



# DEMON SLAVE

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SHADOW QUEST BOOK 2

# **DEMON SLAVE**

by  
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Dear Reader,

You should only read the below preview of Demon Slave if you are 18 years old or older, as it contains mildly sexual content and adult language. Whereas the rest of the book is sexually explicit.

# *Chapter 1*

Pain laced Marik Radkov's throat as he sucked in the freezing air. His legs burned with each long stride. The indigee followed close behind, hollering with each launch of their primitive arrows and spears. Marik thought about turning to attack—he abhorred running away from a fight—but he and his comrades had come to this icy planet with diplomacy in mind.

His captain, Sebastian, suddenly cried out as if in pain, though nothing had hit him. Marik followed his line of sight to the valley below, where Sebastian's mate, Anya, stood in what they thought would be a safe location. They'd left her there to rest, while they searched the area for her sister, Nadua. Now Anya was being threatened—by whom he couldn't see through the blanket of snowfall, but the outline of a craft rested behind them.

His blood turned to ice in his veins as Marik watched the strange man drag her toward the craft. He became enraged when her body went limp and she no longer fought her captor. Fire burned through him, warring with icy dread. He pumped his legs harder, as did Sebastian.

When an arrow embedded itself into Marik's calf, slicing past bone, he hardly felt it. His mind was focused on getting to Anya, and ripping apart whoever had her. The Edge was growing fast, making pain nothing more than a tickle. Horns glowing in rage, his fangs descend—ready to tear into flesh.

The snowfall, which only moments ago had dusted the ground, had grown into a furious blizzard before he realized. It must have hidden the approach of the small shuttle ship that Anya was being pulled toward.

A tug brought Marik's attention back to the arrow in his leg. There was a rope secured to the thick end. Another hard tug and the ground came rushing toward him as his calf slipped out from under him. He clawed at the frozen terrain to keep from sliding backward. Sebastian had stopped and turned to him, pain and indecision etched in his eyes. When a demon's mate was in trouble, nothing else mattered. The fact that Sebastian hesitated now was a testament to their friendship.

“Go!” Marik ordered. His claws sliced the layer of ice underneath him as another

pull forced him back. “She needs you more than I. You know this.” The rope went taught once more and when Sebastian hesitated again, Marik let go. He prayed that Sebastian made it to Anya in time.

The cold wetness of the freshly fallen snow, coupled with the hardened frozen ground, assaulted Marik’s exposed skin as he was yanked backward. Sebastian’s silhouette disappeared into a wall of gray and white. Marik geared himself up to meet his new friends. The pain in his leg became nothing as he invited the Edge, embracing the rage and the extra strength that came with it. He’d never been trained to use the Demon’s Edge in battle, but he’d had more than enough experience losing himself to it over the years.

Once invoked, the Edge would trigger the release of chemicals, creating an intoxicating elixir that increased strength, lessened pain, and reduced one to little more than an animal running on instinct. Relief would come from either lashing out violently, or sexual release. Neither would be pleasant for whoever was on the other end of that rope.

Voices began to rise from behind the veil of white. They spoke a language he’d never heard before, meaning diplomacy would be impossible at the moment. It didn’t matter anyway; Marik would soon be too far gone for rational conversation.

The pulling ceased when the group came into view. A small army of white haired, barely clothed warriors had weapons pointed directly at him. Some wielded arrows and others held swords that gleamed against the bright snow. They dressed as though it were a warm summer’s day, rather than standing amid the freezing storm beating violently around them.

With his claws at the ready, Marik lashed out, making solid contact with the nearest body. A yelp, and a crimson trail of blood urged him on. Though his captor’s skin was bluish, their blood still ran red. Marik needed to see more of it.

A group of the indigee lept on him, yelling and attempting to restrain him with their hands, while others approached with ropes. With a roar, Marik slammed his body into them, successfully beating them away. A man with a sword sliced at him, the blade coming close to his neck, but Marik was quick.

