

# The Blessing of Blood

## Marcus Terrell Smith

From set *Innistrad: Crimson Vow*

*Dear Odric,*

*The war is not over. Far from it. We thought the nightmares had been defeated, but something else has come, something far more powerful and evil. It's hard to explain. So much has happened. I will try to make sense of it for you as best I can.*

*The vampires fought side by side with us. They wanted to save this Plane like we did. But I couldn't help thinking, "To what end?" To make slaves of us all? Food? But there was no time to think of the future, only the present. Only the present enemy that must be destroyed. We'll have to deal with them when this is all over.*

*Among the fallen are the archangels, Bruna and Gisela, who were slain by their own sister and our last archangel—Sigarda. I cannot describe to you what this madness had truly done to them. They are gone now. And you are probably wondering why I have not mentioned Avacyn. She is dead, too.*

*With the aid of Saint Traft, I was able to wield her divine spear and help defeat the first of the nightmares. But whatever it is that has followed. . . it was strong enough to force the Saint out of me and leave me prey to the madness. I barely escaped with my life.*

*Odric, you are the best of us, and we need you to lead us. We need your help to stop this. Before it is too late. I am on my way to you. And I will bring those cathars still loyal to the light with me.*

*Please, do not forget who you are and have always been. We were all deceived at one time. I pray to see you soon.*

*Your dearest friend,*

*Thalia*



Thalia, Guardian of Thraben | Art by: Magali Villeneuve

The priest shuddered as he finished reading Thalia’s letter aloud to Odric. His voice was somber and echoed softly from the walls of the small Nearheath chapel Thalia and Grete had left Odric in.

Over the past several weeks, Odric had rarely wondered if they would ever return, if they would ever want to see him again. He instead spent the whole of his time on his knees before the altar of Avacyn, praying without ceasing for answers, tracing Avacyn’s collar across his chest—shoulder to heart, shoulder to heart.

Regret gripped him like a vice. Thalia had warned him of the Lunarch Council’s corruption, but he was too blind and too arrogant to believe her, despite always knowing demons were afoot. He traced his tear-drenched chest harder.

There were two attending monks who would often drape him in furs on the cold nights and kept the chapel fires burning. They brought him food and drink, most of which he did not take. But what he did consume without fail was holy water prayed over by the priest. It was promised to edify his blood and cleanse it, to make it unsavory for those who might want to steal it and bring ultimate protection against the darkness outside—demons and vampires alike. Unfortunately, the kindness gave him little comfort.

*“The angels are supposed to protect us!”* The words Thalia spat at him before her exile struck like daggers to his heart. And try as he had to resist complete collapse, his will finally failed him. The dam of emotions broke. He wept and wailed uncontrollably, mourning the cathars he had killed in Thraben—those noble warriors he had reared himself and made worthy to defend the light. He anguished for the “sin-plagued” children he had allowed to be burned at the stake. He damned the souls of traitorous Bishops who so zealously consorted with demons. For weeks, he did this.

Then

“It is true,” came the grizzled voice of the priest the day Thalia’s letter arrived. “The wards, Sir Odric they have fallen, and I can no longer cast them as strongly.” The groans he made were grave, as if the words were tearing at his throat as they escaped. Yet the air beneath them was thick with a sudden, ill reso-

lution. “Avacyn is dead. Madness has swept the land. All is lost. There is no more need for worship. No more need for hope.”

The revelation from him turned Odric’s despair into unmitigated rage. He drew his sword, still glowing with angelic moonlight, and glared at the symbol of the angel emblazoned at the hilt. “*You—have—betrayed—us!*” A moment later, he found himself hacking the altar to pieces, destroying every holy plant, relic, and artifact in sight.

When he had concluded the assault, Odric lifted his head and looked back over his shoulder, just in time to see the kind priest exiting solemnly into the coming night. The man had removed his holy robes and dropped his blessed staff to the ground, leaving himself completely unprotected. Such incredible dangers lay just beyond these holy walls. Every priest and patron were keenly aware. And for a man of faith to enter the gaping maw of the damned naked and hopeless, all was truly lost indeed.

