

Tas jumped when he heard a hissing coming from behind the table not from shock but the fact that Astrid immediately dove at it with her wooden and steel stakes poised to strike; she wasn't fooling around as even though the front of her blouse was black from all the soot accumulated from dusting the two vampires on the way up...

The tablecloth underneath rustled and the hideous overwrinkled Kender came scuttling forward and poked her head out hissing at Tas & Astrid as he raised the blue candle Raistlin had given him. Tickle mop spat and hissed but seemed to be somewhat tiring; the vampiric kender had moved like a stiff paper doll in Sithicus; here in Strahds Castle she'd suddenly gained the ability to move like a kender again. Now after being relentlessly pursued and smacked in the head with a bag of shimmerweed; her attitude at least changed to surviving instead of trying to eat them.

“Act' Hold fast! I shall not let this creature get away with what it did to that child! I warn you Tickle mop! I vil be taking you back to Fizban in a holy sack tied with reigns to make sure what is left of you is judged or saved, or I vil slay you where you stand when you attack us! Foul Smelly disgrace! Betrayer and ursuper of Kenderkin! I vil not let thee escape us you little monster!”

“Astrid,” Tas pleaded knowing himself it was kind of foolish to feel anything for this foul insidious creature that had perhaps lured other real Kender to their deaths first for Soth and then for Strahd. Tickle mop's life what it had been; was before the cataclysm; it pained and horrified him worse to see a member of his Race be twisted and manipulated into something so evil and a mockery but also so brittle and stiff and as shambling as a corpse from eons perhaps of being so BORED on a moonlit night she couldn't do anything but wail and blubber beside her coffin. The hissing grew louder. Tickle mop started mewling and groveling as she cradled the cracked sparkling amulet still glowing in her talons. She somehow didn't seem to be interested in them at all so much as she stared into the gem; her dead sickly green clouded eyes washing over in a mockery of what may have been infatuated wonder in her former life.

“She does not hear you anymore Kender!” Raistlin's voice suddenly appeared out of the dark; he stepped forward once and tapped the Staff of Magius right on top of the table as he heard a scurrying back down the length of it. He passively waited; not even bothering to chase after her. “And do you know what Strahd actually offered this wretched one? A chance to go back out at night and feed instead of being required to weep beside her coffin.” Raistlin smirked. “How very Kenderlike,” but then his expression changed to a hard wall of contempt. “I am sorry Tasslehoff Burrfoot and Astrid for what I must do to this creature. In its current state it cannot be allowed to go on for I have actually found WHY it exists. The child was not real Astrid; it was a shade of someone from a memory but it was used to compel horror in you my poor Kender and manipulate your emotions. Strahd knew this so the feeding you witnessed was another of his sick attempts to manipulate you. The other Phylactery was meant FOR YOU instead of Azrael!”

“No Raistlin!” Tas said indignantly! “There are easier ways to do this!” Suddenly Tas realized in actual horror what Raistlin might do if Astrid got in his way. Astrid furiously threw her arms up and turned her back to Tas while watching Ticklempop.

“Stupid Duckweasel!” Astrid squealed, “Cousin Tas! You must not let him destroy her until we have taken her back to Fizban; he said if we do not return her intact we are to destroy her ourselves!” Astrid huffed insisting they do the latter and not kill Ticklempop as she wanted to very much study this Vampire Kender as much as she could...

“It has been the key all along while Soth has been trapped in the mirrors of his memories; A light that once burned brightest in Krynn reduced as a lure into the dark planes of dread. She has been used first by Soth and then by Strahd; but it was Strahd who initially led Ticklempop here for after all she is why Sithicus retains its domain. The light left in her soul is the beacon from the prime material that draws unwary into the realms of dread through the mists of Ravenloft. As long as Strahd retains Ticklempop in his dominion he can hold Soth back indefinitely; if Ticklempop ceases to be in this realm, Soth can and will enter Barovia one final time to challenge Strahd and The Black Nebula will indeed befall us. Barovia and Sithicus must have masters if there

are none the Nebula Engulfs All...”

