

A foretelling of
A Fantasy Novel by James Shade

The Assassin

Year 733

“Where is the urn?!” demanded Alik, bristling with aggression.

“I-I c-cannot help you,” stammered the terrified watchman.

Alik drew his curved dagger, the black skull of the dark god Prak grinning from its pommel. He put it to the watchman’s throat, but was stopped just before he could make the slicing motion that would spill the man’s blood all over the black sands of Shaadrakir. “Khufal would know!” screamed the watchman, trying desperately to prevent his execution.

Alik paused for a moment, determining if the information was true or just a ploy to buy the watchman time. At length, he withdrew the blade and began tapping it slowly upon the man’s forehead instead, accentuating his words as he spoke. “We shall see. For if he does not, I shall return. And Prak will have his sacrifice.” Alik rotated the dagger in his hand, so that the black skull of Prak stared directly into the watchman’s eyes. He left the man quivering against a rotting palm tree and mounted his horse.

“We ride to Aladresh.”

Alik Den-Shazzar kicked his horse and he and his thirteen men thundered off eastwards, towards the coastal city.

Thirteen men. It was all he had left. Once, he had wealth and possessions far beyond avarice. But now, all that remained were these last few men, bound by their loyalty to him and their belief in the dark powers of Prak. Alik had been a “prince of lands”, a *sheyik*, as the barons of Shaadrakir were called, but the new *zultaan* had changed all of that. His first decree, in an effort to stabilize the ever-tumultuous country, had been the redistribution of lands and monies held by the *sheyiks*, hoping to equalize the prosperity of the upper and lower classes.

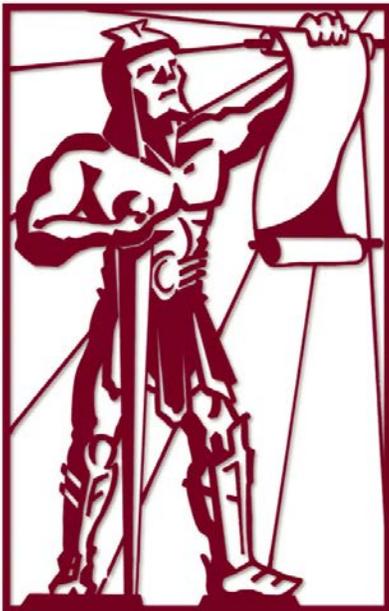
It did not have the effect he intended.

Though the former Grand *Sheyik* had been given a new position of power, many of the *sheyiks* beneath him rebelled, attacking the capitol of Myrashaan. But the *zultaan* was prepared for this backlash and the insurgency was put down. Most of the participants were jailed, some were executed. Alik had laid low during this period of turmoil, having seen its like before and the consequences that came after. He knew to wait and watch and plan.

So he had watched as they took away his valuables, as they took away his slaves, and as they took away his wife, for she was considered property too. His lands were reduced to a fifth of their size, as was the revenue that was generated there. He was allowed to retain his title, though it meant little anymore. And he was allowed to retain the small force of militiamen who patrolled his holdings,

keeping them safe from bandits and marauding beasts. These men had volunteered to serve him, simply for the glory of being in the presence of a *sheyik* of Shaadrakir, for that is what he was, and nothing could change that.

Faster Alik rode, his followers struggling to keep up with the master horseman. He wished to reach Aladresh before sundown, that he may find this small but important item. The sooner he found the urn, the sooner he could assist the foreign battlemage with his plans, and the sooner he could return to his position of wealth and prominence among his people. The pale-skinned Kalisian had promised to aid Alik Den-Shazzar and the other *sheyiks* in reconquering their country, taking it away from this communal-minded ruler and returning power to someone who understood the significance of caste and hierarchy. Alik didn't care which *sheyik* took the throne, as long as the current *zultaan* was replaced. If the task fell to him, so be it. Alik was still well-connected and respected, seen as a wise and cunning *sheyik*. Few knew that his upbringing and training were neither royal nor militant. No, his skills were derived from a different source indeed...



“The Saga Unfolds...”

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