

V:TES STORYLINE

THE AFTERMATH

“We may deceive others but never ourselves. We must seek out the truth and then follow that truth regardless of the implications and regardless of the consequences. That is our way. That is the way of the Kiasyd.”

Anu Diptinatpa regarded Isanwayen in the dim light of the wine cellar. His thin body towered above her, with his alien and elongated head nearly reaching the thick wooden beams running beneath the low ceiling. Anu turned and began to examine the three corpses lying on the large table.

“And what is the truth then? Has father Caine abandoned us? Does the truth lead us towards seeking comfort in the arms of the Dark Mother? Do tell. The truth is not so easy to find. Where is it? I see sights and sounds. I hear beliefs, impressions, stories, tales, legends. Words are written. Words are read. Words are spoken. I can show you all of this. But what is truth? What happens to the Kiasyd when you don’t agree?”

“Debates, investigations, and disputes have gone on for ages. That will not happen now. This matter is too important. The question is too central to our identity. A decision will be rendered and all who dissent will be destroyed.” His voice was a raspy hiss.

“And you? Are you to be among the destroyers or the destroyed?”

“My search continues. That is why I have called for you. That is why I have collected these.” Isanwayen waved his hand over the bodies. “Once I have formed my own conclusion I will follow where it leads, regardless of the consequences.”

“Ah, yes.” Anu looked into the three unseeing eyes of the first corpse. “You must tell how you came to obtain them...”





"I will not. Are you some cheap fortune teller? Are you here to tell me what I want to hear in exchange for a few coins in your palm? You will tell me their stories."

Anu smiled at him and then turned her attention back to the first body. She reached down to a slit in her red skirt and produced an ornate steel scalpel.

"Very well then. Let's eat."



The long black car rolled along the dark gravel road, passing the endless tangled rows of huts, shanties, cinder-block shacks, and improvised dwellings. Dark, hungry eyes glared at the car as it rolled past. Groups of listless, idle men huddled around fires burning in steel drums, watching the car intently as it glided by.

The Salubri warrior sat in the back of the car and stared back at them. She scanned the shadows and dark corners watching for threats or unwelcome surprises. She glanced back at the other occupant of the backseat, Dmitra Ilyanova of the Brujah, former Justicar, and now a leader of the Bahari. The Salubri Antitribu could feel waves of anger emanating from her. This did not bode well for a meeting with the Prince of Hell.

Minutes later on the rooftop terrace the city lay spread out below them. On one side the slums stretched out. They could smell the filth, disease, and death wafting up from it. Shouts, screams, and the occasional pop of distant gunfire rang out in the night. In the other direction lay the markets, mansions, hotels, and skyscrapers. These were the visible indicators of money and power. This side of town reeked from its own kind of disease.

Ilyanova wasted no time before launching a verbal assault on their host, who sat, massive and passive, his vast bulk sprawled on a substantial throne.

"I want answers. How many have we converted? And where are they? On every corner of the earth we have rallied the bloodlines to our cause. Everywhere there are those prepared to swear allegiance to the Bahari and the Dark Mother. And what? What has become of them? Why do I hear so many reports of Kindred spurned or undermined? Compared to what we've done, the loyalists are nothing. But who has joined us? Why do I hear of deaths and disappearances? You will tell me what is going on."



Nergal, the Prince of Hell, laughed. It was a dry, wheezing, quiet laugh and entirely without mirth.

"My dear Dmitra. You have been a most apt pupil. You have done very well. But you must understand. There are those of us who have been pondering these matters and preparing for these nights for centuries. You have not. There is much that you do not yet understand. Foremost, you misunderstand our purpose. We are not trying to save the children of Caine. We are trying to test them."



"Why should the Dark Mother care for those who come to her thinking only of themselves? What of those who would call themselves Bahari, but come to us out of a sense of self-preservation or for personal power? What of those whose loyalties are divided? After all we have shown them, how can they be unsure? They are not worthy of us. When Lilith and her apostates walk among us, when the fallen have risen and come to claim this earth, only the chosen few will be permitted to walk among them."

"Only the most formidable and most cunning." Nergal nodded to the Salubri Antitribu. "Only those who have demonstrated the commitment and will. Only they will be permitted to call themselves Bahari. The rest will perish or be enslaved."

The Prince of Hell paused and held Dmitra's gaze. Her anger had abated only slightly. He continued.

"There is one more thing you should understand. There are a few of us who crawled from that pit so long ago. We few have spent thousands of years knowing that this time would come and prepared for it. There will be only one who has the honor of performing the ritual and opening the portal. That is an honor that we all prize and none of us will easily relinquish. We will let nothing stand in our way."