“Sir Magus Majere! That will destabilize the possibility of us leaving here...” Astrid interjected. “We leave the big bullies to fight each other and we take Ticklmop back to Fizban, yah?”

“Yes of course,” Raistlin nodded to Astrid Damaris; for a second Tas saw his 'sly ass little smirk' as Flint used to call it and realized the black robed mage was up to something. “For I to confront Soth or Strahd we must give them an incentive to show themselves to each other. Meanwhile dear Kender as soon as I do this; you must realize that you are to RUN directly back out and use the Portal Key. Fizban will be waiting for you in the safety of the sanctuary..”

“Raistlin!” Tas squeaked, “You can't do this! That means you get to talk to Strahd alone and sorry but I got a few things to say to that fartbag myself! He's a fat liar! He tried to hurt Tanis and Laurana! They're ok by the way! That's why the portal came in handy because we got them back home; Me and Astrid are really here to back you up Raistlin! We're Kender! Humans always say we aren't afraid of anything and now we get to prove it!”

“You used the key already?” Raistlin cocked an eyebrow and immediately grimaced in disgust. “I have just enough ability to send ONE of you back again.” Raistlin smirked. “It was intended for myself; however due to unforeseen circumstances either Strahd or Soth must be stopped. Only one of us gets to go home...”

“Really?!!” Suddenly Astrid realized what he was saying and she immediately shrieked and started wailing as Tas tried to console her! “Nein! I will face Strahd with you but you must not kill Ticklempop!” Astrid's bravery matched Tasslehoff's. She hastily undid her Satchel and handed Tas the phylactery bottle they'd 'aquired' from Azrael. The still glowing goop in the cylinder slid lazily like a lava lamp inside. “Take this one we already have back to Fizban..”

“No,” Raistlin said flatly. Tasslehoff will remain with me; you my

young Kendermaid will go on to live a happy fruitful life on Krynn once more and remain...”

”Nein!” Astrid stomped her feet and screamed “No! NO Nein No! Acht!” She started wailing and grabbing at Tas. “I wont leave you here!”

“I know you won't!” Tas said. “You can't make her leave Raistlin! We promised my mom we'd save Ticklempop any way we could!”

“And you will,” Raistlin was interrupted by Ticklempop coming screaming back down the table but this time she was looking at Astrid Damaris crying; and she started cackling* The room suddenly started to shift and weave. Tas felt a horrible sensation of blood rushing into his ears and then felt a sharp painful throbbing that made his head hurt. In an instant before Ticklempop could continue mocking and laughing at Astrid who was actually holding her own ears and screaming and complaining about NOT GOING; to even notice Raistlin slip his dagger along his palm and cut his own hand...

Raistlin didn't bother to watch Astrid or Tas reaction; instead Ticklempop suddenly attentively aware that Raistlin was bleeding; sprang at him from underneath the table snarling and foaming at the jowls at the opportunity to taste blood again. In one swift instant as she made for him he deftly caught her by the topknot and in an instant held her fast screaming and clawing at him!

Ticklempop growled and then screamed in suprise and pain as a brilliant flash of energy burst directly from Raistlin's hand into the stunned vampiric Kender causing its entire form to catch like a burning ember from a forge; her body atomized and somehow Raistlin with the same manipulative force he'd used to tear her in half; held a glowing dripping mass of yellow purple goo which he then without skipping a beat asked Astrid to hand him the other empty phylactery vial. The Amulet which Ticklempop had carried; Raistlin tucked into the pocket of his robes; pausing only to mutter a few words to ensure it was indeed Kitiara's cipher. The glowing mass of goop made a chirping noise on the floor and Raistlin held the phylactery out; the goop almost instinctively piled ALL of itself into the chamber as if to seek safety.

