

War of the Vampires: Parts 9&10

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Alice

stared from behind barred eyes; her own eyes; AlÃ¡jisâ€™ eyes. The scene was amazing; the effect mesmerising. AlÃ¡jis now stood atop a great palanquin, her smooth face facing a greater army than any commanded by the forces of the gods. Row upon row of black soldiers stretched out towards the horizon; an ocean of armour that washed against some far off shore. Banners bearing the mark of Nagash were raised as high as the sky. The heavens were hidden behind walls of cloud; here no light could reach; here only darkness reigned.

The scene was worthy of legend; an armada of soldiers beneath a blackened sky, all facing towards one creature. She stood with her back to her tower. That was the past; before her lay her future. To her left and right stood her fellow vampires, their eyes mesmerised by the force before them. There had not been a gathering like this in this age, or any age before. AlÃ¡jisâ€™ black heart heaved in her chest; her breathing was short with excitement, the exhilaration of knowing that soon she would walk at the head of this army; soon she would stand over the fallen body of the stone city; soon, this world would be hers. The creatures beneath her howled and roared with eagerness. She knew how they felt; they had been gathered for one purpose: to kill. And where there was killing, there was blood. The skies themselves were eager; rain came down from the blackened clouds and lightening came down in bolts of power. AlÃ¡jis knew she could wait no longer; she raised her hands and emanated a horrific shriek from her pincered mouth. It sailed across the winds and bought silence to all. Every face now looked to her; obedient to listen, maddened to kill. AlÃ¡jis voice came from her purple lips; indifferent of the cold, she spoke to her followers â€œVampireâ€™s! Too long have we have lain in hiding! To long have we been hunted from the forest that is ours! I stand before you today, to tell you something! Those days are over!â€• her voice bellowed over the winds and dwarfed the thunder; no one in the world would not be obedient to this voice.

Skayak stepped forward, his eyes filled with malice, his fangs glinting in the rain â€œLoyal subjects! Long have you followed me under my banner! And now my time is done. Our mistress of old is here! Today! Be not afearred by whatever our foes have planned, we stand in the presence of the divine!â€•

The resulting shout was immense; Skayak spoke for all those here, they would follow their queen, they would fight! For their queen! What more could AlÃ¡jis say? The night had come; the moment was Nigh â€œVampires! To WAR!!!!!!â€• the sky was split as the horde responded: howls of Vaghulfs and roars of the guard. The shrieks of Banshees pierced the forest, the trees splintered and the woods trembled. Hooves thundered throughout the forest and boots trampled their way from their posts. AlÃ¡jis smile stretched from her cheeks â€œSo it begins.â€•

Alice knew she had little time; already fires could be seen in the distance; she would have to act fast if she ever hoped to beat the horde to the gates of Drakenvald. She began to shape her weapon in her mind: a series of pointed darts. She didnâ€™t hesitate; as soon as the final one was finished she began her assault of AlÃ¡jis mind. She felt the vampire rally her defence. Alice began to strike from different angles, driving through her foes boundaries and smothering her in memories.Â She felt her foe lower her barrier, writhing in pain and struggling to keep her hold. She began to bear down on her helpless victim; she could feel her screaming inside her head. She began to cry; she was part of her, her pain was her own pain. She sobbed as she shaped her final strike, a net of happy memories that would entrap AlÃ¡jis forever. She began to lower the cage over the frightened beast; she closed her eyes and finished the deed. She closed her eyes and opened them. She could see once more the great mass of soldiers marching towards the horizon. She could see Skayak watching her, his eyes narrowed in concern â€œAlÃ¡jis is something wrong?â€•

Alice looked at his shallow eyes and spoke â€œIâ€™m sorry Skayak, Iâ€™m sorryâ€• and with that she flew; she flew high and into the clouds. She looked down to see Skayak staring up at her, his eyes firm in acceptance. She felt a pang of sympathy for the vampire; he was now being forced to ride at the head of a war that he had neither started nor placed any faith in. But it could not be helped. She dragged her eyes away from the figure and up towards the skies. She hurtled against the battering winds, her wings trailing behind her as they fought against the torrents of air. She saw the last of the dark clouds part and sailed into the light. She bathed in the temporary light and sighed at the gentle breeze before hurtling back down to earth. She bolted through the storm clouds and sailed over the countless bodies beneath her. She closed her wings and felt the air rushing past her. She could see the outskirts of Drakwald before her and altered her

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Daekon shifted slightly and felt pain bolt down both of his arms. He was instantly awake as the pain shot through him. He gazed around the room and saw no other prisoners. His hands lay together; clamped by a pair of spiked iron cuffs that were bolted to the ceiling via a long chain. Blood dripped from his wrists as the barbs tightened around him. He grimaced as the pain travelled throughout his body. His shoulders were getting worn; he knew he couldn't stay in this position forever. He looked for anything he could use; anything to either free himself or to hurl as a weapon. There was nothing. He slowly moved his head behind his shoulders, careful not to move his arms. The walls dripped with moisture and the smell was repulsive. Green moss and flies swarmed around the roves and walls, rusting iron bars lay in front of him, scarred by previous escape attempts and years of decay. He could see a body rotting in the corner, foul rodents and maggots seeping through cracks in the man's broken body. He felt his measly morning meal rise up inside him and turned away; he could not afford to lose what little strength he had. He could hear footsteps approaching and slowly raised his head to the iron bars in front of him. He could hear water dripping and the clanging of keys, his spirits lifted suddenly and an ember of hope flickered in his heart. He looked into the eyes of the vampire Elector and felt hate displace hope. The count opened the rotting doors and raised his hand. The two clamps clicked open and Daekon fell to the floor, the vampire could have saved him the humiliation, but he knew this fiend gained satisfaction in watching him suffer. Everyday now he would come and torture him; shriek down his ears and bathe him in blood. He knew not what rove the vampire's insane mind, or what made it so loving of such horrific events. It was better not to think of such things, at least not while your spirits are damp already. Daekon stood up with difficulty and wiped the grime from his trousers. His face was covered in dirt and blood, his shirt worn and tattered and his wrists red from where the vice-like clamps had dug into his flesh. He stared into the eyes of the vampire whom answered with a manic laugh. "Come Daekon, I think it's time you reconsidered our offer."

Shriken once more held the traditional glass of wine to his lips. His face was smooth and young, his mantle of darkness resting upon strong shoulders. He didn't move as Daekon was dragged into the room; his eyes not leaving the empty mirror in front of him. Only once Daekon was seated upon one of two chairs did he speak. "I trust our hospitality has been adequate? No answer came I can understand your hate, after all these years of serving me you discover all I have ever been is this, thing. Elector, whom had bought Daekon, looked hurt by this, he had always been proud of who he was, watching his master speak of his kind like this wasn't what he had expected. Daekon was looking at Shriken through his blue eyes, narrowed I hatred yet restrained with curiosity. Shriken walked to the other vacant chair and lowered himself into it, taking a cherry from the fruit bowl between them. "Well Daekon, I have to ask, what make us the ones who are things? he bit into the cherry, the juices flowing down the man's chin. He spoke as if to an injured child; a lecturing parent who wanted the best. "Daekon, humanity is a disease. You are weak, ignorant, and corrupt. I have walked this world since the very first of your wretched kind set foot upon soil. Nothing has changed. You wage war, you burn forests, you turn to races for aid while in secret you despise them. How can you continue to put faith in the illusion that we are evil? We are the cure Daekon, we make you strong, immortal, and we allow you to see the truth laid bare. All you things pledging faith to a ruler of savages, in gods whom drive you to war amongst one another. What do you get at the end? Nothing. The blood you shed, the oaths of loyalty, all for nothing. How can you still cling to the strands of faith that destroy you? Shriken waited for a response. He rolled another cherry between his long fingers.

