

Katastrof Blood - Victorious Hunter:

Usurper

Prowling

Skeletal trees form towering, stygian graves upon this infinite span of grassless dirt. The harrowing, pearly celestial sphere's silent weeps spurred howling winds as the white titan became wary of its insignificance within the grand grim infinity. Its spectral luminance waves over and forms tiny dazzling shows in the air thanks to the dust and particles; this black woods' excess. And me — patiently listening for their alarms. Each step slowly paced, yet heavy. Every breath carefully considered and thus made slow and low, but a heart blaring like a bashing bell to my alert. They cower behind one of these many black trees of bony branches, ignorant to their odor of sour, fear-sweat in the air forming a trail to them – and the bitter scent ever-grows. They may desperately seek ensconce from their hunter, but all it accomplishes is creating brief game in this primal prowl.

And alas, an irresponsible error; their final fault; the culminating casualty; a mortal misreckoning; an unchecked shadow brought by the moon's betraying light. The graceful white glow flows as the callous celestial remains distracted by the crisis of realizing its unimportance in the void. An enlightening shine, while gratuitous, is valued. For without the light, I would have never experienced such an awesome reward. With the drop of a rock from atop this towering statue of wood, the cowering man that held his offspring tightly as they hid at the foot of this ghoulish tree froze with the stone's crash to the ground. Slowly, their faces turn up to me and I get a sight of true terror in their eyes — and I salivate over it. With his signaling scream, I leap from the leafless canopy. As I descend, he pushes away his pigtailed young, and the whelp bawls. Despite being well aware of his flimsy strength, his idiotic instincts raise his palm with a spinning orange ring of Fire. The embarrassing speck of heat clashed with my bloodlusting gaze; I am unphased. My body crashed upon his and, admittedly without

my full intent, my hands of many scars and blackened nails unmaintained for thousands of daystar rises and sets rained into his chest and tore through the flesh. In my mimicking claw went, then out it came with some red chunk and tossing it aside, and then plunging in did the other.

I went deaf in my massacre, only finding his face running and mouth agape, but I was unhindered until my arms could no longer slash at a torso, but instead the gore-splashed dirt it once was forced to. Upon studying my mess, I fell into a trance with crazed eyes at the chunky spilling, and even more so with whatever unrecognizable body part I had in my hand. I brought it up to my nose, sniffed it, and froze. Slowly, my lower jaw descended, and my hand brought the human chunk closer. My eyes, red with unrest, stared at it with devouring intent, but then I was frozen by a small crack coming from the distance. With a sudden twist of the neck, I stared into the darkness until we locked eyes. The little one far in the shadows, too, was frozen with her foot on a branch broken in two. Even from so far I could see the fear causing her body to shiver. For some time we simply stared at one another — until my heart began to race and I sprung into a furious sprint straight towards the spawn. She shifted into a flee, wailing on her way. My stealth tactics burned in the wind and emerging from its ashes was only the murderous rush. As my steps pounded heavily into this dark soil and saliva fell from my mouth of clenching teeth, I tripped over some curly-haired corpse that was just barely warm. Just as quickly as my fall was over the body of unnaturally colored lips, just as quick did I return to continue my unhinged sprint towards the child. The thing's short legs expectedly failed to outpace my blood seek, and I lunged at her neck with my teeth bore. I gripped the skin of the neck with my jaws and shook the spawn like a mad cur, ignorant to its wails. My teeth sunk and until the taste of iron signified the exsanguination beginning. I crunched my jaws harder, but came to an immediate freeze upon hearing a distinct, "You may halt," flow into my ears.

I slackened the grip of my teeth, dropping the girl. He in his wine red robe stopped before me and gave a careless glance to the bleeding youth before bringing his eyes back

to me. “We need nothing of the child,” he uttered with a subsequent yawn, “Her father is expunged; one less mind free of us — unless...”