“Priest,” Odric called out, “this house of Avacyn may have fallen, but we are still protected inside its walls.” He waited for a response, but none came. “Priest! Come back inside! The sun is going down.”

A small gasp came from a corner of the chapel. Odric turned to the noise to discover a middle-aged man, fearfully cradling his adolescent daughter, both seated in the last pew. Bewilderment and despair were awash on their emaciated faces after hearing the news and witnessing Odric’s outburst. As was custom, the townsfolk would often come by to offer worship to the now dead angel or get a small meal. The poorest of them would even stay overnight, huddled in a corner near the fires. He had seen the two of them before.

“Do not worry,” Odric spoke softly, staring into the child’s fearful eyes. “You are still safe here. I will protect you “

Suddenly, there came a scream. It echoed through the open chapel doors and snuffed out every candle in the sanctuary. It was followed by the sound of a wet gurgle from choking lungs, a cracking of bones, and the unsettling din of tearing flesh—then maniacal, unholy laughter.

“*Hide!*” he ordered urgently to the man and child. They immediately rose from the pew and ran into a closet near the back of the building.

The noises from outside rode in on the back of a heavy gray mist that, like a thick puddle, rolled in through the entrance and crept down the aisle toward the altar where Odric stood battle-ready, his eyes burning through the hanging, sweat-drenched tussle of white hair with its shock of raven black at his forehead. The mist halted its advance ahead of him but never dissipated. It simply lingered, undulating with strange intentions.

At that moment, the two monks rushed in from either side of Odric and beheld the destruction he had wreaked on the altar. “Sir Odric, we heard a scream—!” the first exclaimed, before falling to his knees at the sight. His voice quivered with fright and confusion. The second frantically began to gather what she could of Avacyn’s broken symbols. “What have you done?!”

Odric did not look to them. He kept his focus on the churning mist. “Get back to your quarters,” he said sternly, “and arm yourselves.”

“Where is our priest?!” the second monk clamored. “He is our protection !”

“He’s gone!” Odric growled, raising his sword to the mist. Sounds of murder and destruction were growing outside. “Get back to your quarters and arm yourselves now!”

Suddenly, two ethereal, fog-made tentacles slithered out of the mist and enwrapped the ankles of the monks. They wrapped and unraveled along their arms, legs, and torsos, sweeping like elegant scarves over their flesh, and all at once, the monks became docile and entranced. Together, they pointed their

fingers to the altar, and with emotionless tones, they spoke as one, answering a question the mist had silently asked them:

“The tears of Avacyn rest above the altar where they can drink the light of the moon, Madam Henrika.”



Henrika, Infernal Seer | Art by: Billy Christian

*Henrika.* Odric had heard this name once before. The name had been whispered in talks of how to quash the Skirsdag and other demon sympathizers—a futile endeavor he had come to understand, given the whole of Lunarch leadership would gladly lay prostrate before such fiendish demonlords. He remembered how Jerren, chief among the traitorous lot, became uneasy at her mention, gritted his teeth and tensed his shoulders. A wave of jealousy and reproach had washed over Jerren, knowing she was closer to them than he could ever hope to be.

*Vampires consorting with demons.* A truly diabolical combination.

A silver beam of moonlight appeared through a small window in the roof. It cut through the rising darkness like a spear and struck a shattered ceremonial mirror perched upon the altar, sending several beams of light refracting against the walls and Odric’s blade. Odric raised his sword behind him to capture the true form of the enemy now standing with him in its reflection. There he saw her hooded, feminine silhouette, her arms outstretched to the monks, playing them like puppets on invisible strings.

Avacyn’s tears were a precious commodity in the church, if not all of Innistrad. While followers of the faith were usually anointed on their foreheads with holy water, on special occasions, some were anointed with her divine drops. Infused with the power of the soft light, Avacyn’s tears enhanced their spells, healed their wounds after battle, and bolstered their reach into the spirit realms. Odric snarled. If such a villain as Henrika wanted them—the demon she served, moreover—she must intend to debase them somehow.

