ part. To their error, they failed to detect the wickedness inherent in his soul.

“It appears he wandered into the female barracks,” Mastecus said, hesitant to continue. “The ensuing chaos nearly roused the sleeping Antevictus.”

“There’s only one thing the Ancient Ones would awaken for . . .”

“Yes, immortality. And the old fools believe we will be the ones to find it, here, in this hell that is the universe’s core,” Mastecus fumed.

“If this star-system, or more aptly, fusion of colliding star-systems doesn’t kill us first,” Imorbis replied.

“Speaking of which, before I rushed here to save you, I was trying to talk some sense into Sevron, and at least convince him to leave the open-air, if only for enough time to recoup his shield. But no matter what I said, my words seemed to fall on deaf ears. He has become obsessed with the obelisk, as if his gift of empathy has somehow bonded him to the relic.”

Imorbis was very familiar with his friend’s latest obsession. Since the moment they arrived, Sevron had changed. They were all fascinated with the mystery of the black pillar, and diligently studied it to the best of their abilities. But Sevron was addicted to it. The one man in the entire universe that could read your soul in the first moment he met you, had finally found something he couldn’t readily understand – and it was tearing him apart.

“I will meet with him.”

“You had better hurry. The third sun is on the rise. He has been out there too long as it is, with the little power he has left, he will not make it to see the red sun set.”

Imorbis’ experiment would have to wait, his friend needed him now. He bid Mastecus a half-hearted farewell then used his power to store the vial in his locker. He took a moment to make sure the drop of blood didn’t suddenly disintegrate a hole through the bottom, then Imorbis threw on a spare cloak and headed for the open-air.



The sun beat down upon the land of orange and red sand. Plumes of sand lifted from the desert, spiraling upwards to form miniature tornadoes. In a burst of speed they tore through the dunes, breaking apart the waves of sand in a frenzy of energy. Their power expended, the ribbons of sand broke apart, drifting back to the earth in a cloud.

On the horizon, what once was a field of jagged mountain peaks was now but a towering mound of polished stone. Tucked beneath its shadow – safely sheltered from the searing wind and blistering sun -- was the expedition's makeshift base; a fortress of interlocking slabs of grey bi-metal walls.

Covered in a dim shell of blue flame, Imorbis left the structure, his destination the stark black pillar rising in the distance, and the lone figure sitting in front of it. Imorbis walked out into the howling wind, and as always, felt humbled as he stood before the giant monolith. The structure rose hundreds of feet skyward and was a perfect geometric rectangle. The surface was jet-black and utterly impenetrable, what dwelt within was yet a mystery, as was the material the object was made of. Three dozen of the best and brightest Makii were sent to study it, but thus far, nothing they did seemed to reveal a hint at the object's nature or power – except, perhaps, for one man – Sevron. Sevron had an unusual gift. Without using even a trace of telepathy, he could see the truth of one's heart and soul. If the structure possessed some form of life, or intelligence, Imorbis was willing to bet Sevron would be able to understand its intent.

“So, Sevron, have you uncovered its secret yet?” Imorbis asked, grinning at his friend, who sat at the base of the structure, his sandy brown eyes transfixed on the object. “I've placed a sizable wager that it's a vessel of alien descent, please tell me I haven't been mistaken.”

Sevron continued to sit in silence. Mastecus wasn't exaggerating, his friend was deeply engrossed in the monolith – too much so for his own good. His shield was practically non-existent, already the harsh sand was blowing through, peppering his exposed skin with red dots.

“The odds favored interstellar flotsam,” Imorbis continued, drawing nearer. “The wreckage of an ancient starship left-over from the voyages of the Origin Race. Most believe they came here, as did we, to seek the beginning of life. But lacking the God Door, the chaos of the core prove unnavigable.”

“. . . it doesn't exist,” Sevron suddenly interjected, his voice icy-calm. “That's the only thing that makes sense . . .” he continued, never taking his eyes from the monolith. “Either that, or we don't exist . . . and what we're seeing is a true sliver of reality, something our imagined minds simply cannot grasp.”

So, it was to be like this . . . Imorbis thought, sighing. *Very well.*

Normally, he would love nothing better than to sit with his friend and philosophize the time away, but judging by the blood-red horizon and their failing shields, neither of them had a great deal of time left.

“We know but one fact, my friend -- it is the foundation of life, of that we are certain,” Imorbis said, trying to coax his friend toward reason.

