

## Children of the Night

### Prologue

*1856 – Near the ruins of Machu Picchu, Peru*

*“\*Gasp\* ...Stop, I can’t go any further.”*

Sir Ivan Elsegard looked at his partner in disgust. The two companions had been hiking through South America for months, and it was only now that Dr. Von Steich decided he needed rest – when they were so close!

“Come on, old man,” Sir Ivan urged as he hooked his arms under his partner’s pits. “Now is not the time to be resting. We have a job to do.”

“Pfft...fuck the job, good man. I’ve about had enough. We have been chasing foul beasts across the globe for too long now.”

Sir Ivan could not believe what he was hearing. Had the good doctor gone mad? And now, of all times? They were nearing the end of their quest at long last. The end of the vampire was at hand.

Sir Ivan huffed out of frustration. “You know as well as I do that we cannot stop. We are almost finished with the task that was started all those years ago. We shall not let our clan down now – not when the last lord is within striking distance!”

Dr. Von Steich shook his head. “Sorry, dear Ivan, but I am finished. I can’t possibly see this quest to its end.”

“What do you mean?” Sir Ivan could not believe the nonsense he was hearing. “You have beaten great odds to get this far. We have taken down three vampire lords ourselves...more than any other hunting party.”

“But we have not faced one the likes of Jesuit,” Dr. Von Steich stated with a hint of fear. “Only Van Helsing has taken on a creature as vile and dangerous as Jesuit.”

“Van Helsing is dead!” shouted Sir Ivan.

“And so he is.” Dr. Von Steich began to shake as he spoke. “And so will we be! No one faces evil only overshadowed by the Devil himself and walks away.”

Sir Ivan shook his head. “Not so, my friend. Van Helsing was able to stake Dracula and walk away...”

“Did he?” Dr. Von Steich interrupted. “It took Van Helsing many attempts before he was able to slay the beast. And when it was all said and done, Van Helsing was found dead.”

Sir Ivan Elsegard stood in silence for a moment. He knew the truth behind the good doctor’s words. However, Van Helsing’s death has remained unsolved to this day. Some believed that the famed hunter had been hunted down by the remaining vampire lords. Others believed that Van Helsing took his own life – that the hunt had taken his will to go on living any longer.

“I do not believe that his death had anything to do with his quest to end the reign of Lord Dracula,” he finally said. “I believe the Lord in Heaven required his most valiant warrior for his own needs.”

“Bah, what kind of nonsense is that?” Dr. Von Steich spit as he spoke. “What use does God have for a warrior? Warriors are needed here on Earth.” The doctor shook his head in defiance. “No, good

man, Van Helsing's death was a result of his hunt of the Prince of Darkness. And I wouldn't be surprised if Jesuit led the attack."

Sir Ivan grunted and chuckled all at once. "Do you honestly believe that Jesuit would care if Dracula was removed from the Earth? I would think that he would have preferred to see Dracula dead. Dracula was the only vampire more powerful than the other undead lords. Some vampires resented this fact."

"And how do you know this?" asked Dr. Von Steich.

Sir Ivan smiled. "I don't...but it makes sense."

Dr. Von Steich finally stood up. "Bah, what do you know?" He began to walk away from Sir Ivan.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Dr. Von Steich glanced over his shoulder. "If we are going to do this, let's go...before I change my mind."

Sir Ivan smiled once more. "Now that's the spirit. Let's put an end to this menace once and for all."

The two hunters hiked through the jungle surrounding the ruins of Machu Picchu. Sources had pinpointed Lord Jesuit's whereabouts to a cave just northwest of the ancient ruins. Sir Ivan and his partner had been sent on this quest as soon as they received word from the Council that the other hunts had been successful. Jesuit was the last of his kind – the last vampire that was capable of keeping the race alive.

Normal vampires could breed, but they produced weaker offspring. These vampires were still dangerous to the human population, but they had many weaknesses. They also had very few powers.

Lord vampires, on the other hand, were immune to many of the things that could end a normal vampire's life. Their powers were many, including the ability to create other lords. The only limiting factor was time. It took centuries before a new vampire lord was beyond the limitations of a normal vampire.

Time was on their side now; the hunter clan was sure that the end of the bloodsuckers was near. Defeating Count Dracula was the major hurdle in achieving ultimate victory, and by the glorious God in Heaven, Van Helsing had done it. Surely two men could handle Lord Jesuit; he was nothing compared to Dracula.

Sir Ivan and Dr. Von Steich quickened their pace as dusk began to fall upon the jungle. Sir Ivan noted that the sounds of the jungle were quieting as they approached the caves where Lord Jesuit was said to reside. There was a distant rumble as rain starting to fall through the umbrella of trees.

"Damn it," Sir Ivan cursed.

Dr. Von Steich stopped to see why his partner was upset. He removed his glasses and wiped them off in his shirt. The rain was picking up now. "What's the matter?" he asked.

