

It is at the end of the 17th century and the Vampire nation has risen to power. Within the halls of the Catholic Church it hides and matures under the guise of the Inquisition, looking for others of their kind and condemning those who stand in their way. Their greatest threat does not come from outside their walls but from within their own kind.

The Blood of Ages: Fear Na Droch Fhola

By James Pasch

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THE BLOOD OF AGES

Fear Na Droch Fhola

JAMES PASCH

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ISBN: 978-1-64438-725-2

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2019

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Pasch, James

The Blood of Ages: Fear Na Droch Fhola by James Pasch

FICTION / Science Fiction / Action & Adventure | Alternative History | Fantasy /
Historical

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019906805

Chapter 4: The Awakening

Three days had passed since Elijah and Oz made their escape and there were still too many questions left unanswered. Xitlali's father asked the same questions over and over again in his mind and to his gods. "Who were they and where did they come from? Why were they here? Are they even human? One of them was as white as the moon with hair of fire, the other as black as the night with strength not humanly possible." He pondered over these questions many times, but these paled in comparison to the one question that haunted him the most. The one question that neither he nor the other priests could answer, "Why is Xitlali dying?"

After the attack, she was fine. The bleeding had been stopped and she was awake and responsive making sure the others were fine and taken care of. She even helped organize the burning of the Brood that her father had ordered as a precaution. As he stood there in the sun staring at the still smoldering pile of armor and bones Xitlali lay in the temple slowly slipping away. He had her moved there when she didn't wake the next morning. He had called upon his gods for help.

He had seen and attended to many bites over the years. Bites from animals fiercer and more savage than what man could do. Nothing about this made any sense to him or the others. His first thought was that it must be some sort of infection. But this was too fast, too sudden for it to be just an infection. The wound had been cleansed and dressed almost immediately and even now it showed no signs of being infected. The wound was clean. This left only poison, but there were no other signs of a cut or a stab or anything that would have allowed a poison to enter her body. There was just the bite.

"Yatzil," someone called. It was one of the other priests coming from the temple to get him. From the tone of the voice he was not bringing good news, something else was wrong.

"What is it?" he replied with hesitation.

"Come, its Xitlali," he frantically waved.

Yatzil waved to his guards to follow him as he hurried to Xitlali's side. Two temple servants pushed the giant stone doors shut behind them as they entered. She still lay on the altar, covered in the skins of

exotic and rare creatures he had put on her himself with the hopes that whatever powers they held in life would help her now in her hour of need. She was exactly where he had left her and in exactly the same condition.

Baffled by the reason for the priest's heightened excitement he asked, "what is it, why did you bring me back in here?"

"It's the leeches!" he replied pointing to a large clay pot sitting next to the bed.

Yatzil went to the container and pulled the lid from it. It was half filled with water that had a dozen leeches swimming and squirming around in it. There was nothing odd about it at all he thought to himself.

"The leeches?" He asked holding the lid.

"We tried to use leeches to pull out whatever evil or poison they used on her, but there is a problem."

Yatzil furrowed his brow cautiously almost afraid to ask, "What problem?"

"Watch," the priest replied as he came over and drew one of them from the water with a pair of wooden spoons. As he did this the priest's acolyte pulled the skins covering Xitlali down far enough to expose her upper torso. She was naked underneath. Using one of the smaller skins the acolyte arranged it across her neck and chest leaving only her abdomen exposed. Once the acolyte was done and clear of her body the priest placed the leech on her belly button. At first it flipped itself over and then settled for a brief moment before slithering to her side and dropping off into the skins.

"You see," the priest said grabbing the leech with the spoons.

"See what?" Yatzil replied.

"The leeches," the priest replied dropping it back into the water, "will not drink her blood, it is as if they afraid of it."

"Nonsense," Yatzil scoffed. "It's probably just not hungry, try another."

"Of course," he replied scooping up another leech with the spoons.

Carefully the priest repeated his actions and set the leech gently on her stomach but this time above her belly button. Unlike the last

one the leech didn't even pause before it began crawling its way to her side and dropping down into the skins. Acting quickly the priest had the leech clutched in the spoons once again before it had a chance to burrow itself out of sight. He could tell by the expression on Yatzil face that he was not ready to accept what he had just seen for himself.

"Let me try it again," the priest suggested and he placed the leech once again on her stomach and just like before it headed straight for her side and dropped off her body where the priest was waiting for it with the spoons.

Yatzil shook his head. He was still not ready to accept what was obvious to everyone else in the room. Xitlali was his daughter, this was a reality he could just not accept and no one in the room dare make him.