Enlightenment

With his weighty presence, Father knelt to the bleeding child. He gave a brief look at her injuries but moved onto turning her over. “Do you breathe, child?” he questioned the youth. She stared at him with a stunned glare, mouth agape, chest slowly rising and setting with each breath. “What tales have your guardians fed you, young one?” Father investigated with a poorly acted smile.

Still, the girl simply laid upon the dirt, victimized by the traumatic bolt which stunned her. Father’s head shook with disapproval and he plunged his hand into the right-side pocket of his robe. He pulled out a small vial of some liquid and created a pop in the harrowed air as he pulled out the cork stopper. He tilted the child’s head back, pinched her nose, and let a single drop of the seemingly dark liquid run down her throat before plugging the vial once more. He stood and made his way past me and uttered a praise without trading a glance, “Well done, Viktor. Come now – there still remain many trials ahead of us.”

Violent, ripping coughs soon reached our ears. Father paid it no mind, but I - drifting away from my madness - could not resist its allure. The child back-bound on the dirt had her hands over her throat. She was rolling about the ground frantically and spurring the noise of tight whistling in her chest. The girl’s legs kicked about and her body spasmed, kicking up dirt. Then alas, her being went limp and she finally fell into rest. My crazed eyes began to sink back into something relatively human, but then a new fight began with my struggle to shift into a dull demeanor. Father became wary of my fixation on the breathless child and intruded on my regretful thoughts. “Viktor, *move – forward.*”

Just as the obedient serf I was, I followed him through these spectral woods. He added, “You are not some quadruped creature; stand upright. We have discussed this numerous times before – be imposing on the legs, altercation as man – not beast... Well, at least that is how *they* see fit. I, however, believe there is great potential for Undergrowth in both of these sides of you. Dare I say enough to receive the Warden’s Skull...”

I got off of my hands and stood to my feet, shaken by how I failed to realize it before. With great apprehension, I opened my mouth. “Father, if— if I may speak?”

He nodded.

“Did the— did the child have to be poisoned? Could she not have been brought under Penumbra’s shade?”

Father stopped in his tracks. His soul-sapping gaze turned my way and locked eyes with me for a grim moment. He inquired with a sardonic tongue, “Is this an implication of concern for the poor thing? With how you dug your teeth into her neck and shook her until it nearly snapped as if some sort of ravenous dog, it is surprising to learn there is some sympathy within you for the girl. I doubt you even realize the foreign blood ran down your mouth and in those hairs spurring on your chin. Oh yes, this so-called facial hair... that is another thing we’ll have to discuss in the future...”

Father brought his hands behind him, returning to his dignified posture and he turned his back to me. His shoulders bumped as a throat-muffled chuckle sounded to my ears. “No — we have no use to bring in another one that young right now. If I were to have taken her, she’d undoubtedly become an Expendable and the process itself would melt her into a black sludgy puddle without even functioning as security before then. And – obviously – should the girl have survived the injections and maledictions, she would be a terrible guard.”

“Father — why did you not turn me into an '*Expendable*'?”

“That would have been a grievous waste of potential.”

“What potential do you see in... this?”

Father continued stepping forward. “I see a lot of nothing...”

A conflict of my being began once his utterance settled with me. My eyes welled, but I felt nothing on the inside. These words caused mortification within my mind and thus the majority of my body – but my heart could only be apathetic to the revelation.

“However,” Father restarted, “that is because there are many locked gates – and I cannot see behind them. Very little of the locks have opened and fallen to the ground, but even behind those something very beautiful was revealed. Your achievements and advancements have humbled me in more ways than you could imagine, Viktor. Even if I do not live long enough to see the other side of those gates, I am satisfied with simply knowing that something magnificent behind each and every one of them is just waiting to be released.”

