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BRETHREN

BRETHREN BOOK ONE
WILLIAM ANTHONY SHEA

BAD DOG PUBLISHING

BRETHREN
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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.

Dedicated to
My mother, Helen,
who gave so much, asked for little,
and fought to her last breath...

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PREDATOR

You do not know me,
I am not you,
I wait to sate,
A hunger true,
I will not stop,
Relent or grieve,
You are my prey,
I need to feed,
You cannot run,
You cannot hide,
Your heart fuels,
A fear inside,
I lurk in anticipation of the kill,
To take your blood and soothe my will,
And when I'm done,
And life is spent,
I will retreat but not relent,
Return again to feed desire,
And never stop,
And never tire...

PROLOGUE:
NIGHT OVER DAY

1842, Salem Massachusetts, The Americas

Death mirrored a living world almost too closely, but only because those who existed in the night had once been human and knew no better. Helena had never known such love in a mortal world when she lived on the verge of poverty and exclusion. Perhaps she had been too young, but that was a lie. She had become a burden on her parents, one that her mother kept from being surrendered to a man who would have used her poorly, filled her belly with children, and soaked up her dreams. Many girls, far younger than Helena, had been married throughout the region. Her mother had loved her. She had tried to protect her daughter from the disappointments of a past that she knew only too well. In the end, she would have surrendered Helena to her fate. Her father had tolerated her. He had no compunctions about using his daughter to achieve some end or discarding her to remove a burden from his already troubled home. Her brother, Jacques, had been fond of his sister, but not enough to keep her from harm. His love had been eroded over time and replaced with an unbridled bitterness. His failing support had waned further as food became scarce. Being anywhere other than under the yoke of Pierre Mobius seemed preferable to Jacques, but he was trapped by circumstances. He knew that if Helena stayed in a deteriorating home, she would die in obscurity. Any sliver of joy would be snuffed out under crippling hunger, acrimony and spite. If she was given over to a man for the sake of staving off that burden, there would have been no escape. Helena would have become almost less than property under the rules and laws of men, used, abused, and forgotten. If she had survived under such repression, the years would not have been kind. Jacques had forgotten how to care as his despondency ate away at any sense of moral obligation to a family that only fuelled his nurtured contempt. Helena had seen the toils of life break her mother. She had watched as sadness gave way to an awful resignation that consumed every waking moment. Helena had begun to feel the weight of hopelessness, motivated to denial only because of her youth.

Agnes too had suffered in life. She had been a victim in a truer sense. She had been used and abused without pretension towards acceptable excuses. She had been younger still when offered up to those who did not care to prolong possession of her body in fear of drawing attention to the wrongness of her subjugation. There had been no protection provided by a family who turned away in the face of misguided piety, ignorance, and shame. There were other motivations. Such monstrous failings in character on the part of her parents and siblings had not all been consigned to moral weakness, each had profited from Agnes's downfall. The church supported an upbringing in servitude to a creed that was tailored and twisted to mortal advantage. Baser instincts won out in the absence of outrage. In time, greed too played a part, and innocence suffered.

Leaving the past behind was not easier in the wake of becoming a vampire, but there were advantages to being a predator and not a victim. Helena had been quicker to this realisation after her transition to the night than Agnes. There was a fundamental difference between their pasts – Helena had not yet become a victim.

The night had welcomed the two lovers without judgement, but the living world still pressed its moral outrage and bigotry on their unnatural relationship. They were perceived as something wrong by a few unwitting observers whispering callous dissent. Unlike in the past in mortal life, Helena was not afraid. They were not weak young girls exposed to the whims of deviants and cowards. Anyone motivated towards countering their existence could not do so alone, and the fault of any indiscretion would not be easy to prove. Others could be dissuaded by threats or money. There was less cause to fear the living. Those who dwelled in the night were another matter, but again, Helena had thus far proven equal to any menace. Agnes took longer to conclude that there was less that could harm her in a world that no longer mattered to them both – a society that did not care. Therein resided the delusion of the matter – they were vulnerable to harm, even as *undead* creatures embracing

the night. The parity of their relationship could not cling to the same meaning in death as it would in a living world. In the absence of true fear, they still required careful attention to very real mortal influences.

