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THE

ENDWIN CHRONICLES

Dark Shadows



spieberg

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>>*Dark Shadows*<<

Volume 1

Reading Sample

by Robert Schwarz

Foreword

Nowadays, when you watch a movie trailer, you don't even have to go to the cinema anymore, since the trailer already contains the best scenes anyway. Sad, but true! You would think it's the same with reading samples, but the friendly reader can rest assured that this is not the case here.

The following excerpts were chosen carefully. They contain scenes that shall stir your interest, but won't reveal too much. If you liked the selection, take a look inside the book. The first volume of the Endwin Chronicles with the title »Dark Shadows« was published by Spielberg Verlag in August 2014 and can be ordered via bookstores or Amazon (German version only!). For news and background information on the novel, please check www.the-endwin-chronicles.com or its german sister-website www.die-endwin-chroniken.de

This websites will be updated regularly with the latest developments. Additionally, the Chronicle, Endwin's biggest and only daily paper, will offer ever more new issues containing background information on the characters and the fantastical world of Endwin.

And now I hope you enjoy reading these samples.

Yours truly,

Robert Schwarz

Previously in Endwin ...

Zerdoban, leader of a gang of bandits, has managed to capture the troublesome Arch Wizard and to take the document coveted by his ominous client. Unfortunately, the Arch Wizard manages to escape shortly thereafter and Zerdoban has to explain himself.

Nobody would have noticed his growing concern, except maybe for those who had known him long enough to interpret the signs. His employer did not tolerate failure and Zerdoban had now disappointed him twice already! Their prisoner had escaped! Someone had helped him and to date, all of Zerdoban's efforts to catch the Wizard had been without success. Disgruntled, he made his way to his client's tent. Silently pulling the strings in the background, his client had arrived a few hours after Zerdoban's conversation with the Arch Wizard. He had never met his employer before. The negotiations were usually held by a middleman, a creepy guy called Morgarth. By all appearances, his patron was a highly respected person, at least judging by the equipment and servants he had brought along. Well, that had actually been to be expected. Such missions had, as he knew very well, often to do with schemes at court. Highly suspicious, however, was the fact that the carriage with which his client travelled had no windows at all. Servants had immediately begun to put up a tent made of black canvas. The carriage had then been moved so close to this tent that neither Zerdoban nor his men had been able to tell who exited the coach. Admittedly, this was all very strange, but not strange enough to warrant any concerns. The problems had begun, when shortly after this display a servant had come to him and demanded the prisoner to be brought to his master's tent. But when Zerdoban consequently had gone to fetch the Wizard he had discovered that his captive had escaped. In his rage he had killed the man responsible for guarding the prisoner. Afterwards, he sent out every available man to scout the area surrounding the camp for the escapee.

But what happened next was ...

Involuntarily, he found himself thinking back to his first fateful encounter with his patron, the shadow. Zerdoban, who was considered amongst many to be the toughest fellow either side of the border, felt an icy chill run down his spine at the mere thought of it. He couldn't put his finger on it, but something about this figure hiding in the shadows gave him the jitters. It was like standing on the edge of a cliff. Just a small step and one would plummet into depths no human soul were able to comprehend. It was his luck that he had been able to appease the shadowy figure with the scroll he had taken from the Arch Wizard. But now he had to report that the search for the Wizard had been fruitless. One of the servants threw back the flap of the tent's entrance. Zerdoban squared his shoulders, stooped forward and entered.

Just like last time, there was no light. The air in the tent was uncomfortably chilly. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to this twilight. Then he thought to have made out a shadow among all the other shadows. An absolute darkness, darker still than the blackest night! But everytime he thought to have caught the shadow with his gaze, it seemed to vanish and appear again in a different place. Zerdoban shivered. Suddenly there was a voice, very close to his right ear:

»Well, Zerdoban?« The voice sounded cold and eager. Zerdoban shuddered. »What news are you bringing?«

It took Zerdoban all of his strength not to step back blindly and flee from the tent in a mad rush. He kept his nerve and answered: »My men have searched the grounds for the Wizard and his companions, but they have found no trace of him.« He added quickly: »Maybe he used magic to cover his tracks?«

»That ...«, the voice directly in front of him hissed, »... is highly unlikely! I would have noticed, if that had been the case.«

»Of course«, Zerdoban swallowed.