The feeling of rigor mortis brought by his words suddenly vanished from my body. My face stretched into a broad, beaming smile, yet my heart still felt cold and empty even with these praising words. I felt within myself the raging temptation to commit a gruesome act upon Father worse than what I did to that little girl — but my mind and body would not let me. Every fiber of my being knew what I wanted, but those same fibers wanted something different; they sought the very opposite. In any case, I was shocked by a great brightness – we had exited the grave woods and the full shine of the moon startled me, causing me to flinch. Father, unchanged in his empty demeanor, still appeared concerned with my visceral reaction to something so mundane. Not acknowledging it any further, he stepped up a plank – one I had not realized was there

in my shock from the lunar light – that was ascending into the sailboat we used to arrive here. As he descended the brown plank, I could not help but stare at the folded piece of clothing being carried in his arms. Father flapped it once in the wind, revealing an ominous cloak that seemed as if it had devoured its previous wearers. “Viktor,” his commanding tone gripped me, “wipe the red off your face and cover yourself with this. We can’t have you looking so savagely in the village – even if it is a dispersed one. I hold some secrets; that is not the only reason. With your nature, it’s best to keep your identity shrouded in darkness should any... *unplanned* events transpire.”

I wanted to question him, but my nerves forbid me from opening my mouth and letting my tongue articulate any speculation over his decision. Fortunately, it did not take long for me to understand what he had been referring to – especially considering woodland events not long prior. His dark arm extended to me with it in grasp and my hands followed suit with beckoning openness. Trouble found me as I apprehensively moved to don the thing: My heart’s beating accelerated as the cloak descended onto me, but I didn’t know why. I did not know why I was befuddled by simply attempting to put on the shroud, so I became angry with perplexion. I knew better than to lose my temper especially when my rage was spurred by Father’s decision, so then I began to panic. “Viktor,” he started, “Just pull the opening thing down over your head. We do not have time to waste.”

“I kn–” my soul stopped my lungs from expelling enough oxygen for a yell, so an awkward, lengthy pause befell us. I continued upon finding at least a small bit of composure, even though the rumbling caldera within still made itself apparent. “I know, Father — I’m trying...”

Drained of patience, Father affixed the cloak over me with a swift downward pull. This thing felt more like a consuming blanket than clothing. The drape was heavy and caused my temperatures to rise to maddening levels, but strangely I felt a calmness falling over

me. Father stared into my eyes for a moment, seeming to check for a specific thing. “How do you feel?” he asked.

“Warm. Warrrrm. It is — w—warm.”

Father’s left brow rose. “Not the answer I expected, but it appears that you are no longer riled up – good. Come now, we must move quickly.”

We trailed the small space between forest-dominated land and sea. Father moved quickly for his age, but that was not the most perplexing occurrence. Despite moving with his same dignified hands-behind-the-back strolling posture, he was fast. I typically would find no trouble keeping up with him, but this contraption engulfing my body slowed both my being and mind. I found myself often falling slack-jawed and gawking stupidly at the forest. The slightest squeak from a bat, chirp from a bird, or even a bump into a leafless bush would grab me by the neck and force me to admire it. I noticed Father glancing at me every now and then, but he did not seem to mind – likely because at the very least my legs never stopped moving, even with the occasional slowing. Suddenly, causing my fogged up mind to take an extended period of calculation, the forest of skeletal trees had vanished. At least I thought it did until I took some seconds turning a few inches to the left to see it were mere meters away. But opposed to that direction, a large open valley stretched far and far before us. Some distant homes with thatch roofing were barely visible in the night because of their torches. The houses sporadically littered the treeless and flat, dark land and a small farm with creatures too far and shadowed to make out.

Father stayed put for a moment – I believe he was simply taking in the scene. After some time, he continued moving again; my beckon to follow. Eventually, just outside the spacious village, we arrived at a pebble road stretching throughout the loosely placed buildings. While it resulted in my stress remaining low, I was quite uneasy by the lack of anybody walking about. I then remembered that people typically go to sleep when

the Sun takes its leave and has the Moon take its place for a few hours. “Be on your toes, Viktor... Stay — closeby,” Father warned with a beckoning rise of his right index.