Years had turned to decades of worrying contentment for Agnes. The change had softened her appearance, but it had not completely eradicated hints of disdain, worry, and anguish trapped in perpetuity from a past that could no longer be denied. Truth had been liberating, but it had also fuelled an undercurrent of doubt that wanted to avoid risk. She did not rest in the shadows any easier than she had in the light. Her angelic *sire* offered diligence in the face of any threat, perceived or otherwise, but she could be given over to moments of recklessness that gnawed at Agnes. They were stronger than mortals, faster, and more durable. Still, time was one of the single-most concerns, and it could not be left to chance. They did not age and that noticeable longevity was both a blessing and a curse. Helena and Agnes had moved within the territory several times, never daring to venture too far from the familiar for fear that expectations might alter their need for caution in facing the unknown. They required some semblance of societal awareness without recourse to an upset that might see them scrutinised too closely. The former nun had proven adept at altering their identities, and only once had they returned to the dockland area that had been their home for much of the early years of their stay in Salem. The region had expanded greatly. This, in no small part, made their obscurity easier. Mortals were busy living their short lives to be concerned with those who existed in the night. There were so many other fears to concern them. Life was hard, wearing, and finite. Existing on the periphery of death had its advantages, but it could not become complacent. There were moments when someone took notice, but Agnes was quick to divert attention or instigate moving to another location, and finding ways to sway others to the belief that they had been mistaken in any perceived summation. Curiosity was dissuaded and jealously guarded

against when a mortal took too much of an interest in Helena. Agnes was not blind to the truth. She was seldom the object of notice. Her *sire* radiated an eminence that could not be wholly concealed. She was rash, beautiful, and a force of unnatural allure that danced in the face of mortal desire. Agnes kept them safe, but Helena played her part. She could turn seamlessly from light to darkness without pausing to consider the consequences. Agnes was able to direct Helena's ire when needed and curtail such overtures when the situation warranted a more subtle approach. Problems arose only when Agnes lost focus and her *sire* failed to notice.

The night was rife with pitfalls. Helena had ensured their survival by refraining from killing mortals indiscriminately, even when some were deserving of that fate. There were other ways to punish crimes, reserving death as a solution for the most heinous corruptions. Together, she and Agnes hunted those existing in the night who shared their requirements of the blood, but only true fiends who practised less consideration with regards to the most vulnerable in mortal society. Truthfully, they had not found many vampires in the intervening decades, but neither had they sought out such creatures. Helena was inclined to greater caution in that regard. Whatever she had gleaned from the past only added to her restraint. This was a dangerous world, and it had become more so as mortals eagerly flocked to expanding habitats in the vain hope of a better future. Unexplained deaths occurred all the time, and most could be attributed to some misdeed, illness, or the perils of despondency in an age when life was fleeting or expended cheaply. Agnes was less forgiving with those who preyed on innocence, but she sometimes proffered underlying cruelty that was not reserved for the wicked alone. Helena too favoured a fatal resolution when a particular deviant could not be encouraged to change, or the laws of mortals did not have the where-withal to address such boorish and disagreeable crimes, but there were limits to her outrage. Prolonging the agony of a fiend for the sake of a victim did not seem wholly right. There

were always exceptions, but the lines that Agnes crossed could sometimes seem muddled. Helena required clarity of purpose, lest she too succumbed to being that which they most despised.

Agnes took to the task of uncovering the worst of these deviants with all the aplomb of an avenging angel. However, to Helena's disdain, she often attempted to practice absolution only after forcing the most awful miscreants to admit their crimes by mitigating her sense of justice with a cold and calculated application of pain and fear. This compounded the risk of existing in a mortal world while skirting the night, knowing that the day could well see them undone no matter what precautions were taken to ensure their safety. Torture was not always reliable in uncovering the truth. Some of Agnes's conclusions seemed dangerously dubious.

