

Calling Fire

My newly formed information and blood doning network of bums and homeless people was coming along nicely. Thus far, I had almost a dozen 'helpers'. And the change had brought about vast improvements in all our lives. They got money, the beneficial benefits of having a little vampire blood in their diet, and some dignity. I got blood and intelligence on what was happening in my neighborhood. Everything seemed to be progressing nicely.

And I would soon be changing it all.

When I'd first gotten into town, I hadn't been sure how long I'd be staying. Or even if I'd be staying. As a result, when I'd chosen my day haven, I'd picked it more with an eye towards convenience as opposed to permanence. Gilch would not have approved of the frail, little crack house but then, he was dead and wouldn't be disapproving either. Because of the success our little group was having slaughtering Sabbat vampires, I had begun to accumulate stuff again. Quite a lot of stuff actually - including new lab equipment. It was time to improve my lot in life. After all, that had been my stated reason for taking this gig in the first place.

I decided that I'd start by improving my housing.

It occurred to me once again that I really should get a car of my own. Maybe sometime soon. In the meantime, I took the crosstown bus, walked into another high-crime area, and car-jacked the first thug I came across. I found I was much better at car-jacking than I was at simply stealing cars. Though I rather enjoyed trying, hotwiring cars was just not one of my talents.

Most vampires I knew resided in their hunting area. It was certainly a convenient enough arrangement. You hunt, you feed, you travel the block or two back to your home. This also kept you in close proximity in case someone should come around with the intent of poaching. At the moment that was how I was doing things as well. But not for long. When someone wants you for less than healthful reasons, I've always found it better that they not know where to start looking for you.

With this in mind, I began driving around looking for a new haven. A more secure place to spend my days. Much more secure. In someone else's hunting grounds.

Not being in any particular hurry, I took my sweet time and checked out dozens, if not hundreds of old buildings over the following nights. Some were pretty good looking... in a rundown, no-one-will-be-likely-to-come-looking-around sort of way. On my seventh night of searching, I found someplace that I hadn't even been looking for.

It was an old warehouse building. Metal walls, cement floor. The roof had been partially torn off by a tornado some years ago and the building had been abandoned since. This entire part of town was simply dead. And that suited me just fine.

Walking across the bare, cement foundation, I realized that this would be a perfect place for working my burgeoning magic abilities. And they needed a lot of work. So far, I could light candles and stuff easily enough. I could even start fires in fireplaces. If it was small and flammable, I was on incendiary easy street. But that wasn't enough for me. Not by a longshot. The Book of Crimson Flames that I'd inherited from Gilch said that raging infernos were within reach of the talented. And I planned on becoming most talented. But to do that, I needed to train.

And now I had a place to do just that.

Gathering a number of empty barrels, I set them in a circle around the large room. Yes, that

would work quite nicely. I'd bring various fuels for burning tomorrow night. Maybe a chair as well. Unfortunately, the events of the next evening made me forget about this for a while.

Early the following night, while gathering various fuels for my training fires, I received a call from Karl. His people had spotted numerous Sabbat entering Dallas. And while he couldn't be sure, from their reported direction it looked like they were all heading straight towards Robert's club.

Sprinting to the nearest intersection, I jumped into the open window of a car sitting at the red light. Apparently not wanting a pistol pressed to her head, the woman practically flew out of the driver's side door. A moment later, her car and I were almost literally flying down the road. Ten long minutes later, I skidded into the parking lot of Robert's club. The sounds of gunshots seemed very loud. It was time for me to calm down and not rush into this like some sort of punk out for his first mailbox bashing.

Stepping out of the car, I began obfuscating and sneaking my way across the large, packed parking area. Making my way to the club, I spotted quite a few of the patrons out hiding behind their vehicles. Most were simply cowering. A few were on cell phones frantically calling whoever they could think of to call. Two I noticed were placing bets on the outcome. If I thought they'd still be around when all was said and done, I might have taken a piece of that action. Shaking my head, I continued to the shattered entrance of the club Lascivious.