Two more with swords rushed to the front. Twisting his body, Marik managed to avoid the sharp blades. At their backs, a group of archers notched their arrows, targeting him.

His vision blanched red as the Edge flooded through his veins, deadening his mind to anything but survival.

One of the assailants thrust his blade forward. Marik easily dodged, smashing his head into the other man's skull. With a small grunt, the man dropped to the ground.

Through the fog, Marik couldn't tell how many he was fighting, just that they kept coming—which was fine by him. He could do this all day.

Blood stained the unfallen snowflakes as Marik continued slicing through flesh. Soon he stood on a bank of red snow. He vaguely registered a few arrows embedded in his torso. When had that happened?

Footsteps charged from behind and Marik crashed his elbow into the attacker's nose, dropping him on the spot, but more quickly took his place.

A single voice rose above the rest, yelling in that language he couldn't understand, but the sound broke through his rageful mind. Marik faltered in his step, only slightly, but enough to lose his advantage. A barrage of hands and ropes surrounded him, and he was thrown up against a tree. He lashed out with his body and the ropes began to snap. Then that voice came at him, slowing his movements once more, only this time the voice spoke in a language he knew.

“Stop, demon!”

Marik blinked twice. More ropes came around him, fixing him to the cold bark of the tree, but he was stunned. Before him stood a small, fur-bundled creature holding a bow, arm stretched back, ready to release the arrow trained on Marik's forehead. The only identifying feature he could see through the thick layering of furs and skins was the eyes—ice blue, deep as a cavern, and sucking him in like a wild storm.

A heavy object knocked against Marik's skull and his vision went black.

\* \* \*

Nadua gazed down at the unconscious demon.

While the creature had fought, she had marveled at his immense strength and fluid movements, even as her men were being cut down with ease. His injured leg hadn't hindered him at all.

Her gaze rolled over his powerful frame. His shoulders were packed with strength and his waist slim, the shirt under his long jacket was thick but tight against his chest. She had watched the cords of his muscles flex as he assaulted her elite guard. If he hadn't been hurting her soldiers, she could have admired him all day.

When she had finally noticed the blood being spilled, Nadua realized she needed to end the chaos. Loading her bow, Nadua aimed for the demon and yelled in the

Cyrellian tongue for him to surrender. He hesitated slightly at the sound of her voice, but continued fighting as her men gained ground against him. She knew it would be only a matter of seconds before the demon broke free of their brief hold. On a whim, she'd switched to a language more commonly used by space travelers that she'd learned as a child, and ordered him once again to stop. Had he not stilled when she'd ordered, she would have put an arrow in his brain.

Now, as Nadua knelt beside the fallen beast, one of her soldiers called out, "Your Majesty, you should not get so close, it could wake any moment."

Nadua only waved the concern away and studied the demon further. His features were that of a warrior, strong, just like the rest of him. A small scar next to his ear that twisted down the back of his neck and disappeared under his collar was the only defect. His hair was reddish brown and cut unevenly short, as though he cut it himself and didn't care how it looked. A few arrows still jutted from his arms and legs. He hadn't even seemed to notice they were there.

Demon warriors were legendary, but this was the first one she'd ever seen. And she was impressed. She could use someone like him on her side, though she knew that recruiting him would be impossible. The last time demons came here, they had warred with the Cyrellians. The demons had attempted to claim Cyrellian land as their own, and had fought fiercely for it. In the end, the Cyrellians won, but the battle had been devastating.

"Take him back to camp and clean him up," Nadua ordered. "Make sure he's secure. I will be conducting the interrogation when he is conscious."

"I don't think that's necessary, Your Highness, we can call in a translator."

Nadua speared the guard with a look that ended his objection.

Nadua may not be like the Cyrellians, who were able to ignore the freezing ice storms that constantly assaulted the land—whereas she couldn't go outside without layer upon layer of thick fur—but they would respect her rule.

"I will interrogate him," she said firmly, then changed the subject. "What of the rebel clan? Any sign of them?"

