

# DESCENT™

## LEGENDS OF THE DARK



### CHANCE

ROBBIE MACNIVEN

It was always the children who were the biggest threats.

It didn't matter whether they were orcs, dwarves, gnomes or humans, Chance had long ago learned that the only thing that had the ability to sneak up on him was a child.

There was one standing right now in the hallway – a human one – perhaps six or seven years old, dressed in a long, white bed gown and with her straw-blond hair, freshly brushed, draped over both shoulders. She looked up, unblinkingly, at Chance, with large, dark eyes.

Staring was considered by some hyrrinx to be an act of aggression. Chance had never had time for that, though he did feel an instinctive response, buried deep, to the little girl's observation. It made him stare back.

"Kitty," the little girl said, slowly and seriously.

"Perhaps," Chance replied softly, trying not to feel offended at the comparison. He realized his tail was swaying back and forth, and did his best to quell the anxious movement.

"Kitty... wants the jar?" the girl went on, a confused note entering her voice.

Chance had frozen in the hallway the moment saw the girl staring at him. That meant he was still clutching the ornate, golden Lorimor vase, which he'd just started to raise delicately from its plinth.

"Kitty wants the jar," he confirmed, his ears twitching. The girl frowned and pointed.

"Kitty should not steal! Stealing is bad!"

Chance bared his fangs, the flash of frustration invisible behind the leather mask that covered his muzzle.

"What if... kitty only wanted to borrow it," he suggested, trying to come up with a way to make the girl go back to bed.



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“Would have to ask papa,” the girl said, stoically folding her arms. “He likes the two jars very much.”

“I’m sure he does,” Chance said. The two antiques had been valued – by an experienced collector, while being threatened by several of the Outlaw Prince’s enforcers – at a sum of over five hundred crowns. Between them, they were the most expensive items owned by Lucas Brezer, part of a fortune acquired by an illicit trade network that ran from Lorimor in the south-west to Thelgrim in the north-east.

The Outlaw Prince had demanded that the vases be revalued, in person. That was why Chance and Tali had been dispatched to the Brezer manse in the dead of night. They were antique hunting.

Chance slowly began to lower the vase back onto its plinth. The little girl, presumably Brezer’s daughter, nodded sternly as he did so.

“Good kitty,” she said.

Chance was about to suggest that wasn’t especially the case, when he heard a scream, ringing through the manse from somewhere further upstairs.

It was Tali.

In and out, nice and fast. That was what Tali had said. They’d gone over the plan a dozen times before tonight, even rehearsed parts of it in the abandoned warehouse down by the Rivengate part of the Outlaw Prince’s holdings. Tali, a short, scrappy human who’d been raised amongst the Prince’s army of thieves, had worked with Chance before on a number of heists, though none this big. She was older than Chance, more experienced, a fact that the Prince had highlighted when he’d given them the assignment.

“Fortuna always blesses me with good luck,” he had said. “And I in turn pass a fraction of that luck on to you, Chance. You will need it. Your successes have been too... precarious of late. Tali will keep you right. Defer to her as you would to me.”

“You know he talks down to you on purpose?” Tali had told him later, as the two of them had poured over maps of the Brezer manse in the warehouse’s shadows.

“Who does?” Chance had asked, surprised by the sudden change of tact.

“The Outlaw Prince,” Tali said, her voice more earnest than he was used to. “I couldn’t pull off half the stunts I’ve seen you do since you joined us. Forget Fortuna, you’re the best thief I’ve ever seen.”



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Chance's ears had flicked with amusement.

"Don't take me for a fool," he had warned. "For all I know, the Prince might have told you to tell me that, as a test."

Tali had raised her hands. "He's aware of a lot less than you might think, Chance. He's not all-powerful."

Chance had offered a small shrug, a human affectation he'd picked up off Tali.

"Without him I'd have nothing," he'd said.

"That's what he tells you, isn't it?"

"Sometimes," he had allowed, not wanting to dwell on it. "Can we just get on with the plan?"

"The plan is simple," Tali had said with a smile. "In and out, nice and fast."

"Thief's honor?" Chance had asked. It was one of the Outlaw Prince's many mottos, an oxymoron supposed to promote 'good' practice among his underlings – an effective thief would always prioritize the target over anything else.

"If it comes down to it," Tali had said. "Thief's honor."

Tali's scream almost made Chance drop the vase. He placed it back on its pedestal, glancing quickly at the small girl. She remained rooted to the spot, though there was fear in her wide eyes now.

"Stay here," Chance said. "And protect the vase."