Daekon leaned forward and felt Elector dig his nails into his shoulders like a vice. He didn't even wince as the pain bolted through him. "You want to know why? Why I keep fighting? Why day after day I awaken to live through another wretched day? his voice slowly rose and he could see Shriken's grin growing across his face; he thought he had cracked him, how wrong he was. "Well I shall tell you why vampire. Because unlike your unholy race, we have a soul. We place values on things like trust and loyalty, on valour and honour. We place faith in our friendships and bring truth in our words. We have love. And no matter how you try and change that, no matter what images you plant within my mind I will never join you. Because I would rather die and hold these things close to heart than spend an eternity of life absent from them."

He was panting by the end; he had spoken his heart and now found his hands shacking. Shriken still sat with his smile across his face.

Shriken stood and beckoned to Daekon. "So you want to die. That is good" he walked slowly towards a balcony, the horizon seen far away from the raised platform. They reached the edge and Daekon stepped back violently; he had no idea how high he was. Shriken pointed out to the horizon "Well you soon will have your chance. Do you know what lies beyond those hills? Daekon shook his head "Beyond there lies a horde of your enemies Daekon, a vast army of undead, all of them charging across the plains to devour this city." Daekon stepped away from the edge completely, his face white.

When Shriken next spoke his voice was filled with an evil malice, the words he spoke would spread like poison throughout Daekon's mind "Daekon, your wife leads them."

Daekon stared at Shriken and spoke "No. NO!" Shriken let out a manic laugh as Daekon began to break down, his face begin to fume with hatred while his eyes brimmed with tears. He pointed to the horizon and stuttered "She isn't she can't she can't," he sobbed "I loved her!" He clenched his fists and smote the ground.

Shriken came to him and spat upon his head "Still believe in love?" he sighed "Wake up to the truth Daekon, there is no love in this world. Your world is at an end now; the question is will you fight with me? I have not harmed your people, and yet you beloved is now riding at the front of an army intent with this cities destruction." His voice bounced around Daekon's skull, but he needed not convincing. Shriken spoke just two words now; he knew he had won. "Join me."

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Alice flew atop the clouds towards the doomed city. She could hear behind her the endless tide of dead chanting their fury and bloodlust. Her heart was racing; she had very little time to act, and even less time to plan. She knew where Shriken would be, and she knew what to do. She still pondered whether she would be welcome there, after all, their last encounter had resulted in him trying to murder her, and she doubted her leaving would have changed his mind. Still, this was her city, and she would do whatever it took to keep it from the clutches of the vampires. The lines of trees were slowly thinning, she could see the city rapidly growing on the horizon. The walls were so far unmanned, what was Shriken thinking? She stared closer at the battlements and saw nothing of a defence, but she did see something. Atop the flagpoles there lay no flag of the Empire, what lay there was a flag of the night, a pitch black cloth hung as a final sign of damnation. Alice landed upon the walls with grace and folded her wings back to within their births. She looked down on the city and saw the people just doing their own business, what was going on?

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She crept into the city and walked amongst its people, they seemed, happy, joyful. Men laughed on the street corners and women smiled as they attended their chores.

Yet they didn't seem, right. The laughter seemed to forced, the heart smiles unreal. They didn't look like real people, they didn't sound like them either. She continued to walk towards the castle and the effect remained. There were no beggars, no whores, nothing. The people walked as equals within the city walls, yet for all the peace it was worth nought. Did they even know what awaited them, did they realise soon this world they seemed to love so passionately would end? She could see the castle getting closer now, though she could have known from the quality of the clothes the people wore. She quickened her pace; it was time to find out what this was all about.

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Daekon stood by Shriken's side as they stared out at the city. The city was ready, soon the war would begin, and the vampires would assault a fortress that no other in the world could contend with. He had always doubted how much power Shriken had under his control, but now he could see that his divine will would hold up the tides if it desired. The man stood with a straight back and a small grin. Daekon frowned slightly and spoke "What is it master?"

Shriken's eyes didn't move, but his lips moved a crack "She is here."

Daekon felt his heart leap; finally he was getting the chance to be rid of the curse that had clawed at him for so long "I am ready master."

Shriken smiled again, only this time did move his eyes "I know Daekon, and now she is here she as nowhere to hide. The city herself resists her freedom, she threatens everything we have worked so hard to build; she will not see the truth of what we have made here."

Daekon walked by his inside into the familiar room by his master's side. "I need no convincing master; she is a threat even without those attributes"

Elector stalked into the room "Mt lord, she is here, what do you wish to be done with her?"

Shriken's eyes darted from Daekon to Elector; he reached a decision "Send her to me." Elector bowed low and went along the mantled corridor. Shriken waited until his footsteps died before turning to Daekon "I wish to talk to her alone before her time Daekon, you must be hidden from sight until I call to you."

Daekon bowed low and moved from the room. With his absence Shriken finally allowed himself to loosen. His battles were all drawing to an end, soon it would all be over, and the Empire, the world, would be his. He lifted a blood goblet to his fanged mouth and drained it, allowing the youthful vigour to pump life back into his immortal veins. He placed the fine goblet back upon the table as he heard footsteps approaching. Alice walked into the room with her sword raised in a defensive position. Shriken looked at her as her confusion grew. Her eyes began to narrow and her mouth opened pointlessly. She pointed her sword at Shriken "Who are you? And where is Shriken?"

The vampire smiled at her "I am Shriken Alice, and you really should be more polite to an old friend than to raise a blade to my neck." He remained calm throughout; he knew she wouldn't kill him, even if she could.

Alice slowly circled him shaking her head in disbelief, it can't be Shriken, it can't be "I don't believe you, what have you done with him? What have you done to those people?"

Shriken's amusement grew, perhaps he should enlighten her on recent events; it seemed only fair after all she had been subjected to. "The people out there are as happy as they have ever been, do you not agree? But as to who am I? I am not Shriken; in fact I don't think there was ever a Shriken. I have always been here Alice, the dormant side of the man struggling to be free. And now I am free Alice, I am free to do whatever I please, and you are not going to stop me."

Alice lowered her blade and spoke to the fiend before her "What about the people, are they like you? A dormant side that was never there? They trusted you; they trusted you with their lives and now look at them."

Shriken snapped back "Let's have a look then shall we?" he strode straight towards the window and Alice followed. Shriken pointed out at the masses that stood outside. "Those people are happy now, they are all better now Alice, this is what I will make the world Alice, this is what I will make my world."

Alice stared in horror; he was mad "You're mad! Those people aren't happy, they're not even people!"

Shriken laughed "I may be mad Alice; I may be fuelled with power and drunk with content but I am doing what is right. Look at them Alice, there is no war, there is no poverty or crime, this is a perfect life, a perfect world. I can make this happen Alice. Don't you want this? A world where there is no hate or war, no bitterness or slavery?"