“No, nothing is certain . . .” Sevron said, lowering his head of dark-brown hair. “That's the crux of it. That's where we're wrong. It's not what they think it is. It has nothing to do with creating life . . . it spawned chaos, the *true* reality.”

And the half-full glass is now half-empty.

Clearly there would be no reasoning with his friend.

“You should leave, Sevron. Your shield is dim, and the third sun is soon to rise.”

“I need a moment longer, to test my theory. I’m so close now . . .”

His words were hauntingly familiar . . .

“When the red sun sets, I’ll know if I was right.”

“And if you’re wrong?”

“It would be the first time.”

Sevron managed to tear his gaze from the pillar and turned to Imorbis. As he smirked up at him, Imorbis was surprised at how gaunt he had become. His once, well-muscled friend was all wiry muscles with loose, yet sunken flesh. Imorbis tried to smile back at him but couldn’t summon the lie – Sevron would have known the difference anyway.

“I won’t let you die out here,” Imorbis said. “Not for this thing, not for them.”

The red sun was coming, and with it came a tempest of scouring winds.

Sevron turned away and stood up, letting his robe slip to the sand. His bare chest was immediately blistered by the wind . . .

“I’m sure you won’t,” Sevron replied as the horizon was suddenly filled with fire. “But I have to do this . . . I have to know that my life has meaning . . . or that it does not,” he continued, walking forward to lay his hand on the smooth black surface. “Until I know for sure, everything you, or anyone else does is meaningless . . .”

Sevron no longer had a shield of power to protect him, and the majority of his flesh was bare and exposed to the elements. Wearied from his experiment, Imorbis had a difficult time maintaining his own shield, and he very much doubted anything he could summon would protect him from the coming storm of burning sand. Nevertheless, he stepped forward, calling to his friend. He made it barely three steps before he was blinded by the howling storm.

His shield no longer sufficient protection, he was forced to cover his eyes. He took one final step. Gave one final shout of, “Sevron!” But even he could no longer hear the sound of his own voice. A gust of wind sent him airborne and flung him onto his back. If Sevron was still out there, he would never find him in time. Blinded, and disorientated, Imorbis was doubtful he would make it back himself.

His shield was all but useless, so he focused what little power he had left on a final moment of sight. He filled his eyes with flames of the Oneness and peered into the wind.

He distinguished two shapes; one a lumpy mountain of polished stone, the other a rectangle, towering to the sky . . .

His flesh peeling, Imorbis faced the mountain and crawled his way back to the base camp . . .



The red sun had yet to fully set, but Imorbis rushed out none-the-less. This time he was ablaze in blue flame, and flew over the scorched sands. He sensed his friend, though faintly. The entire time the sun rode through the sky he could sense him, sense his pain. How he yet lived was nothing short of a miracle.

Imorbis followed the sensation and found Sevron curled up at the base of the obelisk, a charred and fleshless husk.

In futility, he poured his Oneness into him, hoping to restore his broken form, but clearly, Sevron was on the verge of death. No amount of Oneness would ever bring him back. There was only one possible cure for that . . .

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a thick crystal vial.

He looked at the vial . . . and he looked at his friend. If anyone could handle the virus, Sevron could. Either way, he was sure to die. Perhaps it was time . . . time to find out what effect the virus had on one of the Makii blood.

With his head cradled in his lap, Imorbis tipped the vial to Sevron's lips . . .

DONA' CORA

Age of Death —

There it was . . . the Kandorian High-Bridge, the last road to Castle Kandor.

At last, she had reached her destination.

Her eyes were small and round, her pupils black pinpoints swimming in a pool of yellow. They took in the High-Bridge – the final obstacle in her century long path.

The bridge spanned a canyon hundreds of feet deep. Below it, serrated rocks littered the cliffs on either side. At the bottom, the churning river could barely be seen; a broil of foamy white liquid crashing through the rocky river bed.

The Kandorian Bridge was a gleaming structure of white metal; seven sets of flowing arches each a hundred feet long. Steel, web-shaped gussets connected the arches and tied them to giant support towers on either side of the canyon.

The infected filled the length of the bridge; a horde of growling, blood-thirsty monsters, awaiting her arrival.

From head to toe she was covered in blood, both black and red. The hair on her head was long, black and drenched in filth. Likewise, the smooth, silken layer of black hair on her arms and face was also soiled and sticking to her flesh. Her golden, form-fitting dress was torn and tattered, also soaked in the gore of her enemies. The gossamer train of her dress dragged behind her, leaving a bloody trail in her wake.

