

War of the Vampires Parts 3&4

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Alice has fallen from her grace and now is victim to a horrific curse. Like it or not, she is powerless to change her destiny. She has no allies, no friends, but she has hope. She holds the key to ending this war before it begins, all she has to do is hope, and believe.....but will it be enough?

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Alice carefully walked towards the cupboard, careful not to show excitement. She looked around at the other servants, then at the door. Only one remained: she could take him, but could she outrun them all? She heard the deep growls of the Varghulfs outside and realised she could not, she would have to play along, at least, for now. She turned back to the oak chest and opened it, praying to Sigmar that her prize remained intact. And there it was, wrapped in the bundle of cloth just like she had left it; her heart seemed to hammer in her chest as she carefully unravelled the shawl to be certain that the stone was intact. It pulsed with an eerie light, casting shadows in all directions; Faces appeared upon its translucent surface, faces in visions of pain and anguish, faces of the damned. She heard a third presence in the back of her mind. It whispered to her silently: "Alice" it hissed "Alice" she could feel the alien presence and cautiously rewrapped the shawl "Thank you, My Alice." She felt the servant presence in her mind falter, whatever this third presence was; it was on her side, for the moment.

She began to walk away, bundle in hand when she felt the third presence again, this time however it did not lie and linger, it attacked her mind in force and with purpose, she frantically tried to regain control but found she could not, this third presence began to choke her, she had no choice: yield or die. Within seconds of deciding she had lost control of her body to this other sense. She felt two of her teeth reach out and sharpen, her eyes slowly darkened until pitch black, her thin slender body now tainted by some filth that one sometimes felt when they have done wrong, she felt stronger, faster and darker. Now she recalled why she had never opened the cloth: now, she had become the very thing of which she was trying to slay: she was a vampire, worse, a spectre. She dropped the stone and it landed with a 'thud' on the floor. All the servants looked her way and shuffled towards her.

Their eyes moved slowly between the stone and this beautiful woman, she stood now with a purpose that few had seen in any servant, which meant she wasn't one. Their eyes displayed a sense of longing, a few of them staring at her slender body. One even dared to speak, though his tone was far from seduced: "He told you not to look at it!" he roared and charged her, the illusion broke instantly: the beautiful woman was now a torrent of anger. Alice lingered at the back of her mind as this vampire executed the servant with one fell swoop of her powerful leg. She crouched down as the others drew their blades. She felt her nails jut out like claws and the spectacular balance she felt atop the balls of her feet, she felt an irresistible urge for blood and destruction, some basic animal instinct that all vampires submit to. She leapt into the air and landed upon the chandelier high above. She leapt down from the sky like a bat and stabbed another servant, using his falling body as a springboard as she impaled another. Several advanced upon her again, but they were no match. She kicked the one aside in the head then grabbed the other two by the wrist. She stood on top of one and sprung over him, taking his sheathed blade with him. She beheaded him quickly and threw the blade like a javelin into another's skull. Alice stared through her own eyes as the thirty or so servants were bested and killed by this awesome combat machine, she drove through them like a steam tank, arms flailing wide and yet each chaotic movement was both precise and accurate, She shrieked as she fought, bathing in the blood of her foes as she killed them, she felt her heartbeat quicken as even more came to challenge her. She seemed entranced by the killing; each deed seemed to do nothing more than to strengthen her madness. When it was over, her heart was pounding, yet not a bead of sweat had appeared upon her brow. She picked up the stone and held it up to her eyes, slowly; she began to examine the corpses.

Alice guessed what was going to happen: she intended to summon the other fallen vampire spectres. She summoned up all of her hatred of the vampires and hurled it at the alien presence in her mind. She buckled to the floor; too busy fighting to take control of her own body. The two silently struggled for domination, her body seizing upon the wooden floor. The vampire was far stronger than the servant, but the first blow had stunned it, she seemed to be holding back too, almost reluctant to kill the being that had saved her. She knew how to fight them now, they couldn't deal with strong emotions, let's see how she, or so she assumed, deal with love. She imagined herself alone with her beloved Daekon, alone in a bed... she imagined each exquisite moment with deliberate emphasis, the touch of hands, the meeting of lips, the ripples of pleasure she had felt as she embraced him The vampire shrieked and howled at this, it was worse than torture to the foul plague within her. She felt the creature's innermost hatred then, a definite declaration of the bitter

resentment of mankind. And for the first time she felt it submit, she seized the control of her body as she would seize the throat of an enemy. She spoke to the presence in her mind. "I know your weakness now, foul spectre, and I know your strengths, this body is mine, but should I ever call upon you, you will fight for me...or else you will fall" there was no answer, but Alice new she had been understood, she could feel the vampire at the back of her mind, mustering hate and thinking of how to get back control. She once more picked the stone and packed it neatly, it was time that she got out of here.

