

A dramatic illustration of a vampire character, Ulrika, with pale skin and short, spiky white hair. She is shown in a dynamic, forward-leaning pose, wearing a dark, ornate, gothic-style coat with intricate patterns. Her right hand is raised, gripping a dark, ornate dagger with a blood-stained hilt. Her mouth is open in a fierce, blood-filled grin, revealing sharp fangs and dark blood. The background is a swirling, fiery orange and yellow, suggesting a scene of intense battle or destruction. The overall tone is dark and intense.

ULRIKA THE VAMPIRE

WARHAMMER

BLOODSWORN

NATHAN LONG

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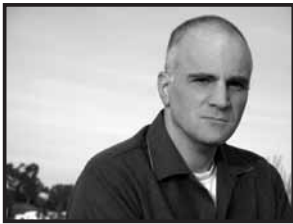
GOTREK & FELIX: THE ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Christian Dunn

# BLOODSWORN

## Nathan Long

Returning to Nuln after her adventures in Praag, Ulrika finds the Lahmian vampires preparing for war. Across the Old World, their rivals, the sinister von Carsteins, attack their strongholds and lead the witch hunters to their hidden lairs. Spurned by her sisters, Ulrika forms an uneasy alliance with the von Carsteins in a plot to destabilise the Empire by striking at its very heart – they plan nothing less than the assassination of Emperor Karl Franz. With enemies on all sides and the Empire in flames, Ulrika must decide whether her future will see her living among the humans, or as their enemy.-



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathan Long hails from Los Angeles, California, where he began his career as a screenwriter in Hollywood. He has written a wide selection of Warhammer fantasy novels, including the Blackhearts trilogy and more recently the adventures of Ulrika the Vampire. To many fans, he is best known for his work on the hugely successful Gotrek & Felix series, including five full-length novels and the first Black Library fantasy audio drama, *Slayer of the Storm God*.

*Bloodsworn* can be purchased direct from this website and GW mail order, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, and better bookstores.

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'I SAID ENOUGH,' said Lashmiya, her voice calm while the old woman shuddered and hissed in agony. 'There are traitors in every army, and spies in every court, but their presence must not be allowed to paralyse us while the enemy steals march upon march on us. We will discover them in time, but we will not wait to act until they are found. There is no time.'

She lowered her hand and the old crone collapsed before the altar, gasping and sobbing and curling up to hug her knees as ribbons of blood trickled down her wrinkled cheeks and dripped on the stone floor.

'Now,' said Lashmiya, turning to the rest as if nothing had happened. 'Report. What do we know of the Sylvanians' plans, and what can we bring to bear against them?'

The assembled sisters hesitated, glancing uneasily at the fallen crone, but Countess Gabriella stood and curtsied.

'Mistress Lashmiya,' she said, looking directly into the emissary's eyes. 'As you no doubt know, Karl Franz has left Altdorf and is travelling to Nuln. The stated reason is that he is leading his army to quell the "vampire uprising" here. The true reason is that Altdorf has become too dangerous. A terrible pox has swept the city, striking rich and poor alike, and has taken victims even within the Emperor's palace. Rumours that the pox was spread by nobles who had slept with undead seductresses, and that Karl Franz himself is infected, have sparked riots and threats of assassination.'

'And exposures too, mistress,' said the long-haired child upon the back of the blinded slave. 'All of my beloved sisters of Altdorf were found out, their disguises of wife, mistress and courtesan torn away. The mobs paraded their blackened bodies through the streets. They called it proof of a great vampire conspiracy.'

'It is,' said Gabriella. 'Proof of a—'

'Of a Sylvanian conspiracy,' finished Lashmiya.

'Yes, mistress,' said Gabriella. 'We believe the Sylvanians are behind all of it – the pox, the exposures, the uprisings that forced Karl Franz to send his most trusted guardians away from him. All these things were done to strip the Emperor of his defences and drive him into the open. They may even have had a hand in turning him towards Nuln.'

'And you believe the Sylvanians mean to assassinate him here,' said Lashmiya, 'and throw the Empire into civil war.'

'Yes, mistress,' said Gabriella. 'Thereby allowing the army that gathers in Hunger Wood to march in almost unopposed.'

'The Sylvanians will have the empire of slaves they have always wanted,' said the child-vampire. 'And we will be cast out. Hunted and fugitive.'

'Why Nuln?'