“But...” Astrid blinked back tears as Raistlin encased the glowing mass in the tube and released his control of the phylactery to her. “What must I do with this? I am no Magus sir Majere! Fizban said Ticklepop she can be saved but you just really Made a mess! She is all drippings and goo! I cannot ask her question in that state! You must not open this! Acht it is messy! Mein Shoes! Eeek!” Astrid wrapped the phylactery up in a cloth and stuffed it back into the satchel but she refused to put it back anywhere on her person other than carry it as necessary! “This was stupid Sir Magus Majere! I hope you know what you're doing! Cousin Tas, do we flip coins? Or do we go ahead and let this duckweasel tell us what to do?!”-

(Authors note: My introduction to Dragonlance was a tale about Tas, a vampire, and 'Henry' used a snuff can of skoal bandits cherry flavor* as a coin to determine the odds- I got grounded because I stayed out all day. No I didn't dip! Yuck! Sickest I ever got at 8 years old swallowed some dip juice accidentally when I tried a dip. See our parents weren't casually worried about us picking up dipping or chewing tobacco because it was gross! “Anyways we used a snuff can, Rednek is Kender backwards.”)

-“You have no other choice; Astrid Damaris I ask that if you wish to honor your family and tell the tale of Tasslehoff Burrfoot please do so alive!” Raistlin winced as echoes of the Soth's ghastly keening all the way from Sithicus as an ominous low wail of Wolves indicated something was about to be wrong echoed through the chambers of every inch of the castle darkness. Soth would be on his way to see Strahd as well; and that's exactly what Raistlin wanted...

At once the droning austere echo of Strahds pipe organ began to emanate again from somewhere in the castle possibly an attempt to drown out the cacaphony of The Death Knight Soth's crooning; “Acht! Offense to da ears stupid lying fartgobble cannot sing!” Astrid mocked holding her earmuffs and grimacing. “Strahds not bad with that Organ..” Tas added, but then winced when it got louder and then so loud he himself had to look at Raistlin and realize if it had not been for them being Kender in the first place half the magical traps laid out through Strahd's castle would have killed them

from horror;(Kender are also highly immune to magic within the Prime Material sphere of Krynn and to an extent in Ravenloft albeit they risk the material danger of extended periods there If they survive as possibly altering them; and not in a good way.)

“Go, Now.” Raistlin wheezed; “Ast usarlum..” The small crackles of a portal key spell began to flit into the dark space and open like a wide mirror. Tas looked at Astrid sorrowfully and nodded; he hugged her and indicated that she HAD to do so; although his slight half kender smile meant maybe he didn't entirely want her to leave him alone with Raistlin and Strahd and not at least see Raistlin to quote Astrid “Smack His Heinie! Yah!”

(*back to the safety of the 'sanctuary beyond the grasp of Ravenloft' the island demiplane that Fizban had agreed to have them brought. (Dms Note: It is imperative you may or may not reveal this to the players depending on whether the Pc's use a Vistani Seer CrystalBall to send a temporary SOS out of the plane of dread's space; to hopefully get them home. The optional choice would have the players meet Fizban in the Outlands so this 'demiplane of safety' you are connected to; once again the concept of the portal key that Pez used in “everything but the Minotaurs' applies here (*remember he farted and they jumped into the portal?) This also allows player unfamiliar with Sigil to be introduced to THE SPIRE; as Sigil will be closed off to the players outside the normal channels; Tas and Raistlin are thrown into Sigil by Strahd no matter what; they are separated integrally to different parts of the aesthetic wheel hub of SIGIL. Whatever happens outside of these events as observers is up to the DM.)

The Keening Grew Louder; Tas looked to see the Portal now open and freely sparking; it looked quite beautiful and particularly interesting and inviting unlike this place; Astrid was missing out on what was sure to be an adventure hanging around Strahd's dump and he certainly didn't want her to “be stuck bored sitting beside a coffin on moonlit nights listening to the stupid fartgobbler play his organ musics all night and wah wah wah!” as Astrid put it, The room and the antechamber suddnely expanded and lit up as they found themselves shifted to an elaborate throne room as expected a huge Pipe Organ blared as an ominous black figure furiously hammered on the

keys and sneered at them in contempt as he mashed on the final note! Tas noticed he'd not bothered to wipe his lips since tearing the seneschals throat out earlier after Raistlin had also introduced the henchman to the phylactery vial he'd intended for them. The price of failure and Strahd was not pleased. His face was now changed and it was clear his vampiric nature was evident in how he found no need in being 'discreet' or 'polite' as he put it any longer.

