

The Edge of Darkness: The Final Battle Book Excerpt

Chapter One

The blood red sun stained the sky with garish shades of orange and crimson as it sank down into the roiling sea. A jagged pinnacle of rock stood out blackly against the fiery backdrop. The cloaked figure at the top leaned forward into the wind. Its mantle billowed wildly; one gloved hand held the hood in place while the other grasped a staff with a molten orb at its top. Rigid, black bands hung stiffly down from the sphere. A voluminous train stretched for several yards behind the shape, and the entire figure was bathed in a reddish aura. A large, burly shape of a man, using a lance for support, slipped as he struggled up the side, the loose rocks and unpredictable soil giving way beneath his weight. He grunted in pain as the shards cut into his flesh. He finally managed to control his fall then labored to stand erect beside the shorter one.

"Everything is ready," Grost stated, the blood from his torn hands dripping onto his boots and the ground. His muscular chest strained against his chain mail tunic, the black metal links forged into cruel barbs that curved outward in every direction from the front panel. He shifted the spear from one hand to the other, his brawny arms flexing with the weight, the edges of the point of the weapon glinting in the fading light. Scars were visible on his square face and exposed torso. The Garzin's dark hair, chopped unevenly without rhyme or reason, bobbed uncontrollably in the wind. He pointed down toward the fleet of ships at the base of the cliff, their black sails awaiting the hoist order. Sinister-appearing spikes projected off the bows; scores of seamen stood along the decks, anticipating the order to set sail. He paused, his eyes averted from the slight figure in front of him.

"Put forth your arm."

Grost swallowed hard then lifted his arm up. He turned his head to the side as the figure placed the staff just above his upper arm, the radiating waves of heat from the globe blistering his skin. His breathing increased as the black strips vibrated, each shudder forcing them to stiffen until they formed a pattern. The black-garbed shape lowered them down around his arm. Grost convulsed as the white-hot material wrapped around his bicep, his strangled scream blocking any intake of air. His eyes watered while his tendons and muscles strained against his skin. Like a leech sucking his blood, the searing bind seemed to draw his life force essence into it. The sphere was lifted; Grost dropped to one knee, sweat dripping off his body.

"Get up."

The Garzin staggered upright and gazed at the mark left by the band, the image concealed underneath the soot covering it. A deep, rumbling boom rippled toward them from the mountain to their rear. Grost instinctively ducked then turned around, his eyes narrowing as he stared at the yellowish clouds escaping the volcano's throat. A series of lesser explosions opened a fracture near the top allowing a thin stream of red-hot lava to creep down the mountain.

"Time grows short, Hekatarin," he coughed, his arm feeling as heavy as an anvil.

"We sail at dawn when the wind shifts from the west," a raspy voice commanded from within the darkness of the hood.

"As you command, Hekatarin."