At once, Odric turned his sword at a sharp angle, bending the moonlight in Henrika’s direction, shining the new beam upon the floor. Her mist swirled and parted immediately to avoid it, retreating beneath the wooden pews like snakes into their hollows.

The enchantment that held the monks fell away at that moment, and they came back to themselves. Dazed and frightened, they looked to one another, then to Odric.

“You’ve been glamered!” Odric shouted. “Now do as I say! Get to safety!”

Without rebuttal or hesitation, the monks rushed into the darkness of the entrances from which they came. The moment they disappeared, however, the heavy thuds of two bodies hitting the floor boomed from the doorways.

Odric grimaced at the sounds. He had been taught to be prepared for the unexpected, and what was coming was definitely that. Footsteps on the roof, skulking about the perimeter of the chapel, even the strident whistle of blades cutting the air should have alerted him that other cathars were present. In fact, it was he who taught them to move in silence; trained them to go unnoticed by the enemy when the situation called for it. But he was so distracted by his grief and the sudden arrival of this Henrika that his guard was momentarily lowered.

He whipped around, bending the light with him and sending it into the darkened door. The beam landed upon two soldiers, both wiping the monks’ blood from their shimmering blades. Odric beheld them with surprise, as they stepped forward. Their faces were like stone with eyes flashing, without remorse for those they had just slain. *Cathars murdering the innocent. . .and clergymen no less?* Avacyn’s madness had spread a greater distance than he thought.

What further caught his eye was that each one was missing a hand—or rather, their left hands had been replaced by the decaying bones of dead ones.

“Brother? Sister?” Odric asked through grinding teeth. “What have you done to yourselves?”

“They’ve been marked by the divine,” came a gloating female voice—Henrika’s clever voice—undulating with the rolling of the mist. “Hearing that their precious angel was dead, they practically lost their will to live. How pitiful they felt knowing they had wasted their best years on the good lie.”

The mist receded into a swirling ball, then rose into the air, coming to form in the shape of a very tall, very thin woman in a cascading gown. Henrika’s lips parted as she smiled, revealing the sharpened fangs behind them. The cathars raised their swords in Odric’s direction, as she went on. “Cathars, such mindless sheep—always in need of purpose, some master to prove their worth to. Well, they have found a new one and been reborn through self-sacrifice. Ormendahl is their angel now.”

Her last words released the dogs from their cages, and the two cathars rushed Odric, one attacking high and the other low. This was a typical method of these oath-traitors—two against one, a rather dishonorable tactic in Odric’s opinion—but one he had grown to expect from their lot. He deftly cart-wheeled in place, as their blades passed over and under him, then returned their advances with his own aggressive flurry that, between his near impossible dodges and blocks, lacerated limbs, scored faces, and shattered bone. Blood ran in rivers over Avacyn’s shattered mementos.

Henrika’s vile laughter echoed from the walls. She applauded the display, encouraging newcomers to join her revelry. For in the ten or so windows of the chapel, the dark silhouettes of more cathars, each one clad in their holy armor with their unholy afflictions on display, loomed over the scene, looking down upon their defamed leader. Odric beheld them with shame and disbelief. So many of them had fallen victim to Henrika’s influence and her demon’s will. He eyed her with murderous intent.

“Fascinating,” smiled Henrika, “a natural-born killer with an unnatural sense of honor. To humans, too. What they’ve said about you, Sir Odric—the legends. They prove absolutely true.”

“Then you know already that you will never leave with those tears,” Odric growled, aiming his blood-drenched sword in her direction.

“Leave?” Henrika chuckled. She spun around gleefully, allowing her golden gown to dance in wild circles. “No. They are going to stay right here in this fine house of worship where they belong. Though I’d hardly call it *fine* myself. I have a mansion with thirty rooms, drenched in silken cloths, hewn out of

marble, and an army of familiars to do my bidding.” She shrugged playfully. “But demons, like angels, are gluttons for ceremony.”

