

Target of Opportunity

While checking one of the drop points I'd arranged with Bilious, I found a note with two peculiar looking glyphs. The first one was a Nosferatu symbol for the number eleven. The second was their notation for river. That was all the information I needed. With a flick of blood energy, the paper burst into flames and was quickly consumed.

Two hours later, I met the odd-smelling Nosferatu at a point on the Trinity River where a storm drain emptied into it. "Right on time," he greeted me, tossing the rat corpse he'd been sucking on aside. Today he was dressed in a drab green raincoat. I couldn't tell what he wore beneath it and didn't really want to know.

"I try to be prompt," I replied with a smile.

"Your information about the prince's man was correct," he acknowledged with a smile of his own. "It gained me status within our community. Gained my primogen additional influence within the court when he exposed the guard's weakness. Know then that I will deal truthfully with you as you have with me." I nodded solemnly and he continued.

"Rabid has agents and sleepers across half of Arlington and all over Fort Worth. But agents are useless unless they are able convey their information to their masters. It wasn't easy, but I've learned that the agents in south Arlington report to a Sabbat Ventrue by the name of Brandon Livingston. He pretends support to the prince which is how he's able to operate without drawing attention to himself. He's going to make you a very nice prize. To be honest, once I found who and what he was, I was tempted to turn him in myself. But you gave me my share of glory, it's only fair that I give you an equal shot."

"A Sabbat Ventrue," I all but purred. "Now that's truly beautiful. Thank you Bilious, you just made my night. Is there any information you'd like to me to keep an ear to the ground about? Also, if there's a chance for me to mention your name in private to the prince or one of his lieutenants, would you like me to do so?"

"No," he said with a shake of his head. "I don't mind being in the forefront on occasion, but too much of a good thing gets you killed in your sleep. As for the other... the local Tremere are up to something. I'm curious as to what it is. If you hear anything about them, let me know. I'll make it worth your while."

"Deal," I replied with a smile. "I'll continue checking our drop points. Just in case you come up with something new to trade."

He nodded and backed down the tunnel until he was surrounded by darkness. "This meeting point and the drop point leading to it are dead and off the list. I'll be checking the remaining drop points as well. You helped me once. Maybe you'll get lucky and do so again. Until then, fare thee well."

"And you," I replied with a nod before turning and walking to the motorcycle I'd ridden over.

I promptly rode over to the construction site where Robert's new club was slowly emerging from the building he'd chosen to renovate the hell out of. As expected, Robert sat there supervising the construction from the back seat of his limo. Actually, he was more bitching about how slowly things were progressing. However, it seemed to me that he was under the impression he was somehow helping.

Rose was there as well. The pretty ghoul remained something of a mystery to me. There

were a number of things I was curious about, not least of which was how she came to be in Robert's service. Rose had been a ghoul for well over a hundred years... not that she looked a day over twenty five. She was the big Nosferatu's right hand as well as his bodyguard. How and why she'd chosen to help a wet-behind-the-ears Nosferatu were just two of the questions I'd never asked.

"Hey Rose, Robert, how goes things?" I called, hopping off the bike and walking over.

"Evening Dmetri," Rose greeted me.

"Hey," the big Nosferatu called with a smile as he climbed out of the car. "How are you this fine evening?"

"Great, terrific even," I replied with a grin.

"Uh oh," Robert frowned. "I'm not sure seeing you this chipper is good."

"I think it may be one of the signs of the apocalypse," Rose suggested helpfully.

"Yeah, yeah. Very funny both of you. I've got news. Good news. But we need a secure place where we can talk about it."

"Hop in," Rose told me, gesturing towards the limo. "I just scanned it for bugs this evening. I'll drive and keep an eye out for anyone trying to put a laser mike on any of the glass. That should be about as secure as you're going to get." I glanced at Robert but he was already getting back into the car. With a shrug, I followed him in. Rose immediately took us out of the parking lot and onto the not-so-open roads of Dallas traffic.

"Okay, what have you got?" Robert asked once Rose indicated she hadn't picked up anyone trailing us.