Alice stepped away from Shriken "No. No I don't want this. Shriken those people aren't happy, they're drones! No love, no joy, and what are we without these, we are nothing if this is what you seek."

Shriken sighed "I'm sorry my child, I truly am, but I cannot have someone like you in my new world."

Alice turned away from the towering figure and her eyes were drawn to the figure approaching from the corner. His eyes were blue and his hair was the same rugged brown it had always been. His clothes were black now, and a curved blade lay in hand. "Daekon?"

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Alice felt her heart crumble, he was alive! She felt a rush of joy wash over her, a wave of love that she had never felt before. She felt a tear forming in her eye, but she brushed it away as he approached. She slowly stepped forward, and then stopped. Something was wrong, his eyes glistened with anger and his face was barred. Alice took a step back "Daekon?"

The man drew his sword, a wicked curve of darkened steel that now resembled his heart. He crossed the room in long strides, determined to kill the woman that had ruined his dreams "There is nothing between you and I now vampire; you have taken away my life, now I will destroy yours." He swung his heavy blade towards Alice's neck, she dodged barely, her mind in shock and her body in decline.

Alice felt her world shatter, Daekon, the man of her dreams, her purpose in life hated her. She felt her morale ebb away, her resolve declining. She parried Daekon's attacks with a heavy heart. How could she fight him? It was like fighting herself. She felt her blade be patted aside by the larger blade. Tears flew down her eyes as Daekon stood before her. His face was iron and his blade raised. Alice wished he would do it, just finish the deed and her anguish. She could feel Alai's sobbing within her, for the first time she spoke to her in pity. "I'm sorry Alice, I'm sorry for all of this. Daekon's blade to lower in slow-motion as the voice spoke within her head. This is not your battle; I should never have made it so. The blade fell from the skies slowly casting a shadow along Alice's smooth face. This is my battle with Shriken, and now your whole world has been turned into a battlefield that should have been settled long ago. A single tear dropped from Alice's cheek, it fell towards the floor and broke upon the carpeted surface. But it is not over yet Alice. I know this shouldn't have happened, but this cannot be how it ends. Alice opened her eyes and looked at Daekon in the eyes, her mind clear and her choice already made. We must finish this now Alice, while we still can. Alice stared into Daekon's piercing blue eyes and felt pity, his part was over now, but his memory would go on. Get up Alice, we have work to do. Alice kicked out at Daekon, her leg ploughing him towards the rear wall. His body flew across the room but his blade flew up high. Alice leapt as Shriken's bolt shot towards her. She caught the blade in the air as the heat of the strike soared over her shoulder. She landed on her feet and leapt towards Shriken, her eyes glowing with purpose and her body filled with righteous vigour. Her blade met Shriken's and the rain began to fall, signalled by the lightening clash within the tower. The two titan's were instantly engaged, lines of silver darted between them, to describe the fight would be impossible, there are no words known that can describe the sheer speed and skill of the two combatants. Strikes were thrown like forks of light; feints were so small no mortal could see them. Alice saw every strike in vivid reality. To her the world raced past, there was only her and Shriken here, at the end of the world, fighting for what both believed was right. Shriken's face was a grimace of hatred as his blade met hers in the air. He darted out of reach of every strike, keeping his own blade between Alice and himself. She did not falter, it was her choice, her duty to kill this man, and no matter what his skill, his strength, she would defeat him. She had to. She kicked out in a savage strike and hurled Shriken back towards the narrow window. She bolted around to look for Daekon. A small indent lay in the wall, but the body was gone.

She turned around and saw Shriken bolting towards her. She crouched and through herself from the floor, she grabbed Shriken with both her arms, her momentum propelling both of them through the tower window.

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Daekon rushed down the stairs panting, what was I thinking? Alice was never meaning to harm anyone, that was Shriken's job. He knew he had little time, he knew the location of a small number of survivors who were preparing for the fight. Daekon raced down the carpeted stairs and turned a corner. He froze. There before him stood Elector. His eyes were a blood red and his craven hair blowing as if a gale. A flaming sword was brandished in his cursed hand. Their eyes met, and both charged.

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Shards of glass fell from the tower along with Alice, her arms locked with Shriken's as they struggled at each others throat. The wind battered both contestants as they duelled, an unrelenting audience eager for neither to win. The rain moved slowly upwards, its speed dwarfed by the rapid descent of the two falling vampires. Shriken grabbed both of Alice's hand with one of his own, his other stretching forward, clasping around Alice's throat. She pulled her hands from Shriken's grip, grabbing her own neck as her windpipe began to close; her lungs lurched as their supply cut off: she felt her head go giddy as the life was crushed from her, her last reserves of oxygen escaping in short gasps. Before her eyes tiny lights began to appear, she pulled all the harder at Shriken's hand, trying frantically to pry the fingers from her throat, but surely enough her strength failed her, the pair of vicious hands holding firm around her neck. She was going to die. Her head began to sag to one side, her muscles depleted of oxygen to hold her head upright, she saw a city of darkness stretched out before her, countless pillars of black pointed up at her. Her eyes widened as she saw the streets, thousands upon thousands of people, every pair of red eyes staring up at them. You can save them. Alai's voice sounded faint in the back of her mind, a far off cry that she had to strain to hear. She looked at the blank faces that stared up at them as they fell to Earth, she could save them all, if she just kept fighting. She looked at Shriken's youthful face and struck out hard, her knee connecting with the man's groin. Shriken recoiled barely a metre from the ground, his wings uncurling along with Alice's as they flew away from the marble steps.

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Daekon felt the heat of his opponent's blade as his own connected with the fiery shaft. Embers cackled from the molten blade and sparks flew from his own. The vampire hastily followed up the savage lunge with a neck strike, which was easily parried, the next strike's target low; a stab at his enemy's leg. Daekon stepped back from the sneaky strike and raised his sword as the vampire seized the extra ground to aim a power strike at Daekon's head. Their two blades met and held each other in the air above their heads, both duellists' face grimaces of concentration, one mistake here would cost a life, or an unlife in Elector's case. Daekon felt his muscles scream with tension as the vampire applied more pressure; the molten blade began to sink towards his chest as Daekon felt the awesome heat intensify. Fire licked at his face and a searing line formed on his forehead. Sweat formed on his brow, but it evaporated before it could reach his eyes. The blade lowered ever closer towards him, and tears were forming in his eyes. He screamed as he drew the last of his strength to his aid, and the vampire laughed at his feeble efforts. That was a mistake he would never forget. Anger pulsed in Daekon's mind and in one push he shoved the blade from him and lashed out with a kick towards Elector's unguarded chest. The vampire recoiled and altered his guard as Daekon went for the offensive drive: a series of fast and aggressive strikes which were sent at the vampire to test both his guard and skill. Each strike forced Elector back, the added momentum increasing the power of each of the strikes sent against him. The vampire fell back against the rapid onslaught, unable to place a strike in his foes rapidly shifting guard. Daekon smiled at the vampire: too easy. He ended the volley at the edge of the marble steps; a single strike at his opponents mid section. As hoped, Elector hopped backwards, unaware of the lethal fall behind him. He staggered backwards, his eyes wide in horror at the trap he had fallen into. The body toppled over as it descended like an avalanche, down the marble stairs, a series of sickening crunches sounding Elector's ultimate demise. The vampire landed face up at the bottom of the stairs with a final crunch, a pair of piercing red eyes facing the sky in horror. A deafening shriek was heard as the vampire was pierced by a hundred shards of falling glass, stars descending from the sky planting themselves in the form of Elector. Blood trickled slowly from the undead corpse. Daekon stayed where he was, not daring to breath lest the air strike him, as the vampire began to stir. Elector raised his hand to his left eye and ran his fingers along the glass shard now embedded in it. He clasped his hand around it and pried it from the socket, a foul mix of blood and tears streaming from the open wound. The battered body stood before him, the meagre excuse for blood streaming from his eye and leg, it's face a pure vision of uncontrolled fury, Daekon had never felt more terror in his heart then when the face set eyes upon him, nor had he felt a greater triumph and been able to laugh in the face of evil.