Helena had become even more concerned of late when she came upon one individual who had been watching her for some weeks. He bore the mark of the *Templar Order* and expended his life willingly to keep her from learning the verity of his interest. He was a true zealot. She became conscious that there were others out there who knew what she and Agnes were, but the former nun was inclined to view the occurrence as a happenstance. Helena's past told her otherwise. The *Order of the Temple* did not move into a territory without purpose. They could not be flippantly disregarded because mortal history told a very different tale as to the endurance of such societies. Helena had known little of what the word '*Templar*' meant before facing the full rebuke of their misguided retribution. Knowing dangers existed out there that in turn recognised the reality of a vampire's actuality did not let Helena rest easy.

The man had killed himself rather than being captured. He had committed a mortal sin in defiance of the God he had sworn allegiance to, rendering his soul damned under the commandments of his faith to protect a greater truth. Helena had cause to wonder what would motivate such a man to end his life rather than give up a secret. Agnes too was persuaded that this merited a greater consideration, but time did not

permit them an opportunity to uncover the veracity of a deeper plot. They could not linger when the possibility of discovery held graver consequences.

The former nun took solace in her *sire's* inclination towards a greater caution, but as the days turned to weeks, to months, and years, the absence of any further evidence waned in the face of other concerns. They should not have let their guard down.

Agnes had been alone when the men attacked her. She had been distracted. The night was never a place to venture out in unescorted, but the former nun required moments of solitude. As with a living relationship, she and Helena needed time apart. The convenience of the opportunity in finding her alone had not been lost on Agnes. She had cause to wonder just how long these miscreants had been watching. However, in the realisation of this revelation, Agnes felt her heart lurch to the thought that Helena too might be in trouble. Any hint of fear turned to anger as concern for her *sire* overwhelmed reason.

The men were armed with long curved blades, blackened with soot to conceal the gleam of the curious daggers. Their clothing was carefully tailored against noise, each possibility of alerting Agnes to their sly advance buffered with ties of dark cloth. They were masked with coarse scarves of black fabric fashioned in snood face coverings that concealed the neck, mouth and nose, leaving a narrow opening around the eyes between this accessory and the hoods that covered the remainder of their heads. These were not men intent on robbery. There was some other purpose at work here.

For all of their bravado, Agnes was not a willing victim, and the men had been lax in any understanding of the prey they sought to murder or contain. She tore open the throat of the first of her attackers before he could take a step to counter any perceived defence on the part of his victim. The man dropped his blade and clutched the wound but did not have long to worry about the extent of the injury. The savagery of the retort was fatal. He choked on the blood pouring from the awful tear

and fell face down in the uncaring mud of this wayward alley. Before the others could react, Agnes had twisted the head of her second attacker to an angle that filled the awful silence with cracks of distress that left little doubt as to the conclusion. The man did not have even a moment to utter a cry before his life was lost. *Panic ensued*. The remaining two attackers turned and fled, realising the futility of pushing their ambitions. Agnes was not a weak woman to be preyed upon. If they had any understanding of the nature of a vampire, its application had been hopelessly inadequate. She was fury and hell incarnate unleashed in a moment of unbridled madness. There was no hope of containing her, let alone realising a greater ambition.

Agnes moved to pursue but halted in her tracks. *Helena*. If they had come for her, they could have also moved against her *sire*. Agnes turned on her heel and ran, the beat of her heart rising to the anguish of desperation. The bodies of two of the attackers remained a testament to some awful misdeed, but the nature of the injuries would also invite unwanted attention. Agnes had no time to cover her tracks. She raced to save her *sire*, knowing it might already be too late.

1867, Bostonia, Massachusetts, The Americas

Moments apart carried a weight that could sometimes seem unbearable. Agnes was tormented by thoughts of Helena when the night yielded nothing to alleviate her tedium. The fact that she was now being watched by those the former nun would have gladly sent to their *final deaths* only added to her disposition. She had too long to dwell on things that could not be changed in the interim. The past returned to haunt her. She had been remiss in keeping her *sire* safe and took no solace in the fact that Helena had been equal to the task in her stead.