"I've got the name of a Sabbat Ventrue serving the prince pretending to be Camarilla," I replied with a wide, predatory grin.

"You're joking," he began. Shaking his head, "No, if you were joking you wouldn't be smiling like that. And stop doing that, you're creeping me out. How'd you find him?"

"One of your brethren tracked him down for me," I told him.

"If the prince thinks he's Camarilla, we're going to have to get proof of his treason," Robert said thoughtfully.

"Yeah, I'd thought of that already. According to my source, this guy's in charge of the Sabbat agents in south Arlington. I'm thinking that you and I get video surveillance footage of him meeting these people. Hear what they report. Maybe spot who he reports to. After a while, we tell the others of our group. See if anything changes with what our surveillance gleans. Gather more proof and turn them all over to the prince. Lock, stock, and barrel."

"If I'm understanding you correctly, you're wanting to make sure none of *our* people are reporting through this guy?" he asked with a frown.

"Yep. I freely admit that I'm not the most trusting of people to start with. A chance to verify that our people aren't on this guy's payroll is too good to pass up."

"If any of them had been turned by Rabid or even someone else in the Sabbat, what makes you think they'd be reporting through this Ventrue weenie?" he asked.

"Nothing. It's just a good opportunity to reinforce my slowly growing faith in our group." I said by way of explanation.

"I don't see the harm. All right, let's do it."

"How long are we going to watch this guy?" Kegger asked a little over a week later in a

voice suspiciously close to a whine.

“Until we’re sure all his people have reported in,” Robert replied with a frown. At the moment it was just the three of us in the van we were using as a base from which to keep an eye on the second house of Brandon Livingston. We had bugs all through both his places as well as a number of cameras. His car even had a pair of cameras and microphones in it now. However, nothing interesting ever happened at his ‘regular’ house. No, this was the house where all the action took place.

“He’s already had ten vamps come by,” the young-looking Ravnos complained. “What makes you think there’s going to be any more?” Other than the fact that Robert and I had watched five other ones come and go? Not much. But I wasn’t ready to tell him about that yet.

“Well crap in a hat,” Kegger breathed, looking past me at one of the monitors over my shoulder. Turning, I found that a new vampire had come to visit Brandon. A vampire that I recognized as well.

“Turn up the volume,” Robert told me in a bare whisper. Rather absently I did so.

“*You’ve done well,*” the voice said through the speakers. “*Twenty years in our service operating right under their noses and still no one knows. Even with the Camarilla being fools, this is most impressive young Livingston.*”

“*Thank you Bishop Sang, I’ve done my best and will continue to do so.*”

“*See that you do. Now, as you may have guessed, I didn’t come here for a chat. Tell me about the Nosferatu.*” the Bishop demanded gently.

“*The prince has commanded them to search for my contact... Rabid, your grace. They are turning over every rock in Dallas trying to find him or someone who can lead them to him.*”

“*No, no. Not the Camarilla Nosferatu. I want to know about our own Nosferatu. Leper moved their hideout recently. I want to know where he moved it to and why.*”

“*Oh. Forgive my misunderstanding Bishop. You were right to come to me your grace. I’ve heard only recently that he had moved. One of his people, a fellow named Boil tried to take his position. Boil failed. However, Leper was unable to kill him and Boil escaped. Leper moved because he feared retaliation. He’s turned about half his people to searching for Boil. They’re now operating out of the tunnels beneath the Lake Worth power plant. It has tunnels connecting it to downtown Fort Worth as well as into various industrial areas.*” That wasn’t in any of the information we’d heard. Must have been in one of the letters the traitor received.

“*Leper has become a disappointment to me. Very well, Livingston. You’ve done well. Continue doing so and you will be rewarded. Well rewarded.*”

“*Thank you, your grace.*”

Turning to the others in the van, I pulled out the hammer. “He’s leaving. Screw Brandon Livingston, we’ve got him on tape. The bishop has to be our priority,” I told them sliding the door open and jumping out.