There were several bodies scattered here and there. Unlike the slaughter at the Wine Vat, this seemed to be a pretty even mix of good guys and bad guys. Unfortunately, my tactical communications gear was sitting upstairs in a file drawer in Robert's office. I supposed I'd have to start taking it with me when I left. In the meantime, I had no idea who was where. That meant doing things the hard way.

Hmm. Two of the bouncers I'd been looking forward to smacking around a little were laid out just inside the door. Shot very dead. From the dead vampires in front of the door, it looked like they'd died in the line of duty giving what they got and maybe a little better. No sign of Rose. Hopefully she was still alive and kicking in someone's teeth. Before me, I found a roaring firefight already in progress. Unfortunately, I didn't recognize any of the people involved. Finding the area behind the front bar to be surprisingly vacant, I hid there and allowed my obfuscation to slip.

"Hey Robert! Rose?! Ya'll still alive?" I yelled. The bar above me began taking heavy fire and small chunks of wood rained down on me. Evidently, someone didn't want me here.

"It's about damn time!" Robert bellowed from somewhere further inside.

"I had to stop and get a manicure!" I returned.

"Shut the hell up and help me kill these Sabbat scum!"

"They're not wearing their I'm-a-Sabbat-scum membership badges!" I yelled. However, despite what I'd just said, I had a feeling the person shooting at the bar was a bad guy. Even if he wasn't a Sabbat, he was shooting at me and therefore had become a bad guy. And I immediately decided that was all the justification I needed and more. Looking through one of the new peep holes in the bar, I spotted the fellow. While Robert was trying to think of some witty reply to my statement, I popped up, shot the fellow three times, and dropped back down behind the bar. Some of the now dead guy's buddies began firing on the bar as well so I returned to looking through a bullet hole in the bar. When one of these people pulled out a grenade launcher, I decided it was time to relocate. Rapidly. The explosion right behind me suggested my timing had been pretty good.

Picking myself up off the floor, I noticed a sudden silence. Feeling around, my fingers found blood coming out of my ears. Could have been worse. I'd worry about the damage later.

Popping into the large hole that had just been made, I immediately found the fellow with the grenade launcher, even now he was pointing it deeper into the club. Barely thinking about it, I shot him twice in the head and then put a bullet into the armpit of the guy next to him. Both dropped nicely. However, I retreated a bit too slowly and caught a rifle round in my right arm rendering it immediately useless. My pistol dropped to the debris-strewn floor. Son of a bitch that hurt! Continuing my retreat away from the gaping hole in the bar, I fumbled around with my left arm and drew my backup pistol. Hammer back, safety off. I immediately felt better. Time for repairs. Seeing a likely spot ahead of me, I began backing my way around to where the bar met the wall with the occasional glimpse behind me to make sure the area hadn't suddenly become occupied.

When my back touched the wall, I shifted my attention to healing my injuries. The arm wound was pretty bad. I could see bone without having to look hard. I didn't think the hearing problem would take long so I worked on that first. As my internal blood supply began slowly shrinking as I healed, the sounds of battle returned to me. Robert was yelling something incoherent and as I changed my focus to my arm, I heard a heavy thud against the wall to my left. When angry, Robert had a habit of throwing people into walls. I rather suspected this had just happened again.

As the hole in my arm slowly filled in with newly formed muscle, Fred stepped inside the club through the remains of the front door. His sunglasses were off and he was smiling from ear to ear. It was a little creepy. Looking like playtime had just been announced, he lifted his G3 and began shooting at everyone in sight.

Obfuscating again, I moved around and picked up my primary pistol. While my backup was nice, the Glock was my chosen weapon for a reason. Damn, my newly-healed arm ached like a bitch. Hmm, looking back at things now, it seemed rather obvious that my backup should have been a duplicate of my primary weapon. With a little luck I'd live to rectify this little problem.

Finding someone about to shoot Fred in the back, I shot them in the head. Fred spun around and pointed his rifle at me a moment before returning to his search for viable targets. Over the roar of his rifle, I just barely heard him say into his mike that I was here with him.

