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The Universal Brotherhood is a sourcebook and adventure for Shadowrun.

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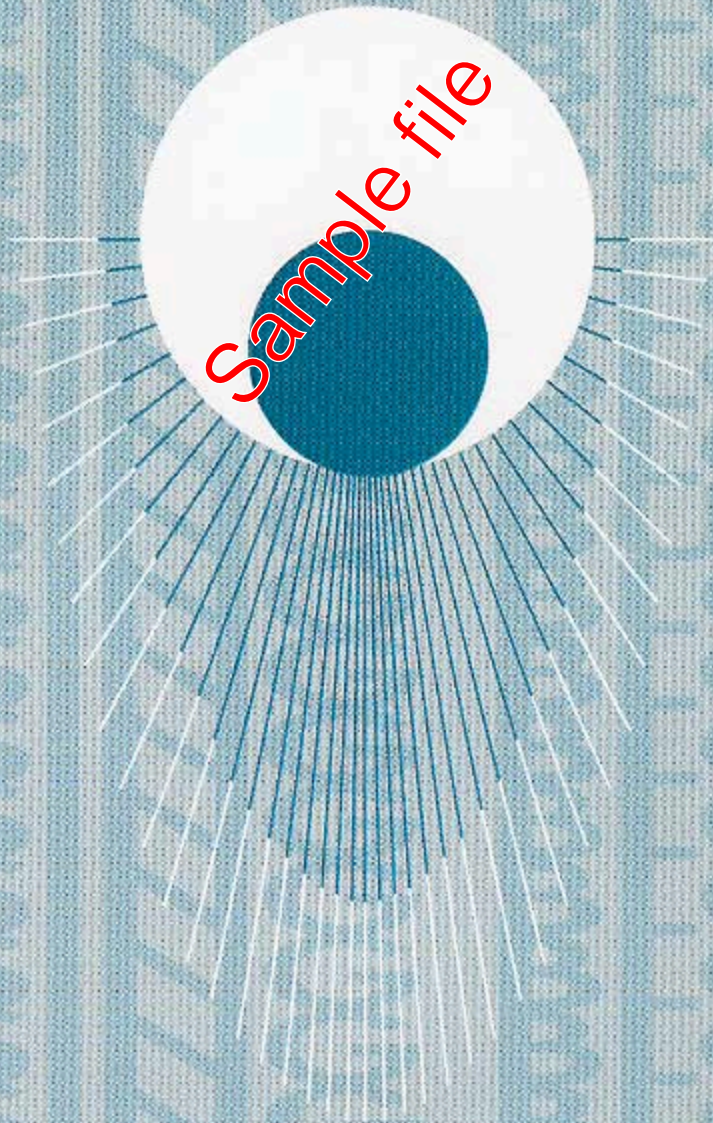
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MISSING BLOOD



Chris Kybasik



Sample file

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DEATH'S SECRET: A Prologue

She was nervous, so they gave her an injection. "She's not ready," one of them complained.

"Nonsense." As always, Malcolm's voice was gentle and reassuring. "She's one of our best. Aren't you, dear?" It had been Malcolm who'd first suggested she was ready for the Inner Circle.

"Yes," said Victoria. "I'm ready."

The first man cut in again. "But she's apprehensive. There's no way she'll have a good merge." Victoria had never seen the man before today and she had already forgotten what he looked like. Because of the drug, she couldn't focus her vision in the dim room.

She was confused and hadn't the foggiest idea what "a good merge" might mean. She attributed her lack of understanding to the drug and her own apprehension. She'd only felt this nervous before, but never in the two years since she'd joined the Brotherhood. And now she couldn't remember why she was afraid. It had to do with something they had told her...something to do with what was about to happen. But she knew the Brotherhood had given her the strength to stay alive during the last two years and that she would always be safe in their care. If it hadn't been for the Brotherhood, she'd probably have killed herself and would never have known how wonderful it was to be alive, would never have met Danial...

Her secret, she thought. Her affair with Danial Simpson was her one secret from the Universal Brotherhood because he'd insisted that she never tell anyone about their relationship. In return, she kept her association with the Brotherhood a secret from him, knowing that Danial would never understand why she needed the group. But after her initiation, she would tell him all about the Brotherhood. He would be proud of her for working her way up the organization's ranks. He would understand when she explained what a responsibility it was to be a member of the Brotherhood.

She reached to touch the necklace Danial had given her the day before, but her fingertips found only the flesh of her neck. For an instant, she was afraid she'd lost it. Or had it been stolen? Her memories were clouded. Then she recalled the necklace being taken from her. "No jewelry," Malcolm had said. "Just the beauty you possess as you. You'll get it back after the ceremony."

"Victoria?" It was Malcolm's voice, here and now.

She realized that she'd gone wandering off with her thoughts.

"Yes, Malcolm. I'm ready."

As the men helped her off the table, Victoria felt dizzy and feared she would crash to the floor. But they held her up and she was safe. The floor was cold against her bare feet and the air chilled her skin. Standing straight, she regained the confidence the Brotherhood had instilled in her over the last two years. She knew with certainty that her impulse to join the Inner Circle

was correct. There was no doubt, no need to second-guess. The men directed her down a corridor, and her steps were firm and unwavering. When they loosened their grip, she continued without difficulty.

They came to a large door that she had seen many times, but through which she had never been allowed to pass. "Some day," they had told her when she'd asked about it. "When you are ready."

I'm ready, she thought. Today I learn more than I ever thought I would.

The door was opened and a rush of warm air caressed her skin. The men on either side of her touched her lightly on the arms and escorted her through the doorway. The floor was warm and soft. Almost alive, she thought, then realized it was the drug again, altering her perceptions. The light was low, a dim orange, and up ahead, she could see a large room. Shapes were moving about in the room, large, hulking figures.

Victoria could not believe her eyes, so she did not. "We are taught lies," the Brotherhood had instructed her. "Illusions that cause us fear, loneliness. You must learn to see what is true and ignore what is not." What her eyes showed her was a creature with huge claws and hard, insect-like skin, but she knew that it was not so. Or, if it were, it was simply part of the wonders the Brotherhood was about to reveal to her.

She noticed that the room was filled with large, rough balls. Cocoons. "This way," Malcolm said softly.

They led her to a cocoon that had been slit. Its surface was wet. "This is where you will stay for awhile, Victoria," said the other man. "This is where you will enter the Inner Circle."

The fear, the instinctive fear, rose in her once again. "Danial," she said softly. The grip of the other man tightened slightly on her arm.

"Relax," said Malcolm, though Victoria did not know if he was speaking to her or to the man. She decided on the latter when Malcolm added, "If someone comes looking for her, we'll deal with it then." Then he asked her, "What is the first truth?"

"That we are all brothers," she answered.

"I love you, Victoria. Do you love us?"

"I love you all."

"Do you want more love, Victoria?"

In a flash, the loneliness of her past shot into her soul and she knew that she needed more love, more love and even more, enough to build a fortress against that loneliness. "Yes. I want more love. Please give me more."

"There is all the love you will ever need within the cocoons, Victoria."

Her body relaxed and she lowered herself down onto hands and knees. She thought she detected a pulse of some kind from the floor. She crawled into the cocoon. It was sticky, like cotton candy, and she remembered going to a carnival with her mother and father...before everything had gone wrong...