"No, Your Highness. The pack of demons must have frightened them off."

They'd been hunting the rebels for weeks now. She and half her elite guard—about thirty men—had been marching through the countryside hoping to find any sign of the rebel's stronghold.

The rebel clan had defected long ago. It was unclear exactly why, but there were whispers of political disagreements. They'd been terrorizing the kingdom ever since,

invading the outer city and stealing whatever they wanted.

During their latest assault, a young woman had been kidnapped. The parents had implored Her Royal Highness to find their daughter Lidian and bring her home.

By the frequent caravan attacks and rumored sightings, they should be close to where the rebels made camp, but the only evidence they'd seen was a solo rebel male, spotted just across the plateau. The sudden arrival of the demons had caused her group to lose sight of him.

“And what of the other demons?” Nadua asked.

“It looks as though they too have escaped.”

Tamir approached, the colors of his tunic a proud reminder of his high rank. She could see he had something on his mind.

“Your Majesty,” Tamir began. “I believe the appearance of these demons could mean another invasion.” The sneer in his voice indicated he still harbored a grudge, and she was reminded that he was old enough to have lived through it.

Nadua nodded, and scanned the depths of her mind for a vision. Unfortunately, they came whenever they came, no matter how many tantrums she threw.

“I agree, send word to Wren. He is to put additional guards on Ava immediately. Also inform him that we will be returning sooner than anticipated.”

“Yes, Your Highness.” Tamir turned and walked away, signaling to a lower-ranked soldier as he went.

Ava was the rightful ruler of the Cyrellians, and Nadua was sure she would one day prove to be a great queen. The only problem was Ava was only fifteen years old. Her father, Fineas, had, on his deathbed, charged Nadua with protecting the crown and keeping Ava safe from those who would see themselves on the throne. Ava had been only two years old at the time. When the decree was made that Nadua would be the proxy queen, not everyone had been happy about it.

Nadua, for one.

There had been an uproar from not only commoners, but those who were closest to the crown. Had it not been for Wren's loyalty to his king, and thankfully to her and Ava, she might not have had the power to take control of the situation.

Nadua hoped she was strong enough to safeguard Ava's crown until she came of age. She owed it to Fineas for taking her in when her own planet had come under attack, and for being so kind to her. He had always treated her like a beloved daughter. It was a tragedy that he'd only gotten two years with his actual daughter, yet four hundred with her.

Though she owed him, and would do everything she could to keep her promise, Nadua was eager for the responsibility to be taken from her shoulders. She was never meant to rule. Kyra, her eldest sister, had been groomed from birth for the task, not her. If her home planet hadn't been attacked, and most of the royals ferried to safety among their many allies, then Nadua would have lived out a glamorous life as Princess Nadua and nothing more.

Oh, how I wish I were home.

But then she wouldn't be here to protect little Ava. Over the years, Nadua had watched her grow from innocent toddler, to the sweet and caring young adult she was today. After watching her, helping in her schooling, and joining in her childish pranks, Nadua loved Ava like a sister. But sometimes she felt more like a mother.

Nadua wanted Ava to be strong when she finally became queen. So whenever Nadua could pry Ava from her many tutors—not that they weren't doing a great job teaching her, in their soft she-might-break sort of way—she and Ava would “play swords”: Nadua's way of testing Ava's fighting abilities, and making corrections if necessary.

Nadua's mind turned back to the unconscious demon, who was being carried away—not so gently—by a few soldiers. If his people were preparing for another invasion, she must prepare the Cyrellians for war.

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The prisoner's tent was large and fairly empty, but for a raging fire pit, and a three foot thick, ten foot high stake jetting from the ground. The still unconscious demon's back was against it, and his hands were tied behind him, securing him in place.

Nadua stood close to the fire, gathering what heat she could, waiting for the demon to awaken. After sending a messenger back to the palace, Tamir joined her in the tent, followed by his favorite subordinate Nakul. The two stood away from the flames; heat could be uncomfortable to them, just as the cold was uncomfortable to her.