"Put out your arm." Yatzil ordered the acolyte.

Without any hesitation, from the other side of the alter the acolyte stretched his arm towards him over Xitlali body.

Without saying a word Yatzil motioned the priest to put the leech on the acolyte's arm where it attached itself immediately and began drinking his blood. As Yatzil stood there trying to make sense of it all, no one notice the small bead of blood running down the inside of the acolyte's arm dripping onto the skins covering Xitlali.

"Careful," the priest warned as he grabbed his arm and pulled it away from the bed. The motion had caused the dripping blood to fall hitting Xitlali on the check and on the lips.

Xitlali's eyes immediately opened as her chest expanded and she let out a shuddering sound as she licked the blood from her lips. Then, just as suddenly as she had woken, she fell back into the animal skins and was oblivious to the world once more.

Yatzil, the acolyte, the guards, and the priest stood there dumbfounded by what they had just witnessed.

The priest pushed the acolyte's arm back over Xitlali's head, allowing a few more drops of blood to fall upon her lips. Again, her eyes opened as she made an audible sound and began licking the blood from her lips as if something else inside her was driving her to do this. For a moment, and just a brief moment, she looked at her

father as if she was crying for help and then slipped back into unconsciousness.

“We need more blood,” her father declared.

The acolyte’s eyes went big and he looked at Yatzil in fear.

“Don’t worry,” her father assured him as he grabbed a bowl from the altar. “I only want a bowl.”

There was some relief in the acolyte’s face as he took the bowl from Yatzil. For a second, he thought that he had intended to kill him to get it. He still wasn’t looking forward to having his wrist slit open to fill the bowl but at least he would get to live.

The priest pulled the acolyte’s arm over the clay vessel that held the leeches. From above the altar he grabbed one of the oil lamps and crept the flame closer and closer to the leech that was still feeding on his arm. Unable to stand the heat, the leech reluctantly surrendered its grip and toppled back into the clay pot with the other leeches. From his waist, the priest pulled a dagger made of sharpened stone and offered it to the young acolyte.

The acolyte’s hand was shaking slightly as he took the knife and looked it over as if trying to judge which side was the sharpest. While he hesitated, the priest took the bowl from him and readied it at the side of the bed. He looked at Yatzil hoping that he might have changed his mind, but the only thing he could see was that he was growing impatient. If he didn’t do something soon, he was afraid Yatzil would reach across the altar and take the blood himself.

Sensing the tension building, the priest said, “here,” as he grabbed the knife back. “Let me do it.” Before the acolyte even tried to offer up any resistance the priest had already cut his own wrist open allowing his blood to flow freely into the waiting bowl. As the bowl steadily filled, he calmly sat the knife down and motioned to the acolyte to grab one of the wraps that had already been prepared.

Along with the wrap the acolyte grabbed the paste that the priests had also prepared in advance. He had used it many times in the past to help stop the bleeding. The young acolyte himself didn’t know exactly what was in it, but he had seen it prepared many times in the past by the elder priests from different plants and herbs.

Once the bowl was near full, the priest grabbed a handful of the paste and began smearing it into his cut. The acolyte readied the wrap and as soon as the priest had the bleeding under control the acolyte quickly wrapped the wound with it using leather strips to tie it in place.

With the wound taken care of Yatzil motioned to the acolyte, “help me sit her up.” He said as he pulled the covers back over her body and slid his arm behind her. The acolyte followed his example putting her arm across her waist before sliding his arm behind her.

“On three,” Yatzil ordered and began counting once he saw the acolyte was ready.

Even though her body seemed lifeless as they sat her up, they took every precaution they could to move her as careful and respectful as possible, especially the acolyte. After all she was the daughter of a high priest, one who was standing on the other side of the altar watching everything he did.

Yatzil nodded to the priest and the bowl, “Give it to her.” he ordered.

The priest pressed his bandaged wrist against his chest and with his good hand he picked the bowl up and placed the edge of it on her lips. He looked up at Yatzil and asked, “Are you sure?”

“Do it,” he replied.

Beneath his breath the priest began praying as he tilted the bowl up allowing the blood to flow through her lips. It was as if an explosion of life had entered her body as her eyes opened and with both hands, she grabbed the priests arm holding the bowl so he couldn’t take it away if he wanted too. His face cringed in pain and even with the acolytes help they could not break her grip. Her strength was something that neither one of them had ever seen or felt before. It felt as if she was going to crush the bones in his arm and hand at any moment.