Anu inspected the second body. She ran her hand over his hard, bald head. Her fingers followed the scars where the flesh-sculptor had performed her work. She placed the scalpel over his right eye and opened a deep incision.

When the warlord came to their city, they were ready. They ambushed him and threw themselves against him, striking him with fists, feet, clubs, and pipes. They could not harm him and he beat them. He



smashed their arms and legs and skulls, and tossed their bodies into a broken pile.

Then the warlord fed them his blood. For three nights, the brothers, ravenous, damaged, and drained, greedily lapped up what they were offered. On the third night they came to accept him as their leader. They would follow him without question.

After a day's drive, hidden in the back of a van, they arrived at dusk at the city split by the wide river. They attacked. Throughout the night they followed the warlord through the city streets, down into the subway tunnels, and into the concrete apartment buildings. The warlord pursued his prey relentlessly and struck them down with terrifying speed, strength, and ferocity. He did not hesitate or show mercy. Kindred who had lived for centuries and participated in countless battles and schemes, had scant moments to experience their own annihilation.

The night's combat ended in an apartment. The haven's former owner lay in pieces in the living room. A siren blared in the distance as the kine made a belated and halting response to the violence that had wracked the city overnight. The warlord Karsh, Emperor of the Camarilla, ran water in the kitchen sink. He washed the blood, grime, and gore from his face, his arms, and his massive chest. He turned to the Blood Brother standing nearby.

"Which one are you again? Volo? You fought well tonight. Whatever happens now, remember that. You didn't run and hide. You didn't accept their gifts or fall for their lies. You fought."



A curious look crossed the weary face of the warlord as he stared at the silent Blood Brother.

"Truly, I do not know what will happen now. It feels like everything that is happening is happening according to their plan. Including my own rise to power. Does that surprise you? To hear that I too am compromised? It is true. Years ago, before all of this, my strength failed me. Rather than fail at my mission and let a demon roam free, I turned to those who understood the demons best, and asked them to contain it. I would not offer them my soul. I promised them my service instead. Now, I am bound by my pact and unable to move directly against their leaders."

"I can not stop them. But who will? Saulot's name is on everyone's lips. His unseen hand is behind much of what is happening. But, as ever, his plan and purpose eludes me. I don't know what game he plays. Shalmath leads the true sons of Brujah in this fight. His power is undeniable. But their numbers are so few. What can they accomplish?"

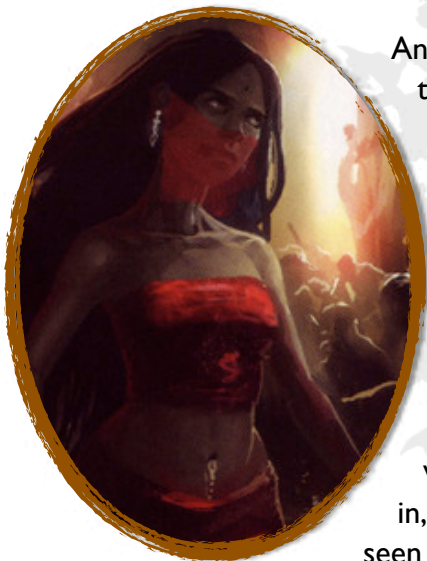


“This is my problem Volo. What use do I have for scholars and philosophers? Who needs Golconda and enlightenment seekers? I need soldiers. If I can’t find them in the Camarilla, I will just have to continue to look for them elsewhere.”

“One day, I will destroy these monsters. Insallah.”

“Quite a speech. I didn’t know the warlord had it in him. I wonder why he would deliver it to a Sabbat neonate of all things?” Anu said.

“Perhaps he had another audience in mind.”



Anu saw herself reflected in Isanwayen’s huge black eyes. She returned to the third body. She cut off his black jeans and t-shirt, revealing fresh tattoos on his chest and arms. These indicated a recent initiation into the Baali. She sliced open his chest and stomach. Then she reached up under his ribs, reaching for the heart.

First there was the pit, wide and black, and seemingly bottomless. Even when the bloodless and lifeless hulks of massive pachyderms were shoved in, their bodies sent tumbling to the blackness, their landing could not be seen or heard.

Above the pit rose the temple pyramid. Its hundreds of stone steps rising to a flat plateau. Eons ago those steps were worn down by constant use as animal and human sacrifices were hauled to the alter at the top. The temple had fallen into disuse, and was visited infrequently by the few who remained faithful. Recently, the temple had been restored to its original form, for its original purpose.

