

# Demon's Wrest Chronicles

## Announcement

The power courses through the body sending with it the gentle reminder that life truly lies in the senses and how much reality they allow to reach the inner man.

It is indeed evident without comparison from the parapets of the cold white heart of Coventry. The view from the west tower gave the senses a complete revitalization, an indescribable feeling of "smallness". From this lofty vantage comes the impressive view of the Zamostian Inner Sphere, a natural fortress in its own rite containing the Wellspring of Zamostia in the form of an immense natural spring bubbling from the heart of a land, considered the cornucopia of the known world by nearly all that beheld it. The vivid greens and yellows springing from the plain marked the many farmsteads barely visible from the towering citadel. If pressed to their utmost the eyes could, thru the freezing air, make out the diligent serfs preening their individual plots on the plain. Of course this was an obvious trick of the eyes as despite the air being indeed the purest in the world it is more than seven thousand feet down to the rich plains of Zamostia.

Was it the high cliff walls that made the area so rich in agriculture or was it the endless supply of not only fresh water but the silt from the depths of the planet pushed up through the Wellspring to mix with the soil of Zamostia? Ramblings indeed, unworthy of thought by an occupied mind. Still, the power and beauty that embodies Zamostia, highlighted by the immense cities of Castorous, the opulent capitol of Zamostia and Capara, the southern seat of power were the envy of every ruler in the lands.

Except one young man.

"Zamostia is a diversion to the beauty and ultimate power that is Coventry!" he whispered, as if to tease the ears of any would be listeners. They will always be the sun and we will be the attacker riding out from the brilliance of the Giver. Peoples, rulers, mages, lords, and demented others will always seek to have you Zamostia. They will place their all into that hope of reaching your golden rings only to fall short, exhausted. In retreat from you they will not see the true power of Sardist coming to enhance their pain and multiply their suffering. They will still be blinded by your beauties as the unwary child looking too long into the raging energies of the Giver. It is at that instant that I will take them! I do not envy you Zamostia, thought Vincenzo, I encourage your presence.

The icy breeze began to turn to a driving gust as the very breath of Caina drove from the southeast across the mountains, over the cliff walls up the towering walls of the castle and directly up Vincenzo's cloak. He whirled about, in mock defiance to meet the frigid zephyr. In life pain and suffering renew the truths of life and Vincenzo more than any other person considered this an axiom. The suffering which he endured made him the man he had become; that man although twisted to many was the embodiment of perfection to him. A level of self esteem that few will ever approach what bordered on self obsession. His life had been a painful one, but had it always been more rewarding than anyone else could have imagined. Still it was not nearly enough.

He looked downward once again. In the distance to the east, as far as the eye could see lay the sprawling kingdom of Coventry, the lands of his father. As the first wisps of snow began to fall in an unusually early winter, he noticed the Knights of the Regent - His personal guard engaging his fathers knights on the practice plain. Downward further still lay the City of Coventry on the plains of Coventry proper. More beautiful than Zamostia could ever be the Districts of Coventry were. What was once no more than numbers of petty kingdoms warring upon one another had, under his father, become the most aggressive and powerful human kingdom on the continent.

Alliances, he thought as great darkened shapes in the distance came into his field of view. It was the making of alliances that others either refused to make or neglected to make when they found themselves at a disadvantage. The proud Zamostians would never consider themselves open to an alliance with the ominous Dark AElf clans. With good reason for they that engage the Daemaa must be prepared to eat the Daemaa. The only thing that the Daemaa truly fear is an enemy more ruthless and powerful than they are.

The Coventarian ritual of Bennicci Madrubis (The skinning, gutting, roasting and eating of ones enemies) has always put the otherwise civilized and revered culture in a dangerous and bizarre backdrop. Not only the eating for the sheer enjoyment of taste as no one prepared any meat as well as the Coventarian gourmet chefs; it was the ultimate end to the conquered. Well not the true end, Vincenzo thought, that comes a couple of days later in the chamber pot.