“Any bishop of the Sabbat is a target of opportunity,” Robert declared. “A target to be passed up only in the event the Cardinal of Fort Worth should be available. And in either event, the rules do not apply, do *whatever it takes*. Not a direct quote but close enough to the prince’s words for me. Let’s take his punk ass down.”

“I’m with you,” Kegger declared, his new arm still a bit smaller than the other. “But this isn’t going to be easy. You know how the Sabbat works,” he said, following after us as we closed on Livingston’s house. “Survival of the fittest. There’s only eight bishops in Fort Worth. And they’ve fought long and hard to attain that rank. Only one bird tougher and that’s the Cardinal. Word on the street has it he’s *bad*.. Really bad. Those just under him are only going

to be a little better.”

“I’ll risk it,” I declared.

“Me too,” Robert said with a feral grin.

“Well I’m not gonna let you two have all the fun for yourselves,” Kegger declared, pulling a pistol from behind his back.

“I didn’t think you liked pistols,” I muttered quietly as we closed on the Sabbat.

“I don’t but it beats being unarmed. And no jokes, screw you very much.” Rather than reply, I chose instead to begin obfuscating. Kegger muttered a curse, “Robert, how long has Dmetri been... son of a bitch! They’re both gone now. Oh, this blows chunks!”

Vaguely I could detect Robert obfuscating his way along off to my left. He seemed to be swinging around that way in a widening arc. Therefore, I chose a fast circle to the right. As I approached the house, the front door opened.

“Goodnight Uncle Frank,” the soon to be dead Brandon Livingston told the Sabbat Bishop known as Sang. “Have a safe trip home.”

“Yes, yes,” the older vampire muttered with a vaguely annoyed wave of his hand and a frown, as he began walking across the lawn towards his car. I had moved around so that the car was now between me and the target vampires. Since we hadn’t come up with a plan of attack, I waited just a couple of moments, until Robert was fairly close to the two Sabbat vampires. Then with Sang lined up in my sights, I began firing.

He staggered back from the first three-round burst. Since I’d managed to line up both Sang and Livingston, I went ahead and sent three rounds towards the suddenly retreating Sabbat Ventrue before returning my attention to the much more dangerous bishop. And by that time it was almost too late. Sang was already up again and moving towards me like a Brujah primogen on speed.

Since I’d shot for his heart, that suggested he was wearing body armor. However, I rather doubted that he wore armor all over. Lowering the hammer slightly, I switched to auto and blazed away at his legs. He staggered again which allowed me to focus on his right thigh. Blood sprayed and he fell.

Ooh. He smelled good.

“You’re in it deep now, boy,” he called to me as his leg healed very, very quickly. “I’m pissed off now. Chances are, I’m not going to let you die. Not even after I break your body and spirit.” His fast but brief sprint had moved him directly away from Robert. However, the delay from me shooting him had given the big Nosferatu enough time to catch up. He literally landed on the Sabbat bishop’s back with his disturbingly long claws out. From the way Sang screamed, I suspected the claws had not had the same problem with body armor that my bullets had. And while Robert kept him occupied, I popped in a fresh magazine and began obfuscating again.

He threw Robert off him, ran to where he’d landed, and began slashing him very fast with much smaller claws than the Nosferatu had. I fired a three-round burst into the Sabbat’s left knee. Apparently angry now, Robert grabbed the older vampire’s upper leg, clamped his other hand on the lower leg, just below where the bullets had shattered flesh and bone, and then ripped the two apart. The older vampire screamed again as Robert discarded the leg.

But the bishop wasn’t done by a longshot.

With an uppercut, he launched the big Nosferatu into the air. Then, with a leaping kick from his good leg, he sent Robert flying into the bushes surrounding the house. I took the opportunity to fire a burst at the Sabbat’s head. Unfortunately, the fellow wouldn’t stay still and I got two grazes for my effort. While they obviously hurt him, he wasn’t even stunned.