Around the pit were gathered the chosen few, the inner circle, the anointed high priests of the Bahari. Myrna Goldman and the Arcadian represented the Kiasyd. Their silver robes and pale blue skin gleamed in the moonlight. In a red robe stood Adonai, leader of the Salubri Antitribu. Sylvie Helgon was dressed in green. The scarred Ahrimane elder was, conspicuously, the only one of their kind in attendance. At the head of the circle, her white robes blackened by blood, was the high priestess Cybele. She stood at the edge of the pit, her silver dagger in hand, looking up the stone stairs to the top of the pyramid.



Outside the circle of five there was another ring. This was a larger crowd of faithful and followers, honored with the privilege of kneeling before the circle and being allowed to witness the events. The Bahari.

Beyond the rows of kneeling followers there was one more. He was alone in the darkness, seen by none. His presence was felt by all. He waited unseen and unnamed.

The ritual had started with the animals. The tale of Noah in reverse. A landing strip had been carved into the remote valley between the cold and rugged hills. The animals were delivered there, two of each of the creatures of Eden. All the beasts that had been named by Adam. Bears and alligators, rhinos and gazelles were led up the paths from the airstrip to the pit at the foot of the temple. The high priestess slit their throats and then sliced them open. She caught their blood in a silver bowl, from which she drank, and then passed it around the circle. The bodies were sent tumbling into the pit.

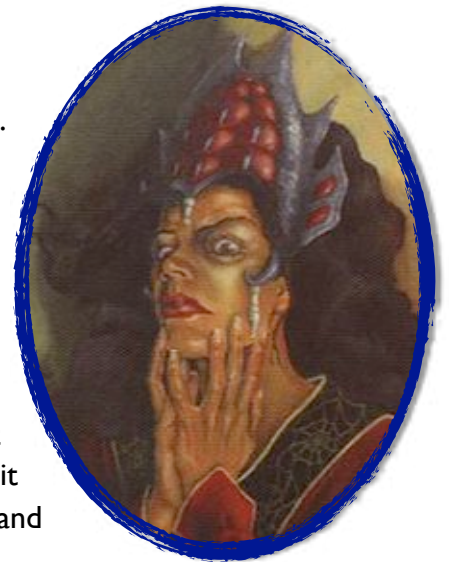
During this season, at this southern point, they would not see the sun. They worshiped under the moon and the red star. Night after night through the constant darkness that afflicted the days, the procession continued. More and more animals fell under the knife. The ground turned black with their blood.

After the animals came the kine. The sons of Seth. The daughters of Eve. Men and women, old and young. Some screamed and pleaded. Some seemed numb or resigned to their fate. All were killed, and drained, and sent into the darkness.

On the final night, under the full light of the moon, they brought forth the Kindred. The children of Cain. A child of the Mexico City circle flailed and fought against her chains, even as she tumbled through the air. A siren screamed with an intensity that hit those assembled like a series of explosions until she was silenced by the severing of her neck and vocal cords. A Lazarene glared at them all, his eyes bright, bulging from his skeletal face, silent and accusing for all of the eighteen minutes it took to open and exsanguinate him.

As the ritual culminated, a grey spiral formed in the clouds overhead. Slowly, it twisted into itself and began to extend down toward the top of the temple. A thick grey braid. A tornado moving in slow motion. It reached down from the sky. When it came to the top of the pyramid the strands split forming an arch. A portal.

As the portal opened, Cybele turned the knife on herself. She tore off her blood-saturated robe. She ran the dagger along her arms and cut deep wounds across her chest. She offered her blood to Lilith and it poured from her like thick tar, until she was empty, her face pale and shining in the moonlight.





The high priestess strode around the pit towards the base of the temple. As she moved something began to stir below her. A darkness, even more impenetrable, bubbled up from below. As Cybele reached the foot of the pyramid, a tentacle of pure shadow leapt from the pit and enveloped her, wrapping around her and lifting her from the ground.

The black tentacle held her there a moment and a stunned hush fell over the gathering. Closest in the circle stood the Arcadian. He approached the high priestess without haste or hesitation. He reached up and took the silver dagger from her entangled hand. Then the Arcadian plunged it into her heart.

Cybele screamed. Her cries were cut short as the arms of shadow dragged her down into the darkness.



A wave of confused alarm passed over the crowd. Should they strike him down? Would that disturb the ritual? Was all of this part of the ritual? The Arcadian faced them all. His grizzled face was without expression. Nobody moved. The Arcadian gave a small nod. Then they felt it. A wave of acknowledgement and approval passed over them. A signal from the unnamed.

The Bahari remained still. The Arcadian turned. Alone, he ascended the stairs towards the portal above.

The spectre hovering over the table of masticated corpses went silent.

Anu Diptinatpa called out to it. "Speak, you worthless thing. I command you! What lay beyond that portal? What happened then?"

"After that?" A cruel smile formed on its ghostly lips.

"The end."