More thunder sounded as Sir Ivan replied. "We were too slow in our hike. Night is falling."

"So? A vampire lord is not affected by the daylight. It would make no difference what time we approached the cave."

Sir Ivan stared at his partner in disgust. How was it that he could be so ignorant of vampire lore? "No, you imbecile! Of course it doesn't matter what time of day it is when we face Jesuit...it is his army that we need to be wary of."

"Army?"

Sir Ivan smacked his head in frustration. "Are you kidding me? After all these hunts...after all these kills...you decide that you will be a dimwitted moron on the night of our greatest quest?"

Dr. Von Steich shrugged his shoulders, turned from Sir Ivan, and continued on towards the caves. Sir Ivan had no choice but to follow. The question was: what cave was the vampire lord hiding in?

The two partners arrived at the mouths of three caves as the heavens completely opened up. The towering trees of the jungle could only protect them so much. It was growing dark now, as the sun was disappearing on the horizon. All was quiet but the torrential rains and the loudening thunder.

Sir Ivan grunted, trying to determine which cave was the most likely residence of Lord Jesuit. He felt something brush against his arm and jumped back in surprise. His growing fear was starting to get the best of him – it was only Dr. Von Steich walking past him.

"I think we should go this way," Dr. Von Steich said as he pointed to the cave on the right.

"What makes you say that?" Sir Ivan questioned.

"Just a hunch," Dr. Von Steich replied as he shrugged his shoulders.

Sir Ivan grumbled and followed Dr. Von Steich into the cave. He supposed dilly-dallying would not help. The vampire squadrons would soon be wakening, and that would spell certain doom for this hunt. Tackling a lord was difficult enough; tackling a lord with an army of vampire servants was mere suicide.

As the two hunters entered the cave, they removed the backpacks that they had been carrying over their shoulders. They both lit a torch and slung the packs back across their shoulders and carried on.

Sir Ivan noticed trickles of light filtering throughout the cave as they marched inward. He feared that they had chosen the wrong cave. Lord Jesuit would be completely safe from the invading rays of light, but his servants would not. As they journeyed deeper into the cave, though, the light disappeared. He wasn't sure if night had completely fallen, or that there were no more entry points for the outside world to enter. Whatever the case may have been, his skin began to crawl.

"I think we're getting close," he whispered, not particularly for his partner's benefit, but to break the silence that surrounded them.

"Shhh," hushed Dr. Von Steich.

What the hell was wrong with his partner? At times he seemed like a complete idiot, but at other times he seemed like a seasoned veteran. Sir Ivan began to suspect that the good doctor was putting on a show. Was he enjoying this a little too much? Was it, indeed, just an act?

"Are you coming?"

Sir Ivan realized that he had stopped as he pondered the mystery behind Dr. Von Steich. "Of course...lead the way."

The two continued on for what seemed like hours. In truth, only minutes had passed. There had been no signs of life, undead or otherwise, anywhere in the cave. Surely this cave had been the wrong choice. Sir Ivan was about to suggest to turn around when they entered into a vast space. He peered around and was surprised to see grass growing everywhere around them. A meadow? Inside a cave?

Sir Ivan frantically looked upwards, but saw no signs of the sky above. They were definitely deep within a cave. If so, how was this possible? Then it dawned on him: they had found Lord Jesuit's lair. Rumors had it that Jesuit was a creator of life. He had the gift to create life where none should exist. It

was what made him a grave concern for the Council. They were worried that Jesuit's powers could allow him to reestablish the vampire race at a quicker pace.

Sir Ivan Elsegard took a deep breath as he realized just how important his quest was. There could be no failure – they had to succeed.

The two hunters strolled through the meadow. They both stopped in their tracks when *it* became visible. There, lying completely in the open, was a magnificent looking coffin – much bigger than any Sir Ivan had ever laid his eyes upon. It was decorated in countless jewels of all shapes, sizes, and types. The hunters stood in complete awe, mesmerized by the sight before them.

“My God,” Sir Ivan gasped. “Have you ever seen anything the likes of this?”

Dr. Von Steich simply shook his head.

After a moment, Sir Ivan spoke again. “Well then, should we get to it?”

Sir Ivan was surprised that they had come across no resistance to this point. Surely this was a little too easy. Had they walked into a trap?

He set up his torch in a holster taken from his backpack, and removed the silver blade that had been sheathed upon his back. He watched as Dr. Von Steich nocked a silver bolt into his crossbow. This was it; there was no turning back.

As he approached the coffin, Sir Ivan swore that he could hear faint laughter coming from high above. He prayed that it was just his imagination playing tricks on him. He glanced towards Dr. Von Steich, who nodded his head to signal that he was ready.