Indeed it was and still shall be the allies of Coventry that kept it apart and ahead of its adversaries. The dark shapes demanded his attention. Allies, his thoughts continued will begin to monopolize your time if you let them.

“What is your news Quibrettktho?” bid Vincenzo as he labored to stabilize himself against the tower wall against beating of the expansive wings of the great drake. The creature throbbed against the skyline to remain airborne for the conveyance of its message.

“Glaekktok, Lord!” the thunderous voice erupted. “I should wish to transform and announce all that I have learned! So it is of my brethren as we have news of great interest and perhaps consequence to your future.” Quibrettktho continued seemingly undaunted by the obvious might required in keeping her 150 foot mass aloft.

Vincenzo admired her beauty as she hovered near the edge of the tower. She was grace and poise in motion and her deep black scales bid contrast to her insatiable heart. Her emerald green eyes shone bright and vivid whenever her master was near. Truly she had become more than a servant over the years since their joining.

It was unfortunate that she held such intense desire for his “attentions”. She had even gone so far as to devour one of Vincenzo’s lovers not five seasons past! Fortunately it was a simple physical affair, but this thing could be getting out of hand. He had always thought that her love would be a useful tool until that fateful day.

“Vincenzo!” came the shout from behind him.

“Remove that dragon from the walls lest the might of her buffet destroys the tower!” the voice of Anoram Scarlotti commanded as he attempted to step onto the top of the tower only to be whisked back to the door.

Sometimes he is so thoughtless, thought Anoram. Does he not realize the power that beast possesses in the beating of its wings. Indeed Anoram had witnessed entire villages leveled by angry dragons of lesser size simply by the beating of their wings. In that instant, however, a smile came over his face as he thought that the only thing protecting us is most certainly the fact that the beast is so completely lovesick it would never knowingly damage its master’s home. Still a man, indeed the supreme dictator of a country, should be able to move about his own home without regard to the buffet of a dragon. Besides she is too old for him anyway, he considered as he approached his son.

“Si Padre, una momento!” cried Vincenzo above the drumming of Quibrettktho’s immense wings. She was fanning the already intensely cold air to a skin burning chill.

“Qui-Bee, take your company and meet me in my chambers in two hours before you wreck the place as father has spoken!” Shouted Vincenzo. His voice barely rose above the din of those beating wings.

“As you wish my lord.” she responded. I will wait for you but the others will occupy their time in some other manner she thought.

The cold winds of this place will be easily left behind when we move to Sklerricc she thought. I can barely feel my talons in this wretched cold! She comforted herself with the thought of changing her form and lying in Vinnie’s bedchamber in front of the heat of the hearth.

His opulent chambers were possibly the only chambers of mortal man she had ever lied in that fit her station. There were always coins, gems, jewels and other finery scattered about the room and the finest of incense continually ebbed into the rooms. The bed itself encompassed the entire room in which it was set. Extending from wall to wall in the circular room that bound it the fine linens, soft comforters and goose down mattress were all too tempting. I can’t wait she thought as the momentum of her great mass carried her downward and over the wall on a circular course that would take her and her comrades to the caves beneath the castle where they dwelt in extreme comfort upon a sea of treasure that was the Royal Coffers.

Once again Vincenzo turned his attention to the beauty and splendor of his own lands below his father’s castle. The last light of day began to settle out over the countryside. The sounds of the castle guards making their shift changes at each battlement could be heard with unusual clarity from the tower. Each man was marching in lock-step with his replacement to their posting. Even though it was likely that no one saw them the maneuver was always flawlessly performed as if the king himself were in audience. The timing of the step was noticeable to the ear as the gold clad knights made their final turn to the tower and saluted the massive flags that sailed still higher than the towering structure. As fate would have it the king, on this night, was present and returned the salute to all four battlement’s guards as they proudly took their stations, Coventry’s elite, to protect their king.