I was made to follow him up through the village, passing many of the houses until there was only one left in the distance that we could go to. Expectedly, we traveled the distance up to it and stopped outside the door. Father began to speak without facing me, “Do not speak unless spoken to, do not have your vision stray anywhere but in my direction, do not feel for anything, and pull up your hood.” With a nod, I pulled over the dark hood that was barely able to hold my unkempt, blooming hair. Hair just like hers before they...

Father knocked on the old white door thrice with a pause of three seconds in between each individual knock. He then waited six seconds before knocking thrice again, but this time with only a two second pause in between the knocks. A warm orange light then grew inside the home, causing shadows to stretch and shrink as the brightness moved to the door. The door opened ever so slightly, just enough for the peeking eye from the interior to stare at us and noticeably widen, and immediately following was the door flinging open. An imposing man, while much aged, towered over us. A brown vest sat over his white shirt and similarly dark wood pigmented pants reached his ankles. His gray hair was loose on his head, nose crooked as if it was struck with aggression, and a scar over his right eye. Despite his rough outlook, the huge man kneeled. He uttered one sentence that pulled me out of my trance, “Sal–salutations, Paramount Hendricks.”

“Shaded Coleson, tell me why did I have to mend your mistake?” Father spoke with haunting weight in his tone.

Sweat became visible on the large man’s head. His face remained positioned to the ground when he replied, “I do not know how word of Penumbra Undergrowth reached them, Paramount Hendricks. I – I only have serfs that are not equally capable of

removing those who have found out too much; I am not sure who could kill them without causing more reveal.”

“I could have you punished harshly for this, Shaded Coleson. I will forgive this mishap one time and one time only. I’ll supply you with some of my Expendables and assign one Warded Vulture to you. While I shall allow you to run your Establishment by your own accord, the Warded Vulture will have final say. This is my order until my next return. Should it override your decision, take the opportunity to learn from it instead of becoming abrasive. If this seems inconvenient, just imagine how inconvenient it will be to have your eyes gouged, teeth pulled, skin torn from your flesh and a spiked bludgeoning to follow should you make another mistake foolish as this. Do you understand?”

Shaded Coleson nodded with a quivering head. “Yes, Paramount Hendricks.”

“Splendid. Is Blackvine Venya nearby?”

“Yes, Paramount Hendricks,” Shaded Coleson answered as he returned to his full height. He turned, aligning himself with the door, beckoning us in. He glanced at me briefly with his hauntingly gray irises, making the artificial euphoria brought by this cloak vanish even quicker. Upon entering the abode, he gently closed the door and lifted a brown dish holding an ignited candle. “Follow me please, Paramount Hendricks,” he uttered like a disciplined slug.

He guided us to a door that opened to a closet. Some clothes were hung on a wooden contraption with extended appendages, but the leftmost section of the carpet along the wall was quite noticeably torn and running up the wall as if it were not trimmed down to a perfectly fit size. Shaded Coleson rolled up the carpet, revealing a wooden floorboard. He leaned half way into the closet, set his right foot on the wood, set his weight on the leg and dragged back his foot, sliding the wood with it and revealing some

stairs descending into darkness, despite ignited torches lining the walls of the roughly hollowed hole. He was first to enter, having Father follow him and me after. My arms were barely able to make more than two steps without having to squeeze myself so that I would avoid bumping into the poorly smoothed walls. It became hard to breathe as this tightness began to rejuvenate many petrifying memories of the Dunking vault. Shaded Coleson eventually led us to a jarringly smooth wall that stuck out like a pearl in black sand. He tapped on it, beckoning a voice to respond: “You’ve come to the wrong place.”

Shaded Coleson opened his mouth to speak presumably some words of confidentiality, but Father’s tongue trampled his words. He announced, “A Penumbrian Paramount pierces all impediments.”