Agnes had a part to play. Any misgivings from her past had to be left behind and suppressed under a feigned insecure façade if she was to be that which was required. Helena had taken a more forthright approach, but the gamble was just as dangerous. Stepping into the vipers nest was never going to be

a strategy of which the former nun approved. They had faced threats before, but this was by far the most perilous. They would not be together. Separation fed tremors of anxiety. Helena wanted to learn something from the *Brethren* before consigning this vampiric society to its fate. The urge had proven greater than any protest Agnes could conjure up in disagreement. The underlying truth that Helena's curiosity motivated her interests remained unspoken. They had watched and they had listened. Helena needed more. Now, they were objects of scrutiny, thrust into the open to draw out those who had been just as adept in remaining obscure. Agnes closed her mind to such deliberations and adopted a countenance of fretfulness as she stepped out into the night, knowing the eyes that watched her every moment could very soon be motivated to reprisal for any perceived breach of territory. She had to become what others saw her to be – a weaker, vulnerable parody of herself, but with a sliver of worth that could be encouraged to follow the folly of those who stood above vampires of a lesser rank and age.

Agnes had sensed the man closing the distance behind her long before he stepped out of the shadows. She resisted the urge to counter his approach and his attack. When he grabbed her from behind, she let out a very real shudder, but the emulated fear had not been real, not until he sunk his fangs into her neck and the iron grip of his strong arms became apparent. He was not intent on being gentle, but as the swoon of ecstasy touched her mind, it was all that the former nun could do to resist lest she fall to the embrace. Her attacker was not stirred to learn anything from her. He was a blunt instrument to capture and contain – nothing more.

‘No, Brutus!’ shouted a voice in stern condemnation. ‘Hold her, but do not feed!’ demanded the voice.

The vampire suckling on Agnes stopped, but he did not withdraw.

‘Plea... please, let me go,’ pleaded Agnes. ‘You... you’re hurting me,’ she added with a sob for effect.

‘No, Brutus!’ shouted the voice as it reached the pitch of a screech with very real alarm.

Agnes’s captor withdrew his fangs. The odour emanating from an emulated belch assailed the former nun and she wrinkled her nose in distaste at this vulgar exchange.

‘Manners,’ scolded the voice from the vampire that Agnes could not see. His momentary distress had eased the nasal pitch of his voice as her captor complied with the frantic command.

Brutus held her firm, his strength undeniable if she was to appear less capable.

Agnes cast a wayward glance towards her captor. She caught sight of his size. He was a tall heavysset man. She saw his red hair and wild wide-eyed stare, the dull glare denied by the snarl of derision contorting his face in menacing anger. Brutus shook her and forced the former nun to look away. The second man was not in her line of sight.

‘Let her go, Brutus. I don’t think she is going to run,’ the man stated, letting out a sigh that may have been to show his disappointment at his companion, or something else.

Brutus relaxed his grip but he did not release Agnes.

‘You are not going to run, are you my dear?’ enquired the man, stepping into view.

He was a good deal shorter than the brute that held Agnes. His youth was hard to conceal. The paleness of his skin was matched only by the whiteness of his teeth, perfectly formed in a mouth that proffered full red lips and an incessant need to smile. His blue eyes were lively and never wavered in taking in every detail of Agnes’s worried expression. His face was lovely for its youth, but not attractive in a way that otherwise invited attention. His dark hair hung to the shoulder, and his grooming was above reproach. His companion did not court the same impression, but Agnes was not inclined to turn her attention to the larger man.

‘No,’ she whispered sheepishly while massaging the hurt from her arms. Agnes kept her eyes low in submission. She had no intention of running. Doing so would only defeat the risk

Helena was taking in facing these vampires.

The smaller man reached out and elevated Agnes's chin, forcing her to lift her eyes to meet his disarming smile.

'Good. Now, I think we had better vacate this area and take you to Primarch Termini. I am sure he will want to greet you personally.'

Brutus let out a growl. He did not seem to agree.

'Neville told us to keep other vampires away from here, Marius,' said the larger man.

'Primarch Termini...' interjected Marius with a scowl of disapproval. '...did not mean those from outside of Bostonia,' he concluded after raising the pitch of his voice to counter some breach of decorum that was lost on Agnes. She did not know if it was because Brutus revealed too much, or betrayed some lack of respect towards the one he called Neville.

'He will want to meet... what is your name, my dear?'