Turning to me, he flashed long fangs. "Come to me children of the night. Heed my summons! Come to me!" And with that dogs from all around began howling and barking. Oh, crap. As I started firing at him again and again, he began lurching towards me with these peculiar, one-legged lunges that covered ground much more quickly than I felt comfortable with him doing. And as if that weren't enough, the first dogs were already here. Reaching the end of this mag, I went ahead and reloaded. "Your time is almost over," he told me with an unpleasant grin, balancing on his one leg. Worry threatened to bloom into fear. Hand-to-hand combat was not my forte. And I damn sure did not want to go toe-to-toe with an elder vampire.

I'd never used the larger of the fires I could summon. Doing so would use a lot of blood and I was still struggling with the last of my pyrophobia. Still, I'd wanted to test it so bad I ached with it some nights but a recent lack of training blood had held me back. Raising my left hand, I decided it was time to live test my most potent magical weapon. The small ignition fire flared into being and a little smile began at one corner of my mouth..

"You think I have the Camarilla fear of flames?" he growled derisively as he obviously lined up his next lunge. I rather strongly suspected this one would get him to me. "I'm a Sabbat firedancer. I walk through bonfires, that little flame is not going to do anything but amuse me."

"Better put your dancing shoes on then, mother fu...." which is the point where he lunged and I cut loose with the full force of the inferno. The world before me turned to flame. His lunge didn't reach me so I figured that the raging fires had blasted him away from me. The fire roared and it was beautiful. Living art. Allowing the flames to die back down to a mere handful, I looked over my handiwork. To my left there was an arc where the asphalt street was smoking and appeared melted. Ahead and to the right, a big chunk of Livingston's yard was a total loss. And amongst the charage lay the now black and crusty bishop, still sizzling a bit.

For a while I just stood there looking at him. Didn't look like much now. Several more dogs wandered into the area and milled around. They'd answered the summons but there was no one to command them now.

"Son of a bitch!" Robert growled. "You scared the piss outta me with the... whatever it was you did with the fire. I'm lucky I'm not extra-crispy like him."

"I was keeping any eye on you," I lied.

"Karl's on his way," Kegger informed us from the front porch. "Brandon was only mostly dead and going for a telephone so I capped his dumb ass." Oh yes, that was much smarter than simply incapacitating him or destroying the telephone. But then, who was I to speak? I tended to shoot first whenever the pretext of an excuse presented itself.

And then the bishop's eyes opened.

From all around us the dogs attacked. Spinning in a semi-circle, I cut loose with the hammer. Bullets sprayed and strays died. Robert knocked the suddenly standing bishop down with a German shepard. Sang then knocked me over with the same, now dead dog. Who'da thought a dog would hurt so much? Rolling up, I found that the bishop had leapt over to the big Nosferatu. Despite my companion's strength, once the Sabbat got wound up he was hell on wheels, slashing with claws almost too fast to see. Robert was losing blood and flesh at an alarming rate.

"Watch young punk!" the Sabbat yelled gleefully, as he flipped Robert over and stuck his remaining knee in Robert's upper back. "I learned this little trick some time ago. Break the back and pierce the heart with the victim's own broken ribs. Works better than stakes." The big Nosferatu groaned and his muscle bulged as he fought to prevent the bishop from pretzelizing him as he'd done to so many Sabbat. I kept trying to line up a shot, however, the rest of the dogs

were now all concentrating on me. Half a dozen of them snapped and lunged at me constantly. When I stuck my arms out to aim, they went for them. So, I dodged the dogs as I could and shot from the hip. A burst for Sang, a burst for a dog or two.

Sang rocked back and grinned at me before biting Robert on the shoulder. The dog died and one of the bullets had passed on through to another and disabled him. Another shot snapped the Sabbath Bishop's head back. Kegger from the porch in a classic two-handed firing stance. Part of Sang's eye socket was gone but he didn't seem to mind.

As he bit Robert again, I shot Sang's shoulder with all three rounds. "Robert! His right arm's vulnerable!" I yelled just prior to shooting a dog that went for my throat. Staggering away from the dead dog's impact and thrown off balance by the one biting my leg, it took me a second to return to the main fight.