“There is that stinking lying fart weasel! I see him behind that organ there!” Astrid pointed and stomped her feet! “Smack his Heinie! Smack it!” Raistlin smirked and with one hand reached around and grabbed Astrid; Tas immediately panicked because he knew it might hurt Astrid. Astrid Squealed however as Raistlin grabbed the back of her pants and (Helped?) toss her into the portal! Luckily in suprise Tas did indeed see the bewildered faces of Tanis AND Laurana on the other side of the portal peering helplessly but attentively to what had just appeared before them. On the other side of the portal the little Kendermaid was sent squealing and bawling into the waiting but safe arms of Laurana and Tanis! Not to be outdone she tried to wheel around and jump back in; crying and kicking at Tanis Half Elven but also overjoyed to see him alive and ok and not turned into an undead or a vampire! She looked back sadly to see the slight awful sadness in cousin Tas eyes that she might not ever see him again; but also his nod that he wanted her safe and able to tell the story just in case like his Kender dad he never made it back.

The portal snapped shut; and in that instant. Tas and Raistlin were alone with the LORD of BAROVIA Strahd Von Zarovich in all his full vampiric glory.

“You...” Strahd sneered at Raistlin. “I am Lord of this Realm of Dread! I AM THE LAND! The madness of Soth has compelled me to take Krynn as my own; why should I allow your Dark Queen Dominion in MY Kingdom a Star in my skies; when she champions YOU as her ARBITER, YOU as her hand, a mortal. A weak husk; who allowed himself a pact with a parasite of a wizard Fistantilus; oh yes, I now know who you served Raistlin Majere of Krynn; Master of The Tower Of Wayreth. A red robed mage too fragile and weak as a mortal to hold his staff! The Gold skin and Hourglass eyes a curse of your pact to save you during your test of magehood; you cheated! Sly you

are! But you are no more capable of deserving your powers as a mortal no more than I did; your magic will become mine. I will consume your husk and then Soth will kneel before me; go back to invade and make ALL Krynn my domain! I gave you a chance to get rid of Soth and leave my land albeit with the price of the elf maiden for MY bride or the alluring woman within the amulet; such prizes will both be mine again. Their life forces will sustain me and satiate my lust as a bargain for what I take if you do not comply with me. I shall drain your souls..." Strahd sneered.

"You're Ugly! But that's an impressive Pipe Organ, I..." Tas piped up. He couldn't think of anything more fitting to say as Strahd had a really impressive pipe organ and he really wanted to try pressing the keys on it but he also thought Strahd was a jerk; and the Nightmare thing was him overcompensating and trying to show off to Raistlin like he was some sort of big thing but Tas could spot someone who thought his crap didn't stink; and this Strahd was fulla crap. He was just so full of himself. Vampire or not he was just a stuffy arrogant former human who as Fizban said 'there is a reason why humans only live about a hundred or so years, they get too familiar with how the sauce is made for the stew and they think they can sneak a few extra bowls for themselves! Don't get greedy Kender lad! A rational person knows they don't need anything but a good heart and an open mind. Plus he was rude, plus he had lied to Tanis and Laurana about letting them leave.