This world's orange sun slowly set at her back. In front of her, a star-filled sky twinkled behind Castle Kandor.

How many had died for her to get here? How many had she killed . . . ?

All of them . . . and the killing wasn't even done.

No. Not yet.

She may have lost the long, hard-fought battle that had started it all, but she wouldn't stop, not until he was dead. Nothing else mattered.

She stood at the entrance of the bridge, as if daring the undead to come to her. They came, howling for her blood. Just as the swarm threatened to engulf her, she covered herself in a thick blaze of blue flames, turning their charge into a storm of ash and fire. Those foolish enough to draw near were incinerated. Others, wise enough to sense an end to their corrupt immortality, tried to backpedal, but were swept up in the press of the throng and likewise shoved into the fire. By the time the mob learned its lesson and reversed direction, she was knee deep in a pile of ash.

They tried to flee, but it didn't matter. They couldn't hide from her. She was a goddess. She was more powerful than any Makii, even after they had infected themselves with their 'Dark Gift'. She not only shared their genetics, but possessed many new and powerful variants that allowed her to control more of the Oneness than any living being before her. The Makii thought that by altering their blood with the Plague they could achieve perfection.

But Dona'Cora was perfection incarnate. She was born with her abilities -- the ultimate achievement of evolution.

She was going to remind them of that fact. She would teach them all what it meant to anger a true goddess.

She could have burned a hole through the crowd from one end of the bridge to the other, but why waste the effort? Wisely, she conserved her power, lest the Makii try to force their 'gift' upon her later.

Dona'Cora melted the bridge supports instead. The western tower toppled. With an ear-wrenching groan, the entire High-Bridge slowly spilled into the canyon, the steel beams and supports bending like rubber as it fell. The forces of the Dark Army tumbled down it like a giant slide, disappearing in the frothy river below.

Dona'Cora drifted upward, covered in a halo of burning blue flame. In front of her, Castle Kandor loomed, a giant keep of stone surrounded by a curtain wall of pure steel. The wall was magic-wrought and never meant to fall – but fall it had. Somewhere inside resided her fallen lover, the God-King Thane. How she dreaded to face him again, she could only imagine what he had become. Her proud, handsome lover was most likely a demon now, his flesh desecrated, his soul corrupted.

She had failed to save him in time. But she wouldn't fail him in this . . . not in this.

No matter what, she wouldn't leave this world until she put him to death.

She flew over the canyon. Below her, the flailing bodies of the undead continued to spill into the river. Some of the stronger ones were able to pull themselves up the bridge and to the other side. A crowd of them formed at the gate, but she sent a wave of flames their way, scorching a clearing for her to land. She drifted to the other side, standing at the collapsed and bent iron gate leading to the citadel. The undead were all around her, snarling, clawing the air in her direction, but otherwise they remained in place, their rotting brains finally comprehending that attacking her was pointless.

Dona'Cora encountered no further resistance as she entered the keep. She sensed the Makii were still lingering in the area, but even they feared to challenge her, and rightly so. They knew her well by now, she had sent many of their kind to the true death through the course of the battle, and would do the same to any more that chose to bar her path.

She strolled through the citadel. The once luxurious entrance hall was in ruins. The round, marble fountain spewed blood; the gilded statues circling it were toppled. The castle had fallen many years past, but the signs of battle remained, the Dead Gods hadn't even bothered to clean their mess. Flaking stains of black blood marred the floors and walls. Skeletal corpses filled the hallways. What flesh remained to them was sunken and black, but beyond that, their clothing was the only part of them that hadn't rotted away. The stench of death and decay clung to the keep, but Dona'Cora had grown so used to the smell she no longer even noticed it.

She ignored the remnants of slaughter altogether, well aware that her own blood-covered body was equally gruesome. She headed for the throne room, where he most likely would be found. Her flames led the way, searing a path through the corpse-filled keep. She cared not for cleaning up the carnage, but was more concerned that the skeletal figures were possessed by the Plague, and could suddenly rise up against her. She didn't want to take that chance, so she turned them all to ash instead.

Dona'Cora left the hallways glowing red with heat as she moved through the castle. By the time she reached the throne room the entire castle was ablaze, its stone walls near melting from the magic wrought fire.

