

Quest for the Source of Darkness Book Excerpt

Chapter One

The dunes sparkled like powdered silver beneath the full moon, their undulating shapes stretching away as far as the eye could see. The wind shifted them into rolling forms that changed right before your very eyes, first hiding then exposing that which lay beneath: things mostly forgotten but not quite gone. Nothing ever truly disappeared for the vestiges of what they once were became re-formed, sometimes into things that did not resemble their original appearance.

A stain emerged upon the immaculate silver sand slowly spreading outward, appearing like a foul oily sheen floating upon an even fouler blackness. The smudge began to sink into the sands momentarily disappearing then reappearing, exposing a wide rift from which cries and shrieks issued forth. Screams of bitterness, hatred and torment freezing the blood and sending shivers of terror up the spine. A faint sooty haze rose from within the darkness, stretching upward toward the star-encrusted heavens accompanied by the tortured howls. It blocked the twinkling points of light for a brief moment before falling back to the dunes where it withdrew back down into its noxious void once more.

A cloaked figure lying prone on the dune to avoid being seen - watched with a combination of fascination and horror as the vapor erupted from the sands. This was where the power was imprisoned but it could never be bound to a master in its raw state: the figure would have to wait until it manifested itself into something that could be controlled. The desert kept its secrets well hidden allowing them a brief breath of air only when no one could see... but there was always someone who did. The desert's mysteries remained secret no longer as the hooded and cloaked figure crawled backward in fearful apprehension.

She awoke to the sound of a deafening peal of thunder; her heart racing with fright as she bolted upright from her prone position as she scanned the area with her saucer-shaped eyes. She found herself in an unfamiliar place with a vicious storm raging just beyond the entrance to the cave. Lightning streaked with a vengeance, illuminating rain intent upon beating the earth into submission. The wind shrieked and moaned as it, too, sought to punish the land for unknown crimes. She shivered, more from the roiling and seething storm than from the cold seeping into her shelter. She pulled her knees up to her chest struggling to remember what she was doing in such an inhospitable place during such a ferocious tempest. She stared around the cave. The brief flashes of lightning illuminated an area that was not very large but was strewn with boulders, especially near what appeared to be a former rockslide toward the back. The air was relatively fresh and dust free, which told her that the cave-in had occurred long ago. The thought of the mountain being unstable, however, made her uneasy. Could a deafening clap of thunder loosen up more of the rocks, burying her within this stony crypt? She winced as the sounds from without took on a human timbre then slowly realized the throat from which they issued was indeed human.

She cautiously approached the entrance, mindful of the driving rain and cocked her head to the side. For several long moments all she heard were the noises caused by the storm. Then a faint cry reached her ears. She crawled forward to the very lip of the cave and squinted downward, gasping as she spied the wreckage loosened by the howling

winds and rain. Vivid lightning lit up a disturbing scene as boulders, ledges and a variety of unidentifiable clumps lay strewn about but she could see little else that could have been the source of that faint shout. She was about to edge back into the relative sanctuary when a white-hot bolt briefly exposed a hapless soul desperately clinging to an outcropping of stone several yards away. She immediately headed for the struggling person, her fingers gripping whatever seemed remotely stable as she half-climbed, half-slid down toward the figure. A large chunk of rock skittered past her, seemingly intent on dislodging the desperate figure. It met with a jagged pinnacle on the side of the mountain down which she scampered, deflecting the projectile away at the very last moment. She redoubled her efforts; finally reaching the figure just as he lost his grip and painfully descended down a few more yards. She silently cursed to herself, grabbing his wrist before he could disappear into the black nothingness far below.

The touch seemed to bring the figure back from its acceptance of doom as he lifted his head upward. A burst of light illuminated the man's battered and bruised face. His eyelids drooped and spittle sprayed out of his mouth as he gasped for air. Blood, diluted by the rain, trickled palely down his countenance. She yanked on his hand to catch his attention then pointed her head back up the way she had come. Something registered in his face and he offered her as much help as his exhausted body could give, then clawed and fought his way up the strangely viscous side of the mountain. Both of their hands were raw from the effort, their clothes torn by the sharp objects impeding their upward progress. He began to tire and she realized if she had misjudged the entrance to the cave she would not have the strength to help either of them the rest of the way. She glanced upward forcing her eyes to stay open against the pounding rain long enough to find the cave, exhaling with relief as she spied it just a few more yards away. She pulled him with a short-lived energy for a large boulder began to bounce down from somewhere overhead in the darkness. She instinctively pressed herself against her exposed charge and prayed it would somehow be deflected away before crushing them beneath its bulk or sending them careening down the side. It dropped onto the ledge next to them, splintering in half before bits and pieces fell away below, the razor sharp shards biting into their flesh. She groped along the shattered shelf then stared up toward the mouth of the cave: they were almost there. The storm intensified as if it meant to destroy them. Time, she knew, was not on their side. Soaked, pounded by the elements and rife with welts and cuts, she dragged the benumbed man inside and fell in a heap beside him, instantly succumbing to her fatigue.