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REMNANT

THE AFTERMATH BOOK ONE
WILLIAM ANTHONY SHEA

BAD DOG PUBLISHING

REMNANT
THE AFTERMATH BOOK ONE
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All characters and events in this book are fictional and any resemblance to actual places, events or persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

For Kara,
Because she got so excited to know that there was a character
in a story with her name, just before I changed the world...

CONTENTS

<i>Fatal Whispers</i>	11
<i>Prologue: Shadows</i>	13
<i>Harrowed</i>	23
<i>Part One: Retribution's Symphony</i>	25
Chapter One: Overtures in Delusion	26
Chapter Two: Accepting Fate	37
Chapter Three: Shades of Lament	47
Chapter Four: Melancholy Dream	57
Chapter Five: Bonds of Love	69
Chapter Six: Fatal Chord	79
<i>Being Dead</i>	89
<i>Part Two: Debts of Discontent</i>	91
Chapter Seven: Andrew's Folly	92
Chapter Eight: Pawns that Break in the Night	103
Chapter Nine: Paying in Blood	113
Chapter Ten: Mortal Inclination	121
Chapter Eleven: A Hunter's Mind	131
<i>Splinters</i>	141
<i>Part Three: And They All Fall Down</i>	143
Chapter Twelve: <i>Brethren</i>	144
Chapter Thirteen: Denial of Hope	155
Chapter Fourteen: Fear of the Night	165
Chapter Fifteen: Reaching Futility	175
Chapter Sixteen: Broken	185
<i>Wicked with Spite</i>	197
<i>Finale: Not All Angels are Good</i>	199
<i>Impasse</i>	215

What Has Come Before...

Even the Dead have Honour (from Return to a Darkling Pool)

James Bourne, the foremost influential *Inquisitor* of the *Brethren* is sent to Londinium to investigate a breach of *Doctrine* within this vampiric society. Jarod Larotte wrote a manuscript revealing some of the darkest secrets of the *Brethren*. However, all is not as it seems, as Larotte proves to be nothing more than a pawn used to lure James into a snare that could yet have deadly consequences.

The Last Dance (from Beyond a Darkling Pool)

James Bourne has come to Madres in Spania as *Inquisitor* to investigate a breach in *Doctrine*. However, this time he has to contend with his first and only *childe*, Kara Reiss, and how vulnerable she makes him. James is in love with Kara, but he must stay focused on his duty to the *Brethren* and *Doctrine*, and play out a game with the undead of Spania that may yet see him and his progeny undone.

Nightmare

A nightmare begins when innocence is lost. Following an age in darkness and blood, history is doomed to repeat itself as misery invites company. What begins with a vampire fallen to the decay of a melancholy dream, leads to tragedy and loss, and ultimately acceptance. Helena, a child on the verge of becoming a woman hunts her own kind long after revenge has lost its meaning. She walks the ages in the guise of angelic death clinging to the feelings that hold back the bare threads of the nightmare, but also force her to accept the consequences of all that she has become in the long night...

Vampire

Helena stands alone and unable to accept the companionship of her adopted *childe*, Emily, but yet compelled to impose

her will to teach the fledgling vampire obedience as well as the deadly consequences of defiance.

Meanwhile James is embroiled in a dangerous game that may have far reaching implications for *Brethren* and mortal societies, a gamble that is not readily apparent to those who follow him into the intrigues of the long night.

In the end, both James and Helena follow a fate that has been intertwined by the blood since the moment of their rebirth into darkness. Helena must make a choice. One that James had already accepted as inevitable...

Fallen

The *Brethren* cannot continue if a mortal society is to be free to find its way. James has long realised this to be true but the vampire hierarchy are resistant to change. They will not willingly surrender control to a living world. All the pieces are falling in place as James enlists Helena's aid in countering *Brethren* dominance over mortal and immortal societies. Kara Reiss too has a part to play. The gamble is as daring as it is mad, but the time of reckoning is fast approaching.

Helena has her own distractions to contend with when a nightmare offers revelations that shake the very foundation of all that she believes. She looks to James to help her make sense of an impossible truth.

The hierarchy is not yet done as those who seek to counter James in his ambitions move against him. The game that is being played is not the one the *Brethren* think, but who will fall and who will endure in the long night...

And now... the Aftermath!