The giant double doors of the throne room had been torn from their hinges and flung to the floor. The force that struck them must have been incredible, for it nearly folded the solid iron

doors in half. On a raised dais just beyond the broken doors, sat the Kandarian Throne -- a polished chair of black marble. Surprisingly, the Makii left the chair untarnished; every last jewel and precious gem was yet encrusted into the black marble.

Her God King hadn't been so lucky. He sat on the throne, his clothing remained; he was dressed in a purple silk coat, a velvet surcoat and black satin mantel. A skeletal hand held a scepter with a large, perfectly transparent diamond at the end. Like the rest of the dead she had come across in the castle, the flesh visible on her dead lover was taut and black -- and very little of it remained. For the most part, his bones were fully exposed. His head was eyeless, hollow, and hung back awkwardly. A stain of black blood covered the front of his coat, and surrounded the throne as well. Some blackened flesh remained on his neck, as did a deep horizontal gash.

His right hand hung to the side, below it rested a jeweled dagger.

"So often this occurs . . . such a waste of life. To see it happen still saddens me."

She was too absorbed in the horror of what her lover had become that she failed to realize the presence of the Makii, and that she was surrounded by them. There were dozens of them, and every moment more of them appeared, slinking out of the shadows.

"I offered Thane peace . . . immortality. What more could one want in life?" the speaker said, then sighed deeply. "Alas, in the end, Thane thought death was the better bargain."

One of the Makii stepped out from the crowd, stopping just short of entering her personal space. He was strange (even for a Makii), it wasn't just his manner of dress that was odd, but his physical features as well. There was something very familiar about him, as though they had met before, but she couldn't put a name to his face -- and what an unsettling face it was. Surely if she had seen him before, the memory of the man would have been hard to erase.

All of the Makii were essentially human, and were often thought to be the progenitors of that race. But after they were infected, they became something altogether different; their skin was pallid, their eyes pure black. All of their hair eventually turned gray, their teeth and fingernails purple and black. Their veins grew swollen and filled with the dark, Plague infected blood.

This being was altogether different, even more gruesome.

He wore a stark white top hat on his head and a suit of matching color. His shoes were white as well and sparkling clean. Gloves of silk covered his hands, which were fixated on twirling the frilly white lace around his collar.

His skin actually had hue -- though it was mostly purple and black, and it was stiff, as though it had been unnaturally stretched to fit over the man's face. It was so taut, the simplest facial expression was impossible, leaving the Makii with a constant, emotionless stare.

And his eyes . . . they weren't just black, they were empty.

He approached her without fear . . . without feeling, as though he was standing before a wall.

Dona'Cora tried to recollect his name (perhaps something with 'annihilator' or 'death-dealer' in it) but nothing seemed to suit him.

Desecrator . . . yes, that seems more fitting, she thought, returning the Dead God's emotionless stare with one of her own.

She knew the Makii had a fondness of such titles, but Dona'Cora made a conscious effort to ignore them. Even if she cared enough to try, she couldn't possibly remember them all, for according to the latest estimates, the Makii yet numbered around two million (Dona'Cora took great pride in the knowledge that she had played a large role in reducing that number).

Typically, their haughty titles were meant to strike fear in the hearts of the living. But no matter how well deserved the titles may be, Dona'Cora found them to be a childish indulgence.

They merely served to foster the Dead Gods' own immortality fantasies. But no matter how ominous their names, Dona'Cora put them to death just the same.

Honestly, she really didn't care what the white-dressed Makii's name was -- it didn't matter -- he was soon to be dead and forgotten.

"I told Thane there need not be war between us, that we could be as brothers, if he only partook of the *blood*," the Dead God continued, his lips cracking as he spoke. "What heights he could have risen to in our ranks? But in the end, he denied our gift. He took another path . . . When at last they realized the battle was over and they had lost, Thane, and the rest of his soldiers took their own lives."

The Dead God took off his hat and shook his head, as if in sadness – though his face was as impassive as ever.

"Even though we fought as foes, I admired his courage and power. In life, he was a valiant warrior, holding Castle Kandor far longer than we had anticipated. Had he been blessed with the *blood*, he would have been fearsome indeed."

The Dead God was putting on such a credible show of sympathy that Dona'Cora half expected to see tears spilling from the pits where his eyes should be.

"His death is truly a great loss. But on behalf of my Brethren, we beg you, please do not hold us to blame. After all, Thane's life ended by his own hand."

Dona'Cora had seen enough of the Dead God's act.

