

A Plague of Dead

“Alright,” Samuel began, addressing the rest of us, as we stopped in front of the house. “Are we ready to go in?”

“Sure,” I replied immediately. “It’s why we came.”

“But surely we’re not going to just walk in through the front door,” Kegger said with a frown. “I mean, this is *Rabid*’s sanitarium we’re talking about here. No doubt he’s got some sort of trap or monster waiting for anyone who tries that.”

“Let’s not start trying to secondguess the crazy-but-genius psychiatrist,” Robert stated firmly. “We won’t get anything done if we sit around arguing about what he might have and might not have done. We need a simple, direct course of action.”

“Indeed,” Samuel agreed with a nod. “There are a number of entrances into the building. Let’s pick one and go in.”

“Second floor window over the porch,” Randal said with a nod to his left in the direction of said windows. “We have easy access to the roof over of the porch via the porch railing. Once we’re up, it’s an easy walk from there. The unexpected entry point may give us an edge.”

With a little shrug, I told the others, “Sounds like as good a plan as any. Let’s get to it.”

“His last genius idea didn’t work out so well,” Samuel declared, earning himself an angry look from the other vampire. “Still, it seems sound enough. Lead on Dmetri and Robert. Kegger, you watch our backs.”

“Got it,” the other Ravnos nodded.

Robert and I trotted over the house and quietly climbed up onto the porch roof. There were a couple of obvious weak spots over the porch but easing around them allowed us to get to one of the windows in question. The room on the other side of the cracked glass was empty. Tugging experimentally on the window availed me not. As it turned out, all the windows were locked and to a lesser extent, painted shut. Robert first grew out, then forced his abnormally long and strong claws under the edge of the window and began slowly lifting. There followed a metallic snapping noise from the other side of the window and the big Nosferatu had to be careful not to completely destroy the window as it suddenly moved free. Keeping a careful eye on the inside of the room, I motioned him in and blindly waved for the next person to climb up. Leaving the window up, he silently climbed inside. A moment later he had popped my window open as well.

Just as whoever it was behind me reached the roof, I caught a glimpse of motion from inside. I raised my fist for the person behind me to stop. When I no longer heard them, I began obfuscating. From my position just outside the window, I braced the hammer on the window sill and drew a bead on the shadows down the hallway where I’d seen movement. From the corner of my eye I noticed that Robert had begun obfuscating as well.

Out of the shadows stepped the most pathetic, emaciated-looking man I’d ever seen outside photos from concentration camps. Dressed in filthy rags, he carried only a rusty knife. Entering the room, he stopped and looked around. He then somehow looked right at Robert and gave an almost animalistic, moaning cry. Robert lashed out and impaled the side of the thin man’s head with his claws. With a flick of his wrist, the big vampire tossed the dead man aside like one would a light bag of laundry.

From deep inside the sanitarium the gaunt man’s cry was repeated. Behind me on the

porch, Randal began muttering a string of obscenities that seemed to span numerous languages. Suddenly the cry was picked up by dozens of voices. At the far end of the hallway this room looked out on, I saw movement. Incendiary ammo in an old, wooden house was just a bad idea so I'd switched out the mag in the hammer for standard ball. A quick three round burst and the shadowed figure dropped. Two more entered my line of sight and I dropped them with another pair of bursts. Then suddenly the entire hallway was filled with surging people. All skeletal looking. All determined to keep coming no matter how many of them I shot and I shot a lot of them before finally having to reload. During that brief time, the many, many survivors entered the room Robert occupied like an emaciated wave.

Robert began killing them easily but they kept coming into the room. Randal knocked out a window and opened up with his Sten gun. One of them managed to cut the big Nosferatu with an old kitchen knife which only made him angry. But the gaunt people didn't seem to care if they lived or died. Indeed, perhaps they hoped for death. Five of them wrapped themselves around Robert's legs and another eventually around his left arm. But it wasn't only Robert they were coming after. The gaunt men and women ran on to the windows where Randal and I were firing from as well. And ignoring smaller wounds and those who died before them, they came storming out said windows. "What the hell?!" Kegger demanded from the roof behind me and Randal. The unpleasant sound of his stick hitting bone immediately followed. Not bothering to look, I emptied another magazine and backed away as I reloaded. Randal ran dry at the same time which seemed like really crappy timing to me as the skeletal people continued pouring out the windows - now completely unabated. From inside I heard Robert yell but I could no longer see him for all the thin people. Just as I popped a fresh mag in, one of them tackled me sideways.

We fell to the roof and then on through. Seemed we'd hit a thin spot. I'd been able to spin a bit in the air and had landed on my attacker. He'd managed to stab me in the side and now had a broken back for his troubles. With a grimace of pain, I removed the knife and then sheathed it in his heart. Standing, I noticed for the first time a thin, white band around his wrist. Like he was a hospital patient.