She walked out of the inn once more into the icy wind of night. She saw the two Varghulfs crouching like tigers, ready to pounce. Her breast heaved as she took in a deep breath. Show no fear, let them know the threat. She stared at the pair defiantly, her eyes reflecting their grizzled fur and scarred faces. She saw the remnants of torn flesh upon their fangs. She felt the presence in her mind again and smiled. "Back so soon" she spoke to it. She allowed the presence back into her body and felt the same events happen again, her fangs jutted out once more, her nails growing into claws. She looked at the two pitiful creatures and smiled gently and then leapt into the sky on top of the next building. The two Varghulfs took flight, eager to pursue this challenge of a human. She jumped from building to building, savouring the moment of exhilaration as adrenaline pulsed through her body. She soared through the air upon blankets of smoke and came to rest on rooftops from half a mile away. Soon however, she tired of this game, and decided to test her own combat prowess. She glided to a halt, the two Varghulfs landing and snarling at her like dogs. She drew her curved blade slowly, it's silver blade reflecting the moonlight from above. The two Varghulfs attacked together, each leaping towards her head. She dodged the pair easily and the two fell upon the roof tops. But they were still fast, the one took flight and attacked from above, Alice had only seconds to react before the other came at her from the front. The Varghulfs continued this endless barrage of frenzied blows. The village was filled with the sound of blade on claw, of flesh upon fang. She added her own scars to those of her foes, smiling hellishly at the suffering of her own creatures. She toyed with them until the crack of dawn each one launching fake attacks and becoming ever more predictable. When the Sun reached the horizon the two Varghulfs where exhausted, but Alice was as fresh as yesterday. She finally took pity and beheaded each of them with one fell swoop before walking to the edge of the clock tower on which they had fought. She considered the height she was at, she was a bit out of practice at flying with wings, but why not try. It was the strangest sensation she had ever felt, but it wasn't the first if such things today. She felt her spine straiten and her shoulder blades broaden, she felt no pain as the tools of her flight pierced through the skin on her back. She looked at the anomaly that lay on each side of her. The membranes felt light, like a shower curtain pulled taught, and held together by bony supports. She leapt of the building, and felt the air buffet against her new wings. She pushed down with this new set of limbs and felt a distinct pleasure as she rose up in the sky. "You know what Vampire, I think we are going to get along just fine" turning north, she made her way towards her destination

The stone city appeared as a dot on the horizon; barely visible over the canopy of forest that rushed under Alice as she soared in the sky. She decided it best to enter the city on foot; it would not be smart to enter the most vampire-hating city of the old world in her present state. She spotted a patch of low greenland just a few paces away from the main trading road; it was well hidden, however, behind a screen of young trees. Circling as she descended, she made her way towards the small clearing. She landed on the grassland and entered her mind again, she was surprised at how willing the vampire had been to surrender her control, either she really had accepted Alice as a master, or she knew that staying as she was would get her killed in this place. After fully changed back, she pushed away the fragile trees and wondered whether bandits had ever hid behind their cover. The few, leafy, branches beneath her feat snapped as her thick leather boots landed on them, those still attached to the trees clawing at her red tweed jacket and white shirt. She caught her thumb on a thorn and cursed. She soon tired of this method and drew her falchion. She moved slowly towards the road, hacking at the underbrush with her falchion. She stopped abruptly as her feet met the narrow earth road, her eyes set upon the body in front of her.

Her eyes were transfixed upon the bleeding corpse, the wound was deep, and it was obvious that the poor soul would not survive no matter how recent the attack. Something struck her as odd, brandished in the man's hand was a small dagger, covered in blood also. Had the man made a stand? "Oi, don't move!" she heard the loading and cocking of guns all around her, a ring of soldiers closing in on her. They looked imperial, the colours of their province covered there armour. "What have me here than" said one on horseback "A murder?" Alice stared at the man in disbelief, his nose stuck up as if he were far too important to know what had happened, his hands seemed creaseless, clearly this man had been born of nobility, both facts proved that much. Alice imagined the scene in their eyes: a dead body, a woman, blade in hand. Blood soaked both. She tried to explain, but found the stubborn captain would have none of it. "Well, regardless of your will, captain, I will enter this city" The circle tightened in one fluid moment, guns all pointed at her head "Tut, tut, the only way you'll be getting in this city is in chains" he nodded. Two of the men grabbed her arms while another retrieved her falchion. They dragged her down the road towards the gates.

The walls rose up before her, defiant against the jungle and moss that threatened to consume it, high atop the ramparts she saw the with-hunter flags swaying in the wind. Her boots trailed as she was carried into the market square, stalls on every corner. Wagons selling embroider cloths from around the globe stand in cafes and small food stands. Armed guards oversaw the seen, all seen in low whispers in the shadowy corners. It was not the best time to be in Drakanvald: every man distrusts his neighbour, every guard with a side business in vice, the city was a mess, brothels hung at every corner, sick looking women smiling at the men, while around every other alley there was someone more than willing to offer you 'an end to a disagreement' Thieves and killers were always a threat, here in the poor district, everyday was a battle. People made their homes out of the wood they can get from the forests, gutters made out of spades, and a homeless person sleeping with your dog.