He darted for the stairs, on all fours, a gray-furred blur as he bounded up them in just two leaps. At the top was a landing, sumptuously decorated like the rest of the manse, in dark ironbark paneling and decorative Isheim sheep's wool rugs. His sense of hearing, razor-sharp, had picked up not only Tali's cry, but the sounds of a struggle and the crash of something heavy falling. She was being attacked.

The landing led to another corridor which took him right. His mind ran through the plan of the building as he went, memorized before they'd set out. He took a door to the left, and emerged onto walkway that ran around the upper walls of the library at the manse's heart.

He saw Tali below on the library's ground floor, struggling with a guard in a leather doublet over the remains of a fallen set of bookshelves. Another of the hired muscle had been pinned by the collapse, while a third was racing across the room, a heavy cudgel raised.



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Chance had his thorn-tip knives out in an instant, one of the small throwing daggers held deftly between each finger. As he did so, his eyes were caught by a gleam to the right, causing him to hesitate.

He realized what Tali had been trying to do – scale the bookshelves to reach the upper level without negotiating the stairs. On the walkway he'd emerged onto sat another plinth with the second of the twin vases, shining bright in the light of the chandelier suspended overhead.

He looked back down at Tali. She had spotted him, practically next to the vase. They shared an unspoken second of realization.

*Thief's honor. The target comes first.*

Chance bared his fangs, and threw the first of his knives. The little steel barb flew straight and true, thumping into the calf of the charging, cudgel-wielding man as he closed on Tali. He went down with a yelp of pain. The one grappling with Tali looked up with surprise, spotting Chance above him just before the second knife struck his shoulder, actually slicing past Tali's arm before finding its target.

She threw him off as he yelled in pain, shouting at the same time.

"Chance, watch out!"

He'd already sensed the impending attack. A fourth guard had stepped out onto the walkway behind him, his scarred face flushed with rage as he brought up his club. Chance ducked and rolled, hearing a splitting crash as the heavy weapon splintered the wooden railing that had been in front of him a moment before.

His roll bought him into contact with the plinth holding the vase. It was barely a brush, but it caused enough of a wobble for the antique to start tipping over the edge. Chance reached out without thinking, catching it neatly in the same paw his shadowclaw gauntlet was strapped to.

He stared at it, realizing what he'd just done, before a roar behind him caused him to dart past the plinth with tail raised. Another blow cracked it and sent it toppling as the irate guard surged after him.

"Come back, you mangy little scavenger," the guard bellowed.

Chance didn't get far. A door opened in front of him, causing him to come up short as yet another member of Brezer's entourage, hair tousled from a sleep disturbed, stepped out to intercept him.

He looked from the new arrival, back at the one pursuing him, realizing he was cornered.

"I'm not a scavenger," he told the man raising his club to strike. "I'm a thief."

Chance threw the vase.



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Both men cried out in horror, staring at the golden antique as it seemed to arc, in slow motion, up toward the library's high rafters.

Chance hissed and lashed out, his movements a blur. His shadowclaws raked across the first man's thighs, bringing him down like a leaden sack, before the last of his thorn-tip knives pinned the sleeve of the club-wielding guard to the wall. The hyrrinx straightened as both men bellowed, the first clutching his wound while the second struggled to free his arm. He stretched out his paws, and caught the vase with deft precision as it fell back down to him.

Tali had popped her smoke bombs, choking, ashen-gray clouds billowing through the lower part of the library. She emerged from them beneath the walkway where Chance was, waving up at him.

"Drop it!"

He held the vase over the side and let go, following it over. Tali caught the antique with a grunt just as Chance landed beside her, on all fours.

"Window," he said, pointing with one claw through the smoke at a possible escape route. Tali nodded.

Together they rushed it, heads down, smashing through it with a crash of shattering glass. Chance rolled through the shrubbery beyond and was up again in time to steady Tali, grasping the vase just before it tumbled from her grip.

They made it through the Westport gate and into an alleyway along the back of the Duck and Harp inn before pausing to catch their breath.

"So much for thief's honor, huh?" Tali panted, managing a grin.

"Hey, I got the target," Chance said, holding up the vase.

"My target," she corrected. "Where's yours?"

"It had a particularly fearsome guard watching over it," Chance said, tugging down his mask to give Tali a fanged grin of his own. She rolled her eyes, clearly not believing him.

"You could've just left me," she said. "The Outlaw Prince won't be pleased."

Chance grimaced. "I just hope he won't find out," he said, the concern in his voice clear. Tali laughed and patted his shoulder, trying to encourage him.

"You know, Chance, sometimes you can be a terrible thief," she said. "But I'm glad you're such a good friend."



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