Waiting no longer than a second, the wall sunk into the ground and revealed a path stretching in two directions. Shaded Coleson and Father first entered it respectively, and upon me taking myself into the area it was revealed not to be as large as I presumed. Instead of meeting more walls of stone and soil, dark indigo metal bars lining both ends of the hallway were revealed, only visible due to the single lantern hanging ghoulishly from the ceiling. Judging by the amount of locks, there were only six prison cells. Four were placed at the front: One on the left, one on the right, and a dense wall separating the two sections. Next to me - the prisons separated by the stairs we had descended - sat two cells at opposing ends. There were no bodies filling the cells, strangely – just a lone chair at the leftmost wall. A woman, judging by the voice and feminine outline of her wears, knelt before us — or more likely to Father. “Greetings, Paramount Hendricks,” her voice crawled through the air like a spiritual serpent.

The woman’s body was covered from head to toe in some dark wrappings, leaving room for only a single eye to be exposed. Atop her head sat a large black fedora with a violet ribbon circling just above the brim. But the most striking piece was the void scythe strapped to her back, emitting some black, yet shimmering, energy. Instead of rising and dissipating into the air as it diffused, the dark energy seemed to stick to the

reaping weapon's surface area; its void energy radiating from two femur bones connected by a dense bolt of iron at the lateral condyles. The bones seemed to be encased by some black iron that rippled an occasional white energy. "Blackvine Venya," Father said with a greeting tilt of his head.

She stood and looked at me. Her eye squinted and she chuckled with checked excitement. "I believe Paramount Hendricks has made the correct selection," she spoke beneath her breath, seeming to believe my ears would not hear.

"Venya, unfortunately I did not travel here to give an appraisal – in fact I fear it may even be the opposite. I believe you know what the matter is."

Blackvine Venya nodded. "Yes, I am indeed well aware, Paramount, though there is a misunderstanding – at least partly. While Shaded Coleson did have part in the mishap, a Glorho is mostly responsible for this information spill – Specifically Klazza. Some days ago, the oaf was strolling right into Mirkholm, the sister village on the other side of this island. He sniffed around until he believed he found what he wanted. Fortunately, he found a family taking a stroll far outside the village, but the fool snatched their son believing he was a wielder of magic because the boy picked up a stone and chucked it at a tree. If only I were jesting. But alas, it crumbles down to even more loony levels. The vacuous rat shouted the words – verbatim might I add – 'For the Penumbra Undergrowth's Dream!' as he swiped their child. He tossed out some spells of Shadow to disorient and frighten them off, which I am still dumbfounded by considering he could have simply escaped with the child by fleeing - the only one with magical abilities was the father but he could barely hurt a snail. They ended up fleeing into Mirkholm and no doubt spread the word around there, but I am certain the folk must've picked up on the dark explosions occurring outside of their territory anyway.

I do take some blame in these events, though. You see, Paramount, I was well on my way to cut down Klazza myself, but the fool moved too quickly and reached the family who

were on their way back to Mirkholm. I did not want to bring greater attention to the commotion, so I made the decision to reside in the forest and simply allow the events to play out. Unfortunately, Klazza got away before I could execute him, thus the opportunity of putting an end to his messy and careless tactics slipped from me; I was too slow.”

Father brought his right hand up to his chin and stroked it. “You claimed Shaded Coleson had a part in this nonsense but never explained how.”

“Well, you see Paramount Hendricks, Shaded Coleson wishes to act as if an adolescent. This impatient roach believed he could get Glorho Klazza to work under him despite that rogue cur being an infamous nomadic nobody among the Undergrowth – except to Coleson, clearly. So what I conjecture is that at some point, Shaded Coleson sought out Klazza and informed him to arrive here, a populated island, instead of at least having their treasonist meetup on some remote wilderness.”