A lot can happen in a second.

The bishop's right arm had indeed moseyed off away from the bishop and now lay out in the yard. However, Robert was now in a one-armed headlock and the Sabbath had latched onto his neck. Robert wasn't looking so good. Splattering dog brains all over my lower leg, I ran for them. Another shot rang out from the porch and one of the remaining dogs yelped in pain from just behind me. Emulating what he was doing to Robert, I grabbed Sang in a one armed headlock and bit through the charred crust on his neck, thrashing my teeth around and sucking just as hard as I possibly could. Oh, he tasted every bit as good as his blood had smelled. It was literally the best blood I'd ever tasted even with the taste of soot spicing it up. But he didn't let go of Robert. As I reached around to shoot him in the back, the last dog latched onto my arm. Crap!

Robert reached up behind him and did something that obviously hurt the bishop but the fellow still refused to release him and continued bleeding out the big man. While I drank from the Sabbath, I tried wrestling my arm around so I could bring the hammer back into play but the dog shook my arm as he bit, preventing me from even getting it around in the right direction. Then, with another bang from the porch, the dog was suddenly gone.

"Hurry Dmetri! Robert can't hold out much longer!" Kegger yelled. Unfortunately, I was having to heal my arm enough to regain control if it. I could feel the hammer still clasped in a death grip, but my fine motor functions had been damaged. I tried my best to concentrate on healing the arm even as I tried to dig my fangs deeper yet into the Sabbath. For his part, the bishop seemed to be wrenching Robert around back and forth in order to make himself as difficult a pistol target as possible. My arm finally healed just enough that I could do what needed doing. Jabbing the front of the hammer up under the back edge of his body armor, I fired. With a scream he released the big man who immediately rolled away. Still drinking, I fired again and again.

And with a sudden surprise, I drank in his powers.

A number of his memories, thoughts, and emotions flashed through me but were gone quickly, unwanted and unneeded. But I'd been reading about the powers of other vampires. And as several of them flashed through me, I was able to cram the book knowledge together with the power to actually perform the bishop's most powerful blood disciplines. In this case Celerity and Fortitude. Speed of action and resistance to physical harm. Both would take practice to master... but I was a practicing fool when it came to burning blood. And if my suspicions were correct about the woman who'd sired me, the power of Fortitude already lay dormant within me. When I called upon this discipline, I expected it to come and to come quickly. Considering what I did for a living, that seemed like a really good idea.

“You alright, man?” Kegger asked. I was a bit surprised to find myself on my back with the now dead Bishop Sang still clutched to me.

Sitting up and pushing the Sabbat corpse away, I replied, “I’ve been better but all things being equal, I’m good. Robert?”

“Taking a drink of the Ventrue filth in the house,” he explained. “He doesn’t look so good.” He then blinked in surprise. “We’re going to be heros,” he said as though just realizing it.

“Yeah, maybe,” I replied with a frown as I just realized what it was that I’d done. Vampires called it diablerie. It was one of the big no-nos for vampiredom. At least the Camarilla portion of it. I hadn’t even realized it was happening until it was already over. Normally, that wouldn’t matter a bit. My punishment would be death. But this had been a bishop of the Sabbat. And as Robert had said, there was a standing order that they were to be killed on sight by any means possible.

“No cell phone on his body,” Kegger sighed. “Maybe he’s got something in his car.” And he wandered over to check it out. Standing up, I found that all my wounds had been healed somewhere along the way. With a frown I walked over to one of the dog corpses which had begun twitching. This was one of the dogs who’d only caught a single bullet. Judging from the blood on it’s snout, I suspected the vampire blood was repairing it. Maybe not a corpse then. Unusual for a ‘natural’ conversion to take place but it happened from time to time.

Shrugging, I picked up the twitching dog as well as one of the dog corpses. It was unclear if the dog was actually becoming a vampire or if it was becoming a ghoul. Either way, it would make for an interesting experiment.

By the time the cleanup crews arrived, I was already driving back to my new haven. I had a lot to sort out and needed some quiet time in which to do it.