“Someday all of this shall be yours”, his father began ending his salute with the acknowledgement of the fourth and final battlement.

“Yes, perhaps ...” Vincenzo remarked trailing off as if the subject were a burden too great to be borne. He couldn’t help but be reminded that he would be taking Toupaulli’s place as the ruler of Sklerricc. It was a grand thing and Vincenzo always wanted to beat his brother out of the position but, to inherit such power without proving ones self went against the code. It was as if he was directly responsible for the death of his older brother.

“What in the Nine Hells do you mean, perhaps?” Anoram growled. “The position is yours, you have proven yourself to me repeatedly! I trust your ability and to a great extent your judgment. There is nothing more to discuss, unless you feel that I should leave Count Narcoulli in charge of your affairs?”

Anoram knew that this more than anything else would stir Vincenzo’s blood. There was only contempt for Narcoulli in his sons heart. Vincenzo yet blamed House Narcoulli for the death of his mother and brother. Their party was in the area of his protection when they disappeared. To make matters worse their bodies were never found. It pained Anoram so to think that they may never be raised, that he would never see his beloved Deidre nor his son Toupaulli again. But he refused to coddle to Vincenzo’s minor pains and therefore must harden him once and for all.

“The Test of Ascension is unnecessary for you - stop living in the past and grip the reality of today!”, he finished

“Papa, I ...”, he labored as he began to launch into a defense yet he halted. He realized that it was truth that his father spoke. Certainly no one missed mother and Toupaulli more than his father did. He was also aware that although he would never admit it his father was pained by Vincenzo’s constant reminder of the losses that they had incurred. It is best that this be dropped and I allow our lives to continue, he thought.

“I will make you proud, Papa and our enemies will fear the name Scarlotti!” he continued. He looked boldly straight into the eyes of his father, reached out and embraced his arms.

Anoram held his son’s arms. For a moment he recalled the days long past before Vincenzo went off to scour the low places of Maenatae. So much had changed both within his son and his kingdom. More than any of his brothers, including Toupaulli, Vincenzo was the one to take over the Sklerran Marches. If he could not own this errant vassal then likely no one could. Releasing the metal clad arms he turned and strode toward the tower door.

“Now, that is my son, a true leader of men!” his father exclaimed as he marched off toward the tower stairway. Sometimes I could strangle him, thought Anoram, especially when he forces up those old memories I’ve tried to bury for so long. No one could possibly know how I feel and no one must ever know. “I miss you so my dearest Deidre and you my brave Toupaulli. Sleep well.” he whispered as he descended the stair passage of the great tower.

Vincenzo did not see his father descend into the tower. He had already begun to play an old game with himself. Danger and personal challenge is a daily meat to successful Coventarians. To Vincenzo Scarlotti they were a four course meal. The threat of death and the facing of his own personal fears kept his heart racing in his chest. They kept him

primed as a tiger on the hunt, poised for the kill, crouched low in the tall grass waiting to spring upon its victim. Wary of enemies and their designs.

Amustos Flenore, known as a heightening of the senses through a feeding of personal fears. Acknowledged by all those of learning as a valid and powerful mental method of increasing the inner strengths of a person. An extremely dangerous tool to those trained and gifted in its use as well as to their foes.

“Am-Flen” as the Knights of the Regent referred to it was a one of a kind and rare find. It existed on a level of its own. In many ways this ancient art was one of the few disciplines developed solely by the humans, perfected by them and controllable only by human-kind. Demi-humans had pursued the ritualistic life-style of Am-Flen only to discover it did nothing to benefit them and perhaps went so far as to make them a bit crazy.