With no movement of the head, Father’s eyes turned up to Shaded Coleson. He pierced into the man’s heart until returning his attention back to Blackvine Venya. “Thank you for the input, Blackvine Venya. Calming to know there is at least one sentient being here,” he appraised. He then turned back to Shaded Coleson with a scowl. “You however are truly beginning to get under my skin — but this is fine since Klazza is on the island, so at least we may put an end to him. Your foolish decision has turned out well in the end, we now just need to find a solution on how to handle damage control of all these revelations being tossed about...”

Venya sighed dreadfully, bringing Father’s eyes back to her. “If only it were that simple, Paramount. Shaded Coleson left his boat unchecked; Glorho Klazza stole it and sailed off to who knows where. All he said – or more accurately described as incoherent babbling and shouts – was, ‘Seven bases! To the Earth cage, youth! Klazza needs a bolt first!’ before slithering off onto his boat with the boy and sailing off.”

The weight of Father's thinning patience even made my skin shrink with fear despite his flooding fury being guided elsewhere. Shaded Coleson stared at the ground like a guilty child. His shirt seemed as if it had been dunked in the sea with how much sweat drenched it. "The Warded Vulture will make all decisions for you, simpleton. I will give it the order to bring your head back to me should you even blink disobediently. But there are more pressing matters to tend to – how to deal with Mirkholm."

"Oh yes, that conundrum..." Blackvine Venya flaunted a vial she pulled from within her outfit. The glass container seemed empty, but upon closer inspection it was full of some clear fluid. "I took care of that. I had the bottle stored up for some time and it seems this was just such an occasion for it. I recommend against drinking from any body of water here unless you wish to have your brain eat itself. An unfortunate fate for a village so neat, but that just makes room for me to expand my establishment. The family you two dispatched of knew better than to drink from any river. I've been watching the father for some time now and learned he was vaguely aware of us. As in, he knew of a 'dark group,' but no specific name. He advised his wife and daughter to stay away from the bodies of water, but it would do them little good to stay on an island where they could not access water. He planned to desert this island, but," Venya chuckled, "the boats were all coincidentally sunken at the same time. 'Tis when they decided to hideout in the Skeletal Forest instead of the... *other one* in hopes some savior would happen to stumble by."

Father grinned with pride. "Blackvine Venya – I see you advancing very far. Good, it seems that all is under control here then."

"In the grand scheme of things — yes. *I*, however, have a small problem. It seems my poison got in touch with one of my upper guardsmen – Villoven Vire. It is a tragic fate and a hefty loss; he was one of my most imposing. The solution reacted with him much differently than the common folk who all expectedly perished upon coming in contact

with it. I believe it changed him because of how he's dwelled in the darkness of Penumbra for so long. The man has gone mad in these forests and I do not believe there is a way to salvage his mind should containment even be successful - he'll likely have to be put down."

"Intriguing..." Father lowly vocalized, lowering his eyelids in ponder. "Viktor, a new hill to climb has arisen. You will go with Blackvine Venya to this 'Villoven Vire.' Do as she instructs – she is a fantastic influence."

He stiffly faced Shaded Coleson, "I on the other hand have some dull-witted animal to discipline for several counts of... neuronically delayed disposition."

"Yes, Paramount. You there, short one – come," she beckoned with an index as she ascended the subterranean steps. I watched her body disappear up them with tightness centering in my chest. My legs froze as if they grew eyes and some gorgon thing stared into them. I found myself having trouble breathing and a growing tension in my skull feeling ready to burst, but then his hand fell on my shoulder. "Viktor, soothe yourself. These are steps necessary to usurpation. Follow her, at once."

Apprehensively, I trailed the Blackvine with fear overpowering my joints rusted by uncertainty. I breached the ground through the door and was taken back upon remembering we had entered that prison through a door in the floor, inside of a closet... She stood outside of this house, staring at me through the front entrance of Shaded Coleson's home – at least I believe it is. Instead of uttering a word, she raised a finger, once again beckoning me to follow. As we trekked away from the village and further up the, frankly beautiful, valley she broke the silence - much to my dismay. "Is Viktor your real name or did Paramount Hendricks assign that one to you?" she questioned me.