Agnes was momentarily taken aback. The way the smaller man spoke seemed wrong. He was too young to be so cordially old, but then age was subjective when it came to vampires.

'Agnes,' replied the former nun softly.

'...Agnes,' affirmed Marius, returning to his winning smile. 'Come along, Brutus. The night is waning. Our dear Primarch is not known for his patience.'

Agnes followed Marius. She was only too aware that Brutus deliberately marked her steps and needed no persuasion to cause her harm if she was inclined to resist. She was learning. *Brutus... Marius... Primarch Neville Termini* – the latter some-one of importance. This was why they had come to Bostonia... to Boston. The antiquated impression that these two vampires played out seemed somewhat contrived or their behaviour had been instilled to provide a subtle misdirection to conceal the truth of their age. Perhaps their mannerisms were some throw-back to the one they served. Marius gave the impression of being somewhat clever, but that too was a sham. Brutus was exactly how he appeared – a blunt implement, the muscle to his smaller companion's mouth. Agnes let her heart labour. She

feigned weakness and fear. In truth, knowing Helena was out there alone provided an element of credence to any hint of dread taxing her countenance. Coming to Bostonia was a gamble. Stepping out of the shadows might yet cost them dearer than either was willing to pay.

DECEIT

Listen to the words,
Spoken in the night,
Whispers played with purpose,
Chasing deceit's delight,
A voice tells only lies,
Veiled in simple truths,
To twist and turn a knife,
Deep within the roots,
Tones turn from softness,
An angry rebuke,
Masked in a charade,
Of congenial refute,
It's hard to miss the subtleties,
Deceptions rendered moot,
Lies following lies,
Trampled under boot,
Misdirection and confusion,
Treacheries abound,
Look behind the curtains,
Where sycophants are found,
In the end, the truth is broken,
Cast beneath doubt,
A tragedy in motion,
Never sneaking out...

PART ONE:
FATAL INSURRECTION

Chapter One

Night Moves

1867, Bostonia, Massachusetts, The Americas

The intrigues of the night were no less engaging than those enacted in the day. Playing morally questionable games with the lives of people, living or dead, would inevitably have consequences. However, the trick was in realising the danger before one took the game too far. Neville Termini was not a man who suffered an inclination to thread softly, even in the face of mistakes that might yet see him undone. His ambitions far outweighed any inclination towards restraint. He had a very entitled view with regards to those interests he served, and the *Brethren* who fell under his authority. The eastern realm of Bostonia was a holding in decline. His demesne had been waning long before he stepped into the position of Primarch. Neville knew he had not been the first choice of the Conclave in Bostonia. He was only too aware that the current Castellan of this domain held him in even less regard than his predecessor.

The mansion house of Primarch Neville Termini was also in decline, having suffered from a lack of care by its antecedents. Notwithstanding the state of disrepair, cracks, and forlornly jaded façade, there were obvious structural issues that included dangerous subsidence of the older west building that formed the original dwelling. The estate had been added to, expanded, and in parts, forgotten. The property surrounding the estate boasted a myriad of overgrown bushes, waywardly intrusive trees and gardens that no longer held any distinction with regard to boundaries. The ill-fitting rusting gates marking the entrance to an uncertain path ran straight to the house on a gravel trail that was potholed with pools of dirty rainwater during prolonged bouts of inclement weather. The mansion further suffered from adopting aspects of several previous owners, living and dead, who had come from the old countries, each adding something to the cumbersome architecture of the