Some sages schooled in the arts of sociology and physiology theorized that the free willed and sporadic lifestyle of demi-humans was not capable of living within the requirements of such a controlled and rigorous discipline. Perhaps, but then why could the dwarves, truly the most ridged of all creatures not reap the benefits of Am-Flen? The experiment by the Khernn’aad colonies never yielded the powerful results the humans now enjoyed. Dwarves, however, never fell victim to the wild psychotic breaks and the psychosis that befell humans unable to control the effects of Am-Flen. For instance, no dwarf ever became completely deranged and murdered his entire clan before taking his own life. No dwarf ever withdrew to live out his life in a shell, as if his soul were banished to another plane while the body lingered behind to wither and die.

The dangers of Am-Flen are indeed high. It is forbidden to attempt to practice the ancient art without the proper guidance from an Am-Flen master. The penalty of death was almost welcomed by those poor souls that attempted to wield the powers of the inner man and failed. As a consummate master of the art of Amustos Flenore Vincenzo balanced his life. Balanced it with his surroundings against a private struggle between his own fears and their possible outcomes. A victory against unseen foes on a daily basis built his powers of perception and tactics to the highest levels. His reflexes were not only faster but they were subtler than many of the best halfling thieves. His mastery of the “one eyed nap” had become renowned and the ability to “dream speak”, a talent he developed himself befuddled even the most accomplished of Am-Flen users.

And so it was as Vincenzo moved closer to the edge of the tower the old fear came up to haunt him. He shook as the sweat on his neck met with the icy breeze.

“Never play near the edge of the towers!”, his mother would warn. “One wrong move and you fall to an agonizing death on the rocks below!”

Perhaps it was her fault that he never was able to rid himself of this fear. Perhaps it was the fact that he continually fed this fear with his inner self examination and stress using the techniques of Am-Flen. Strangely though, the edge of the parapet was indeed compelling. The closer the edge drew the faster his heart raced. His fear of heights was nearly euphoric. He felt that he was outside of his own body, an unsympathetic alter-ego which reveled in toying with him. As he drew near the edge he felt his senses peak as his Am-Flen powers grew.

“I see you coming, Stephen”, he thought. As his mind reeled near the brink of disaster and his greatest fears his senses heightened to an incredible point. The cold wind died to a faint breeze then all at once arose in a fierce gust peaking in a furious driving wind. It pushed through his cloaks and armor all the way to his flesh. Once there the cold air gave a push toward the edge.

“This wind is as a breath from Caina, the voice of the Ice Devils, as sure as not”, he thought.

He pooled his strengths to confront his fears at their most intense level. Bearing himself up it was all he could do to gaze down the walls of the west tower to the sharp rocks below. He was so deep within the disciplines of the Am-Flen that he had even put his own abilities of flight from his mind. As it raced full speed toward its greatest fear his psyche was alone to face whatever lie ahead. Carefully, he inched forward ever mindful of the great height of the tower. “Not much further”, he hollowly assured himself as he moved up almost touching the machicolations. At once he was mindful of the dark shape opening the door behind him and his mind raced as a voice that was not there a moment ago coarsely broke the silence.

“Vinnie! Let’s move it, we must prepare for the campaign.” Cried Stephen over the driving icy wind.

Vincenzo spun about, rage on his face, his personal fears still in his heart. He felt the power of his link to his darker self rise to the surface almost completely unchecked. He wrestled with it for a brief moment that to him was an eternity. As he was at the peak of his visions and the heart of his own inner fears he found himself too engrossed in the searching to deal with any other entity.

The shock of return to reality was almost too great to bear. Surely any person of lesser experience in Am-Flen would have been thrown into a completely schizophrenic experience, lashing out at the first person they saw. As it was Vinnie began the great struggle with himself, not yet in complete control of his emotions but acting as an advisor to his own persona; he made rapid and direct suggestions to the inner man in an effort to fool him into allowing the re-entrance to his own body. Overcome by the barrage of controlled and ordered thoughts the inner man, purely evil and totally devoted to predatory response began to weaken. Not quite soon enough.

