

# BLAKE RUDDING

## PROLOGUE I

### A MOTHER'S VENGEANCE

The world trembled, and with a sharp gasp of pain, a solitary succubus stirred to life upon the ash-covered floor. Niamh lay there, with dust cascading from the ceiling above as the ground quivered and shuddered beneath her. A dull ache pulsed within her, not a physical wound but a deeper torment—a recurring ache of the heart.

This was not the first time her vessel had been destroyed, casting her soul back to her body within the demonic realm of Thanatoria. In all previous instances, Niamh would feel Lord Demidicus' summons to return within mere moments, as time between the realms flowed inconsistently. Days, even months, might pass on the other side around Völuspá and its countless moons, while only mere minutes transpired for the demons. Yet, this time, she knew there would be no such call.

*“How did it come to this? How did everything go so terribly wrong?”* Niamh's thoughts mourned in seething rage.

Memories washed over the succubus as she lay on the ash-coated ground, reflecting on what had gone wrong, and more importantly, tracing back to where it had all first started.

Some three hundred years ago, under a distant dark moon circling Völuspá—just a day ago in Thanatoria—a vampiric lord, shrouded in his black cloak, watched intently. Nearby, one of his underlings, a younger-looking vampire with red, beady eyes, a sharp nose, and a receding hairline, draped in black robes, presided over a summoning ritual. The ritual was intricate, composed of layers of engraved runes, each filled with blood, forming concentric circles with additional blood rings. Rings upon engraved rings. At the center lay a shivering, nude woman, an elven scout, chained and captured within their borders.

“Olin, this test had better proceed as you've claimed,” the vampire lord hissed to his progeny.

The ancient vampire had sired many offspring throughout the centuries before his homeworld, Nyxoria, was violently wrenched from its reality and thrust into orbit around the vast, magic-rich world of Völuspá. Since that cataclysmic shift, he had been unable to sire any more pure-blooded vampires of his own lineage. While his vampiric bite and blood could transform members of other races into vampires, the birth of new pure-blooded vampires had become exceedingly rare. Every three or five hundred years, a vampire might become impregnated, but none of his mistresses ever did, denying him any new direct progeny. There was something peculiar about their new realm, a latent curse, it seemed, that thwarted the continuation of his bloodline. This phenomenon, he observed, was not unique to his kind; it affected all the numerous races within this accursed realm as well.

“It will, Lord Demidicus,” Olin assured, bowing before returning to the final touches of the rune inscriptions encircling the woman.

Stepping out of the circle, Olin leaned down before a single rune. With a claw, he pierced his index finger, allowing a lone drop of blood to fall upon the engraving. A dull red glow began to spread from rune to rune, growing in brightness and intensity. The pools of blood started to ripple, and the elf’s shrieks and screams of horror echoed as tendrils of blood defied gravity, tethering to her nude form.

Like bindings, the tendrils ensnared her body, wrapping themselves around the struggling elf. The more she fought against her chains, the quicker the blood tendrils spread, enveloping her entire form in thick, red blood. She let out one final scream as the viscous fluid poured down her throat.

The mana stones illuminating the chamber flickered several times, plunging everything into darkness. Then, just as light seemed poised to return, a pale red glow emitted from the center of the ritual, pulsating like a beating heart at the location of the elf’s own. Hairline fractures, glowing red, radiated from this pulsating light, spreading across her entire body. Suddenly, the blood burst off the woman, but it didn’t scatter far. It appeared to levitate momentarily in the air before rising like inverted raindrops, coating the ceiling in blood.

A second later, the mana stones relit, illuminating the chamber. At the ritual’s center, an entirely different woman now stood, a being unlike any Lord Demidicus had ever encountered. Her posture was rigid yet regal as she arched her back, boldly highlighting her voluptuous breast against her ethereal gray flesh. Soft, defining muscles flowed from her slender abdomen to her broad hips, designed for seductive delights. From the nape of her lower back, dragon-like wings, spanning over three and a half meters, began to slowly encircle her perfect thighs, forming a black skirt-like veil, complemented by a tail curling with sinister glee. Atop her head, two black horns, resembling a regal crown more than menacing appendages, were set against long, vivid pink hair cascading elegantly down her back.

She raised her hand to her face, flexing it in bewilderment, examining the retracting talons at her fingertips with her bright, glowing pink eyes.

Lord Demidicus’s breath hitched, unable to contain his astonishment. The ancient vampire lord realized that Olin had failed to summon a Champion he could control, one with access to this realm’s unique Leveler system. Yet, he could feel the immense power emanating from this woman. Although her power might not match his own—a rarity in itself—her strength was undeniable.