The hole in my arm finished closing just about the same time as my internal blood reserves hit zero. Grabbing a corpse at random, I bit them. Not much blood left but every little bit helped. I did the same with three more corpses before I finally decided I was ready for whatever lay ahead.

When the wall behind us exploded, I began doubting the wisdom of that particular decision.

Evidently there had been a roaring firefight going on in the parking lot as well. A quick look through the new hole in the wall was enough for me to figure out what was happening. A group of Sabbat seemed to be intent on running inside to gain cover against Karl and his people, who seemed to be intent upon closing with the Sabbat while they enthusiastically fired their automatic weapons. As I began drawing back inside so as not to be on the receiving end of more bullets, I caught a glimpse of Kegger skating along with his metal stick. If my quick impression had been correct, the stick had been bloody. Maybe the Ravnos had a use after all. Best not to jump to snap judgements though.

Hearing a crash behind me, I spun around, pistol ready. Robert had burst through the wall, apparently using a Sabbat of some kind to cushion the impact. "First you put holes in my suit," he growled. Looking around, he seemed to get even more angry. "Now you pukers are making holes in my bar!" And with that he ripped off the front half of the fellow's ribcage. Even Fred, who'd followed Robert in through the new hole in the wall, winced at that. Yuck.

“Hey, Dmetri,” Randal called from the actual doorway leading further into the club as he brandished a submachine gun. “See what Robert got me? Pretty cool, huh? Used in World War II by British commandos.” He was holding a Sten gun. And he immediately pointed it at the remains of the front door and opened fire. It seemed that the Sabbat outside had arrived. And that the Sten was indeed much more effective in combat than his .45 revolver had been.

About this time Half a dozen grenades bounced into the room from outside. While the Sten was effective against one of the throwers, the others popped back behind the remains of the front wall. Without hesitation, I dove over the bar.

The explosions were deafening.

Again.

Dammit.

Looking through the holes in the bar, I found a bunch of Sabbat sprinting inside. Poking the end of my Glock through another hole, I began emergency vermin control procedures. I also began repairing my hearing... again, as I drew my backup pistol... again. Better circumstances this time. I was about to have an empty clip and I'd rather not have to reload with people shooting at me. However, by this time the others had joined in and the Sabbat were having a rough time of it. Just outside the door, one of the Sabbat exploded. I rather suspected I now knew where Samuel was. From out in the parking lot, several cars blew up in quick succession. The firefight outside died out in the aftermath of this even as the last of the Sabbat vampires inside died in a hail of bullets.

As we collectively reloaded, we could hear the sounds of near maniacal laughter from just outside where the front door should have been. It continued on as several additional cars exploded, delaying Karl, Kegger, and Samuel's arrival. A pistol, an M-16, and a belt of grenades bounced into the room. The grenades had me worried for a second before I realized that the pins were all where they belonged.

“Don't shoot,” a man's voice called in between apparently uncontrollable fits of laughter. “I have an important message for you!” Robert, Randal, Fred, and I all looked at each other and shrugged. What the hell?

“Come in and deliver your message,” I called.

Stepping up to the doorway, the laughing man abruptly stopped his hysterical laughter. Instead, he began crying bloody tears. Surprised, we exchanged a quick round of puzzled looks amongst us.

Through tear filled eyes, the fellow wheezed, “Fear the Malkavian.” And with that he reached into a pocket and blew himself up, taking most of the room with him.

Unfortunately, this ended up setting the place on fire as well as blowing out a couple of rather important walls. From out in the parking lot, we picked pieces of debris out of ourselves and watched Robert's club burn to the ground. All of my little group and Rose had gotten out mostly alright. Barely hanging on in a couple of cases but barely certainly beat the alternative. Body armor is a wonderful thing. Already being dead seemed to help as well. Nothing a bucketful of blood wouldn't fix.

It certainly appeared I wasn't the only one who could call fire... albeit fire of a different sort. I took this as a personal sign that things around here were going to get more and more interesting. Someone had targeted us. That someone was most likely the Malkavian the bomber had mentioned.

No doubt about it. It was time to make preparations. And practice.

A lot.

