

# **THE DARK WATCH**

## **Book 1: The Heirs of Destiny**

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## **Prologue**

### **The Vale**

The city of Eden had once, long ago, been aptly named, but its gleaming towers and verdant gardens were gone and buried under layers of jagged, charred stone. It was redesigned to match the twisted image of its overseers. Though it was mid-afternoon, the sky was a wall of boiling shadowy fumes, blocking out the sky, sun, moon, or stars, if they even existed anymore.

Piercing the center of the marred city lay a tower that looked more like a bloody spinal column. It hovered over the sprawl like an ever watchful predator, ready to strike. Smoke drifted casually out of its skull-like peak. A dark, winged silhouette shot from a platform in the fanged skull. A passer-by might have assumed it was a bird, but they would have been wrong. As the shape grew closer, the jaws, spines, and claws of the dragon emerged. On its back sat a cloaked figure, adorned with scant armour that seemed more for ornamentation than protection.

The dragon and its rider dipped low, over a temple that resembled a broken ribcage, signaling its brethren to join. Dozens of smaller, dragon-like creatures leapt to the air, carrying hooded shapes on their backs. The flock spun in the air, building momentum, and then hurtled themselves low across the city, following the leader.

The city's inhabitants scattered through the burnt streets like seals from a shark as the menacing shadows flew overhead. One would have expected the denizens to peer out of their hiding places, to see what the nightmarish creatures were up to, but they knew it was best not to take an interest in the Hands of Death. They were the arms and ears of this world's master, and it was safer to live like rodents, hiding in the dark, leaving their lords to their business.

With a shudder the swarm fell to the earth like artillery fire, and settled on whatever surface they could find. The dragon landed in the middle of the town square, and its rider leapt to the ground. Behind him, several white skinned minions scrambled to keep up, while trying not to drop their load of scrolls. The dragon-rider's spear pounded the ground with each step, while casting a red glint, as if it had committed so many murderous acts, that blood had soaked into the metal, and turned it crimson.

Across from the perched horde lay a garrison that resembled a mound of internal organs. The sight was made more ominous by the putrescent mist that filled the streets. Dozens of robed figures appeared at its battlements as if under attack. With a flick of the spearman's wrist, the gates opened, revealing several finely dressed figures. The group did not seem put off by the invasion of this specter, once they caught sight of him. In fact their pallid shades and bloody tattoos each wore on their bald heads, showed they were just as unnatural as their visitor. Recognizing the newcomer, they immediately bowed.

"Xarnov, it is an honour to entertain one of the Hands of Death," said the nearest figure.

"Silence, and assemble your fellow Inquisitors. We have just learned that the Dark Watch have been assembling a secret army in hopes of challenging our Lord's Mastery of the Vale."

There were many mutterings and cackles of disbelief.

"The Dark Watch are too few, how can they be any match for us?"

"I didn't say they were a threat, only that they were going to try and become one," shot back Xarnov. "As soon as your men are gathered, we will be heading to Earth where the army is hidden. We will investigate, hunt them down, and kill them all."

"What is Earth?"

“Know you nothing? Earth lies in another dimension, where our ancestors once lived centuries ago, but we left as it was plagued by the rotting stench of human normals. Magic is dead to them, and they breed like maggots. But go we must, as our Lord demands it.”

The Xarnov pointed his spear at the nearest Inquisitor, and his attendants began handing out fresh scrolls, carrying the seal of their Lord and Master.

“Inside you will find the name of your targets, and where to find them. You need to learn what they know of the Dark Watch, and what their plans are. After that, kill them. Thule. You will hunt down a man named Kael Savoie. Kane, you will have a more challenging assignment. Since Sonja Brigg and Cassandra Cambo live near each other, you will be charged with killing both.”

The Inquisitor bowed deeply, honoured with being handed such a mission.

Xarnov continued to read the names off his death list -- fifty in all. The excitement grew among them, eager for the taste of blood, and to prove themselves to their Master, the Lord of Death.