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Alice pivoted in the air, shielding her fragile wings from the falling glass with her armoured body. She saw Shriken, some way off, his wings as black as night and a fell aura shrouding his body. She flapped once hard to gain altitude and glided away from the figure to a nearby church steeple. She landed upon the sloping tiles; her feet staying planted with her acute balance. She stared at Shriken from afar, following the massive form as it swept across the skies. A normal human would see nothing through the torrential storm that gripped the city, but Alice's acute senses detected the figure with ease. She could barely hear anything over the thunder that cracked the sky, but she could hear something, a low chant that seemed to come from the city walls themselves. Alice looked down from her perch and gasped in horror, the people. They all stood, staring at her, some scaling the church walls to reach her. Their eyes were a deep red and their faces a dull grey. All colour had been washed away, the sea of people looked identical before even her inhuman own eye, now she could see Shriken's world for what it truly was, a hellish prison for the bodies of the dead, their souls restless with the fate they had endured. A bolt of lightning ought her mind back to reality. Shriken was getting closer; he two had seen his adversary in the storm. Alice gritted her teeth and through herself from the steeple, her form ready like an owl before lurching at its prey. Alice propelled herself through the murky sky, the rain battering her face as she cut through it, the wind blowing behind her, pushing her already great momentum to the limit. Shriken accelerated, his body almost streamline as it drove through the darkness. G-force coursed through Alice's body, she could feel cuts all over her body, skin splitting under the massive pressure she was gathering. She and Shriken shrieked as they closed the last few precious metres, the whole world seemed to hold its breath as the two closed in, the thousands of faces all staring at the point of impact, waiting to see who triumphed. And then it happened. The two crashed into each other, the release of pressure shifting the rain as it fell, sending waves of water onto those closest to the scene. Clawed arm and fanged mouth met as the two tangled their bodies together. Shriken remained dominant during the skirmish, but none the less he was wounded by it. Alice lashed out with a vicious heel, biting down hard on the arm that was aiming for her throat. Shriken raised a single clawed hand and raked it along Alice's pristine face. Blood flicked from the wound as joined the droplets travelling to Earth. Alice barely felt the blow, within seconds another twelve attacks had been launched, to the human eye it would be indescribable, the speed the skill, the pure madness of the pairs strikes. Each blow that landed could fell a troll, and yet neither seemed harmed by the colossal strikes. Wings were torn and blood was spilt, the very heavens trembled as the two fighters battled. Alice began to feel her strength sapping, but still she fought on, both in mind and body. She could feel Shriken's mental strikes like cannon shots against her skull, she retaliated with equal force in reality, a deadly scrape across the chest that broke flesh but failed to draw blood. Shriken shrieked and Alice felt her ears splitting, seizing the moment Shriken bolted, driving himself into Alice and throwing her across the city. She landed with a crash in one of the widows of the old school, her back forming a crater in the far wall. Her body was shattered and her will broken, she could barely feel her arms or legs, both were scarred so badly it would seem she had neither. She felt a voice inside her head. She spoke to the presence inside her. I can't beat him, he's too strong. The voice answered response: You may not be able to defeat him, but that doesn't mean that I can't. Alice became weary all of a sudden, who was she asking of her? Let me back in control Alice, your powers have limits, how can you hope to win when his powers have none? I am akin to him Alice, we share the same strengths, and I know of his weaknesses. Alice knew she was

right. She lifted the cage entrapping the beast. She felt youthful energy flow into her body, her wings re-grew and her body stitched itself together. Power flew through her veins like blood, she was ready now, ready to fight, ready to kill.

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Daekon raised his sword to his enemy. There no longer lay the simmering blade there been before; the vampire lay naked and defenceless. Daekon found his voice filled with authority as he addressed the vampire, his speech amplified with valour and esteem. "Stand down vampire, you are beaten and wounded, I will give you one chance and one only to repent for your sins." Daekon's sword dropped to the ground and his hands clawed at his neck. The vampire's eyes were almost aflame; his hand outstretched and closed in a fist. Daekon felt his windpipe tighten, restricting the flow of air to his lungs. He stared into the flaming eyes of the vampire, cracks appearing all over his face, flames licking from the wounds in place of blood. The hatred in those eyes was beyond human understanding, no being could withstand the pulsating rage that now beat through Elector's veins, and his body was showing the signs. Daekon could barely feel below his neck, the sheer pressure building up and slowly killing him. Blood trickled down his nose and he could taste it in his mouth. He watched through haunted eyes as the shells began to avert their gazes from the sky, their red eyes resting on Daekon. They walked towards him, slowly but surely measuring the feet to Daekon's demise. For that was all that was left, death.Â

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Al'jis felt the wind blowing against her body, it felt different, good. Alice had been true to her word, all was hers now, she could walk away, forever; leave Alice eternally trapped whilst she reigned supreme over mortals. No. She had a duty to her, and that duty she would fulfil. She stood up, flexing her legs before walking to the edge of the splintered hole that marked her point of entry. She didn't use her wings; magic was all she needed as she began to rise into the air. She saw Shriken as he howled above the city, his brawling frame leaping from rooftops. He had finally succumbed to madness; the caged beast had escaped its leash, now all that was left of the noble man was a name, nothing else. Shriken looked up as she hissed, his eyes were a flaming red, his clothes torn and his skin scarred. She would look no better she supposed, but that didn't matter right now. Shriken leapt from his post towards Al'jis and she responded in kind. The two raced together for a second time, rain soaking them both through and through while dodging between the streaks of lightening split the skies. Al'jis twisted through with agile grace while Shriken simply blasted the bolts from his path. The last few metres closed in and Al'jis braced herself, extending her claws and preparing to pounce like a hawk upon her prey. Shriken raised both hands towards her breast. The air was split as the two shrieked; water exploded as claw met with hardened flesh, a huge sphere surrounded them and fell to drown those below. Al'jis felt pain run through her even as her claws rammed into Shriken's two shoulders. She broke off instantly, ignoring the pain as she slashed at his face. Shriken covered his face and kicked out towards her chest, knocking the breath from Al'jis. She recoiled then ducked as Shriken's form lunged at her; she swung around him and began to launch a frenzy of blows on his unguarded back. He howled several times before launching a back kick towards her. She had expected the move and easily dodged however found herself held by a single clawed hand. Shriken pulled her close and placed a muscular arm around her throat. Some say you cannot choke a vampire, but those that say so are wrong. Al'jis could feel her windpipe being slowly crushed by the mass of muscle compressing it. She gasped and tried to suck in the air but felt nothing. She struggled at Shriken's hands as he pressed harder. She looked down onto the city of corpses, her eyes trailing towards the tower. Then she saw him, a lone man being advanced by an arsenal of dead. Daekon. Suddenly her own life didn't matter anymore. She flung Shriken's hand from her throat and stabbed into his torso. He struggled to hold her as she struggled; she kicked out and slashed upwards, her claws travelling the distance between Shriken's neck and forehead. Blood rushed from the open wound and Shriken howled in pain, clutching his hands at the grievous wound. Al'jis raised her legs and kicked out at Shriken, using the extra momentum to propel herself towards her love.