I trailed behind her, compact not with timidity, but something similar yet more unsettling. After taking some time to bolden my nerves, “It is my true name bestowed by Father,” I mumbled.

“Father? Is that what he has you call him?” she laughed quietly, “I won’t question a Paramount’s tactics – especially not Hendricks’. Are you always this timid? I did not expect such collected mannerism from Paramount’s chosen— hmm. What is your fixation? Do I cause you unease?”

She awaited a response, earning none. “Hmm. You need not worry, ‘Viktor.’ I know Paramount Hendricks is a strict, dutiful man – but *I* have not yet taken on such stressful responsibilities. I don’t believe I ever wish to do so, truly. I find it far more enjoyable for some underlings to be beneath me while still having the freedom to shed blood whenever I please. Do you have any aspirations, ‘Viktor’?”

She paused again, waiting for me to utter anything. Still, I remained silent. “I don’t bite – well, I won’t bite you. You *can* speak,” she dug.

My lips finally opened with thinning patience, “I have nothing to say.”

At Last, a Forest of Foliage

Much to my relief, we arrived at the entrance of some forest, bringing an end to any petty dialogue. Similar to the Skeletal woods – and thus far more unusual – was the lack of fauna and their noises. But unlike the previous woods, it was lush with foliage, causing that abnormality to be even more unsettling – and a strange odor roamed. Still, the terrible regrets rained themselves on me. Unbeknownst to me, my body began to carry itself into the new nightly woods. I felt some spectral call beckoning me into its cosmic-bombarded, green guts of life. A skinny, suspiciously cleared path soon found me in my waltz through the dark. Upon spending some time here, I decided to ask Blackvine Venya a simple question, “Where is this guardsman?” and expected a swift

response since she wanted to chat so eagerly. Instead, I found myself alone. While my brain is far from efficient, I did manage to conclude that this was not simply misfortune.

A clearing in the distance caught my eyes within this burdening hood, that soon began losing its languiding effect... or perhaps it would be better described as languishing. Presuming that said clearing was my intended destination, I trotted through the foliage until I stood *just* in an area encircled by trees with unimpeded way to the moon – that enthralling orb's ghastly flow trespassing me until it found a radiating rage to tug on I had put into a flimsy vault before. Or perhaps that was something else... Nevertheless, a whistle in the wind resulted in my collapse onto my hands and knees by the agony of a rusty hatchet striking me in my left shoulder. But this blow did not feel as just a hurled blade, but instead... something greater. It was no mere raging thrust of some maddened warrior nor some mere magic-enhanced weapon. This felt like something which would have those of Mount Olympus up in arms.

Then, a rapid, impending pound of the ground great enough for my bones to feel the quake and loud enough for my ears to weep started. The noise and shakes were born of that— *thing* as its knuckles and feet smashed the grass, strengthening as it approached. The stench of some mighty, toxic odor ever-increasing as it neared. That thing darting towards me, cycling its movement both on arms and legs. It reminded me a lot of... me. Its head donned a crown shaped helmet drowned black in the night and the body was bulbous, yet hulking, but that did not seem to hinder its rapid, four-'legged' sprint to me. Its eyes revealed to be radiating an ominous purple color as his massive body approach shook me, but more harrowing to my skeletal was what it spoke upon its titanic body overshadowing mine. It uttered with an empty, yet heavy voice, "Skin not yet of that sickly pale, but bones already so frail. Muscles flimsy; thin; a delicacy no doubt destined to be unsatisfactory. Are you ridden with it, too? Or has it not yet infiltrated you? Does it make your organs bitter? No matter - all questions will be answered from a simple taste after I commit this blood-splattered litter."