'It is sound tactics, mistress,' said Casilla, swaggering forwards with her hand on the hilt of her sword. 'It would have been nearly impossible to strike at Karl Franz in Altdorf, among all his defences. Also here they will be able to accuse Countess Emmanuelle of his murder, perhaps even say she is a member of our sisterhood.'

Reikland will be forced to come out against Wissenland, and once that war starts, the other provinces will not stand by.'

Lashmiya nodded. 'And what have you done to foil this plot? Besides fight like cats in a bag, that is? Do you know who leads the Sylvanians? Do you know their numbers? Where they are hiding? How they plan to kill Karl Franz? When they will strike?'

Again there was hesitation among the sisters, and again Gabriella spoke.

'We know they are not quartered in the city, though they have agents here. We have sent swains and thralls into the forests around Nuln, looking for them. None have found any trace. They are likely hidden by sorcery.'

'And you have not wrested the information from their agents?' asked Lashmiya.

'Many have talked before they died,' said Gabriella. 'But they did not know their master's name, nor his lair. They claim to have met him in a different place each time, and did not see his face. None were privy to the full plan, and we have yet to piece it all together from the scraps.'

'That is because Countess Gabriella has not *given* us all the scraps,' said the crone who had faced Lashmiya's wrath before, standing unsteadily. 'And we do not know their leader's name because she has not seen fit to tell us.'

Lashmiya turned blazing eyes on her, as mutterings swept through the sisters, but before the emissary could lash out again, the crone curtseyed demurely.

'Forgive me if I incur your wrath once more, mistress, but was not sister Gabriella our Queen's agent in Sylvania? Was it not her duty to watch and guard against just such schemes as this? How can she not have known this was coming? Unless, of course, she serves a master as well as a mistress!'

'Enough,' said Lashmiya again, as the mutterings became shouts. 'Enough!'

The storm of argument cut off again as she glared at them all, moon-white energy crackling around her balled fists.

'It seems the Sylvanians have learned Lahmian subtlety,' she said, 'while *you* have forgotten it. They have used whispers to turn you against each other, and you have not seen this for what it is. This will cease. From now on, only I have the right to brand someone spy or traitor. Any sister accusing any other of disloyalty will face my wrath. Is that clear?'

Disgruntled muttering answered her, and the crone turned her back.

Lashmiya nodded almost imperceptibly to her Norse guards. The spearwomen stepped forwards as one and stabbed the crone through the back and neck. She shrieked once, then crumpled to the floor in a welter of blood, her spine severed in two places.

'Is that clear?'

'Yes, mistress,' chorused the Lahmians.

'I am pleased to hear it,' said Lashmiya, then raised her chin and addressed them. 'For if we are to win this war, if we are to survive as a race, we must join together and work as one. And not only that. We must learn from the Sylvanians as they have learned from us. If they can learn intrigue, then we can learn war. We must remember that we too have fangs. We must remember that we can be strong as well as cunning, brave as well as deceitful, swift as well as secret. We have been backed into a corner, dearest daughters. Now it is time to bare our claws!'

The Lahmians cheered, and Lashmiya let them, then raised her voice again. 'I will meet with you all individually, and hear your stories and complaints. Until then, you are dismissed, but know that my eyes and the eyes of our Queen are always on you. You may go.' She saluted them with a raised hand, then stepped down from the altar and strode for the door again, her spearwomen following behind her.

The chamber erupted in nervous babbling as she passed through them, and the

Lahmians rose and began to huddle in little groups. Ulrika and Famke, who stood where they had stopped when Lashmiya's thunderclap had announced her presence, now relaxed and started towards Mathilda, Hermione and Gabriella again.

In the first row, Hermione was whispering urgently in Gabriella's ear, looking as frightened as Ulrika had ever seen her. Gabriella held her arm, speaking soothingly, but as she turned her towards the exit, she glanced up – and looked straight at Ulrika.

Ulrika stopped, wary, as Gabriella stared. Would the countess curse her? Would she slap her? Would she kill her?

Gabriella walked up the stairs as Hermione and Mathilda turned to look after her, then spread her arms and embraced Ulrika, pulling her close.

'Welcome home, daughter,' she said. 'I am glad you still live.'

Ulrika closed her arms around Gabriella's shoulders and returned the embrace, her breast heaving with stifled sobs. How could she have left such unquestioning love? How could she have been so selfish as to hurt Gabriella and break the vows she had made to her? It felt good to be home.

'You!' said Hermione, following Gabriella up the steps. 'I have been awaiting your return!' She pointed a finger at Ulrika. 'Hold her, sisters! This one I *know* is a traitor!'