

# Chains of Vengeance

by E.J. Cain

To support this author and contribute to future chapters in the World of Enelis series, check out this link:

<http://arboreantears.com/other/writings/>

Edition 1

Copyright © 2016 E.J. Cain. All rights reserved.

## **(1) The Lord of Darkness**

It had been a day of celebration for the shadmar of House Niedrie. Their patriarch had arrived from the depths of the deep underground. It was time for him to lead their society into greater glory. They would continue to put their plan into motion.

It had been many decades in preparation, a plan for a massive war between the dark skinned shadmar and their hated surface kin. The elves of House Niedrie had been preparing for so long that it had become the single purpose that united these otherwise chaotic beings. Rarely do the shadmar houses keep alliances, much less actually work together. There are constant power struggles, back-stabbing, and new leaders rising to take control, often in new directions. But Lord Delrith Niedrie had a vision; a golden, uniting vision for all the dark elves. He offered them the surface. With many centuries of manipulation and struggle, Lord Niedrie conquered all the shadmar houses in the subterranean depths below. Now a throng of dark elves would fight and die at his command. All this because they believed that they could take back the surface world from the elves above; take back the lands their ancestors once called home.

At first it had seemed a foolish attempt at control; a pathetic minor house attempting to take command through manipulation. But somehow no other house could stop the prevailing sorcerer of House Niedrie. Every attempt at betrayal or warfare became drastic for the aggressor and Lord Niedrie would always remain on top. Many whispered he had a dark power at his command, others whispered that only a true visionary could remain victorious. It was the greater belief in the latter that slowly brought the legions of dark elves to lay their swords and lives down for the sorcerer.

As his armies grew, the larger houses attempted to unite and squash the minor lord. A civil war tore apart the shadmar houses, bringing great devastation to their home caverns. Ultimately, in the magical aftermath of the war, the ceilings of the great caverns shattered and fell, destroying much of the shadmar city of Dith Derithin. It was then that Delrith Niedrie's dream seemed essential for the future of the survivors. His dream united the remaining shadmar, even those that previously opposed him, and brought them to the surface and the beginning of their new future; their only future.

Captain Velstir paced nervously about the large antechamber. The rough stone had an ebon sheen. Though the ancient shadmar fortress had crumbled over the many millennia since it was abandoned, these days its inner chambers were well restored. The captain admired his almost square visage and glistening red eyes that showed a hint of amber in the silver-framed mirror. The shadmar captain smiled at himself, proud of the progress his people were making. Never had the warrior seen his kin progress so far in his two centuries of life. Never had he seen hope for a brighter future. No more war between the great houses of the shadmar; only peace and unity. The promise of the war to come had been a powerful motivating force.

It was only a few years since the shadmar climbed towards the surface. The captain easily remembered the hopeless tunnels and sleepless hours trying to guard the refugees from unseen monstrosities. The lightless caverns housed many vile beasts and expert predators. Now the dark elves dwelt comfortably in the numerous chambers deep under their ancient stronghold. Valraen was the ancient seat of the king of the shadmar during the rule of the

Kingdom of Four Crowns. Before the treachery of the light-skinned elves. Before the dark elves were banished to the deep underground over four millennia ago.

The captain dropped his smile and continued to pace, knowing that his impending meeting with the house patriarch would not turn out well. They had razed three elven villages in the past few days. He was given strict orders to not allow a single survivor in these villages so that larger settlements would not become aware of their presence. But that single elf, that wizard, had defied him. The captain knew he would take the blame. He wondered what his punishment would be for failing his patriarch. His mistake could single-handedly ruin their efforts if that wizard knew that these attacks came from not mere raiders, but a conquering army. The shadmar had planned to slowly establish themselves in this fortress and prepare their defenses. Then they would march to Elienspar, the capital of the elves and the seat of the crown. Lord Niedrie planned to march in no more than a few months. Though the captain wished it were sooner.

Meanwhile, Lord Delrith Niedrie, the high lord of the house, sat upon his dark throne. His thin features accented his pale eyes and abnormal height. He sat alone, slowly stroking a large rat on his lap within the windowless chamber. He arranged for light absorbing blackness, using his magical prowess, so that he could ease the tension on his eyes. They were sensitive to the light, and he found this his only relief from the bright world above. The darkness was home, so alike to the stone caverns of the deep underground of which he was so accustomed. Although he knew that in the centuries to come, his people would no longer be slaves to the darkness. They would one day welcome the sun and slaughter their enemies amidst the dawn. Once the war began and the traitorous fey elves were no more.

*This world will soon beckon to me,* thought the dark elf patriarch as he continued to absent-mindedly pet the large rat on his lap.

A small knock on his chamber door interrupted him.

"This better be good news!" he shouted to the stone door.

A small-framed servant entered meekly. "Lord Niedrie, Captain Velstir wishes to discuss the results of the raid with you," the scrawny dark elf said.

A menacing grin spread across the dark lord's face as he jumped off his throne, sending the rat sprawling to the floor. He ran to the door and pulled it open in one wide gesture.

"Captain Velstir," he said smiling, "tell me what has befallen our enemies over the past few days." He then stepped into the doorway of the antechamber past the quivering servant.

The captain turned away from his pacing nervously, his voice suddenly not coming to him. The patriarch's eyes narrowed as he stood stern, facing the captain. He stood up straight and looked at his master, into those menacing pale eyes.

"Lord Niedrie," the captain said with a quick bow, "the raid has been successful for the most part. Our enemies have all been decimated in the three elven villages we've discovered. However..." The captain gulped.

"However?" the patriarch echoed impatiently, a tinge of anger growing on his face. The captain searched the hallway, trying to keep his view away from the growing flames in the eyes before him.