Strahd sneered and shifted his gaze to the Kender who stood defiant staring up at him next to Raistlin. He'd seen 'halflings' of other races in his domain before but these "Kender" were somewhat of an oddity to him. Also they weren't AFRAID of him. Both of these things were problematic in his eyes and that infuriated him. This little being had successfully evaded all attempts to kill him and capture his soul. Ticklemop was the last straw. He couldn't manipulate and control Soth without the Kender's link to the Graygem Artifact on Krynn. Takhisis had taunted him that the Graygem held the Kender fast to Krynn and no matter of tampering could ever break their lifeline to Krynn as it was much a part of Krynn as she was a part of everything. The enchanter had kept Soth distracted in the mirrors; Ticklemop entered his domain leading others there over centuries; to eventually lure the greatest prize Raistlin Majere; trick him into entering the mists of Ravenloft

and then destroy him once and for all; usurp the right to be the Dark Queen's arbiter of justice and invade Krynn; or trap Raistlin forever in Sithicus to deal with Soth and succumb to his power once the black nebula engulfed the planet.

“Shut Up...” Strahd said flatly to the Kender. You could hear a pin drop. Tas indignantly started to talk again; and Strahd raised an eyebrow and said again, deeply and more insistent. “Shut. Up.”

“Oh you go jump in a privy pit you smelly arsed half brain...” Tas immediately flew so fast into Kender taunt mode that Strahd blinked several times in disbelief that the Kender was STILL going and NOT STOPPING. Raistlin himself smirked in memory recalling a long ago envy of his youth that he wished he'd had the ability to taunt and enrage bullies the way the Kender used to; and this time it was a little 4 foot Kender telling the Lord of Barovia to “Go suck a fart out of a Nightmare's backside and then breathe it out on a torch like I saw this person do at a carnival one time; but no seriously suck a fart cuase you really are a piece of lying refuse Strahd and I hope you crap your pants at the most inopportune time; although I don't know if vampires eat anymore and have to go but if you do I hope it really inconveniences you because frankly buddy, You are a complete Butt hole. You are rude! Plus you cant even do magic even half as good as Raistlin Majere can, he forgot more than you ever knew about magic... you hedge wizard... You couldn't carry Fizbans Hat which is ok because he can't either because he always loses it. I'm pretty sure if you touched his hat and tried to put it on it would explode you like a firework! That would be great..”

That's it..” Strahd flinched a split second just in time to sneer at the Kender and move but before he did Raistlin in an immediate act of self defense uttered one word...

“Shirak...” The Staff of Magius flared to life and Strahd defiantly grabbed ahold of it. His eyes burned with hate and rage as he towered over Raistlin with his hand grasping the hilt of the dragon clawed tip... He leered in defiance at Raistlin and bared his fangs; the light got brighter... “Ast Tulathlalaris alalarath!” Strahd screamed at him as Raistlin uttered a few final words; the Staff flared and a massive crackle of thunder blasted Strahd

upwards as he and Raistlin held onto the staff as the concussive shockwave attempted to force them both away from the staff; Raistlin's hourglass eyes flashed in a contemptible silent sneer of satisfaction as he watched an absolute look of genuine surprise and horror cross Strahd Von Zarovich's face right before the inevitable happened...

“GaaaaaH!” Strahd screamed and yelled as a tangle of blue electricity and fire snaked its way up the staff from the ground out of the top of the staff and all over the left side of his body still grasping the staff! He let go because he was now a flaming torch! His screaming continued louder and Strahd immediately broke away to zip around the room in an impressive shower of sparks and confusion and smoke! Tas stood and watched the Vampire change forms almost 3 times in one second... Becoming a bat and realizing he was still on fire trying to get away from Raistlin has assumed a mist form but wasn't doing a good job of keeping it stable because he crawled around on the floor now like Raistlin used to when he would cough up blood; his half vampire half human features morphing and twisting before settling again into an ugly feral beast he was albeit now hideously burned and deformed! Strahd gasped at Raistlin in surprise and rage... His mouth opened and he attempted to speak but his jaw gave way, however it wasn't because he was disintegrating... No... Strahd was growing... bigger.. His muscles and limbs started to harden and take the shape of a massive ogrelike monster.. He was still ugly! Dripping blood! Gallons of it! One eye was gone! The other gleamed with a red glare to match Soth's. Raistlin and Tas watched part of the burned husk of flesh fall away from Strahd's body only to congeal into a mass that started to fuse with him and make him larger! The man\vampire grew until he was 7 feet, 10 feet... Massive amounts of blood and fluid congealed in a mass around Strahd's legs and arms. Raistlin held onto the Staff Of Magius and uttered the word.