house, betrayed by decades of indifference. Neville had done little to rectify this decaying testament to his rule. He did not exist in the living world or relate to mortal overtures of rank. His time as a living human had been too short and boorishly decadent for him to realise that ruling required effort both in thought and deed. Had he shown more foresight, the Primarch could have done much to bolster his position in living and *undead* societies by offering a perception of station. However, his attention was always focused on *Brethren* rule and vampiric desire, to the detriment of realising that awareness of a mortal world would in turn serve his purpose in the night. He was young in appearance, but he wore a countenance of age that served to diminish any hope of being mistaken for someone youthful. Neville was in many ways, born an old man. His frowning disposition, sullen expression, and slovenly appearance only added to perceptions of age. In some ways, he perfectly suited the house in which he resided. His eyes had been narrowed by suspicion and did not naturally close to reduced scrutiny. This defect had been a throwback to his mortal years living in a world where he perceived everyone was out to get him. Even in the aftermath of his transition to the night, Neville had cause to mistrust those around him. His siblings in the night, *sired* from the same man who offered him nothing but servitude to a cause that kept him weak, only added to a deeper frustration. One by one they fell, and not always by his hand or machinations. Edmund Farielle had been different only insofar as he had departed Bostonia to seek out his own ambitions in the absence of an opportunity to rise in rank under their *sire*. He had erred in his rule of a brood that had ultimately paid the price and Farielle had been censured – *deposed* in absentia. Anton Ren had been a poor Primarch of the eastern realm, diminished at every turn by those he served. He had failed to keep his attention on the things that mattered. Neville had not been culpable in his *sire's* demise, but then neither did he do anything to prevent that conclusion. Primarch Anton Ren had been found sitting in his study in the repose of

contemplation, but he had been bled out, fed on by an unknown assailant. Neville had acceded the position of Primarch because he was next in line. There had been no other consideration and no serious alternate contender. If Farielle had been here, he might have taken Anton's place, but his brood brother had been absent from Bostonia for some time. His endorsement to being *deposed* also muddled matters. Of course, there were whispers that the Conclave only granted Neville the position because he was perceived as weak and would offer no challenge and less risk to those who stood in judgement. They were in error. Neville had always been ambitious. Now he had the opportunity to prove his detractors wrong.

Neville was frustrated at every turn, but he had found a way to circumvent the intricacies of *Doctrine*. In truth, Travelle had discovered the ambiguity in the wording of a laborious script that bored Primarch Termini to distraction when it was first brought to his attention. Realising the benefit took time and Travelle had been remarkably patient to reach a point of conclusion that stirred interest by his Primarch. Such details as to the finding of this loophole mattered little. The realisation of the material rested firmly with Neville as only he, as Primarch, could initiate using such a bold strategy to bolster his position. Travelle had cautioned him against using *Doctrine* against the *Brethren* hierarchy. He had persistently stated that any such revelation was not true to the spirit of the interpretation. Travelle's intent had merely been motivated by understanding *Doctrine* for the benefit of all those subject to the society of the night. He had explained how *Doctrine* could be misconstrued to another meaning in several references, and how Neville might be seen as a bridge to mend the grievances of the past for those who had been wronged by association. Travelle doubted that many *Brethren* had done more than peruse the edicts of the society of the night and that the rules governing vampires were in dire need of revising to shore up such lapses in elucidation. The flaws existed. Travelle had seen an opportunity to be of use in correcting such imperfections but nothing more. He did

not have the ambition to appreciate the scope of what he had uncovered or to realise the manner in which such devices could be used by one motivated towards egotism. Neville had stopped listening when his interest waned. He had become annoyed with incessant pleas that warned against using *Doctrine* cruelly to stir up dissent. Travelle was inclined to drone on and the Primarch was not about to admit that he had never read any of the edicts of *Doctrine*. In the end, his sycophantic vassal had left in a despondent state. Travelle had not realised his value. Nor had he realised the worth of his discovery to Neville. Travelle wanted a friend, a confidant he could trust. He wanted someone to tell him that he was significant. He had been useful from time to time, but the Primarch of the eastern realm no longer cared for such associations. Travelle was under the misguided impression that they had been friends. Neville had no such delusions. Travelle had been useful – nothing more. Primarch Termini could not afford such luxuries. Ambition proved a lonely mantle, and sharing the trappings of power was not in his nature. Not everyone was meant to rule. Neville had always known he was destined for greatness, and he did not want to wait centuries to realise what should have been his from the beginning. Edmund Farielle would have ascended to rule the eastern realm had he not been *deposed* – a fortunate turn of events for Neville. However, this led to a discovery, one that now served Anton Ren's true successor, but he needed to tread softly. Primarch Termini was not known for his subtlety. Those subject to his rule offered even less in the delicacies of intrigue. Perhaps snubbing Travelle had been a mistake. He was far too sensitive for a vampire. Neville could never admit to that fact, and apologising was simply beneath him, even if his vassal could continue to be of use. Travelle had left for a time, sulking over his failure to ingratiate himself into a position of relevance. He had left in the end, not solely because of his protests over the misuse of *Doctrine*, but when he challenged Neville to prove any overtures of friendship by stating his first name. Primarch Termini