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Daekon gazed as the lifeless shells began to move towards the stairs. Horror gripped his heart as one by one others turned to gaze at him. They moved so slowly, their deformed bodies hobbling along. One of them was further than the rest, its hair was a deep black and a pair of plagued red eyes stared out from bloodshot sockets. Blue bulbous veins covered a sickly grey body. It outstretched a single purple hand, bony fingers and green nails pointing towards him. Daekon wanted to scream as the others raised their own hands, a revolting wave of undead washing towards him. He trembled and whimpered as the one closest reached the first stair. It stumbled on the rock and its body fell forward with a sickening crunch. It raised its head and a single arm, the other hung, broken, by its side. It reached forward and pulled itself further towards Daekon. The scene was bleak; Daekon was doomed to be pulled apart by wave upon wave of zombies, in a city full of those who would not care, beneath a sky that blocked his way to the house of Sigmar. Daekon felt tears rush to his eyes as more arrived, some clinging to walls, mouths gagging in lust. Tears swam down his eyes as they came, some dropped straight from rooftops, shattering legs just to reach their prey. Then it happened. Nothing could describe the despair he felt then. As one, the great horde began to groan. Thick, grey liquid dripped from their mouths, a foul mixture of bile and saliva. The groaning floated throughout the city. Daekon tried to block it out as it crept inside his mind. He could feel it, crawling, inside his skin. It consumed his senses and drowned him in despair. He felt his heart beating, too fast for any human. Blood swam through his veins and pulsed in the side of his head. He felt his whole body go cold, the breath before him freezing upon air. Veins bulged out of his constricted neck, keeping him alive to witness

his despair. He tried to fight it, resisting with all of his will. The groaning continued, he felt it in his mind, infecting him, consuming him. And then, without want or need, he joined them; his own groan joined the thousands echoing throughout the city, a foul harmony sung over the baseline of damnation. His lips bulged and cold crept through him, his mind caved in to the beast as the others marched up the stairs. Foul liquid frothed from his mouth and it dripped onto the marble below. His eyes looked down to where the first of the beasts had reached the top of the stairs. It stretched out its hand and gripped his leg, hard. He felt it instantly, an icy curse coming over him, the hairs on his leg froze upright and his waist lost all feeling. His arms numbed and his head froze as it stared down towards the creature that would soon become his kin.

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Alice shot down the air as the zombie laid hands upon Daekon; she shrieked from on high and watched as the zombies began to look to her. But one did not. The zombie clung to Daekon as if his child, the thought sickened her and she resolved there was only one thing she could do. She knew it wasn't his fault, she may have even known the man, but it was the only way. She fell from the heavens like an angel and landed upon the marble floor. She didn't hesitate as her hands clamped around the fell creature's neck. It wrung easily and soon blackened blood flowed down the marble steps. Al'jis looked up to see Shriken falling with a mockery of grace. She glanced at the bloated corpse and lifted it, throwing it with a single hand into Shriken's path. The body smacked, full force, into Shriken's plummeting body, Al'jis timed her move and leapt towards him, a light push propelling her body from the cracked floor. She pushed them both towards a wooden building, the sturdy framework blasted apart by the combined forces. She let go and landed on the wooden panels while Shriken and the corpse smashed into the next room. The vampire lord threw the body from him like a stuffed dummy. It rested lifeless and sagging by the fireplace. But that wasn't what Al'jis focussed on; her eyes were glued on what lay before her. Shriken was gone, this wasn't him anymore. His face was horribly scarred, but even his body left no resemblance, fur covered the majority of his body and every inch of skin was pulled tight by massive muscles. The hulking beast looked at her, eyes fuming with hatred and a mouth more like a snout showed a row of sharp barbed teeth. Varghulf.

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Caksin stared at Daekon, who's side was this guy on? He had been there when the city was purged; Daekon had stood aside Shriken as the people had fled for their lives. He had laughed when he had confronted him; he had even tried to kill him. But in either case, it looked like even he was doomed to the same fate in the end. Unless he saved him now. He barely hesitated as he drew his crossbow, locking the bolt in place and heard the slight click. He raised it to his shoulder and stared down his sight at Daekon, his finger brushing against the trigger. He pulled. The zombie climbing the stairs fell limp and Caksin raced from his hiding place behind the tower. He bit the stopper from his bottle and ran to Daekon's side. He checked the eyes twice and through the water over him. Daekon fell to the floor instantly, his body no longer held frozen. His face was back to its normal colour, curious, what had been holding him? He turned his head and saw the vampire standing there, his own body also frozen. That was weird, how? The body was broken and battered, and no doubt the vampire would soon die. What was holding it together? Caksin gazed up at the tower: So the stone is still there. Caksin looked back down at Daekon, the former friend back before him. He stared up at his saviour but his face was still a look of worry. He scrambled to his feet "Caksin! Caksin, where is Alice?"

Caksin frowned "Alice is here? Where?" he glanced around him and saw the zombies advancing, but they were slow, and being half giant meant such things were beyond his notice. He instead looked to the gaping hole in the building across the street; only one thing could have caused that.

Daekon looked at him "She's here, in the city, Caksin, I have to find her, find a clear path, go!"

Caksin didn't wait; he raised his two maces and carved his way through the weakling undead. Daekon ran in the opposite direction, dodging in and out of the corpses that littered the floor.

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The huge claw raked at her, narrowly missing her ducking forehead. Al'jis retaliated, swinging her left arm in a carving arc. It hit the beast, but it didn't care. In one frenzied blow it flung Al'jis into the air, her frame flying until it landed, safe, several metres away. She didn't wait, launching from her stationary post into the air. Al'jis dug her two claws into Shriken's shoulder and rapidly hailed her blows upon the bare chest. He took the blows, the thick hide shielding him from the savage assault. In a succession of three strikes, Shriken flung Al'jis into the air above him, lashing out with a kick as she fell to the ground behind him. Al'jis flew and stopped, seemingly suspended in the air. Her feet lay upon a support pole, her superior balance holding her in place. In the blink of an eyelid, Al'jis leapt from her perch, sliding between Shriken's wide legs and slashing the back of his knees. She stood up using her heels and turned to face the kneeling Shriken. In one fell movement Al'jis threw Shriken into the pole she had leapt from, his immense body crushed the pole,

splinters flew out in all directions and the roof began to fall. AlĀjis flipped backwards towards the hole in the wall, she prayed Shriken would crumble along with the shack, but he did not. Before she had reached the exit, he bolted, flinging out towards her, gripping around her waist with both arms and driving them both into the next building. Rubble crashed around AlĀjis and plaster and wood shattered behind her. She felt her back rest against the floor but couldn't even revive before it too fell and crashed against the ground. AlĀjis felt the air escape her lungs as the building descended upon her; she could feel each crumb as it fell onto her back. What she didn't feel was the rock that fell onto her head. She lay there, still, dead or unconscious was the only question that was in Daekon's mind as he watched the dust cleared.