She imagined, as she had many times in the past, what it would be like to have skin as cold as theirs. To find the snow pleasing as the flakes settled on their skin.

To be able to touch another without burning pain.

Because her skin was so warm and theirs so cold, if she touched the skin of a Cyrellian, both would burn at the contact. It often made her sad that she could never give Ava a simple hug without being careful there was no skin to skin contact. Nadua



hadn't felt a true painless physical touch since she'd left her home planet more than four hundred years ago.

With her hands stretched out to the dancing flames, she gazed at the demon. His shirt had been removed, in order to clean and mend the many arrow wounds. Ancient scars of all sizes and shapes trailed along his torso, around his back, and down the length of his arms—blemishes on an otherwise perfectly sculpted physique.

Without his shirt, the demon looked even stronger than before. The light of the fire created shadows against the cords of his muscles, and the scars helped project a sense of danger. Though the marks were faded now, they must have caused great pain when they were made. Nadua watched his chest rise and fall with each slow breath.

Would his skin feel warm and soft?

The thought startled her, just as his green eyes flashed open and immediately found hers.

The drowsy demon was gone. A predator sat in his place.

## *Chapter 2*

Marik quickly averted his gaze, and assessed his situation. Pain laced his body. He was slumped on the chilly floor, in a concoction of sludge and mud created from the melting snow, and tied to a thick piece of wood jutting from the ground. Lingering rage coupled with being tied down threatened to push him to the Edge once more. But the ropes they used to secure his wrists were brittle and could be easily broken.

It was obvious that these people didn't understand a demon's strength. The Edge receded. Marik decided to wait till he was fully in control before escaping.

Two men with straight white hair and a hint of blue in their skin stood to his right. The fur covered creature stood to his left, leaning over a blazing fire. The difference in their dress was extreme. The men wore hardly anything to protect themselves from the harsh cold. Perhaps they didn't need to.

The bundle of fur was openly studying his scars. For some reason, that caused a surge of embarrassment to run through him. Long ago, his scars brought him unmitigated shame—not born of battles won or lost, but of punishment. For most demons, wounds healed without a mark of their existence, but his masters had been harsh, wanting to leave their mark on him by making him bleed and not allowing him to heal properly. Marik thought he had left the humiliation of his scars in his past, until now.

He scowled at the mass of fur. Their eyes locked. Her iridescent blue eyes grew wide for a moment, before regaining their composure and turning away. An involuntary growl escaped him, successfully forcing those blue depths back to him. Why he wanted that he didn't know, perhaps a play for dominance. Pieces of the Edge still mingled in his blood, causing his mind to be muddled.

“Quiet down, demon,” a lithe feminine voice commanded from behind the thick hides. Then, in another tongue she spoke more kindly to the two males. Doubling his irritation.

Marik had learned a number of languages, due to his many diverse masters and their equally diverse speech, so deciphering this one should be a breeze. Unfortunately, Marik hadn't heard any dialect like it before. It would take some time to decode. Luckily demons were quick learners.

The blue-eyed bundle turned back to him, speaking again in one of the common space languages, though her idiom was old-fashioned. “Demon, I have some questions, and you will answer them truthfully. Understand?”

Marik didn’t move at first. He just challenged the creature with his gaze. She challenged him right back, rising to her full height. Of course, her bravado wasn’t that impressive. She assumed he was securely tied down. And therefore harmless.

How would her bravery fare when he snapped the rope and took out her two guards, so he could have her at his mercy?

The thought jarred him as much as it pleased him. He wondered if that body matched the silky voice it belonged to.

Marik inwardly shook himself. The Edge, though dulled from the earlier fight, still demanded release, and this female’s scent was stroking his desire. He needed to take this situation more seriously.

Marik slowly nodded, curious what she would ask him.

“Are your people here to war with us?”

He wasn’t expecting that. Shaking his head Marik answered, “Not at all.”

“Then why are you here?”