Blood spilled over the sides of the bowl as the two struggled against her. It trailed down her cheeks and neck onto her shoulders and the skins that covered her. It wasn’t until the bowl was empty that she let go of him and snatched the bowl out of his hand. He fell

backwards into the arms of the acolyte and together they backed away from her.

Like a starved dog Xitlali licked and bit on the edges of the bowl trying to get every drop of blood from it she could. Yatzil just stood there watching with a look of relief and bewilderment on his face. Relieved that his daughter was still alive and bewildered at what had become of her.

Like before and for only a brief moment she had a look about her that said she was coming around. She looked at her father again with some sense of clarity and then collapsed back onto the altar. The bowl fell from her hands and crashed to the floor shattering into a number of pieces. She was no longer breathing.

The priest and the acolyte looked at her father. There was nothing more the two of them could do, but neither one of them wanted to be the one to tell him.

Yatzil stared at them both and shook his head to let them know that he knew they had lost her. A tear came to his eye as he turned to his daughter. With the gentle touch of a loving father he placed his hand on her cheek as if he was saying goodbye. Even the acolyte fought back a tear as Yatzil pulled the skins over her face.

“Do you want me to prepare her for burial?” the priest asked.

Yatzil stared at him for a moment. The priest had one arm pressed against his chest to help stop the bleeding and the other hung at his side as if it had been broken in the struggle. “No,” he nodded, “you are in no condition, your acolyte can do that for you.”

“I can?” the acolyte questioned.

“You follow his every word,” Yatzil scorned him, “down to every detail.”

“Yes, yes” the acolyte stuttered.

Yatzil wiped the tears from his eyes and breathed in deep as if trying to muster courage from somewhere inside of himself. “You take care of those wounds,” he said as he turned to the priest, “and while you do that, I’ll bring the news to her mother.”

With his guards behind him, Yatzil turned and began to leave. Behind them the priest and the acolyte followed closely. As Yatzil approached the doors the same two temples servants pushed the giant

doors back open for him and his entourage. A wind blew through the temple and in it Yatzil could hear Xitlali's voice calling him from the spirit world. He couldn't help but notice that she sounded confused and lost. He started to cry again, and again she called to him.

"Why are you crying?" she asked.

Yatzil looked at the priest and the acolyte who seemed to look around as if they could hear her voice too.

"Is it her?" the priest asked the acolyte.

"Because I've lost you," Yatzil replied.

"How can she speak to us from the spirit world?" the acolyte asked.

"Lost?" the voice replied. "I don't understand?"

The priest smiled, "In life she moved in and out of the spirit world almost at will. So why in death do we question that she cannot move in and out of this world also?"

"You have died and crossed over into the spirit world," Yatzil explained.

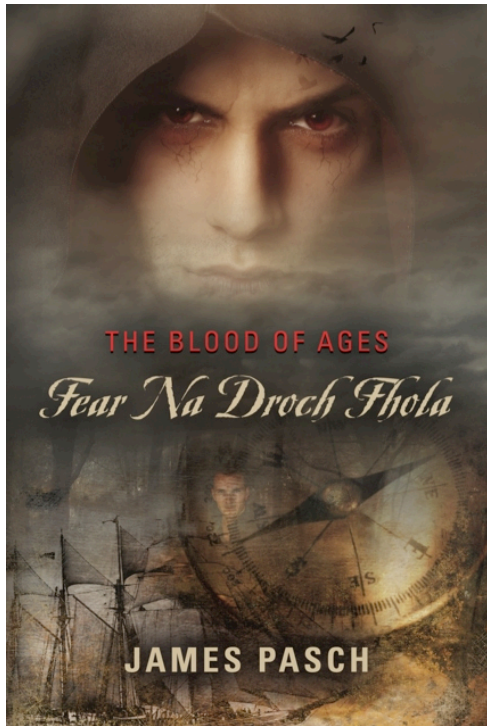
"What do you mean died?" she asked as if surprised.

"You died only moments ago. You're just not aware of it that's all."

"No, I haven't," she replied.

Almost as if on cue all three men as well as the guards turned back to the altar where Xitlali lay only to find she wasn't there. It was bad enough none of them could explain the illness that had taken her from them, or the reasons the leeches acted like they did or even her uncontrollable thirst for blood. How do you even begin to explain this, when from out of the shadow of the altar stepped Xitlali wearing only the stain of the priest's blood on her face. She was alive and well and in this world, or the spirit world there was no explanation for it. They were all witnesses to her death.

Xitlali, the daughter of a Mayan priest had died, and Xitlali the vampire had awoken.



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