She burst into flames. Every inch of the throne room was bathed in brilliant blue light, leaving the Makii with no more shadows to lurk in. All in all, there were around fifty of the Dead Gods present. She wasn't intimidated or afraid. Instead, she only found their pale dead faces pathetic to behold.

"You wish me to believe you are without blame in this?" Dona'Cora coldly stated, throwing her own fearless self-confidence back into the man's face.

She was a goddess! These beings were but corpses.

"To believe you actually give a damn about him?"

Her halo flared even brighter. Her blue flames crackled and roared as they leapt from her flesh.

"There is only one thing your kind cares for, the Hunger. If truly you are sad, it is only because you were denied the blood of a God."

The white-clad Makii was through pretending.

The man gave up the charade of mock sadness. He stood before her, calm, still, and utterly devoid of emotion. He replaced the hat on his head and raised his eyeless gaze to Dona'Cora.

"I see . . . We had hoped you would be wiser than Thane, Dona'Cora, and joined us willingly. It's true, his blood would have been savored. But, judging on how difficult you have been to dispose of, I think yours will be sweeter yet. And I promise that with you, we won't let a single drop go to waste."

The Dead God slowly approached her.

As if oblivious to the fact that her life had just been threatened, Dona'Cora ignored the man, and turning to the others she said, "This isn't over. We will fight again one day, and when we do, I promise your lives shall have a permanent end."

With that, the Dead God came at her . . .

He *was* powerful! He moved so fast she could barely see him -- despite the vast amount of Oneness she held. But she didn't have to see him. His actions were predictable; he was overconfident and moved too fast for his own good. He also underestimated her power. He

never expected that she could do in an instant what took others hours. She opened a Rift right in front of her, right in the path of the Dead God. In the last second he tried to halt his momentum, but it was too late. His left leg was severed at the knee, his right arm vanished at his shoulder. His top hat was cut cleanly in half . . . so too was his head. What was left of him crumpled to the throne room floor. His leg, arm and face disappeared into the oblivion of the Black Door.

. . . So too did Dona'Corra.

The rift hovered in front of her; a pulsating tear in space and time. She casually stepped into it, not worried for a second about the fifty Makii she was leaving behind. It would be easy for them to track her . . . but she knew they wouldn't. The Makii's greatest weakness was their fear of death, and she had just accentuated it by making short work their white-clad leader. She was also confident they were wise enough to realize her statement wasn't a boast, and that if they saw her again, she truly would put an end to their immortality.

Dona'Corra was a harsh, cold, arrogant woman. Only one thing in the entire universe had ever proven to soften her heart. But now the love of Thane was no more. She had failed him. As she drifted through the abyss, she had an epiphany. Her heart grew colder than ever, her power grew stronger.

The war was lost, her lover had died, but in the abyss she found a new purpose to her existence.

Dona'Corra left the Rift, entering a gray and desolate wasteland. The dense atmosphere nearly crushed her; the powerful wind nearly lifted her off her feet. Her power saved her from both. In the distance, a white sun burned the horizon. Above it hung a shiny black moon; a ball of melted obsidian glass.

Dona'Corra took a step toward the horizon and the hovering black moon -- her first step on a long pathway to vengeance.

In the millennium that followed, her every action became focused on fulfilling her threat of one day destroying the Makii. To whatever god that would hear her, she vowed that when next they meet, she would be the one who was victorious.

SEVRON

Sevron fell away from the Rift, collapsing onto his back. Black blood poured from his severed arm, leg, and head – which had been neatly sliced in half, leaving a gaping wound where the man’s face used to be. The only recognizable features were a pair of holes where his nose once was, and his soggy grey brain. His once immaculate jacket and pants were rapidly transforming from pure white to black as the fine fabric soaked up his blood. His remaining leg flopped around uncontrollably, splashing the black blood around the room. His top hat had been cut along with his head, only half of it remained, sitting in a spreading dark pool.

The Makii gathered around, watching the man go through what should have been his death throes. They exchanged glances with one another. Some, shared looks of knowing; others fear. But mostly they appeared uncertain.

“We should end him now. We may never have a chance like this again,” one of them dared to voice. “I believe in victory and conquest – such is the way of the Makii – but Sevron desires only corruption. It was never meant to be as such,” the speaker continued. She may have once been a young woman fully blessed with natural beauty, but it was hard to tell for certain, because now her flesh appeared to have been soaked in bleach, the blood in her veins replaced with ink. Her eyes were like black marbles, her hair was thin, coarse and grey.