Marik wondered if it were wise to reveal that they came to Undewla in search of Anya’s lost sister, Nadua, a Faieara princess who, according to a magical book, was supposed to be hiding somewhere on this planet.

Even in Marik’s head it sounded daft.

According to the book, supposedly written by the king of the Faieara himself, and who could see glimpses of the future, Nadua’s presence was necessary in winning their war against the Kayadon—a race of warmongers in control of their home world.

Coincidentally, the Kayadon had destroyed Marik’s home planet shortly after they’d captured him and his sister Misha, selling them both into slavery. Marik cringed at the memory of Misha’s screams as they had dragged her away. He couldn’t have more thoroughly failed her than if he’d sold her into slavery himself.

The bundle of fur cleared her throat, waiting for his answer. It was possible that these people knew of Nadua, but would they help him? By the nasty looks he was getting from the two in the corner, Marik didn’t think so. If he revealed too much information, it could be used against him and his friends. But then, if he didn’t reveal anything these natives might turn to torture. Of course, Marik would destroy them first, but he’d like to avoid that route if possible.

Finally, Marik decided to keep it vague. “We are searching for someone. We have

no intention of staying on this planet long. And we definitely do not seek war.”

The woman eyed him warily before conversing once more with the two men. The men began to shout and sneer in his direction, until an abrupt command from her silenced them, making it obvious who was in charge here.

Incredulous, she asked, “Who is it you seek, demon?”

Shaking his head, Marik answered, “I’ll not say more till I know I can trust you. And with me tied up and bleeding, I’d say you’ll have a time of earning it.”

The bundle of fur nearly choked on a laugh. “Oh, I must earn your trust? How am I to believe anything you say when you attacked my men?”

“As I remember it, they attacked first.”

The woman waved his comment away and turned back to her fire. “You were trespassing on our territory. The last time demons came to this planet, they brought with them a reign of destruction not equaled since.” She glared at him then. “I will not let that happen again. If your people are planning another attack, I will discover the truth.”

Marik was stunned. “Demons have been here before?”

“Don’t act stupid. Am I to believe you don’t know the history of your own people?”

A low warning growl erupted from Marik, and both the white-haired males pulled their swords. The furry creature stilled them with a look, cutting off their clipped tones.

“Well?” She continued, unconcerned by the threat in Marik’s eyes.

“Five hundred years ago my planet was destroyed and my people scattered through the universe. I have no idea how many survived or where they now reside. If a group of demons attacked your people, I would have no way of knowing.”

The woman’s brows drew together in a surprising show of compassion, though he knew it to be contrived.

\* \* \*

Surely the demon was lying, but his story was so close to her own. Nadua too was separated from her people and had no way of knowing what was happening back on Evlon.

Quickly she turned away to hide any show of emotion. The demon would no doubt see it as a weakness. From what she knew of demons, they abhorred any emotion that

wasn't anger or hatred, they were strong and stubborn, and they were incredibly lusty. Barbaric, one Cyrellian had said. She had to appear emotionless and prove herself equal, if she were to get any real information.

Nadua would need to use the worst of his traits against him. His stubbornness would be a problem and she couldn't fathom a way to manipulate him by his strengths. Her eyes followed the lines of his sculpted arms. No, that would need to be kept in check. Perhaps his lust could be her ally, but how? There were no other females in the camp besides her. Nadua shivered at the implication.

Could she lower herself in such a way?

Quickly she shook the thought away and nearly laughed—while other parts of her seized on the idea. She firmly ignored those parts.

He's quite possibly evil.

Her body didn't seem to care. But it had an excuse as to why it was being defiant. Seeing this male, fighting and winning against her greatest warriors was one hell of a turn on. She supposed it didn't help that she hadn't been touched in centuries.

The last man she'd kissed had been a Cyrellian named Cyrus, Fineas' brother. It was the silly act of two drunken friends. And though it had been painful, it was her most tender memory. A few days later, Cyrus had died, at the hands of the rebels no less. Nadua had been devastated. A few of his paintings still hung on a wall in her room.