“Dulak.” As if to mock Strahd. The staff winked out. Giving the monster a second to process that Raistlin has just burned the living hells out of him literally speaking. He tapped the end of the staff on the stone and smirked at Strahd who was now limping almost crawling back toward his throne to sit down and recuperate.. His eye blazed with hate.. He stumbled against the pipe organ making it screech in an insulting manner with the

pressing off odd keys.. They'd humiliated Strahd..

“Yep,” Tas looked at Raistlin. “He's really mad now.”

Strahd made no motion this time to counter the Kender's chattering as he leaned back onto his already massive throne; and now having grown twice his normal size, Tas certainly had to admire how his back had already started to sprout a new set of bat wings; actually they were bigger than wings like giant large talons sprouting out his back; but he couldn't quite get his body to coalesce past the 'raw burnt meat stage' being his eventual vampiric powers of regeneration at work.

Tas was out of Holy Water and he couldn't ask Astrid to spit in the Vampires eye; her being a half Cleric which would have been an exceptional idea because Female Kenders sometimes can spit a watermelon seed or anything the rate of a bullet; 'Aunt Magda ran a bunch of bandits off with a handful of sunflower seeds, allegedly.' Tas didn't want to spit in Strahd's face because that would be rude and he was a Kender after all who prided himself on manners. A good throttling by Raistlin might have been enough to make him listen to reason maybe but Tas doubted it 'old habits especially after hundreds of years are hard to break'. No need to add insult to injury it took all Tas could not to smirk and laugh at Strahd because he'd been so vicious and mean talking when he appeared; a tap of Raistlin's staff, they go whirling around up in the air round the room for a few minutes and NOW Strahd HAS to sit down for a minute... Dark Lord his Kender arse, this Strahd was an overconceited bread loaf all stuffed full of, well.. crap.

“Well met, Majere...” Strahd huffed obviously out of breath but with the attitude of someone who had just finished a fencing match or a duel; in his past life he had dueled and killed True Men in battles to the death many times in an arena or on the field of battle.

Strahd sneered at Tas and snorted (down the side of his face that wasn't burnt) with the huge feral/ogre nostril; into his hand and flung it at the Kender,

“Shut. Up.” Strahd huffed in the same breath and fixed his blaring red

eye on Raistlin. The Kender gleefully dodged the disgusting gesture still grinning from ear to ear...

“Ok,” Tas said. “Don't mind me, you just talk it out with Raistlin. I'll just sit here and try this, Pipe- that Uncle Trapspringer said 'halflings' smoke of course I really Never have smoked, don't really want or need to. Tobacco stinks, Flint would chew plugs of it and tell me the sweet expensive cubed kind was chocolate; oh wrong it was, I threw up! I got him back because I peed in his ale well not deliberately I just went to go fill up the mugs and just so happen to set his down slightly to the side on my way to the..” Tas smirked and pulled out a pipe with a grin and stuck it in his mouth.

He lit it and puffed like an inexperienced smoker who just got ahold of a bad cigar! Two puffs in, Tas turned Green, his eyes bugged out; and he coughed so hard he became red faced and dropped the pipe waving his hands and staggering around in a circle retching... “Hack! Wheeeze! How does Fizban or any human find that even remotely relaxing... ahaaaack! Oh that is not good! No, no, nein. Excuse me...” Tas hacked and coughed so loud it was echoing off the walls of the chamber as Raistlin & Strahd silently fumed at each other perhaps not even paying attention to the Kenders antics other than a respite from their inevitable fight to commence once the other took the notion to do so...