"However... an ethmar wizard escaped from the village we raided this week."

Fury flashed across the lord's face, "What!?" he roared.

“S-S-Sorry, my Lord,” the captain stammered. “We were awaiting your arrival to the surface before we acted. The commander feared that we would be going beyond the boundaries of your orders by sending any armed patrols,” the captain recounted.

Pure rage roared to life within the Lord of House Niedrie, “*Why didn’t you dispose of him!?*”

The captain dropped to his knees, and stuttered, “H-H-He fled from us before we could reach him. I-I-I claim full responsibility in this matter,” courage then returned to the old captain’s voice, “He did not head toward the sulmar capital, he flew eastward. With your permission, Lord, I shall hunt him down, personally.”

The patriarch eyed the captain for a long moment, those burning eyes slowly losing their flames. “Have you memory of his face?” the lord then purred evilly.

“Yes, my Lord,” the captain said, his voice strong and resolute, “without a doubt in my mind.”

Lord Delrith Niedrie grabbed the captain’s neck and pulled the burly dark elf to his feet with surprising strength. “Then I will charge you to find him,” he said intensely while staring into the captain’s face. With a wave of the patriarch’s dark hands, the captain of the dark elf guard fell asleep hard to the floor. The dark lord then turned to the servant cringing near the door, “Take our captain to the spell chamber, he is going to require a new *vestment* for this task.”

The servant, knowing the price for sluggishness, quickly obeyed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Deep in the under-chambers of the foreboding fortress of Valraen, blood-curdling screams echoed down the halls. In the spell chamber of Lord Delrith, the muscular body of Captain Velstir lay nude and strapped to a circular table. The circumference of the large chamber featured many large candles and braziers burning with an eerie glow. A red pentagram was drawn upon the center of the three-tiered room on the lowest level. A few small candles burned at each of the five points of the star. In the center of that pentagram the pained captain shuffled and screamed. Tears of pain dripped down Captain Velstir’s cheeks as his cringing body was cut, stabbed, and prodded by a handful of servants. They quietly stuck large iron spikes into the shadmar’s limbs. A black-cloaked figure then entered the room, the hint of a smile hidden beneath the cloak’s hood.

“Are we comfortable, Captain?” the excited patriarch said sardonically as he slowly walked towards the small podium just outside the pentagram. He opened the large tome upon the podium and searched unhurried for the proper page. Ignoring the screams from Captain Velstir, the patriarch motioned for his assistants to leave the room.

“Now we begin, Captain. Now you wrestle with real demons,” the patriarch whispered quietly, more to himself than to the injured warrior.

The dark lord raised his right hand and closed his fist tightly. The lights in the room all went out, except for the candles upon the pentagram’s points, these turned an unearthly red color as they brightened. The patriarch raised his other hand and began chanting in a dark, guttural tongue. The flames on those candles then slowly rose off the candles themselves and began to grow wildly.

The five flames, now each over a foot wide and three feet tall suddenly shot out at each other above the circular table, creating a flaming rift in space above the now quiet and frightened captain. The rift was a flaming circle with over a six foot diameter. Through the rift, glowing brimstone and hotter flames loomed in the distance. Soon a deep, unearthly voice spoke from the rift in the same dark guttural tongue as the shadmar sorcerer behind the podium.

“Delrith of the mortal house of Niedrie, what services does thee request from the Indomitable Burning Lords of Xelenvar?”

The sorcerer grinned at his success in making contact with the demon-lord. Although it was certainly not the first time the sorcerer had made this connection, there was always the tentative fear of being greeted by silence. Delrith calmly walked towards the rift, but carefully remained outside the pentagram.

“A boon, my Lord Zalkael,” the patriarch answered. “A simple request. I need only a lowly seeking-demon to take possession of this ineffective captain, so that our plans may go unhindered.”

A low growl erupted from the flaming portal. Then silence. The flames burned around the rift, crackling and popping, slowly feeding off an infinite source. The patriarch felt a slight tingle at the back of his head, knowing that the demon would soon learn all he knew. Delrith waited nervously for the demon's reaction, but the long wait continued. He began counting the rough tiles on the floor, afraid to shuffle his feet even though the strain in his legs were begging for a readjustment of posture.

Suddenly, the demon's voice erupted, “I read your mind, mortal. These troubles do not do well for our plans. Your boon is granted.”

Then without a pause, the rift closed and all the flames in the room went out as if a gust of wind had roared through the chamber. Delrith slowly began to breathe again, curiously eyeing the captain, who was staring back at the sorcerer with only hate in his eyes. The candles at each of the pentagram's points slowly returned to life. Red-glowing spirits, tiny motes of light, began to rise from the small flames, slowly drifting into the warrior's wounds. The captain returned to his screaming as the spirits began a horrific transformation on the shadmar warrior.

The dark elf's slender ebony hands and feet enlarged into huge raking claws. The square jaw of the captain stretched into a feline jaw with razor sharp teeth. The iron spikes burst free from the muscular body as he gained strength and size. His intelligent eyes brightened into a flare of sinister instincts. Soon the shadmar warrior was replaced by a snarling, demonic panther.

Delrith stepped towards the panther in awe as the spirit-demons took control of the warrior's body. A smile spread across the patriarch's thin face as the transformation finished.

“Now, you are ready for the hunt, Captain,” he said. The jet-black panther-like creature snarled in reply as it was released from its bonds. The brawny beast crawled off the spell table and sniffed the air as if trying to find some unknown scent. Then it growled as if its quarry were nearby. The beast then raced off down the corridors seeking the forest for a particular light-skinned wizard.