Or a psychiatric patient.

From inside the house came the sounds of a shotgun firing and firing fast. Evidently Samuel hadn't waiting for them to come to him. Two of them jumped off the roof, landing near me. With a flick of my thumb I switched to single shot and plugged them both. Stepping out, away from the porch, a knife glanced off my head. Not sure which one had hit me, I simply began on the right and started quickly working my way left. Halfway across, Randal opened up again with his Sten gun. The crowd in front of him dropped away revealing the Ravnos who now had several cuts, a few of them deep-looking, and a knife sticking out of his thigh as well; not to mention a slightly cut up Kegger with a bloody stick and blood splashed across his face and chest. He seemed to be having the time of his life. Since I most likely come from the same blood as those two, I can say with authority that Ravnos are weird.

As the two Ravnos now had a little breathing space around them, I took a moment and climbed back up onto the porch roof. During this time, more of the innumerable gaunt people had come out for Randal and Kegger to play with. For a while, helping them not be overrun while simultaneously not falling through the roof took all my attention. Just before this mag went dry, we were temporarily left without targets on the roof.

Reloading, I yelled, "Robert! Sing out!"

His bellow came from the left side of the room. Switching to full auto, I blazed across

the entire right side of the room and then swept back close to where Robert's voice had come from. Randal ran around to the side and opened up from there creating an effective crossfire. A few seconds later the big Nosferatu was once more visible to us. He had bodies stacked around him almost as high as his armpits. Having once more finished reloading, I switched back to single shot and began shooting those closest to Robert. Randal took care of any who got close to himself or me. Kegger circled around behind Randal and climbed in through the remains of the window there to help Robert in the melee. We heard more sporadic shotgun blasts from further in the house but were too busy finishing off what we had here to investigate.

"Jesus," Kegger muttered as the last of them dropped. "There must have been over a hundred of them."

"Yeah," Randal agreed, pulling out a fresh magazine for his Sten gun. With a concerned look at me, he whispered, "Last one." Shaking his head, he slapped it in. I was in similar straights. All my standard ball ammo was gone. That last mag had been silver. I had about half a mag of silver left and then three more of incendiary. And using incendiary ammo here remained a lousy idea. That hadn't changed. Unfortunately.

"They came from the attic," a bloody Samuel stated as he slowly walked down the hallway towards us. "I took a look up there. There's cots stacked four high with almost no space between them. The smell... Let's just say these fellows are better off now."

"Patients," Robert said, holding up one of the plastic wristbands I'd noticed earlier. "Psychiatric patients. Just in case anyone had any doubts that we were on the right track."

"None here," Randal stated, pulling the knife from his thigh with a grimace. "Kegger?" he asked. "Would you mind going down and getting several blood packets from the truck?"

"No problem dude," came the reply as the other Ravnos quickly climbed out the window.

"You could go around and use the stairs," Samuel declared with a frown.

"I could," Kegger agreed cheerfully, as he began climbing down onto the porch railing.

Shaking my head, I sat down on the nearest stack of bodies. With a frown I ran my finger across what had evidently been a mortal wound on the top layer of my seat. Concentrating, I tasted it. Yes, it was faint but definitely there.

"Just a trace of vampire blood," I stated. "Ghouls. Probably every last one of them."

"Not a big surprise," Robert said with a sigh as he too sat on a pile of corpses.

"Samuel," I said with a frown. "How you doing on ammo?"

"I'm low," he replied with a scowl. "My powers of suggestion had no hold over these people."

"I can't say I'm surprised. And Randal and I are both getting low on ammunition as well."

"I can have a crate of ammunition airlifted in," he suggested.

"How long would that take?" Robert asked, licking closed a cut on his wrist.

"Forty minutes. Maybe an hour," the Ventrue replied.

"Too long," Kegger stated, pushing a briefcase up onto the porch roof before he followed it up. "We have only so much night to do this. We know Rabid's not in the attic now. I'm willing to place a bet that he's not on this floor or the ground floor either," he said, crawling through the window. Randal took the case from him as well as a couple of the plastic blood packets within it before passing the lot on to Robert. He and Samuel both took packets. With a shrug, I took one myself.

"If we continue your line of thinking," Robert began, licking up the last of his first blood packet, "I suppose that leaves a basement somewhere. Probably his haven."

Kegger just nodded around the blood packet he was quickly draining.

“Press on then?” Randal asked.

With a thoughtful frown Samuel nodded and walked out into the hallway. One at a time the rest of us followed suite.

Searching the second and first stories of the old sanitarium showed us just what we'd expected: Rabid wasn't up here, though we did find the remains of his old office. It was plain to see that it hadn't been used in a long, long time. The search also revealed to us the entrance to the basement or cellar.

Determined to put an end to this tonight, I opened the door.