“Stephen”, he cried in a fierce, wild eyed rage, “have I not told you never to blindside me!? You will pay for this continued error on your part!” Although Vincenzo could not allow Stephen to behold any weakness in himself, neither could he afford to allow the inner man to take control of his mind never to return to reality. Nor could he allow the entity to kill his much needed companion. He grappled with the beast further.

Stephen Adriano had been the closest friend to Vincenzo since their childhood. He was actually more of a brother than a friend. Both grew up in the recesses of the forbidding walls and dark dungeons of the Demons Wrest.

There were many adventures undertaken from the time of youth as the two conquered every thing from the rats in the wine cellar to the errant undead servant of the priests in the temples below the castle. They had indeed been adventurers from the very beginning. Sneaking away from their protectors at every opportunity to attack and defeat the creatures that dwelt within the nightmare world that developed the two young men.

All too often it was their fathers or their father's guards that rescued the pair, dispatching the foes they encountered mere moments before they faced certain death themselves.

It was also the telling of another tale that made matters worse still as the two weaved the facts and fictions of their encounters together to form possibly the most complex lie ever heard. It was these lies that they told over and over, consoling themselves and licking their wounds, until the liar believed his own tale. With this renewed bravery the pair would raid the armory, equip themselves and strike out on yet another rendezvous with disaster.

Of course they were always wise enough to leave clues as to their intentions and direction, although not openly. Their fathers were equally careful to rescue not only the two young slayers of abominations but, their pride also. Never would they come before the boys realized the true sting of battle. Besides with the power of the bracers left in the armoury for them they were never in any real danger. So their fathers thought.

He has always been a shock to the system, thought Stephen. Expect the unexpected with Vinnie. This time however he can expect a new defeat. His words, Stephen decided, they never made any sense on the outside. With Vinnie there was always some hidden meaning. There was never any reassurance in his demeanor.

One thing was sure, however, Vinnie enjoyed pain and if he was preparing to dole it out on Stephen then it would be heartily returned.

In a move performed countless times before he slid to the left and pulled the great scythe from its grip on his back. As the menacing weapon came forth the blade began to glow with a soft violet hue. Proud of his more than adequate prowess with the weapon he brought his fierce gaze to bear on his opponent only to discover that Vincenzo was not only prepared for his attack but was making his own thrust. A fierce thrust it was; the anticipation of Stephen's move was unbelievable. By reflex and luck the glowing blade of the sleek Katana was brushed to the outside of its intended target.

I have you now, thought the inner man as he prepared to follow through with the second Katana. It will be so simple carving your gizzard the beast thought. As the blade pressed on course to the lower portion of Stephen's breastplate Vincenzo, grappling with the inner man found a weak point and completely slipped in. He had won. In forcing out the beast over such a crucial fear, the possible slaying of a lifetime friend, he had gained momentous strength.

Unfortunately he had also left himself open to attack from his right and Stephen, unable to discern whether or not Vincenzo was yet in a mood to kill him or not, decided to press the fight and at least disable him. As quickly as it swung out to block Vincenzo's earlier attack the great scythe returned to attack. The blade came down and struck the exposed leg of the Prince Regent leaving a deep cut in the leg and a searing pain throughout his system. So long as the blade remained it began to sap his energies off. Life flowed up the cruel blade, through the ancient pyrewood handle to the grip of the dark priest.

Vincenzo's vital energies were nearly more than Stephen could take. Considering the state Vincenzo's psyche had risen to; Stephen's Vampire Blade was overwhelmed as was he.

Stephen now regarded the prospect of assuming a position of importance in Vinnie's imminent court was becoming less attractive. If these outbursts cannot be controlled even the promised position of Judicial Minister will wax dull. High positions in the government were always welcomed by those offered them but, only if they didn't face this kind of torture on a daily basis. I can't keep him at bay for long Stephen thought beginning to face the power Vinnie controlled. I hope I can hold him off until he gains control of his senses, the Priest considered, it would be best to taunt his inner self in hopes of throwing it off guard for a time.