(the reader should be aware just like a 5 year old trying a pipe for the first time; Tas doesn't smoke! He never smoked! He's gonna cough choke n puke, like a dope! Kender are not Hobbits* in that regard; they like alcohol but pipeweed* on Krynn is unknown. Some Kenders may smoke, Not Tas. He never did and probably never will after that and I'm pretty sure, its just Tobacco..)

“I grow bored,” Strahd sneered. “Of this one's amusing but completely oblivious reaction to the impending death I bring you both; once I've made my point..” Raistlin didn't bother to counter or interject with something witty, he found his silent smirk was enough to enrage Strahd all by itself and so he continued to let Strahd Pontificate and Preach, for the moment..

“These foolish creatures...” Strahd continued. “Your Savior, this Fizban.. oh yes your Dark Queen told me of him, he will NEVER come to save you from my realm unless I allow it. So many thousands of lives have squealed their lasts breaths to Paladine over Eons what seems to mortals hundred of years* when they all succumbed to my will to no avail. Your gods have no place here in my realm. I AM THE LAND. My Dark Queen cares not if I destroy you both as it will indeed prove I AM the master of past and present; for I am immortal, NOT YOU!”

“Fizban is going to...” Tas recovered long enough to throw a pebble back at Strahd who hissed in annoyance at the tiny speck the kender had snatched off the floor. “You shut up about Fizban! Ogreface! Yeah you look like an Ogre now, like really stupid too...”

“Fizban gave you the very Phylacteries you carry to retain YOUR souls; should you never return. Do you not understand you foolish pathetic creature? He cared so much about you; he was willing to allow your 'friend' Raistlin once he had disposed of me, dispose of the both of YOU so neither of you would be left within Barovia to be used by ME. Once you had defeated me Raistlin Majere, you envisioned yourself snuffing these little cretins like drowned broods of a bitch dog in a pond; watching them helplessly beg you as you ripped their lights from their souls and tucked them away perhaps to bargain elsewhere...”

“Raistlin?” Suddenly a horrible reminder in Tasslehoff's brain about who Raistlin was and WHY he joined the dark Queen reminded him that Raistlin was still a black robed wizard as evil as Strahd in some regards. “Were you going to really kill me and Astrid like you did Tickle mop if we didn't make it back?! Were you gonna goop us? Like that?! I mean we don't have any more of those things to hold another, do we?”

“To Prevent HIM, from using your souls as yet another anchor into Krynn to draw more unsuspecting ones into his domain?” Raistlin didn't hesitate. “Yes, and given the circumstances Tasslehoff Burrfoot if Strahd does succeed in killing ME and YOU by some chance are miraculously still alive; I'd have you do the same for me. We cannot die or remain on this plane. That

much is certain if we wish to prevail...”

“I don't need silly phylacteries to retain your souls HERE!” Strahd bellowed. “You will never leave my domain! Why would I worry about Azrael and Ticklepop being lost to me, when I have two more resilient fools in front of me. You have made my work that much easier...” Strahd burst into evil guffawing...

YOU FILTH! THEY ARE MINE! HOW DARE YOU?!

“Holy moly! Whoops sorry Tak...Ouch, stop ok, I know you don't like Holy words..”

As if on cue the looming encroaching Darkness crept into the chamber; followed by an immediate flash of Purple light as the familiar form of Takhisis Avatar sneered into a mirror frame and burst forth in a cloud to hover before them. Tas breathed an indescribable sigh as he'd witnessed seeing The Queen of Darkness before; but she wasn't usually a nice lady and this time she was really Angry, at Strahd or Raistlin he couldn't tell because Raistlin doubled over and immediately started coughing like he used to and Tas had to look away for a second because Takhisis made him really uncomfortable to look at, she was beautiful but at the same time the contours of her face made his head hurt like if he stared at her eyes too much it felt like she could flatten his head and all out like a piece of bread dough and then bake it and bite a hunk out of it...

Tas couldn't think, he felt his knees buckle.. Like something making him hold still which for a Kender is torturing anyway. Like being pressed to the ground with a massive hand..

Stop, let me up..