What struck him more profoundly was her allure, surpassing any creature he had ever encountered. For the first time in untold centuries, Lord Demidicus wasn’t consumed by thoughts of power or control. Instead, he found himself utterly captivated by her sinister beauty, or perhaps by the captivating power inherent in the malevolence of beauty itself.

“May I have your name?” Demidicus inquired, visibly awestruck by her presence.

The woman shifted her gaze from her hand, her glowing pink eyes locking with the vampire lord’s. In a voice laced with seduction, she replied, “Niamh.”

“What are you, Niamh?” he asked, his curiosity piqued.

She tilted her head, her expression one of confusion, as if puzzled by his ignorance. “I am a succubus, one of the demonic races,” she cooed, her words carrying a hint of dark warning.

The sound of her voice sent a shiver of desire through the ancient vampire, a sensation he hadn’t experienced in centuries. Captivated, he took Niamh as his wife in all but name, with Olin’s failure to summon a Champion for him now fading into insignificance. From then on, Lord Demidicus began to learn about the demonic world that existed beyond the confines of the accursed realm in which his kind found themselves trapped.

Soon after, a dark miracle occurred, something the ancient vampire had long since given up hope for—the succubus, Niamh, was with child.

Against all odds, within a realm where the birth of new life was an extraordinarily rare phenomenon, a pureblooded demonic vampire was born. It was as if new life itself was an unintended trace, a miraculous anomaly amidst all magical occurrences. And yet, there she was, their daughter, Aurelia, defying the very laws that seemed to govern their existence.

Niamh was overjoyed, lavishing Aurelia with love and affection—emotions that sharply contrasted her innate nature of sinister passion and lust. For the first time, she found something that surpassed her own cardinal desires in importance. This profound shift, this newfound priority, might have been the very point where everything began to go wrong.

Aurelia was a kindhearted girl, content and lacking nothing, cherished in every way by her mother. Her soul was free of malice, hatred, or cruelty. However, her father harbored a deep detest for this child, and even more so for Niamh, for fostering such innocence... such weakness.

Niamh’s status in Lord Demidicus’ eyes dwindled, relegating her to nothing more than a favored pet. As for Aurelia, she was considered too feeble to be counted among his scions. Contemplating options from banishment to the tantalizing prospect of a ritual sacrifice to empower a powerful mana crystal, a dark idea began to coalesce in the back of his mind as he gazed at his pet succubus.

Under the directive of the ancient vampire lord, Olin secretly resumed his research on creating a Champion under Lord Demidicus’s thrall. Nights merged into months, months into years, and years into decades. On the eve of Aurelia’s hundredth birthday, the culmination of this dark endeavor was set to unfold. If all went according to plan, Lord Demidicus’ daughter would be transformed into a Leveler, finally deemed worthy of his esteemed bloodline.

Niamh was outraged, acutely aware that her daughter’s soul could not coexist with whatever entity they intended to summon through the ritual. This defiance marked the first time she opposed the ancient vampire lord. Her resistance, expressed in a single, resolute “No,” had dire consequences. She found herself abruptly back in Thanatoria, in her true body, realizing that Demidicus had destroyed her vessel in retaliation for her opposition.

Tears cascaded down her cheeks as she let out a scream of rage, a heart-wrenching sound that mirrored the depths of her despair and helplessness over her daughter, Aurelia’s, imperiled soul.

As Niamh curled up on the ground, sobbing uncontrollably, she felt her soul being irresistibly drawn back to the other realm. Powerless to resist, she blinked, only to find herself in a new vessel. As before, the body had been altered by ritual magic, eerily mirroring her true form. Yet, the pain and disdain within her only intensified as she confronted the smug visage of Demidicus, his features shrouded in the shadows of his cowl. In the darkness, only his glowing red eyes and sharp fangs were distinctly visible, adding to his menacing aura.

Niamh was consumed with the desire to murder him, to tear out his heart and force-feed him his own genitals. However, she knew that revenge would require patience. Like all succubi, she understood the art of manipulation, and she intended to use it to orchestrate his downfall. But before she set her plan into motion, she needed to discover what had happened to her daughter, to Aurelia.

“Come, my daughter, I’d like to introduce you to my favorite pet,” Lord Demidicus said, his voice saturated with a tone of great delight. The emphasis he placed on “my daughter” did not go unnoticed by Niamh.

