

Blood Rite

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Lights up, Arlo and Kisara are wandering through a long-forgotten desert battlefield.

Kisara: I wouldn't pick that if I were you.

Arlo: Why not? He's not going to need it anymore. (Pauses, lifts sword from skeleton.) Owww!

Kisara: I told you so...wait, you're bleeding!

Arlo: (Groans in pain, throws down sword.) Darn piece of junk-something cut me!

Kisara: On the hilt?

Arlo: Yeah, the hilt. (Picks up sword slowly, examines it.) I don't see where, though...

Kisara: Here's a bandage.

Arlo: Thanks. (Wraps hand.) Do you see anything sharp?

Kisara (Examines blade): No, nothing.

Arlo: Strange, but oh well.... (Slides blade in empty scabbard).

Kisara: You're crazy, little bro.

Arlo: Yeah, yeah. (Pauses, cautiously glances around.) Here that?

(Lycos, Fure, and 4 Highwaymen enter scene on horseback.)

Lycos: Nice jewelry you have around your neck. Mind handing it over?

Arlo: Actually we do mind.

Lycos (Guffaws loudly, jumps off horse.): Jeez, kid I wasn't talking to you! I was talking to her.

Kisara: Same thing he said.

Lycos: You both have some serious guts to be talking to me like that. You're in Lycos' territory now, so show some respect.

Kisara (Laughs softly): Your territory? Looks like a pile of bones and dust to me.

(Fure chuckles. 4 Highwaymen murmur ominously, draw weapons.)

Lycos: Alright then. (Pauses, draws enormous axe.) You see that bird above your heads? Do you see it?

You're going to be in its stomach in a few minutes.

Arlo: Yeah I see it. A relative of yours, I'm guessing.

(Lycos and 4 Highwaymen charge; Fure hangs back, waits; Arlo draws new sword; Kisara draws sword; they fight. Arlo grazes Lycos' forearm once.)

Lycos: What...are you doing...to me? (Drops axe, falls to ground dead. Pale red pools around entire body.)

Kisara: Arlo, are you okay?!

Arlo: Fine, I think...the blood's not mine.

(Kisara fights highwaymen, easily defeats them. Fure looks at Arlo's blade, flees.)

Kisara: Stop him, Arlo!

Arlo: How?! I wouldn't be able to catch that coward even on a horse!

(The siblings watch Fure vanish into the desert; Kisara groans, annoyed.)

Kisara: Arlo!

Arlo: What? You were the closest. Don't blame me.

Kisara: I was fighting three of them. (Shakes her head.) And I don't have an enchanted sword like you do.

Arlo (Looks fondly at new sword.): No you don't.

Lt. Fure meets Ambassador in nearby ghost town alleyway.

Ambassador: The services of the *Tribe of Duskin* do not come cheaply. Even for one of your ill repute, Fure.

Fure: Fine. I just need a score of your foot soldiers.

Ambassador: A score? (Tilts head, intrigued.) What are you hunting this time, Fure?

Fure: A pair of kids.

Ambassador: Kids?

Fure: Yeah, kids that stole something from me.

(Ambassador stares at Fure quietly, nods.)

Ambassador: You have your soldiers. (Fure nods, begins to move away; Ambassador holds wrist tightly.): Understand that you will ask no more future favors from the *Tribe of Duskin*. You may have once been our principal assassin, but no longer are you now. (Whispers.) I await your betrayal.

Fure: Alright, just get your soldiers ready in a few hours.

Arlo and Kisara reach nearby ghost town on horseback.

Arlo: I'm seriously close to gnawing off my own hand. (Glances at Kisara's burlap.) You didn't save any food from that village did you?

Kisara: Yeah, a couple slices of that crunchy bread. (Rummages into burlap, pulls out cloth with bread inside; rips it into half, passes piece to Arlo.)

Arlo: Thanks, sis. (The siblings dismount from horses, munches on bread.)

(Fure and Ambassador enter scene, hidden in alleyway.)

Ambassador: Unremarkable.

Fure: Huh?

Ambassador: Your adolescent targets, Fure. They are very unremarkable.

Fure: Yeah, well they managed to defeat Lycos.

Ambassador: Lycos was a minor street thug.

Fure: And three of his bodyguards.

Ambassador: More thugs, only more foolish and inexperienced. (Pauses.) Are you making excuses for them, or hiding something?

Fure (Stammers for reply, pales.): No, of course not.

Ambassador: You fled, didn't you? You didn't stay and fight them.

Fure: He has a Blood-Rite blade, alright?!