Nadua wasn't quite a virgin, but four hundred years out of practice, she might as well be.

Perhaps one of her maids from the castle could entice him, but by the looks of those burns on his skin, where the guards had handled him, he too couldn't touch Cyrellian skin without pain. The guard that had removed his torn clothing and tied him up had complained that the beast was boiling to the touch.

What would his skin feel like to her?

She scolded herself. Not going to happen.

“So, you claim you are seeking someone on my planet, but won't tell me who, and expect me to earn your trust in order to find out.” Nadua couldn't help the twitch in her lip. The demon matched her smirk and her amusement was lost. She couldn't imagine what business this demon had on Undewla that didn't involve deception.

Perhaps he seeks a fallen brother. Unlikely, but plausible. Just after the war's end, demon sightings had been frequent, even though what was left of the demon invaders had reportedly been chased off this planet. Sightings were rare these days, but every

now and again a farmer from the outskirts would run to the nearest pub, shouting about a giant beast with fire red horns that had pilfered one of his animals. Most people just laughed it off.

Was it possible that a demon or two had been left behind when his comrades took flight so long ago? And if so, had this demon and his small group been attempting a rescue? It would explain why he didn't want to reveal his target. And if that were the case, then he lied about not knowing demons had been here, and therefore he most definitely could not be trusted.

“Rest up demon, we have a long journey in the morning.”

“Oh?”

“I'm bringing you to my home, where you'll have free room and board, maybe a meal or two, and your choice of the many cells in our prison. There you can think about the whole trust issue and who needs to be the one earning it.”

## Chapter 3

“What a generous offer,” Marik replied with a roll of his eyes. Actually, it sounded like a pretty good deal. A free ride into town. He wouldn’t need to wander around this wasteland trying to find life. Instead, she was going to lead him straight to it. Marik supposed he could stick around for a little while.

With an air of superiority, the bundle of fur left, speaking briefly with the two white-haired men in that strange language. In turn they gave a small bow and then swung their angry faces toward him the moment she stepped out of sight. Marik smiled and winked, causing their sneers to deepen.

That woman had mentioned demons coming here. Amazing that they would choose this place. Most likely, the group of demons who allegedly stumbled upon this frozen planet, and thought, “what a nice home that would make,” were desperate for some reason. The conditions on this planet weren’t suitable for anyone but perhaps these cold blue people. Any demon would have a hard time keeping oneself alive here, let alone thrive in a group.

He found himself wondering how Nadua was fairing on her own. She must have survived. Anya had sensed her just as they landed, right before the wave of blue attackers had interrupted their search. And from what Marik could tell, Anya was pretty accurate in her assumptions. It gave him much relief to know that once Anya was safely back with Sebastian, she would be able to help find him.

He had faith that Sebastian would succeed in rescuing her. Sebastian must succeed. If he didn’t—

Marik frowned, dismissing the twinge of panic that laced through him.

His thoughts were interrupted by an argument that had started between the two guards. They spoke in hurried whispers while pointing at him every so often. When one of them bent to inspect his bindings, Marik grew curious. The other opened the tent flap wide, as if to exit, giving him a perfect view of the bundle of fur just as she entered her own tent across the way. Then they were gone, leaving the crackle of the fire as Marik’s only companion.

Their strange behavior left him with brows drawn, staring into the flames. Their

leader's position was revealed. Did they intend for him to see where she slept? Though the one had fiddled with Marik's ropes, the bindings didn't feel any tighter or more secure. He could still break them with a twist of his wrist.

If these people had known demons in battle, they must know how strong his kind could be. They couldn't be so ignorant as to think this meager rope could hold him.

Unless they wanted him to break free.

Now that he thought of it, those guards had been standing further away from the woman than Marik had been. If he'd wanted her throat, he could have had it before they would have had a chance to react. Any guard worth his weight wouldn't have allowed a situation like that, even if the incredibly dangerous demon was properly secured.

