

"The horse, man," Daedalus cried out. "Give me the horse."

The soldier stood, gaping in horror as Daedalus bore down on him. The reins dangled loosely in his hand, but he didn't move quickly enough. Daedalus kicked out viciously, sending the man sprawling, and leaped into the saddle without a downward or backward glance. He sent the animal caroming through the trees at a gallop.

In the clearing, not so far behind, but still well out of sight of Daedalus's fleeing form, the bone lion reared back, claws digging into the soft earth of the forest floor, and gave a silent roar. Devoid of lungs and throat, the terrible construct could only open its fiendish maw wide and show the endless rows of teeth it would use to rend its prey. Long, talon-shaped spikes of bone protruded from its skeletal joints, like the blades used on the wheels of battle wagons or chariots. Two large diamonds blazed with dark essence in its pitted eye sockets. The guards near the corral slunk into the trees in fear, staring at one another wide-eyed and trembling.

The Drinker of Seeping Poison leaned down and scooped up the bag that Daedalus had carried. He lifted it to the lion, holding it in one steady hand. The scent of its quarry wafted from the soiled leather. The lion reared again, flexing the bones and sinew of its form, and then leaned down more closely. The Deathknight met the eerie beast's gaze and held the leather bag very still.

"Go," he commanded. "Go and drag him back to whatever pit spawned you."



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ISBN 1-58846-860-7

First Edition: September 2004

Printed in Canada

White Wolf Publishing

1554 Litton Drive

Stone Mountain, GA 30083

www.white-wolf.com/fiction

IT IS THE SECOND AGE OF MAN



Long ago, in the First Age, mortals became Exalted by the Unconquered Sun and other celestial gods. These demi-gods were Princes of the Earth and presided over a golden age of unparalleled wonder. But like all utopias, the age ended in tears and bloodshed.

The official histories say that the Solar Exalted went mad and had to be put down lest they destroy all Creation. Those who had been enlightened rulers became despots and anathema, and the First Age gave way to an era of chaos and warfare. This harsh time only ended with the rise of the Scarlet Empress, a powerful Dragon-Blood who fought back all enemies and founded a great empire. For a time, all was well—at least for those who toed the Empress's line.

But times are changing again. The Scarlet Empress has either gone missing or retreated into seclusion. The dark forces of the undead and the Fair Folk are stirring again. And, most cataclysmic of all, the Solar Exalted have returned. Across Creation, men and women find themselves imbued with the power of the Unconquered Sun and awaken to memories from a long-ago golden age.

The Sun-Children, the Anathema, have been reborn.

Among their kind is Dace. Before his Exaltation he was a grizzled mercenary, a veteran of the petty wars of the so-called Scavenger Lands—the region around the great trading city of Nexus. Now, empowered by the Sun with unparalleled combat skill, he leads his own mercenary force and has become one of Nexus's protectors. But the weight of destiny lies heavily on his shoulders and he fears great struggles are ahead. Already he has faced grim agents of the Deathlords and invading demons.

There is little rest for the chosen of the Sun.