Ambassador: That changes things, doesn't it, Fure? I never thought you the coward.

Fure: I'm not a coward. I recognized the strength of a Blood-Rite weapon.

Ambassador: Ahh yes, the dreaded Blood-Rite weapon. Forms a blood bond with its wielder, protects its wielder by consuming the lifeblood of anyone with the merest touch. (Pauses.) *The Tribe of Duskin* has created some truly awful weapons, Fure, haven't we?

(Fure nods tersely.)

Ambassador: But I have an answer for you. You should know that for every weapon The Tribe creates, we also make a counter-weapon that defeats it. (Ambassador holds up gray vial, hands it to Fure.) Ash is that counter-weapon for a Blood-Rite weapon. Drink what is inside and feel undiluted power run through your body, Fure.

Ambassador (In a quiet whisper.): But the pain of using Ash....it is intolerable, is it not? Imagine the sinews and tendons and veins and arteries and organs being ripped from your skeleton, to have your very will ripped from your psyche. The result has turned many a soul insane in a matter of hours. But the amount you drank, Fure, will destroy you in a matter of seconds

Fure: Good, tell your soldiers to surround them from every rooftop and alley. I'll take them right now, when they're relaxed! That sword will be mine and not yours, Ambassador, or your silly tribe. Once I retrieve my sword, our business will be finished. (Unscrews cap, swallows contents. Coughs once, glares at Ambassador, approaches the siblings.)

Arlo: Hey!!

Kisara: It's that highwayman from earlier! (Both siblings draw weapons; Fure eyes Arlo's Blood-Rite blade carefully as he draws his saber.)

Fure: Attack! (20 *Tribe of Duskin* soldiers emerge from the ghost town around them, brandishing swords and daggers and spears.) That weapon, child, is mine.

(Fure suddenly collapses to ground; flesh begins to melt from body, Fure screams in agony; Kisara screams in horror.)

Ambassador (Whispers.): And so Ash begins its countdown.

(20 Duskin soldiers surround the siblings; they fight.)

Arlo: There might be too many for us!

Kisara: Don't say that!

(Arlo and Kisara finally defeat the final Duskin together; Arlo sighs, disgusted.)

Arlo: What happened to their faces?

Kisara: What is that thing? (Stares at skeleton lying on ground, skin draped grotesquely over its bones.)

Arlo: I don't know, but I think I just lost my appetite.

(Skeleton stands; Ash-Fure crackles at the siblings; Arlo steps forward, attacks first; uninjured, Ash-Fure continues to laugh.)

Ash-Fure: I have no blood for your Blood-Rite weapon to consume, child. I am evil and destruction incarnate, the very definition of unstoppable darkness. I am evil and destruction incarnate, the very...

Kisara (Whisper, afraid.): What creature are we fighting now?

(Arlo and Kisara fight Ash-Fure; Kisara knocks Ash-Fure's saber from his hands; Arlo cuts his arm off.)

Ash-Fure (Laughs maniacally.): No pain! No pain. No pain!

(Arlo steps forward, removes several ribs, punctures sternum.)

Ash-Fure: Try all you want, you can't kill me! You can't kill me, you can't kill me....

Ambassador (Steps from alley shadows, gives disapproving sigh.): You were right, Fure. You are not a coward, just a helpless fool.

Ash-Fure: What....what....

Kisara: Arlo, watch out for that old man!

Arlo (Spinning to meet threat.): I got him, sis!

Ambassador: The sword belongs to the *Tribe of Duskin*, not to you Fure. It is our weapon, a weapon we created and lost ages ago. It is by very unfortunate luck that a pair of children found the sword very near to your birthplace, Fure.

(Ash-Fure turns, converges on Ambassador.)

Ambassador: I did not completely betray you though. You did indeed drink Ash, but the concoction is truly wicked. While it does guarantee you invulnerability to a Blood-Rite weapon, you lose everything. Once you consume Ash you only have a certain amount of time before your end draws near. For you Fure, that moment is now.

(Fure's legs crumple to white dust; ribs flake away as he falls; skull shatters and he dies with a rasp.)

Ambassador: Now, what shall I do with you two? What?
(Arlo and Kisara are long gone; Ambassador spies hoof-prints leading away from Fure's powdery remains into desert.)

Ambassador: Perhaps, Fure, they are not unremarkable kids. Nevertheless, that Blood-Rite sword will be mine, as it was my father's six-hundred years ago. It is my blood right.

Ambassador steps forward, boots shifting Fure's remains, and wrenches the unbroken vial of Ash from skeletal fingers.

The End.