Alice wasn't surprised to see so few faces turn to gaze at her; this scene was regrettably common in these streets. The procession continued through the city, guards standing at either side blocking off the whores and beggars that approached them in rags. They made their way into the upper districts and slowly the image changed: The brothels were replaced by stables, the tattered rags people wore to protect their modesty and heat was replaced by lace jackets to protect ones social standing. Slave-selling was popular in the city too, here one could buy one with almost any service, and apparently some could even talk! There were all kinds of strange people standing in shop windows: people with black skin, people with gills, people with fangs and people whom seemed not a man." The people grew more interested as they drew closer to the palace, everyone knew that it was there the executions were held, and the sight of a dead body along with a chained woman seemed a great cause for one to think of such things. To Alice's relief they did not go to the palace, they turned about a small corner in the wall into a prison. The men let her go finally and Alice massaged her arms. She stood within a small room, a high ceiling, however few other luxuries. A small wooden table and rotting chair lay in a corner, however neither looked like it would stand if one would blow upon them. The body was carted away, and the door was shut with her and the captain still inside. The captain's face seemed different, very different. His face was lined with worry and his hands were clasped with worry, when he opened them he spoke: "Seizum danks, Alais" Alice stared in astonishment, the man knew her name, what's more, he spoke it in the ancient with-hunter tongue. He pulled up the chair and Alice sat, thankful that the chair seemed sturdy. "Who are you?" she asked her lips mouthing each word perfectly as if speaking to a child. The man opposite her smiled, he removed his hat and put on a peculiar expression "Alice, you know I can never play games" Alice's eyes widened in amazement and then narrowed in uncertainty. "But how, lord Shriken is dead, I saw him killed wit my own eyes" the man looked slightly pained that she had not believed him. He held up his shirt to reveal a hideous scar running across his huge chest, he slowly pulled his shirt back on and nodded at Alice as she nodded in kind "Now then Alice, I think we need a little talk." he took a deep breath and began. "I have some questions for you, questions you must answer truthfully, you are on a very slippery slop, my child" He walked over too a corner where a small clay jug could be seen filled with water, he put it down on the table and poured Alice a glass.

Alice nodded, accepting the cup "Alright"

Shriken stroked his beard and hesitated before adding "Is it true that your village was attacked by the vampires?"

"Yes" Alice nodded

He bowed his head in earnest "Is it true that you are the only survivor?"

Alice paused "I may be, if the vampire killed his captives"

Shriken nodded as if he had been expecting it, his eyes hovering slightly over her forearm. Dear god! He knew.

"And how is it that you escaped?" he asked

Alice gulped "I, er..., I ran for it, I guess" she began to drink the water.

Shriken seemed to accept the vague explanation. "And how is it that you have travelled almost thirty leagues in the space of a morning?"

Alice chocked on her water "I'm sorry, she said as she saw she had thrown the water jug all over Shriken, the clear droplets falling from his drenched robes to join the remains of the shattered urn on the floor. "I think that's quite enough of the questions for today, let me take you to your accommodation within the castle" said Shriken, standing up and drying off his robes with magic. Alice stood up with him and they made their way from the cell towards the interior of the castle.

They made their way up the carpeted staircase, huge windows on either side as they ascended the great watchtower. Shriken stopped at the next alcove to allow some youths down the staircase, and partly to let Alice catch up. Shriken was remarkably fit, even if he was a young man there would be few in his league. They say he was nearly 200 years old, his life sustained by the will of his people. However they both knew that this sadly wasn't true: more and more now he would erupt into coughing fits and he would find himself gasping for air after short distances. Of the inevitable demise of their leader, the slayers do not speak; some believe that the very spirit of these warriors rested upon their leader, and that the line would end with his departure from this world. They reached the top of the spiralling stairway and stepped into a large corridor with several benches to offer rest after the long walks. Shriken walked straight between both rows and stopped at the crossroads, he smiled faintly and spoke to Alice. "Here our paths end my child, we are on the same side, my sweat, but simply going in different directions" she had known at the smile that he had been planning to leave her now, he knew her secret, and he was now openly telling her that he would tell the brethren. They would kill her. The voice at the back of her head screamed and flailed, desperate to be out of this body that would seal its doom. Alice smiled up at her superior "My friend doesn't want you to leave, she thinks I should kill you were you stand, or see how fast you can travel the thirty league to the ground down that staircase"

Shriken didn't look amused "You could kill me, I have no doubt that you have that power, but there is one thing that you lack to do that, you lack the heartlessness to murder a friend. Alice knew he was right; she walked down the left calmly, even while her mind was in frenzy, Shriken walked the other way. Neither one looked back.

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