»Your repeated failure is inexcusable, Zerdoban!«, the shadow hissed, his voice seemingly coming from above. »Find the Arch Wizard. Do whatever is necessary! Don't dare to show your face until you have found him and do not disappoint me again!« The threat in the shadow's voice could not be overheard.

»Yes, Master.« Zerdoban gritted his teeth. He had made a mistake. He should have never accepted this mission, but it was too late for regret. He had made a pact with the devil and if he could not deliver his sacrifice, the devil would hold him to it.

Hurriedly and without looking back, he left the tent. After a few dozen yards, the constricting feeling in his chest subsided a bit, leaving him to breathe easier. He ordered his men to widen the search perimeter. Then, he took several deep breaths. He had to get hold of this Wizard! Involuntarily, his hand reached for the bruises on his face.

Previously in Endwin ...

Horgard, the Arch Wizard, and the pitiful remains of his escort have arrived in the dwarf city of Verndûr and have made it right up to the throne of the dwarf king. Here, the councillor Gamrin gives them trouble. The following scene takes place after Gamrin has been sent out of the hall.

At an unknown place, somewhere outside of the palace walls ...

»You assured me the Arch Wizard would never make it here and what happens? He's standing right in front of Denôr's throne, alive and fresh as a daisy!« Gamrin bristled with anger and slammed his fist on the table standing next to two chairs in an otherwise empty room. »This man can ruin everything! These Wizards have to put their nose everywhere!« He looked up and his angry gaze turned towards a dark figure draped in a hooded cloak residing with him in the shabby chamber. »This is your fault alone, Morgarth!« Gamrin cursed, letting himself fall into one of the chairs, groaning.

»Your worries are misplaced«, Morgarth tried to reassure him. He took a seat in the other chair. With a fluid movement, he peeled back the hood. Underneath, a chiselled, pale face and dark eyes appeared, framed by long, black hair. The pointed tips of narrow ears were showing conspicuously. He considered the dwarf with one of those incomprehensible expressions that sent Gamrin cold shivers down his spine time and time again. »It is true we could not get the Arch Wizard under our control.« Morgarth shrugged regretfully. »Good people are hard to find nowadays! But in his wisdom, my master sent me and I won't fail. So do not worry! Everything is going according to plan. Just take care of your part of the deal. I will deal with the Arch Wizard when the time is right.«

With these words the servant of the Shadow got up and moved towards the door. On the threshold, he stopped and turned around. »A lot depends on the success of this enterprise, Gamrin. So, no mistakes!« Then finally he turned his back on the dwarf and disappeared into the dark corridor leading to the chamber, pulling the hood back over his face. The door slammed shut with a thump. All that was left was a dwarf getting the creeping suspicion that it had possibly been a bad idea to take the offer presented to him that night three months ago.

Previously in Endwin ...

Morgarth, the dark elf and dark Wizard has managed to take Kyra prisoner. After interrogating her, he's meeting Zerdoban, leader of a gang of scoundrels and cutthroats, in his chamber for a talk ...

The chamber was stuffy and smelled of burned oil mixed with the strong odour coming from Zerdoban's unwashed body. Zerdoban was sitting at a small table, its battered and stained surface covered by an oil lamp, a pitcher of stale beer and a half empty tankard. A skinny figure cloaked in dark robes was sitting across from him. A pale, bony hand reached for the tankard and lifted it to thin, pale-blue lips. For a while, only the gargling sounds of foamy beer could be heard, rushing over the edge of the mug like a waterfall, only to disappear down the throat of the emaciated figure.

»Torturing young girls seems to make thirsty«, Zerdoban remarked with a slightly sarcastic undertone. Morgarth's hand, in the process of putting down the mug, stopped dead in its tracks. The elf's usually so composed face twitched dangerously.

»You should choose your words with care, Zerdoban«, Morgarth said, putting down the tankard and wiping the remaining foam from his mouth with the seam of his robe. His dark eyes bored themselves into those of his opponent. Zerdoban withstood Morgarth's gaze for several heartbeats, then blurted out a curse and averted his eyes. Morgarth laughed and leaned back in his chair with satisfaction. Zerdoban, scrunching his face, reached for the pitcher and poured the elf another drink. His next question sounded unfriendly: »Well? Have you learned what you wanted to know?« The pitcher came down crashing on the small table. Beer sloshed over the brim, adding new stains to the surface of the table.

