

THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

GERBOD FLEMING

Sample file

The Devil's Advocate

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Sample file

PROLOGUE

Anno Domini 1093

The creature paused on the moonlit hillside, clawed fingers and toes kneading at the exposed rockface. Wolfish nose twitched, revealing canines too long for the once-human form. There was a scent on the winter breeze, a new scent, not far away. Distracted by an itch, the beast scratched behind an ear with its foot, then picked a louse from the toenail with its teeth. More sniffing the night air. Definitely a new scent. Not sheep or boar or the blood-rich stench of peasant. Something else.

Owain stepped from behind a boulder and with the momentum of three powerful strides thrust his spear into the back of the crouching Gangrel, rais-

ing the creature to its feet by the force of the blow. For a brief moment the skewered beast grasped at the spear protruding from its chest, then the last strength fled from its body. With a snarl of pain and rage, it dropped to its knees and then collapsed to its side.

“Forty years since I’ve hunted these hills, and still I’m able to track you three nights running before you notice my presence.” Owain fairly spat the words as he stood above the impaled, convulsing figure. “And you Gangrel! What elder would choose you as progeny?” He noticed blood splattered on his dark cloak; the stain would not show, but still he raised the cloth to his lips and licked the damp patch. “Was your sire’s mind fouled with tainted blood, or maybe the years have caught up with him? More animal than man by now?”

The Gangrel struggled to speak, but could only gasp as blood gurgled in its throat.

“Where is your sire?” Owain asked leaning down close to the Gangrel’s face. “The deep cave a league to the west by the birch stand?” The surprise and the fear—the elder Gangrel was not an understanding master, then—in the Gangrel’s eyes told Owain that he was right. “Yes, you led me there last night.” Owain smiled and patted his prey roughly on the cheek. “I’ll mention you to him.”

Finally the Gangrel forced out stuttered words: “B-Bl-aidd...will t-tear...”

Owain stood and placed a booted foot firmly against the Gangrel's face, pinning its head to the ground. "Blaidd. Wolf. How quaint. What the peasants call him, no doubt. And he's going to tear me apart? Limb from limb? Perhaps." Owain drew his sword and with one fierce blow rent the Gangrel's head from its body.

"And so it begins," Owain said solemnly to the night. *I've been away from Wales for far too long*, he thought as clouds obscured the moon and a mist of rain began to fall. *Far too long*



Morgan ap Rhys strode briskly into the great hall, all but deserted at this late hour of the morning, and found red-haired Iorwerth. Morgan called to his older brother, the lone occupant of the hall, who hardly looked up from where he sat oiling his boots. "He's dead, Iorwerth! Robert of Rhuddlan is dead!"

At this, Iorwerth did stop his oiling. "According to whom?" he asked, eyes narrowed.

Morgan ignored his brother's skepticism. "Riders from the north. It was Gruffudd that killed him—raiding at Degannwy and Robert tried to stop three shiploads of Welshmen with only one man, and Gruffudd took his head!"

"Answer my question," Iorwerth pressed impatiently. "What riders?"