Ā

AlĀjis choked in the dust. She could taste blood in her mouth and almost felt the urge to go off and feed. She needed it; Shriken was beyond the boundaries of even her now, a creature of unholy madness, hunger only served to assist his power. There was only one way to beat him, she knew that, but the risk was great, she risked eternal imprisonment, not to mention failure. But she had to, she had no other choice. She stood up to her full height, not that much higher than the average man, but still an intimidating image. She stared at Shriken; he seemed normal once more, a grim smile worn on his face. AlĀjis knew he was pleased, he had always thought she was strong, and he had never liked to be disappointed. Alice sat in the back of the shell, she didn't know what the other vampire thought of her foe, but she was petrified. Shriken's whole body pulsed with energy, the force was enough to kill anything, or so she thought, but Shriken commanded it with ease. AlĀjis own aura began to bolster, she had so much power, Alice could see now how easily the two could have ruled the Old World, and perhaps even beyond. AlĀjis spoke to her nemesis, her voice filled with power. Ā
 ĀShriken, neither of us can win through the tools of mortals; we both know we don't have to fight with our fists. Ā

Shriken smiled, the voice this time lost to eth possessing spirit, Shriken was gone, there was nothing left but the vampire now. ĀThat is true AlĀjis; they say your mastery of magic was surpassed only by the gods, Ā he clicked his fingers and flames erupted from his palm. ĀUnfortunately for you, I walk among them. Ā And with that he raised his hand, sending a blazing inferno towards AlĀjis. She raised both hands and allowed the wave to wash over her, her skin not even scorched while her surroundings charred. She raised two fingers to her neck and stepped with her front leg, pointing the same two fingers at Shriken's chest, a bolt of black lightning erupting from her fingers. Shriken redirected the strike to the ground, and then did the same to the next strike. The strikes were simple and ineffective, but even the three she had thrown had done enough to anger Shriken, and anger all too often leads to mistakes. Shriken bounced eth third strike and threw a fireball at his foe in anger. She caught the ball in her hand and watched as the flame shrank. She smiled at Shriken and clicked it out. ĀSurely you can do better than that. Ā

Shriken howled and released a trio of firestrikes; AlĀjis caught each of them and retaliated with a savage lightning bolt. The vampire turned, narrowly moving from the bolts path. He attacked again, with a differentiating array of strikes. Light shows erupted between both magicians, neither of them throwing a powerful strike, yet both fought with greater power than any priest of Sigmar. AlĀjis began to raise the tempo of her strikes, hailing several varying blows to try and confuse her foe. Heat pulsed between them as the strikes began to melt the very air before them. Spells collided and rubble flew, no way was either going to back down now, it was all or nothing. Words of power split the silence, uttered at rapid paces as countermeasures and strikes were exchanged. The ground beneath AlĀjis began to crack; fire appeared at her feet as the world itself felt the strain of the two wizards. It seemed AlĀjis was slowing her strikes; she uttered less and less words, barely moving her hands for anything, or so it would seem, to the untrained eye. To a trained magician she was being the most tactical fighter that was possible. Power was everything, not always using it, but conserving it, varying it. Although without words it would cost her more, it would cost Shriken tenfold to create a shield if he knew not which strikes were coming. There was only one thing he could do, copy. The strikes were launched at an incredible rate, no longer bound by the speed of their masters' tongues. The air burst alive with fire, it danced between them, wafted this way and that by eth rapid tempo of eth strikes. Cracks were understatements; great rifts were now appearing on the ground, desecrating the land they stood upon. Both combatants fought on, both knew the first to rise would be at a great disadvantage, but both knew it would have to come soon. AlĀjis made a daring move, using even more of her energy to strike at Shriken's mind with a strike. He shielded, but only just, great energy had been used to generate the shield and too much had been wasted on light and heat. Shriken cursed, he had no choice but to rise now in his weakened state. He barely rose an inch before he felt AlĀjis strikes pounding him from beneath. He was assaulted on all sides, being forced to create a full body shield, the greatest source of energy that could be used in one spell. AlĀjis smiled and began to rise herself. Of course blows came at her too, but she had the upper hand by far now, she continued her barrage, assailing Shriken with a merciless combination of strikes. Together they rose, two dancers held in nature's embrace. The wind changed its course as they battled, lightning bent and rain curled away from the epic duel.

Ā

Neither face showed emotion, neither face showed anything. Silently they struggled in the skies of the damned city, whoever lost here would fall, and here no one would be able to hear them scream. Concentration was essential, the slightest movement or miscalculation would destroy the fragile balance achieved between the two now. All she had to do was keep her concentration, and she would wear her foe down to his doom. He stared at her with a look of mockery, was

he toying with her? Then she felt it, crawling beneath her skull, like some clawing hand gripping at her head. She recoiled instantly, abandoning her magical duel to rush to the defence of her mind. Shriken's mocking laugh could be heard within her mind, bounding of the edges of her skull, echoing throughout the chasm of her mind. "You are mine Al'jis." The voice was strange, slurred, harsh. It was not that of Shriken's, though elements of it remained, this was of a much darker, fouler beast. She felt Al'jis's presence shield her from the new menace, but it was hopeless, the presence held her mind, it was everywhere. There was no escape. She could hear Al'jis whimpering, why? The voice laughed out again, relishing its moment of victory "You know what awaits her, Al'jis, perhaps you should tell her before her fall."

Al'jis sobbed once more and replied "You always were one for treachery and torture, but this, have you no heart?"

The fiend laughed and Alice felt her ego being pulled away. "Come Alice, now you are mine." She moved backwards, determined not to allow him to use her. But it was no use, Shriken advanced upon her, forcing her into the corner of her mind. She curled into a ball, hiding in the darkest pit she could find, and it was here she began her fall. She felt fangs sink into her neck, blood rushing into Shriken, her own blood, ancient blood. Her mind fell apart, and she began to fall.

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Daekon looked up and felt tears in his eyes. Alice lay there in the clouds, Shriken's fangs draining her of life. He watched through disbelieving eyes as her body began to fall, plummet, down to Earth. He howled at the winds as the body descended, his eyes were filled with an insane fury as he watched a fiend crawl around a corner. His rage filled his body, gave him purpose, gave him strength. He raised his large sword and cleaved the ghouls head straight off. But he didn't stop there, more were coming, and he let them come. He ran through the streets like some madman, swinging his sword in a crazed frenzy. If undead could show fear then they showed it then, Daekon's eyes were wide with madness and grief and his bloodthirsty screams echoes throughout the city. Those that stood in his way were butchered, those that hid survived only a second longer. Every nerve in Daekon's body screamed at him to put the blade down, his muscles were bulging and his heart pumping faster than anybody's should ever go. Adrenaline poured through his veins like a second blood, feeding him energy and willing him on. He rounded yet another corner and saw three of the abominations, all gathered around a body. He screamed even louder and felled all three in a single colossal sweep of his axe, blackened blood fountained everywhere and soon the whole scene was a bloody mess. Daekon stood there panting, his chest rising and falling as he stared down at Alice. He dropped his blade and knelt beside her, he looked to the sky and saw Shriken beginning to descend, he remembered he still knew nothing of his and Elector's encounter. He looked at Alice and checked her pulse, a faint thudding resounding against his two fingers. Relief washed over him in waves. She was alive, for now at least. He looked back p to Shriken and felt a smile pulling at his lips. He hadn't won yet. Daekon picked up Alice's limp frame and sprinted, already hearing the curses of a maddened Shriken. ^ ^ ^ ^