did not remember ever having heard Travelle's forename. In the aftermath of his vassal's surly exit, he had learned that it was Draco, unusual enough to have been easy to recall. And yet, Neville did not remember the appellation any clearer after hearing it stated by Marius who he had asked in passing. The detail was too trivial to commit to memory. Neville had learned that his vassal had returned to the eastern realm of late, cowed by the world at large no doubt. He was accepted back into the fold but not to the court of his Primarch. Such would be an admittance of some fault that Neville could never accept. Travelle had served his purpose, as all good vassals should. He was a lesser pawn in a game that only mattered to those above his station. Neville was the master of his own destiny. He had no need of advisors or supporters to realise his ambitions. He alone ruled. He alone had seen the importance of Travelle's discovery, elevating the realisation to a place of true importance by someone who understood ambition.

Neville was also impatient. He had sent his minions out into the domain to find those who were allied with no realm. The irony was not lost on him. He had achieved his position only because of Farielle's fall from grace and Travelle's diligence in studying *Brethren Doctrine*. Using the *deposed* as a solution was singularly ingenious but not what his vassal had intended when he brought the matter to Neville's attention. Travelle was to be commended, or he would have been if Neville had not dismissed his involvement in the whole affair altogether. *Siring* vampires was carefully controlled within *Brethren* society for thousands of years. Vampires could not be permitted to overwhelm a mortal world to their detriment. Increasing one's brood was constrained under *Doctrine*. Rank had certain privileges, but age too played a vital part in reckoning the status of a realm. The *deposed* offered a convenient way of sidestepping *Doctrine*. While bringing those who had erred in vampire society into his ranks was distasteful, Neville was not above using pawns of convenience to serve his ambitions. Once absolved of past transgressions and subjugated to his realm by

a blood oath, each, in turn, would be permitted to *sire* a *childe*. In the wake of growing numbers, Neville Termini's influence would rise in Bostonia. The idea was so simple, how could it fail?

Neville was alone in the aftermath of putting his plan into action. He had been for some time. If Travelle had been here, his presence might have eased the tedium or at least provided a distraction. Permitting his vassal to attend him would be a sign of weakness in Neville's mind. He could not afford to become reliant on anyone. As Primarch, he had *Protectors*, but they were no substitute for the usual sycophants who visited his court from time to time. The house had grown quiet. There would be no intrusions unless Neville commanded otherwise. Even those charged with his safety knew better than to transgress. They were poor company at the best of times, vapid instruments of security, and stayed to the duty for which they had been *sired*. Neville's violent outbursts when disturbed in the past had deterred any failure in understanding the limits of their remit. No one had come to petition him. No one had requested an audience. The eastern realm had been in decline for too long. His few subjects had been sent out into Bostonia and the outlying regions by his command, all to enact a strategy that he had devised because of Travelle. Neville did not need anyone to stand at his side. He was alone. He would always rule alone. And yet, he felt like he was being watched. The hairs on the back of his neck offered a very mortal response to this sentiment. Neville knew that his solitude had a price. The silence fuelled his paranoia. He was in need of distraction, and that thought stirred another. He wanted to feed. Realising his ambitions had been exhausting. Waiting to see them come to fruition was equally tiring. If there had been anyone else in his audience chamber, Neville would have known. He was not above recognising the traces of paranoia that crept into his mind when he had not fed, and yet the feeling of intrusion persisted. His inclination towards solitude dissipated. Neville left the chamber to seek the blood he

needed to bolster his resolve and keep the voices of doubt in check. The night was not young, but as Primarch, Neville would not have to go far to seek sustenance.