»Indeed.« Morgarth allowed himself a faint smile. »Tomorrow we leave.«

»We?« Confused, Zerdoban blinked »Do you really want me to accompany you?«

»No, no!« Morgarth lifted his hands in defence. »You should stay here and make sure these country bumpkins don't get any stupid ideas. When I say ›we‹ I mean this little ginger witch and her friend. Somehow I have the feeling those two might possibly become useful some day. At least until I got what I want.« Zerdoban didn't seem to mind Morgarth's rejection. Instead, he decided to dig deeper: »Surely you mean this shining trinket the girl was holding in her hand, don't you?«

Morgarth darted a calculating glance at his opponent. How much could he tell this thug without revealing the true value of the stone? His hand enveloped the handle of his mug once again. He wanted to take another mouthful from his freshly filled tankard before answering. He would let Zerdoban wriggle a bit. He felt the dark, thick beer slowly running down his throat, a malty aftertaste being left on his tongue. Morgarth stopped short. For a short moment, it seemed as if the room was spinning around him. He blinked several times while putting his empty mug on the table with erratic movement. Slowly, the dizziness that had taken a hold of him seemed to dissipate. Pensively, Morgath considered the mug sitting before him. This brew seemed to be stronger than anticipated. He cleared his throat and directed his attention towards Zerdoban. »This trinket, as you call it, is a special kind of crystal. It is the heart of a dragon, to be precise.« That part of him not under the influence of alcohol marvelled at the fact that he revealed this information so easily. Hadn't he just been wondering whether to let Zerdoban in on this?

I see", Zerdoban remarked with interest. He didn't seem to notice his opponent blinking heavily from time to time. "And what do you do with such a dragon heart? I mean, you don't want it just because it's pretty, do you?" Morgath burst out laughing.

Oh no! No, surely not." He leaned forward until their faces were only a handwidth apart. Then he lowered his voice and whispered: "The dragonstone is a very powerful magical artefact I have you know. Indeed!", he emphasized when he noticed his opponent's sceptical expression. "My master covets it more than anything else. With its help, he is going to restore his former power. And what's more ...", Morgath put his hand on Zerdoban's right arm in a familiar gesture. "What's more is that with the stone's help I should be able to free your people from the curse, as well as the dragon gold."

Zerdoban's eyes went wide with astonishment. "Is that possible?"

Morgarth nodded heavily. "As soon as the stone is in my possession."

Zerdoban fell silent for a moment. He seemed to ponder the elf's words. Then, a sly expression crossed his face. "And you are sure you could control the stone just as well as the little ginger witch did?"

A frown appeared on Morgarth's forehead and rage flashed in his eyes when he exploded: "How dare you compare me to that brat? Her skills, if she has any at all, are nothing next to my powers!"

Appeasingly, Zerdoban held up his hands and put on a reassuring smile. "Nobody doubts your powers, Morgarth, not even in the slightest. However, well, don't get me wrong. I'm just asking myself why the old dwarf gave the stone to her, of all people, you know?"

Morgarth moved back and sat up straight, in his eyes a blazing fire. How did that good-for-

nothing bandit dare to talk to him like that? He was about to give an unfriendly retort when his mouth closed on its own. Instead he furrowed his brow. Of course this brat had nothing on him, who could take on an Arch Wizard without effort. Regardless, Zerdoban's words were sinking deeper into his thoughts like a poisoned thorn. Why had the guardians of the stronghold left the stone with this girl? Why had they not tried to take away the stone when the situation became dangerous? Had he overlooked something? His eyes became narrow while thinking about this. No! Impossible! The girl had accompanied the old guy during his escape. Certainly she had only carried the stone for him. Yes, that had to be it! There couldn't be any other explanation. Calmer now, he exhaled, his features relaxing. Everything was alright. If only there wasn't this leaden exhaustion that seemed to consume him more and more. He blinked involuntarily and with a jerk he pushed back his chair and stood up. He had trouble keeping his balance, an unsteadiness betraying his condition. His voice sounded husky when he noted: "I think it's time for me to retire for the night. It's been a long day and I intend to leave very early in the morning." He nodded towards Zerdoban who was still sitting at the table, while almost losing his balance once again. Then, he turned towards the door and slightly uncoordinated stepped into the corridor. Zerdoban looked after him with a pensive expression on his face. His gaze was still directed towards the door long after his guest had closed it.