Her body, however, retained its youthful shape. Her legs were long and lean, with a muscle tone that was firm and well defined. A fair amount of her ample alabaster breasts were exposed through the split of her dress, their size further accentuated by the dress’ sleek fit and the color-shifting scale mail material from which it was made. Depending how the light hit them, the tiny metal scales alternated in color from silver, purple and gold.

“The glory of the Makii will end in ruin if he is allowed to live . . . the entire universe will end as such,” she declared, her black eyes staring at the thrashing Dead God.

“If you wish to try, I shall not stop you, Melina. But I warn you, be certain you can actually succeed in such a task. We have all been witness to his power, and I have had the misfortune of seeing it more than most,” a Dead God replied. The speaker was handsomely dressed, wearing a black silk shirt with matching cape, and shiny boots of black leather. His gray hair was short and slicked back. The Dead God’s face was clean shaven and had smooth, soft features that would have appeared friendly on any other face. “Believe me when I say that Lord Sevron is the only one of us who is truly immortal.”

As if in response to his words, the movements of Sevron’s body became more purposeful, his limbs stopped thrashing. His remaining arm actually pushed him to his knee. With blood still pouring from his head and his brain exposed, Sevron turned to face the rest of the Makii.

“Galimoto agrees with Melina,” a piping voice spoke, followed by a fluttering of wings as a tiny red-bodied creature with yellow eyes flew into the circle of Makii. The being had large wings of black leather and a long, whip-like tail that ended in twin barbs. He hovered in front of the Makii, keeping one yellow eye trained towards the fallen Dead God to make sure he didn’t get too close, then he continued, “Lately, Sevron reeks of death . . . even more than the rest of you. Perhaps, Master, if you help her . . .”

Sevron turned to the creature, blood bubbling from his gaping throat as he attempted to howl at the little imp.

As soon as Sevron turned to him, the imp instantly fled the circle . . . and he didn't stop, not until he was far from Kandor Keep.

"I *will* end him, Imorbis. Of that you can be certain. This has to stop. For the *gift* I willingly accept the Hunger, but what he has become, I cannot accept," the woman said, her white fist emanating with waves of black. "If you cowards refuse to help, then to the dead with you."

She closed in on the wounded Dead God.

Imorbis shook his head and took several steps back – the other Dead Gods followed him, none of them moved to Melina's aid.

"Look at you now, 'Sevron, The Servant of Death'," Melina said as she stood over him.

He gurgled in response to her, blood spurting from the hole that was his face, covering her steel scaled dress.

"Foul creature," she said, her face twisting in disgust. "Time to join those you've despoiled, Sevron."

Both of her fists were humming with power, the waves of black energy throbbing with the beat of her heart.

She raised her arms, preparing to unleash the full might of her power, ending the Dead God once and for all.

With surprising speed, Sevron stood up, his black blood formed into a leg . . . and into an arm as well. His new-born black fist plowed forward, penetrating her dress of metal scales, and continuing onward, plunging into Melina's chest. Briefly, her face registered shock, then, once she realized her doom, it showed only fear. The power she held sputtered and faded. All of her energy was diverted to keep her already dead body alive.

She should have let herself go.

Sevron's hand of black blood heaved her upwards. Her blood sprayed through the air, raining down on Sevron. With his other hand, he grabbed her arm, and ripped it from her body, tearing it off as easily as if he was pulling the limb from an insect. Melina's screams filled the throne room. Sevron grabbed her face, turning her screams into gurgles. His fingers melted into her skin and bones, then he tore her skull apart, face and all. Her brain spilled from her head as Sevron flung her to the floor.

Lastly, he took a leg. He planted one foot on her body and pulled. There was an awful slurping sound and then . . .

"Mastecus . . ." Sevron called, his black blood had formed the semblance of a face.

He began incorporating Melina's arm to his body. His blood filled her veins, animating the woman's severed limb and controlling it as his own.

"Yes, Lord Sevron," one of the Makii responded, a thin, elderly looking Dead God with a long, angular gray beard.

"Learn to control your creation, the imp, or I will."

Mastecus fully understood the threat; for Sevron to control Galimoto, Mastecus would have to die.

"I apologize, Sevron. It shall not happen again."

"As for you, Imorbis," Sevron said, fusing Melina's leg to his body.

Imorbis bowed his slicked head low.

"Yes?"

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