Sir Ivan reached out his hand, concentrating mightily to overcome the shakes. He grasped the edge of the coffin's lid and slowly pulled it open. Surprisingly, the coffin was not empty, as he feared it might be. Inside laid the vampire lord known as Jesuit. Despite his fancy housing, Lord Jesuit was a plain looking vamp. He wore simple robes and sported a scruffy beard. The reports had been true: Lord Jesuit looked like and emulated the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Step aside, Sir Ivan,” Dr. Von Steich commanded from behind. “Let me get a good look at him.”

Sir Ivan did as he was ordered – he did not want to be so close to the vampire lord anyway.

“Yes, that is him. Shall we?”

Sir Ivan was surprised at Dr. Von Steich's nonchalant attitude. He had gone from being a fearful, idiotic hindrance, to becoming a cold-hearted, calculating vampire killing machine. Whatever the case, Sir Ivan was glad that he was the only one, seemingly, shaking in his boots. The task had to be completed.

“Sir Ivan, is your sword ready?”

“It is,” Sir Ivan replied as he gripped the handle of his sword with all his might.

“Then let us end this! Let the reign of the vampire cease on this glorious night!”

What the hell? Who was this man? Sir Ivan watched as Dr. Von Steich leapt backwards and fire a bolt into Jesuit's heart as he landed. “Now, Sir Ivan!”

Before he knew it, Sir Ivan was swinging his sword. There was only one way to kill a vampire lord. He had to be staked through the heart with an object made of silver. He also had to be decapitated with another object made of silver. Both procedures had to occur within seconds of one another. Otherwise, you were screwed.

Time seemed to slow as Sir Ivan's sword pierced the air. He saw the vampire lord's eyes open and gaze upon him. Was he smiling at him? The sword inched closer to its mark as Lord Jesuit uttered the words that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

*Thou shall strike me down today because I allow it. I am the eternal god of damnation – the one who cares enough to create new forms of life that will end mankind's destruction of our planet. You, despicable humans, think we, vampires, are the curse of this world, but it is you who are the cancer that rots this world. It is time to wash away sin correctly; time to correct the mistake that Jesus Christ made.*

*With your death blow, you will release my soul unto my children. A new breed of vampire will be born – one that will slowly infiltrate the filthy human race and destroy it from within. By the year 2012, your kind will be no more. By then, it will be too late. It is a pity that you will not live to warn your fellow man scum of the coming curse. As the last lord of the vampyre , I say unto you: may God save your soul. My soul shall save the Earth.*

As quickly as time had slowed, it regained normal speed even faster. Sir Ivan tried to halt his blade mid-strike, but the effort proved futile. The blade struck true, severing Lord Jesuit's head from his body. As the decapitated head soared through the air and splattered off a surface somewhere in the darkness, a great white light shot forth from the now slumping body. When the light had fully departed, the vampire lord's body disintegrated into a billion ashes of dust.

"What have we done?" mouthed Sir Ivan.

A hand came down to rest upon his shoulder. "We've done it, my friend. Humanity can now rejoice in this cleansing!"

Sir Ivan turned to face his partner. A grim look formed upon his face. "I'm afraid we have made a grave mistake."

"What do you mean?" Dr. Von Steich asked, clearly in disbelief. "We have put an end to the lords of the vampire. We have effectively signaled an end of the entire race."

"No, my friend," said Sir Ivan, "we have done exactly the opposite."

"Whatever do you mean?"

Before he could answer, Sir Ivan could feel a draft blowing against his face from above. The room filled with deafening echoes of cricket-like chirping and ear piercing screeches. Whatever was descending upon them was coming in fast. There was no time to run; the vampire lord had spoken true. They would die here tonight, failing mankind in the process.

"What is that sound?" asked Dr. Von Steich as he covered his ears. "I can't take it!"

Sir Ivan did not answer. Instead, he reached for his torch so he could see what would soon be taking his life. "Dear God, no!" he shouted. Descending upon them was a massive swarm of bats – only these bats resembled human babies with wings.

Beside him, Dr. Von Steich finally realized the horror that they had unleashed. He was desperately firing crossbow bolts randomly into the air, hoping to take out as many bat babies as he could. No bolt found the mark.

Sir Ivan did not resort to such madness. Instead, he stood as a statue and welcomed his death like a warrior. The battle was lost, but he prayed that the war would not be. As the screeching bat babies found their targets, he prayed to the Lord in Heaven for a quick death. He could feel the blood gushing from his face as the babies gnawed and clawed at his flesh. He could hear the screams emanating from Dr. Von Steich as the babies did the same to him.

As his eyeballs popped out of their sockets, Sir Ivan could feel his life force slipping away. He welcomed death now. He could still hear Dr. Von Steich crying out in horror, but he knew that he would not for much longer. Whether he succumbed to darkness first, or whether his ears would be ripped from his head first, did not matter. He just wanted the world to end and his god to reclaim him. Sadly, this would not be so.

On this night, in the year 1856, the Children of the Night were born. However, their task required the services of Sir Ivan Elsegard and Dr. Von Steich. Though they physically died, they were very much still alive.