FATAL WHISPERS

Sighs of deliberate discontent,
Sowing seeds of doubt,
A heart stirs to bitter lament,
When the mind begins to shout,
Beware betrayer,
Beware friend,
Beware of all you hear,
Within the simplest whisper,
Resides a fatal fear,
All the shadows close around,
Till foe and friend obscure,
Truth has fallen to deceit,
Before an open door,
And if you step,
And if you pass,
A threshold through this spite,
In last relief you take a breath,
To feel the sharpest knife...

PROLOGUE:
SHADOWS

The Recent Past...

Even in the absence of light, there are shadows. They exist and you know they are there. Denying their existence does not make it untrue. They will always be there. The long night never ends and the darkness can touch a soul deeply when an existence is stretched throughout an age that defies a mortal finality. *Life is fleeting*. Even a prolonged existence can prove to be finite, as a result of exterior influences or by just giving up when faced with deleterious occurrences that seem just as relentless in crushing a will to live, or exist. A belief that something is wrong, like the shadows hidden on the periphery of reason, can often be enough to provoke a need to know the truth. It can also signal an erosion of mental fortitude. The mind looks to reason away the things that cannot be explained when the memory is uncertain or flawed, but denying the truth does not make it false. *Brethren* society was born in the darker recesses of moral and mortal decay. They, like a mortal societal counterpart, were interwoven into history, the proverbial shadows behind humanity, pulling on strings that shaped ages of dominance and moral impropriety. Like those tangible shadows, the ones that existed while in the sleep of the dead and plagued the mind were all the more distressing for one simple fact that was becoming less and less reliable – a vampire did not dream and had to depend more and more on memory. Reason denied imagination, even in the face of a grim reality. Any inclination towards seeing something other than that which was fuelled by the blood was all at once unsettling. If it persisted, it could grow and fester until the discontent tasked the mind to prolonged moments of anguish. Ultimately a fixation could lead to touch the tendrils of madness that opened a morbid door marking a fall into an all-consuming melancholy – something in turn that would drive one to the depths of despair, the mind's reaction to a need to dream. In the end only utter insanity would remain to plague the conscious mind. In the case of Lazarus, the images which forced him to a waking

recollection of what could only be considered a nightmare served to shake the very foundations of any belief he had in absolutes with regards to the mental awareness of his mind while in the sleep of the dead. He was inclined to think too much when reason failed to provide an answer. However, this particular recurring nightmare worried him. His fear seeped into reality. He did not want to become that which he most despised – a creature of instinct lost in the mire of a melancholy dream, unable to distinguish the difference between wakefulness and the sleep of a vampire. The thought made his heart tremor with alarm and played to further thoughts of his physical and mental decay. He remembered the creatures of his now dead Castellan, Nicolas Aldar – those that lived in the depths under his *sire's* home. They were true fiends – devoid of reason, driven by instinct alone, and kept at bay by a master who had but a fragile hold on his sanity. Lazarus had grown to fear the night and the solitude when his mind ruminated on something he knew to be false.

'There will be no forgiveness for you...'

Lazarus felt his lips move but the words seemed... forced.

'I will burn your garden and all that you have achieved to the ground...'

No! Lazarus did not – he would not have committed such an act. He wanted to wake up now, but the impossible dream held him, leaving him uncertain as to the state of his consciousness. He saw Xavier. The memory was in contrast, clear and obscured. Nicolas's *sire* was afraid. Xavier's mind was exposed to the horror of his doom. Yet, he did not attempt to retaliate. He just emulated a resigned sigh and gave himself to his fate. *Surrender. Why didn't he retaliate?* Lazarus held him and... fed long, offering the age old vampire no quarter and no relief. *Why would he do such a thing?* He bore Xavier no ill will. In fact, Nicolas's *sire* had always treated him kindly, perhaps not with open friendship, but he had not proven dismissive as he had been with others among the *Brethren*. Xavier acknowledged the existence of