“Ceremony?” Odric whispered, slowly piecing the clues together of her end goal. “An anointing?”

Henrika smiled, rolling her eyes coyly, before she answered, “Perhaps.”



Vampire's Vengeance | Art by: Chris Cold

He observed with keen eyes this nonchalance she exuded. He had been trained to read the enemy. Henrika was one who could care less about the mission she had been tasked with, like a whimsical child who took joy in distractions from her nightly chores. Moreover, the way she spoke of her master's aims proved she held the demon in no real esteem. The attack on the chapel was only

“A means to an end,” said Odric. “That is why you and your horde of dogs have come here.”

“*Domnathi* is what we prefer to be called “

“Never heard of you,” Odric spat at her. “Yours must be one of those inferior bloodlines.” The ever-present smile left Henrika's face for a moment. His tactic had worked as he knew it would. *That is what she wants.* He surmised immediately. *What all minor vampire houses want—Supremacy.*

“*Inferior* is a word that denotes weakness and stupidity, cathar.” She allowed her tongue to linger on her lips after her last rebuttal. “We kill the weak and stupid “

“But spare the strong and willing.” Odric stepped forward, another tactic in mind—*make her feel small and the whole truth will expose itself.* “So that they can be soldiers in *his* army.” There was a stirring among the cathars in the windows as he approached her. “But you're not their leader as you seem to boast. These damned men and women are not marked for you. They are not familiars you can control. You are simply an errand girl “

“I am a dealmaker,” she hissed back at him, glaring at the remark. Her claws gave a shrill ting as they flexed.

“Dealmaker? What kind of deal would a demon and a vampire make?”

“One of blood,” came another voice from the entrance—a sad, familiar voice.



At the chapel doors stood the kind priest once again. The moonlight showed his face beaten and bruised, his bare limbs torn and bleeding. He hobbled forward, his right leg broken in several places, but he did not even wince from the pain. His skin was pale from a massive loss of blood—not just from injury but from the kiss of a vampire—a neck riddled with fang marks.

“For our loyalty,” the priest continued, “the liege of darkness will offer up his divine blood “

“Hush now,” Henrika whispered to him, smiling at Odric. The priest fell silent. His eyes were empty and fixed upon the pool of tears above the altar. The mist swirled gently around him. “Grief-stricken men are always such loquacious creatures, aren’t they?” she continued. “Strong helpers, though.”

It is then that Odric noticed the grinning, giggling devil cradled in the priest’s frail arms. Like a rabid dog, it was gnawing at the bones of a dead human hand—a hand now fixed to the priest’s bleeding wrist. Each bite caused his fingers to flex and wriggle.

“Though your angel is dead, there is still power in the tears,” Henrika spoke. “That power needs direction and vessels to wield it. Demons need priests, too—priests that must be anointed into their unholy order. He will be our first.”

“Stop, priest!” Odric threatened, cutting the air with his sword. The priest continued his procession.

“You would kill an innocent?” asked Henrika coolly. “The smallest flick of a finger would probably kill him, you know. Would you want another stain on your conscience, Sir Odric? After all those poor children you let burn?”

The sound of blades erupting from their sheaths rang out from behind him in the darkened doorways. The turncoat cathars were readying their attack. Odric counted twenty spread about the perimeter of the chapel—at the windows, at the entrance, at the doorways—not to mention the glamered priest and his devil.

“No,” Henrika started again. “You have a higher calling—a new master to serve.”

Odric again caught the reflection of the moon in his sword and was suddenly stirred by something Thalia had told him. “I serve the soft light of the moon,” he started, “the moon that holds back the terrors of the night. I serve the holiness humanity aspires to !”

“Long-winded cathars,” Henricka sneered. “This is a war the terrors will win!”