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Caksin rounded the corner, his huge mace crushing another skull, rotten brains and dark blood spilling out into the next street. The maddened half-ogre sprinted on, his twin maces making a bloody mess of whatever they encountered. Deformed hands and splattered muscle littered the path behind him, the devastation more akin to a mass invasion than to a single man. If undead could show fear, they showed it then, their shaking forms scurrying along the walls splattered with their kin. Caksin roared as he slew the frail creatures, blood pumping through his veins faster than ever before, ever in his time of chaos. He felt a fire within him, a fire that before today had been a flickering ember. He didn't stop, he kept charging, each kill doing nothing but fuel the fire within him. He released his anger, venting it onto anyone near and laughed as the life left their black eyes once more. His heavy boots hammered against the floor and his chain mail clanked heavily as he ran down the creatures. Not a thought passed his mind about when he would stop, he would have been perfectly happy to continue on, so free was his mind. He felt his huge mace connect with another of the critters, the huge spiked ball cutting through the skin like a knife through silk. He bounded round the corner and his eyes stared in disbelief. He tried to slow but found he couldn't, the gained momentum to great to halt. He raised his hands to his face as his body fell through the wall of fire, flames searing and cooking his flesh and armour. His body tilted forward and he felt his shoulder meet the ground. He rolled, the burning flames smothered beneath him. He finally stopped and gazed back at the flickering wall, that had been a close one, but it took more than a little heat to cook a lion. His shoulder hurt and he felt blood trickle down forming a pool on the dirty gravel path. Grunting, he used his good arm to rise to his feet, his armour feeling somewhat heavier than moments before. His twin maces lay together a few paces away, their superior hilt unaffected by the blaze that had wounded their master. He walked over to them, picking one up in each hand. He didn't bother to turn around and check, he knew the vampire had been there ever since he had seen the wall "There was little point in that." He said, rounding on his foe "I never planned on running anyway." And indeed there he stood, Elector, in glistening black armour and with the pale white face akin to a marble statue. His eyes a burning red, but nothing in comparison to the flaming blade held in his undead hand. Caksin flourished his maces, issuing the challenge. The vampire merely smiled and raised his hand. Caksin frowned then screamed, dropping his two smoking maces to the ground. He bit his lip as he fell to the ground and gripped his left hand, the thin leather still smoking from the burst of heat. His pinkish skin was showing through in several places and his twin maces lay feet from him, useless. He raised his steaming eyes to the one responsible. A flaming shaft greeted him, pointing down upon him. He was alone, defenceless,

inside. Caksin's fingers closed around the blade's cloth hilt and he pulled up, the shimmering blade rising to meet the flaming sword that threatened its owner. The two blades met between their owners, Caksin grit his teeth as he tried to push his foe from him. The vampire sneered as his weight transferred from his feet to his arms. Caksin felt the strain, and showed it, sweat trickling from his brow despite not moving. His muscles bulged and his blade shimmered, he was going to give it his all to kill this vampire. He could feel his blade's unearthly hilt beneath his fingers, could sense some degree of its phenomenal power. The elves had given him this gift and rightfully so, for this blade would do more for Caksin than fell the dead. Clenching his fist tighter around the hilt, Caksin breathed in deeply, savouring some portion of the ghostly steam pulsing from the blade. He stared into the red eyes of his foe, and something of a smile pulled at his face. In one push, he forced the vampire from him, the flaming blade flying through the air; no embers were along its surface when it landed some feet away. The vampire backed away as Caksin rose, the ghostly blade pointed at him like an accusation rather than a threat. Fear lit up in Elector's eyes, he raised his hands defensively as Caksin advanced. "You have crimes to pay for, vampire."

A foul laugh emanated from Elector's pincered mouth "No, you have crimes to pay for, child of chaos! And with that, of fire shot from the vampire's hand, connecting with the elven weapon. It stayed there, the ethereal blade resistant to the intense heat being poured upon it. Caksin held the blade firmly in two hands, and felt the pressure pile as Elector stepped towards him "You are more like us than you are like them, traitor, and that is why I haven't killed you yet."

Caksin could feel the sword vibrating, even it could not withstand the magical might of the creature it opposed, but even so, he couldn't just give in to the fiend! "I will never serve you! Or your crooked master!"

"No matter, corpses serve us vampires just as well."

A deafening howl sailed across the wind, both combatants ran for cover as the ground began to shake as if an earthquake had struck. A strange shriek followed it and Caksin watched as the nearby vampire disappeared in a ring of fire. He stared blankly for a few moments. The strange occurrence had saved his life, but where was the vampire now? And what had caused it? Pondering the answers, Caksin began to run towards the resistance base.

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Daekon ran even as the deafening howl shook the buildings on either side of him, splinters cascading down into the gutters of the road. Clearly Shriken was not interested in playing cat and mouse; he would tear this city apart in order to get his hands on his goal. Unfortunately for him, Daekon didn't agree with his thoughts on the matter. He bounded round the next corner and cut down a shortcut known only to those raised on this city. He could feel the weight of his precious cargo on his back as he ran, his breathing was fast and sharp and his face covered with dust, as well as his hair. His feet pounded against the solid floor and shockwaves rippled up his calves, his head spinning as adrenaline pulsed through it. He had to get Alice out of this mess; he hoped to Sigmar the resistance wouldn't harbour too many grudges.

^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ He turned yet another corner and sprinted right, back towards his original destination before he had been sidetracked. He could see Caksin ahead of him, running just as fast, whether he could see them or not was another question. The road was long; Caksin had a good start ahead of them, and from the sound in Daekon's ears-he hadn't been able to rid this place of its undead inhabitants. A brief turn of the head confirmed it, at least six dozen were following in his wake, their lifeless bodies moving a bit too fast for Daekon's liking. He sprinted and felt his ribcage hammering against his chest. The ghouls behind him responded as one, their bodies chasing at impossible speed. Daekon cursed, he wasn't going to make it. Unless he dropped Alice now, let the ghouls finish this once and for all. No. He felt so angry for considering it, Alice had saved him-he wasn't going to abandon her now. He drew in a sharp breath and roared down towards his friend "Caksin!" the running figure paused and turned around, the scene reflected in his horrified eyes. His feet turned towards them as his eyes rested on the figure on Daekon's back. He mouthed a single word "Alice" before pulling himself to his full height, his sword held ready and his face proud and determined. Daekon's heart leapt as Caksin began to run towards them. It was suicide, to try and hold back such a wave, but it looked like Caksin had fought his fill.

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Caksin raised his sword and howled to the winds as he charged, his eyes crazed and wild, his face glistening with sweat. The ghouls crawled towards him on their deformed limbs, scurrying after his friend Daekon. Daekon pounded down the track and the two glanced at each other, a brief connection of understanding and a last goodbye. Caksin raised his sword and brought it down in an arc onto one of the ghoul's skulls. He swung around again and threw another two back into their ranks. His eyes widened as one lunged at him, its claw raking along his face and flicking blood behind him. A quick flick of his blade and another corpse joined the floor, but the main bulk of the undead was closing in, and he knew not

whether he would be able to tackle them all. He turned around and looked at Daekon; he was standing there, stubborn as he was, unwilling to let his friend go. Caksin cursed, Alice had to survive. "Daekon! RUN!!!!"