Marik didn't really care if her guards wanted her dead or not. She was of no use to him anyway, if all she wanted to do was lock him up. But he wasn't going to be the one to end her life. Pockets of his past flashed in his mind, images of the arena. He fought the memories back. No, he wouldn't kill her. Not unless she gave him a pretty damn good reason. And because she was unwittingly doing him a favor by bringing him to civilization, where he could begin the search for Nadua, he needed her alive for the time being.

He also suspected that he was still alive because of her. She only wanted answers, but he figured he owed her, at least a little.

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A kick to his still-tender leg had Marik growling into consciousness. He bared his fangs at the offender, who swiftly backed up. Behind the man, seven fully loaded guards stood ready. One of them came forward to cut Marik free from the stake.

Marik stretched his arms and their bodies went tense as they strained their weapons toward him.

"Look, I don't need any more holes in me. It'll just piss me off."

The men exchanged sideways glances, clearly not understanding. Marik rested one arm on his knee and leaned back against the wooden stake.

"Is something happening here? Or are we posing for a picture?" His shirt was tossed to him, and he caught it in mid-flight. "What? No seamstress?" He fingered one of the many tears. "I have a mind to lodge a complaint."

One of the men yelled something, urging him with a flick of his bow to put it on. When he did, the same man continued barking out orders. Though he didn't know



what was being said, it didn't take a genius to figure out they wanted him up and out of the tent.

As he exited, five more guards were ready for him outside. "I'm flattered boys, but you're still a little understaffed." Marik glanced around. Everyone was packing up. Most of the tents were already disassembled.

Across camp, the walking rug caught his attention. She was kneeling next to an obscenely large brown animal with an angular leather face, filling a sack with supplies. The animal was twice her size in height, thick legs held up its massive body. On further study, he noted the beast sported fur like the woman's cloak.

For some reason, Marik grew alarmed when the giant's long neck twisted and its head came toward her, but it only pushed at her with its snout, as if being playful. She laughed as she went tumbling, and gently swatted its nose.

Marik wanted to watch her more, but a sharp point pressed into his back, while the guards in front of him parted. Ahead sat a small caged wagon, attached to another one of those large fuzzy beasts, this one with coarse gray fur.

"Great, I get the nearly dead oversized varmint."

A flare of unease rippled through Marik. Being caged was one of the many horrors from his past. He'd sworn never to let it happen again. But with more than a dozen armed warriors ready to pounce if he showed any resistance, Marik forced his feet forward.

He flicked the metal with his nail and noted the sound of low-quality workmanship. Gods, these people were making it too easy.

Lifting himself with the help of one of the top metal bars, he slipped inside the tiny entrance feet first and the door was closed behind him. "Don't I get a pillow or something? These accommodations are a little bare for my taste. And if you were wise, you'd get the hungry demon some breakfast."

Ignoring him, the guards went about their business, secure in the thought that Marik wasn't going anywhere. He slumped against the bars, and quietly observed his captors.

What was left of the camp was torn down and stored within various transport wagons. Whenever an order was shouted, Marik paid attention to how it was carried out. Already he was beginning to learn certain words, associating them with the actions.

Marik craned his neck to see what that woman was up to, but she was gone, and so was her creature. A bit later, close to the edge of the gnarled woods, Marik caught sight of the two guards from the night before, speaking far away from the rest of the

group. He didn't like that.

Before long, they were on the move. His ride was bumpy and he made the inconvenience known, but of course no one understood him. They wouldn't have paid any attention if they could.

Around midday, pellets of snow began to drift in the air. At the same time a familiar ragged beast trotted up beside him, with an equally ragged body riding atop it. "Morning, demon. How fare you?"

"I'm dandy, how polite of you to ask. Could use a fresh set of clothes, and hot meal though."

"Oh, absolutely, I'm here to serve. Would you like to look at a menu?"

"If you've got one."

"I'll get right on that, right after you give me the truth of your intentions here."