Hey that kind of hurts, ow...

Tas eyes swam and he tried to look up to see what was happening but everything got really dark except for the flaring visage of Takhisis screaming through a portal...

Raistlin did not make an effort to light his staff as he was barely able to stand and not fall in the floor; his ailment which had plagued him as a magic

user once before had suddenly manifested itself to render him helpless. The convulsions unable to make him do anything but viciously heave every time a word was spoken; like a knife; Strahd was not doing this... Strahd did not have the power to do this, The Queen; only the Queen, but Why? He heard her speak in his mind..

Silence fool... He knows not of what he speaks..

Raistlin felt himself begin to lose consciousness he grasped his staff as he felt everything else give away around him...

Strahd leered forward at the flaring visage attempting to swat at it with his massive mutated arms flailing away; to no avail he hit nothing and sneered in contempt!

“Bitch! This is My Realm! It will always be My Realm! How dare YOU allow this stunted husk to usurp me! How dare you allow Soth to slip away into madness? The nebula will consume your world as well as mine; we shall all perish within the oblivion of nothing...”

YOU ARE NOT MY CHAMPION! Takhisis sneered.

“Bitch, why should I be your champion? When I can be your master, perhaps your God...” Strahd hissed and laughed again. “A dark one came to me and told me what you fear to lose...” Strahd laughed again. “I once tricked a maiden with a kiss by tossing a gem in front of her; she grasped the gem and then...”

NO! YOU LIE!

“Yes,” Strahd sneered again. “You'll not follow both to stop me...”

NO! STRAHD YOU FILTH! A MORTAL KNOWS NOT OF THE PLANES AS I.. YOU, WILL REGRET AND PERHAPS EVEN FORGET... GO THEN COWARD, THE PLANES WILL RESTORE WHAT IS MINE... IF YOU HAVE IT, USE IT...

“I've found a cage, with a lock and a key...” Where even Gods cannot touch you. Not unlike my Realm, it's a cage. But I will rule this cage; you will never rule or escape the cage in which I put you Takhisis! I will rule; and maybe then you will understand; such a coup in the Blood War to be gained...

Gaaaaah! YOU FILTH! YOU WILL NOT. THE BLOOD WAR WILL CONSUME THEMSELVES, ALONG WITH YOU!

“We shall see,” Strahd looked toward Tasslehoff and Raistlin now frozen in time... He raised his hand and tossed a single black blood red ruby onto the stone floor... It clattered, spun and then melted into a spot of blood. Large rifts of purple light melted what was left of the chamber floor into a glowing oblivion...

Takhisis screamed in rage as a massive vortex spun her image away in a cloud as a massive portal opened; the bodies of Tasslehoff Burrfoot and Raistlin Majere clutching his staff were dragged into the maelstrom in a brilliant flash of color and lightning...

Takhisis screamed louder as Strahd's booming laughter echoed off the walls of the chamber.. The face of Takhisis contorted into an anguished scream and then her eyes narrowed as the face dove into the maelstrom itself...

The Portal snapped shut; a deadening silence. Strahd exhaled a single breath through his jowls and satisfactorily yawned in a mocking contempt of what had just happened.

Strahd was finally alone in his Realm...

Or Was he? In that Instant the form of Lord Soth materialized in front of him...

Strahd sneered and rose to meet his opponent. The Death Knight made a salute with his sword and stepped forward to receive his challenge. The world

exploded. In that Instant the Behemoth Strahd and Soth were now locked in a drawn out battle. There would be No Discernible Victor as neither had the power to completely remove the other.

Sword clashed against bone and sinew; blood & rage and fury knifing through the consuming darkness; magic flaring & far below in the valley below Strahd's Castle the Vistani themselves watched in horror as in the sky the image constellation of the Queen of darkness which shown so prominently had suddenly blazed as if on fire and winked out; around them an encroaching cold suddenly began to permeate all; a deeper darkness a strangling feeling of nothing but dread..

Strahd and Soth continued to fight on...