Lazarus, with a nod, a greeting, and even tolerance that became endearing over time. Xavier had been destroyed. He had been subjected to mediocrity and a callous fate. In the end, as Xavier's body began to decay, wisps of torment that turned to ashes in the wind, the fragrance of the garden filled Lazarus's nostrils. The sweet scent was too much. Then it changed. It seemed tainted by the essence of a vintage that soured more with each passing moment. Regret lingered with misery. An aching longing spoiled the wisps marking a futile end to a long night that would amount to nothing but pity. Xavier Farielle Novus dissipated on a light breeze, rising like a cloud above his glorious garden as the rain began to fall. Lazarus had ended his existence. He had defied *Doctrine* and... brought about the downfall of the *Brethren*. He had begun to unravel an aching hurt of his own, one that had manifested as a mounting lunacy, false impressions that sent sharp stabs of pain deep into his skull until they tore at the vestiges of his increasingly fragile mind and begged to be free. *Truth*. It was just a dream, a nightmare left over from a victim he had been careless in choosing. Xavier Farielle Novus was gone. Nicolas Aldar was gone. Lazarus had murdered Augustus Decimus. The *Brethren* had fallen. *A vampire did not dream in the sleep of the dead. Xavier cried out. Nicolas screamed at him. Gus offered only a sad resignation.* Why the latter joined in condemning Lazarus, the tormented vampire did not know. Guilt was a strange and unsettling bedfellow. Lazarus wept under the weight of their recriminations as each thought conjured another apparition to fuel a deeper condemnation – ghostly afterimages that always culminated with the forlorn face of Xavier.

'I will take your blood and all that you are...'

What had he done? The image held him. Again, Xavier dissipated on a light breeze, rising like a cloud above his glorious garden as the rain began to fall. Lazarus watched his awful empty demise... his surrender. The images played over and over again in a nightmare that did not want to let go.

Lazarus fought against the truth. He fought against... the lie – mirrored in the wisps of decay and torment that turned to ashes... the taint too strong to fade, but yet it did.

Lazarus woke screaming – a terrible endorsement of his previous state of wakefulness. The sensation was as unsettling as it was impossible. He had not experienced such a feeling in a very long time, and then, he had been alive – a frail, weak parody of a human being who aspired to the impossible – one who would never have realised the deceptive aspirations of a mind that remained locked in a shell of mortal insignificance. He had become a vampire. More, he had become *Brethren*. Even now, the distinction was significant in the aftermath of all that had happened. Lazarus's distress was not imagined. His screams were real. The images that drove him to this singularly uncharacteristic outburst were not something he remembered ever having occurred in his own existence, or in any from whom he took blood, and yet, they had the enduring aspect of the most vivid memory – a haunting recollection of some deeply disturbing failure. *A vampire did not dream!*

Lazarus had destroyed Xavier Farielle Novus. He had taken the blood of Nicolas Aldar's *sire* in the gardens of his home. He had done so with a callous disregard for the *Primarch's* position within the *Brethren*, and in defiance of his own *sire's* wishes to take Xavier's blood himself when the time was right. *Betrayer!* He had offered no quarter and no solace in the embrace. His cruelty had been staggering, but too obvious. *This was wrong!* Lazarus had not done such a thing. He had not aspired to ambitions marked with such reckless abandon. His plots and manoeuvres were subtle and patient. He was not hasty in his motivations. Still, the thoughts consumed him. They indicted him for a lapse in judgement and mental awareness that fuelled his fear.

Lazarus could not accept the reasoning of a mind locked in the throes of confusion. He had gone to Xavier's home but he did not harm the elder vampire. He had not even thought

of such a thing. Xavier's death served no purpose. His influence had been waning for a very long time. Nicolas would have put Lazarus down if he had dared to desire such an outcome, let alone to have committed such an act. This was very wrong. Nicolas had attacked him... for reasons that Lazarus became uncertain about when once he had been sure.

A dull ache throbbled in Lazarus's head. Soon it sharpened to a level of discomfort that made the vampire question his sanity in wakefulness, as he had done in the realisation of a nightmare. He had not harmed Xavier. He was sure. *If he had not done such a thing, then who did?* Worse, who had given him such a nightmare to endure? *And why?* If he had not been culpable in the act, and had been unaware of the circumstances, there could be no other explanation. The memories did not belong to him. Lazarus initially deliberated more on the 'why' rather than the 'how' – but he could not dismiss how this had been done. His mind worked to grasp at the truth. *Helena?* The pain cut deep into his skull and Lazarus fell to his knees. *She... fed long and offered the age old vampire no quarter and no relief.* Helena had destroyed Xavier!

