

# *The Ascent of the Dark*

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# 1.

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I'll never forget this day. The day I met him for the first and probably last time. He approached Altstadt from the misty woods of Brennenburg carrying an extinguished lantern and a leather bag, which gave a rather unpleasant odour. The lantern was all wet and beyond further use, yet the man refused to throw it away. "It was my light. My sanity" – He would keep saying in a dead sort of voice. He obviously resembled someone who'd went through horrible events that tainted his mind forever. The only things he pleaded for were a hot meal and drink, which were given to him in a small inn near the village centre. He ate in silence and away from other customers, keeping the strange bag as far away from them as possible. As the owner of the local approached his table the stranger jumped in his seat, screaming and toppling chairs and empty tables. Everybody except me got to their feet, ready to act. The stranger took a few deep breaths and muttered apologies, then grabbed his bag and set off towards the exit, trying to fight back an urge to throw a wild look on every face he was passing by. When the door shut with a faint thud everybody plunged into excited conversation while I said goodbye to the astonished owner and went out into the falling evening, the horrid experiences of that strange man still whispering in the wind. I w...

“Grandpa Helmutt! Grandpa Helmutt! Come and play with us! Please!” - A sudden call of grandchildren’s snatched the old man out of his diarying. He lifted his head and smiled warmly towards his two small happinesses, ignoring the irritation coming from the fact that someone disturbed him during the raining. Helmutt loved to write when there was a downpour outside. It helped him concentrate. Groaning silently, he got up with a heavy wonder where the paranoid man could be now. Has he left Altstadt? Or maybe he’s planning to stay? “Alright kids, I’m coming. Grandpa’s coming.”

The carriage made its way among spacious green fields, stumbling occasionally when the cracked wheels hit a rock or the empty space of a hole. Daniel left Altstadt far behind and was heading for larger agglomerations, where he could find people that can help him cross the boundary unnoticed and unharmed. He had to come back home and bring along the contents of the leather bag. It was now resting upon the seat opposite Daniel who woke up suddenly as the carriage stumbled again. Suppressing a curse, he pulled the curtains tight and froze at his seat, waiting. Soon enough, he heard the voice that was one of the very few back there in Brennenburg: “I thought we had an agreement, Daniel.” – Agrippa’s voice sounded offensive despite being suppressed by the thick leather.

“Agrippa, I’m sorry. I...I don’t know how to explain it. When I saw Alexander floating in the air and discovered a way to put him out forever, I just...forgot about everything else. I...”

“You let yourself be overcome by hatred and desire for revenge, my dear friend. But I must admit I’m surprised that you didn’t throw me aside as soon as the danger was over.

That was...a sort of good thing to do, my friend. Thank you, Daniel.”

“Don’t thank me, Cornelius. Look at you. It’s a miracle you are still alive. But I don’t know for how long this miracle will last.”

“Rather a curse than a miracle. Don’t worry, my friend, I stopped living an ordinary life a long time ago, probably before you even heard of Brennenburg Castle. I don’t have to be fed, I don’t need to drink and piss. How can a head piss, Daniel?”

“I have to admit that I kept you on me for several reasons.”

“Such as?”

“I want you to tell me more about Alexander as we continue our journey home. We’ve got a lot of time. And I will be going to Egypt in near future and I’m going to need your knowledge of orbs and the Shadow in order to survive.”

“Daniel, I don’t want to sound pessimistic, but...If you want to rescue somebody I think you’re wasting your time.”

Daniel didn’t reply as if those last words hadn’t made any difference. Then, keeping the voice down so that the driver couldn’t hear him, he said:

“I’ve done so many bad things, Cornelius. Now I have the opportunity to do some good. I must find Herbert and his men. Dead or alive, I must find them. Now please tell me about Alexander as you knew.”

The head in the bag sighed heavily and began speaking, weighing the words carefully. Night spread its dark breath, and the driver lit the lantern to his right side and continued ordering the horses about, unaware that the carriage he was driving suddenly filled with memories – memories of a sad and extremely sensitive man, lost in loneliness and longevity.

*To be continued...*