1867, Bostonia, Massachusetts, The Americas

Watching was not always easy. Darius Black was patient to a fault, even when he could not be certain as to the nature of the intrigues employed by his benefactor. He had others out there in the night taking a more active interest on his behalf, observing that which needed to be watched. They were the eyes and ears that would tell him if there was a change coming, any hint of an upset to the machinations of Castellan James Bourne. They would not tell him if such musings had been anticipated. The intrigues of the night were often akin to bushels of straw cast precariously into the wind. They looked to form a reckless pattern until someone showed him otherwise. James was adept at reading designs of ambition, those that had come to pass and many yet to be realised. Darius existed in the here and now. He did not give his service frivolously or without cause. He had done so out of an obligation to James's *sire*, but in time the connection between the two had become more valuable than any compulsion towards duty. Joshua had saved Darius Black in the past from certain death when he was but a fledgling vampire. He had done so at great risk to his own existence. Darius had been hunted by his own brethren from the *Order of the Temple* in the hours after succumbing to the night. Joshua had stood with the former *Templar* and overcame the odds against men who had been well-schooled in martial skills and in hunting creatures of darkness. Darius's *sire*, Christian Allard, had not fared well at the hands of his *childe's* former brothers. Their faith had been unmoved by pleas for clemency. They had butchered Christian and Darius had been forced to flee. He had been a man of honour in life. So too had Darius. Vampires were painted in all of the ancient texts as fiends of darkness. The truth was to be denied. As with mortals, not all vampires were demons, evil

What Has Come Before...

Even the Dead have Honour (from Return to a Darkling Pool) - 1845

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) - 1848

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.

Brethren Prequel: Nightmare - 1693-1870

A nightmare begins when innocence is lost. Following an age in darkness and blood, history is doomed to repeat itself as misery invites treacherous 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 kind long after revenge has lost its meaning. She walks the ages in the guise of angelic death clinging to feelings that hold back the bare threads of a nightmare, but also force her to accept the consequences of all that she has become in the long night...

Also by William Anthony Shea

TALES FROM A DARKLING POOL (Author's Preferred Text)
RETURN TO A DARKLING POOL (*with – Even the Dead Have Honour*)
A DARKLING POOL AGAIN
BEYOND A DARKLING POOL (*with – The Last Dance*)
RIPPLES FROM A DARKLING POOL
VERGE OF A DARKLING POOL

KNIGHTSHADE THE ROLE PLAYING GAME

KST01: THE INITIATE'S TOME
KST02: THE GRANDMASTER'S TOME
KST03: THE LOREMASTER'S TOME
KST03: THE QUESTMASTER'S TOME – NYR*

FUMBLING VOLUME ONE
FUMBLING VOLUME TWO
SUPERSPANDEX HERO BOYS – NYR*

SAGA OF THE SENTENIAL

BOOK ONE: CAULDRON OF TROUBLE
BOOK TWO: FOR THE LAND THAT FELL
BOOK THREE: THE HOUSE OF SILMARIN

BRETHREN

BR00: NIGHTMARE
BR01: BRETHREN
BR02: VAMPIRE
BR03: FALLEN

AFTERMATH

AM01: REMNANT
AM02: DAWN
AM03: RISEN –NYR*

KILLING TIME

W/MICHAEL D. O'MAHONY

GNARL & OTHER STORIES

*NYR – Not Yet Released

By L Shea

IMMORAL DAWN

DE CORK BOIs (a.k.a. The Cork Boys)

DEAD TO ME: De Many Deaths of Michaleen

*NYR – Not Yet Released

Night has fallen on the *Brethren*, a vampire society vying for power in a dangerous game played out on the periphery of a mortal domain. Helena has come to Bostonia seeking to understand the nature of what she has become in the wake of her *sire's* past and recent failures. Discovering that there are other vampires out there existing as if they were still part of a living world, she wanted only to bring them to account for preying on innocence but the truth captivates her to consider other ambitions. Agnes holds to no such desires and follows an unforgiving path.

Meanwhile, James is embroiled in a conflict that was always fated to come to pass but the arrival of Helena serves as both a distraction and a tie to his past that cannot be easily denied. The outcome is inevitable but the end is far from certain when James is left with the only choice that matters – to finish what he started before a mortal world pays the price for any deferral.