Lazarus could barely contain the revelation once it seeped from the inner agonies of his mind, pushing passed unbearable pains that drove him to the floor. He turned on his back and thrashed against the searing cut of an imagined blade which penetrated and drove a relentless hurt into his skull to traverse an uncertain path down his left temple, circling his ear, jutting across his nose until it traced the line of his jaw and, in turn, ignited his teeth to individual miseries that cried at him to relent against this madness and accept the lie lest his sufferings drag him into something from which there would be no coming back.

Who had done this to him? James! The former Castellan of Bostonia was behind this violation. Xavier's face came to the fore. It tormented Lazarus. The pain was excruciating.

Lazarus screamed again and again. He sobbed in the

embrace of a weakness that would have set his mortal countenance to shame in a time that he long denied.

Where was Edwin? Why had he not come? Surely he would have heard the sounds of his *sire's* distress. Lazarus could barely think passed the pain. He was forced to replay that which he knew could not be true. The image of Xavier being destroyed filled his mind and consumed his thoughts. James was behind the violation but someone else had done this to him. Lazarus could almost reach through the confusion to tear back the curtain keeping him from the truth.

'Focus.' A voice whispered in his mind. Lazarus saw the face of Edwin. No, he had not even been *sired* then and he was gone now. Still, a face pushed against the memory. Xavier's haggard and defeated visage swallowed that of Edwin's. Lazarus sobbed pitifully. Helena had killed Xavier. He had... reached out against a lie and... killed Edwin, lost in the throes of a nightmare that had now cost him another vassal. Edwin's pale, boyish features and closely cropped hair, his perfectly round nose, the endearing twinkle in his eyes when he smiled – all gone. The horrible sound of rending flesh reverberated in Lazarus's mind, an echo of a terrible moment of unbridled anguish as Edwin came to offer solace to his *sire* and found only fury and madness. He had fought in desperation to survive and failed. Lazarus looked to his hands and saw the faint traces of blood around the nails of his fingers where they had cut into Edwin's back as he had held him in an embrace of insanity. Lazarus had drained him completely and cast him aside, the vintage too young to accede to the same fate that had taken Xavier. Lazarus had denied Edwin a gentle end. He had been as brutal and remorseless as Helena had been with Xavier. He had been driven by a deeper borrowed emotion. *Callous.* His mind, and now his heart, was in turmoil. He had killed Edwin while locked in the deception of madness, a deep hurt that had been inflicted on him by an antagonist he struggled to identify. In the end, the revelation seemed so obvious.

‘*Focus!*’ The voice whispered in his mind again – another violation to endure from a faceless shadow, but it forced clarity into the past transgression.

Drake! Morgan Drake! The name came to his mind unbidden. It pushed through his despair, his agony, and his confusion. The pain cut through his skull again and again, each hurt now fading as he fought to untangle the lie. His physical tolerance had almost reached its limit. Morgan Drake had done this to him. He had made Lazarus culpable in the demise of Xavier. Nicolas had attacked him, not because he became aware of any collusion between his *childe* and James Bourne, but when he perceived the deeper falsehood – the destruction of Xavier. He saw only his *childe’s* betrayal of the blood bond between them. The *Brethren* had fallen. *James!* Drake had nothing to gain. Helena did not act on her own accord. She had been motivated only to rescue Agnes. It could only have been James. His desire to see a mortal world free from the dominance of the *Brethren* had become plain in the aftermath of Nicolas’s fall. He had lost Kara Reiss. It had not been enough of a punishment for his daring. The whispers withdrew and Lazarus felt so empty and betrayed. He became aware of the briskness in the air and a fleeting shadow lifting from his mind.

Lazarus climbed to his feet. The pain had retreated to nothing more than a dull ache now. Lazarus was tearing away the last pieces of a puzzle that had been placed in his mind. He was not going mad. He was not falling to a melancholy dream, or the madness of a prolonged existence. He was not dreaming. This revelation gave him some consolation in the aftermath of an ordeal that had continued for far too long.

Lazarus remained transfixed, soaking up his thoughts and tearing away the remains of a lie that fuelled deeper uncertainties. He had let James destroy Nicolas and walk away because he believed that the former Castellan of Bostonia had suffered a loss that paid some measure of an

account for his betrayal of the *Brethren*. Nicolas had destroyed Kara Reiss. *Was that also a lie? Had Lazarus been so utterly deceived?*

Time would reveal all. For now, Lazarus needed blood. He needed to rest and recover. He needed time to think. Everything was deception. James had played him. He had played them all. The *Brethren* had fallen, but they were not gone. Those who survived had merely retreated into the shadows. They would rise again – if only to hold those who had destroyed their society to account for a betrayal that required answers.