"You know, Vinnie, if I didn't know better I'd have to say that you didn't like me!" Stephen said pulling the reapers tool from the wound in his friend's leg. The Gore that oozed forth was not that of the normal gouge or wound. The liquid was a deep blue color and a yellow that Stephen always regarded as beautiful issued from the already festering wound.

Vinnie considered that perhaps the smell of battle is not so much sweat and blood that pours to the ground from the combatants. Perhaps it is the charge in the air that is the strength to which they two hold onto life while at the same instant they endeavor to loose it one from the other. Such thoughts become secondary as the very energies of life were being drawn from his body by a skilled Priest of Death.

Time for play to end he considered. In an instant as a flash of light Stephen was put down. Had he been a spectator viewing the conflict from the side the swiftness of Vincenzo's finely controlled move would have simply left him mildly confused. Since he was actually involved in the conflict he would be forced to settle for complete befuddlement. The movement was so well planned, so carefully executed, its complexity could be detected only in its results. As Stephen completed the withdrawal of the great scythe and made the grazing move to what would have been Vincenzo's open flank it was over. In mid stride Stephen's breast plate was about his waist and legs and the razor-sharp blades of the Katana Swords were waiting, poised at the throat of the bewildered priest.

It took only a moment for Stephen to notice that Vincenzo's eyes were back to normal and that it appeared that the Prince Regent was again the master of his own destiny. He would not die this day.

"You cut the straps to my breast plate" Stephen replied coldly. My father gave me that piece from his private trove, you know?" The response came with some difficulty as he balanced himself at the edge of the parapet brushing his exposed neck against the blades balancing him between death by decapitation and death from a fall.

"Yes, I know" responded Vinnie, shifting his weight to balance himself against the stiff breeze blowing him towards Stephen and the edge of the tower. "I was with you the day that you received it. I've always admired its craftsmanship" he replied rather matter-of-factly as he watched Stephen still caught between his razor sharp swords.

The two lifelong friends stared coldly at one another for quite some time. Indeed to each it was an eternity. To Stephen the pressure of the blades placed thin cuts on his neck even through his leather armors; Vincenzo's swords constantly held at Stephen's neck despite the ferocious gusts of wind and the stress of holding his arms at the ready for so long.

"The Code," Vincenzo thought, "it is strict yet in the toil comfort waits.

“Comfort?”, the beast asks?

“Yes, comfort.” he would quickly reply, “It is a peace that overflows the soul when all debts to the inner self are paid in full. It is not a bond to be taken lightly as so many would. The commoner cannot comprehend the Code for the contrast of morality and immorality bred together as a single creed. Indeed, it is the essence of dichotomy embracing cold while seeking the warmth. It is a difficult concept to grasp. So is that of being a member of the Clan Scarlotti and dwelling within the walls of the Demon’s Wrest. The Code is simply a preset program that guides the faithful, beyond the simple laws of the masses. For the Clan Scarlotti it is the Code that determines every action without exception. It was the Code that held the two clansmen at an impasse.

“So what is it this time brother” responded an indignant, yet cool Stephen as he prepared to fashion a cigarette to smoke?

“Worship at your feet? You realize, of course, that I will again be forced to deny you that joy by my own code and Priestly Vows.” Stephen continued placing the makings bag back in his belt.

“Well,” Vincenzo began, tilting his head back to remove the hair from his sweat moistened face, “I have this festering cut on my leg that concerns me. Second, I should enjoy your returning the energies that you sapped from my body. And lastly, I believe that we need to talk on a more serious note about this adventure that we shall soon be undertaking.”

Stephens eyes began to narrow as Vincenzo closed his last statement. He pondered his situation and what he had just heard and replied, “I shall remove your afflictions as always, Vinnie.” He brought the tightly rolled cigarette up to his mouth, rested it on his lower lip and said, “but first, have you got a light?”