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Daekon turned his back to the scene of blood behind him, his mind on keeping his two feet moving. The immediate threat may have gone, but there were other threats than ghouls still hunting him within this city, or at least that is what he thought. He ran down the street and turned right, towards the hidden location of resistance fighters hiding out on the enemy's doorstep. A few more streets and he had reached the familiar quarter that had formed his headquarters as the head of the organisation. The resistance was still located here, just somewhat in a different place. Daekon had slowed to walking speed now, there may still be enemies here, but from the silence he could tell there were none lurking in the shadows. It's one of the tricks he had learned, the air always seemed to move differently if someone was nearby, you could taste it on the air, that pungent truth that tells you something isn't right. Daekon reached a thick oak door, the knocker engraved with a small, silver hammer. He let himself in, closing the door behind him without hesitation. The house was silent, which was good; the house had nothing appealing to the senses other than the smell that drifted from the rich wooden walls. Daekon walked towards the end of the corridor, to where one would usually enter into a grand white kitchen. Instead, he crouched, staring almost aimlessly at the wooden floor beneath him. He smiled, the entrance was well hidden, even if you were looking for it, you'd have problems. The thought of who was in charge now came to mind, the trap door hadn't been ready upon his departure, it was good to see at least one person had rose up to claim the mantle. Daekon carefully ran his fingers along the trap door, this was it, he was certain. He tapped lightly on the four corners of the panel and frowned deeply when nothing happened. Then he heard a sound behind him and he grinned at the hole behind him. Lowering himself, he placed Alice lightly through the hole, before dropping into the darkness of the under city.

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The resistance had been planning for this moment for a while now, ever since Daekon had begun the organisation he had been drawing graphs and building blueprints of the underground city. It was a large collection of tunnels, countless ones ending in nothing, but for those who knew the ways around, the place held everything they needed: water, food, living quarters, and weapons, lots and lots of weapons. It had been Daekon's last order to the men after his first meeting with Caksin to take the organisation down to the sub levels, had Elector waited longer before pouncing on him, he would have seen the countless rows of people and their possessions descending into the murky tunnels. Now Daekon returned to this place, seeking aid and shelter from the hordes above. His feet tapped lightly on the well-crafted stonework, he and his cargo heading deeper into the winding tunnels.

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Daekon stopped before the door, his mind hesitant, fearful. His hand was outstretched towards the handle, trying to reach, yet always too far. His eyes were brimming with tears, yet he knew not why. His heart beat slowly in his rib cage, thudding throughout the corridor. His feet stayed where they were, keeping him here, but why? Daekon stared at the door still, afraid. It was strange how he had come so far, only now did he begin to fear. At the back of his mind, it had always been there, always, yet through battle and plotting, it had never taken root. Now, beneath the surface of it all, he finally had to face the truth. This was it now, all his life it had seemed like a game to him, but now, now it finally hit him, and suddenly, he doubted. One step, one slight movement, and it would all begin, and he didn't know what would happen, or whether any of them would make it out on the other side. This one step, something you do without thought, was everything. Finally, Daekon let his heart empty of his past, all he once knew was nothing, this was it now, his whole life, everything he had ever done, had been building up to this tiny, insignificant moment. Yet to Daekon, it was all that mattered in the world. The tears stung in his eyes, once this happened, everything would change, his life would flip and all could be lost. He didn't know if he could face it, he wasn't strong enough. His thoughts drifted to Alice, the woman he would die to let live, she had always been there for him, unquestioning, obedient, loving, caring. People don't talk like that anymore, love is the language of fairy tales, the truth is not every story has a happy ending, not every cloud has a silver lining. They say war separates the men from the boys, the weak from the strong. But in Daekon's eyes, it was the strong that walked away, who gave it all to be with that one someone, who were willing to let go of their past, and rise above the fighting and death. His hand still lay there, suspended in mid-air. He sighed once, and deeply, before stepping forward.

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The door swung inwards and Daekon stepped through, ignoring the startle cries and gasps that followed his arrival. He barely had time to lay Alice on a table before a knife was flicked to his neck "You filth, you betrayed us!" the voice was rough, as was the hand gripping his hair. "Get up!" Daekon was hauled to his feet and thrown to the wall "The little buggers on led them here, bolt the damn door!"

Daekon spoke in a calm voice, he had changed now, same in body, but different in mind "I haven't come here with Shriken"

The knife flicked towards his throat and the short, vicious man holding it spoke in a spiteful tongue "Who then? His petty servant?"

Daekon kept calm "I'm here with Caksin, Shriken has been pursuing us throughout the city, he gave his life so that I could get here."

The man's face contorted and he brought his right hand up, ready to punch "You ruddy fucking murderer!" Daekon caught the fist and turned, pinning the smaller man against the wall

At least five pistols pointed at his head then, at least these guys would be ready for the fight when it came. Daekon spoke again "I'm not here for blood or trouble; I'm here to stand and fight." He let the man go "And to bring you a chance of survival."

A large man who Daekon supposed was the leader, looked towards the table, and he laughed deeply "A woman! You are here to tell me, that a woman, is our best chance against vampires?"

Laughs echoed about the room and the larger man stepped up to face Daekon. He was at least half a head taller, but Daekon held no fear for the brutish man, merely pity "You can laugh, but the fact is Caksin has died to save this woman. Why? Because she is without a doubt the best warrior in this room, isn't she?"

A shrill laugh came from the left "She looks pretty grand to, go on then; let's see how vicious she can be, eh?"

Daekon's leg bolted, his foot ramming into the larger man's groin. The brute buckled and fell to the ground while Daekon marched forward and grabbed the other man by the throat "You touch her, and I swear in the name of Sigmar I will break every bone in your body one by one do you hear me?" He let the man go when he nodded weakly and he walked to Alice's side. Her face was as pale as sheet and her eyes stayed closed. His fingers strayed to her neck and he found the slight pulsing sound that signalled life. Daekon knelt by her side and rubbed her hand in his "Is anyone here a doctor?"

A man stepped forward and Daekon was socked when several others came forward to help "What do you need doing?" The doctor outstretched a hand and Daekon accepted it gladly, it seemed the people still held him in high favour.

"She fell, from the tower, she's as white as a ghost, but her pulse still beats slowly."

The doctor dropped to her side and placed two fingers on her neck and nodded slightly "It's amazing she survived, I doubt anything could survive such a fall, perhaps Caksin has found something truly special that may help us yet."

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Daekon nodded, the doctor hadn't meant what he said, he was from the village, he would have helped anyway, but for the sake of those that didn't know Alice he had to make something up. "I'll be right back, I need to go and fetch something." He was about to turn when he heard loud clanging in the tunnels. The women lined up along the back wall and in seconds the men were in front with weapons. Daekon smiled, the men were ready. The door burst open and all weapons were lowered. Daekon stared in horror at the bloodied figure of Caksin. His face was smeared with blood and cuts covered every visible part of his skin. A deep gash went down his left leg and by the looks of things may have come out the other side too. Daekon's eyes met with Caksin's and he guessed what he was about to say. Caksin nodded "It started."

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