As Aurelia entered the room, the succubus was seized by a paralyzing chill, noticing something profoundly different about her. The familiar trace of magic within Aurelia was missing; instead, it appeared that the magic around her contorted and rippled at her command, a phenomenon that left Niamh utterly confounded. It was evident she had not become a Champion, but something far more formidable and unknown. Worse still, there was a newfound cruelty and an inscrutable drive for power, or perhaps something even greater, within her piercing gaze.

What further puzzled Niamh was the presence of her daughter’s soul. It felt out of place, not residing within Aurelia’s body. The soul now within her was an imposter, a usurper of flesh. Nevertheless, Niamh could still sense Aurelia’s true essence lingering nearby. Her attention was drawn to a ring on Aurelia’s finger, and her gaze sharply shifted towards Lord Demidicus, whose yellow-fanged smile shone malevolently from the shadows.

Untold pain and sorrow surged within Niamh, yet she dared not express it, fully aware that the ancient vampire would relish any opportunity to banish her soul back to her demonic reality. Biting her tongue and silently plotting her revenge, she greeted this false Aurelia with an overly flourished bow. All the while, she painfully ignored the snickering of the one who held her existence within this realm in the cruel palm of his hands.

Blinking back the tears that stubbornly clung to her eyes, Niamh’s memories of those harrowing events long past began to fade. She rose to her feet as the world around her continued to quake and shudder. Small pebbles and dust continued to rain down from the stone ceiling. For Niamh, about three hundred years had elapsed since she last stepped out of her chambers. However, for the demons who last saw her, it seemed as though only a day had passed.

Despite her nature as a demonic creature of passion and lust, Niamh had discovered something she once thought impossible for a succubus: love. Beyond the maternal love for her daughter, she had unexpectedly found love with a dark elf, a Priestess of Dreams. Now, as her world converged with

the realm that harbored both her lost daughter's soul and the woman she cherished, Niamh was determined to reclaim both loves that had been taken from her.

As Niamh emerged from her chambers into the palace corridor, an imp scurried towards her, only to drop into a gesture of deep reverence. The imp babbled frantically, "Your Seductress, Your Temptress, my Dark Queen, chaotic reports are flooding in from all corners. It's complete anarchy, but not the kind we revel in. Volcanoes across Thanatoria are erupting in unison. The world trembles beneath our feet, and the sky... it's a mystical swirl of pinks and blues, as if an aurora shrouds our entire planet, M-My Seductress."

With a stride that swayed her hips, Niamh moved through her palace, her faithful imp following. She walked past her towering throne of golden skulls and wings, unfazed by the violent shaking around her. Dust turned to pebbles, then stones, and pillars crumbled, as her world seemed to fall apart. Outside, she gazed at the spiteful heavens. The succubus' heart had long since abandoned her reality within this room. She watched as a hole in the fabric of space opened, revealing a massive planet, its pinks and blues reminiscent of the magical aurora above. A sly smile crept onto her face.

"Imp, heed my command. Tell my generals to ascend to the heavens, to the void and beyond. All who can fly, teleport, or survive. Bring sorrow, pain, suffering, and those with great delight and cheer," Niamh commanded.

"Ascend?" the imp asked, confused.

"We join the Moons of Völuspá. Its atmosphere envelops its countless moons with a shroud of breathable life. Those who can fly are in for a journey. Tell them to take what they need to survive. They'll find they can reach any moon they desire," she explained to the imp.

"W-What of your kingdom?" the imp implored more than asked, his voice tinged with concern.

Niamh sighed, a hint of resignation in her breath. "I don't see Thanatoria surviving what is to come," she said. Yet, her tone lacked sorrow; instead, it was laced with a resolve not born of remorse, but of a deep-seated desire for revenge.

Even as her world and kingdom crumbled, the succubus, Niamh, felt a surge of power unlike any she had experienced in centuries. Freed from the constraints that had once bound her, she no longer had her power tethered to a mere vessel. Gone were the days when she was at the mercy of others, forced to explore an alternate reality on their whims. She was no longer powerless, no longer had to endure the agony of her child's soul, birthed in another reality, being bound to a ring while another occupied her daughter's body. Above all, the man responsible for her child's suffering would no longer draw breath.

Taking a deep breath, Niamh clenched her fist and extended it towards the gaping hole in space, towards Völuspá. As she did so, her power and magic rippled around her, sending another shudder through the dying world.

"I'm coming for you, Demidicus," she vowed, her voice a blend of promise and threat.