Her body rocked slightly as the beast kept pace, and Marik could almost make out the shape of her body under all that mess. His shaft took note as well. He'd obviously been far too long without a woman if that mere hint of a female form was turning him on.

"If you don't believe what I've said already, then I don't know what to tell you. Anything else I say would be a lie just to get what I want." He paused, waiting for a response. When he didn't receive one, he continued in a sarcastic tone. "Fine, here goes. My friends and I hail from a galactic-fun-ship, and we came to this planet in order to fill it with candy and cheese."

She narrowed her eyes. "Cute. I don't even know why I tried. The deception of your kind is legendary."

"Have you actually met one of my kind?"

"Aside from you? No. But you've already proven the stories to be true."

Marik couldn't help but roll his eyes at that.

They rode in stony silence for a moment. The only sound was from the crunch of snow, and heavy snort-breathing from the weird furry monster. Its wrinkled gray face was the only part that wasn't covered in tangled brown fur.

"What's that thing you ride?"

"This is an edison.

"It smells."

"It's not that bad. Edisons are a traveler's companion of choice. They're strong, and can endure long trips in the harshest weather. They don't eat much and their fur keeps them as warm as they need to be." The woman scratched the edison's neck.

“And she’s loyal. Aren’t you, Sweetie?”

“She? It looks too ugly to be a girl.”

She covered what must be its ears. “Shh, you’ll hurt her feelings.”

“Oh, forgive me. Let me amend. She’s dazzling in her dreadlock do, her step, so light and dainty.”

The edison let out a grunt as if protesting his sarcasm.

“And I’m sure the smell will grow on me eventually. How you match her radiance, lady, the two of you must be sisters.”

Her posture straightened. “What a tongue you have.”

“Oh, you have no idea what my tongue can do.” Marik smiled as he sensed her unease. His teasing backfired and he inconspicuously shifted in his pants.

“Maybe we’ll see what it can do once I’ve ripped it from your head, hmm.”

“You’ll need to put your finger in my mouth first.” Marik flashed a fanged grin. Her blue eyes flared with disdain, which only worked to encourage him. “Tell me, do all the females dress like you and Eddie here? It must be hard for the men to decipher between the two. I can imagine the awkward morning when they’ve found they’d been fucking the wrong species.”

After casting him a look of unmitigated hatred that seemed out of place in those blue depths, the woman rode away.

\* \* \*

Nadua mentally scolded herself for letting him get to her so easily. The lying bastard was her prisoner, yet he was the one having fun. He must expect that his friends will come back for him. And perhaps they would, but her people would be ready. They were but two days from home.

“Your Highness,” a voice called. Nadua slowed her speed to let Tamir catch up with her. “One of our sentries has spotted a rebel, just south of us.”

Nadua pulled back on the lead and Sweetie obediently stopped. The rest of the party did as well. “I want to find the rebels too, but don’t you think the threat of a demon invasion is more important right now?”

Tamir bowed his head. “Of course, Your Highness, whatever you think is best, but this could be our last chance to find the rebels. Surely they will move again with us being so close. And the demon is secure for the moment. I hardly think an extra day would hurt. Plus I have already sent a messenger to the castle. They should already be

prepared by the time we arrive.”

Nadua supposed he was right. Wren would have everything taken care of before they even set foot into town. “How many were spotted?”

“Just one, but he could be a scout, not too far from the others.”

Nadua’s eyes following the horizon. It was already midday. With a sigh, she pointed to a high bluff. “We’ll make camp there. After everything is set up, I’ll take half the men with me to search while the other half stays with our prisoner.”

“I’ll go with you, Your Highness.”

“No, I’ll need a leader to stay behind, in case the rebels attack.”

“Of course. I’ll relay your wishes to the others.” Tamir bowed and rode ahead.

It took about an hour to reach the high ground. While Tamir supervised construction, Nadua gathered her group and headed out in search of the rebel outpost.

Silently, she prayed for Lidian’s safety.

Coming soon...  
**DEMON SLAVE**  
(Shadow Quest Series - Book 2)

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