The loss of Edwin had been a pity. He had been intuitive to his *sire's* needs, attentive, organised and he would be missed. If he had been the *childe* of Nicolas Aldar, Edwin would barely have been worthy of a ripple of notice in the aftermath of his unfortunate demise. Like Nicolas, when it came to attachments, Lazarus did not adore Edwin. He was fond of the fledgling vampire, but if truth be told, Edwin was a convenience, a dalliance that served a purpose. He had provoked something in Lazarus that had hitherto remained dormant – a desire that was indulgent. He had been a pleasant distraction and a capable companion. Lazarus had an overwhelming need for the verity of his thoughts now. In time, Edwin could be replaced.

Lazarus chose to focus on those who had perpetrated this callous infraction on his psyche. While he would certainly make *Brethren* interests aware of some necessary facts and use the resources of a fractured society that now existed in the shadows, he was not without his own means to pursue a modicum of payment that would inflict an equal measure of anguish, beginning with the one thing that James valued most – Kara Reiss. If she had not fallen with the *Brethren*, then that was the least he could do. There had been no love between him and Nicolas Aldar. It was not in his *sire's* nature to endure an emotional connection. Such human considerations made him feel inferior and weak, and Nicolas

had enough shortcomings without giving into those he could not control. He had not loved Lazarus. He had tolerated him for his efficiency. Still, given the circumstances of his *sire's* fall and James's escape, Lazarus felt an obligation to set matters right. He had not thought about James or Kara Reiss in decades. He had been busy with other matters. Time moved in circles if left to fester. Lazarus would find James. If Kara Reiss did survive, he would be forced to kill them both.

The shadow moved away. Lazarus had been suitably motivated to pursue James. It was easy to reach into a mind that had already been cultivated to suggestion. Michael had many questions but few answers. In time, he would know everything that had occurred. His sire was lost, but those responsible would be held to account; James – Kara – Drake – Helena. Lazarus was a pawn. His forfeiture was necessary. Michael withdrew from the haven of Nicolas Aldar's childe of the blood. The night had fallen on the Brethren, but the offense would not go unanswered.

ALSO FROM BAD DOG PUBLISHING

By William Anthony Shea

TALES FROM A DARKLING POOL

(Author's Preferred Text)

RETURN TO A DARKLING POOL

A DARKLING POOL AGAIN

BEYOND A DARKLING POOL

RIPPLES FROM A DARKLING POOL

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SAGA OF THE SENTENIAL:

BOOK ONE: CAULDRON OF TROUBLE

BOOK TWO: FOR THE LAND THAT FELL

BOOK THREE: THE HOUSE OF SILMARIN

*

THE BRETHERN TRILOGY

NIGHTMARE

VAMPIRE

FALLEN

*

THE AFTERMATH TRILOGY

REMNANT

DAWN – NYR#

RISEN – NYR#

*

KNIGHTSHADE RPG:

KST01: THE INITIATE'S TOME

KST02: THE GRANDMASTER'S TOME

KST03: THE LOREMASTER'S TOME – NYR#

KST04: THE QUESTMASTER'S TOME – NYR#

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FUMBLING VOLUME ONE

FUMBLING VOLUME TWO

FUMBLING VOLUME THREE – NYR#

#NYR = Not Yet Released.

By Michael D O'Mahony & William Anthony Shea

GNARL & OTHER STORIES

By L Shea

IMMORAL DAWN

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DE CORK BOIs

DE CORK BOIs TOO – NYR#

*

DEAD TO ME (De Many Deaths of Michaleen)

DEAD TO ME TOO (De Many Deaths of D'Others) – NYR#

*

DE WORLD ACCORDING TO DEREK

Book One: Feck Off Now! – NYR#

*NYR = Not Yet Released.

An old danger returns from a past that was thought to be ash on the wind, seeking answers from those who brought about the fall of the *Brethren*.

Aaron must draw out the last of a vampire society that now exists only in the shadows of a mortal world. Helena faces a darker future, but whether she must do so alone is a choice she is not yet willing to make.

The long night is never done, even for those who have passed to a final death. Memories linger in the blood. Remnants of a *Brethren* society cling to the past and seek retribution against those who brought about its fall.