Then she dissolved into the gray mist and spread to the corners of the sanctuary, pushing the pews to the walls as she moved, as if preparing an arena for them to duel. At the same time others appeared—an audience of Domnathi vampires, peering with glowing eyes from the doorway, window, and hole in the roof. The sounds of their amusement filled the air.

At her last words, the footsteps began to pound and rush. Two of them, their arms raised, moved to pounce upon him, when a dark shadow broke the beam of moonlight. The muffled sounds of a violent skirmish rumbled through the roof, and not an instant later did it give way, sending glass, wood, and a pummeled cathar plummeting directly on top of one of Odric’s assailants. Thalia came down along with her and landed hard, both boots flat on the dead cathar’s chest. The sounds of bones crushing terminated the clash.

Thalia stood tall as she extracted her blood-drenched sword from the dead bodies. She turned to Odric, her head of long golden hair waving in the night wind. Odric turned to her as well, pulling his sword from the third cathar’s belly.

“Hello, old friend,” she smiled, and Odric smiled back, feeling an anxious quickening in his heart. Emotion rose in his throat and charged through his limbs. He wanted to reach and hug her tight in that moment, to know that she was truly real. He was grateful she was still alive; grateful she had not

succumbed to the wiles of demons; but more than anything, he was grateful at the chance to finally redeem himself for all the horrors he had allowed to pass in his time at Thraben.

Their salutation lasted only a moment, as the shattering glass of the chapel windows heralded a new onslaught of cathars. Thalia rolled out of the way, avoiding more falling shards and the slash of the enemy's sword, while Odric caught the blow with his own blade. He then suffered the brute with a blow to the nose that ended him. Several others had entered after the first but did not fight right away. They ransacked the chapel, snatching every piece of silver from the walls and throwing them outside through the windows and door.

With mighty swings of her sword and the deftest aerobatics, Thalia slashed open cathars' arms and legs, letting her momentum take her spinning over her shoulder to finish off several more. Odric shattered the skull of three with his fists, crushed the ribcages of several who had fallen at his feet. His killing sword sent reams of blood flying against the walls and floor and suffused the chapel with a kaleidoscope of moonlight from its polished silver. Back to back, the two comrades battled without mercy until the last cathars had fallen. Through it all, the priest continued his slow march.

"Protect our dear priest," Henrika's voice sang over the collapsing of bodies and clanging of swords. "Clergies are kept by dead men."

As if it were a rallying call, her words triggered an onslaught of at least twenty Domnathi vampires, who swooped into the chapel from all sides. Like a swarm of hungry rats, they overran the two weary fighters, sinking their fangs into flesh and drinking their fill. Odric and Thalia struggled to fend them off—Odric able to tear out the throats of two, Thalia able to gouge out an eye and stomp one's head in—but there were too many. Soon they were disarmed, overwhelmed, and held at the mercy of Henrika's minions.

Henrika came to full form again. Her eyelids and cheeks were stained in red, painted in the blood of one of her hapless victims. In her presence, the vampires halted their feed, though they kept their nails and fangs sunk deep in their prey's flesh.

"How valiant," she jeered, giving a soft clap. "A fine effort by the both of you. You managed to kill some forty of your weaker kinsmen in one fell swoop and at the same time provide me two of the strongest cathars there ever were "

She looked at the priest, who was now standing at the altar, holding the devil out over the pool. A wink of her eye prompted one of her subjects to proffer the priest a dagger.

From there, the priest sank the blade into the devil's belly and, pulling upward, tore the creature in two. Black blood, thick as oil, gushed out of the forlorn creature and into the pool, where the liquid sizzled and smoked. As it did, the priest began to mumble a prayer in a tongue Odric had never heard. His voice became deep and gnarled like the growl of a dying bear. And suddenly, the swirling mixture of damned blood and divine tears became cloudy, then turned a shade of deep crimson. As it did, the darkened visage of a horned beast beneath the liquid came into view—an essence of the demon.

"Ah, the blood of demons," Henrika smiled, approaching Odric. "It is immeasurable in its power, when wielded in the right veins. It takes away fear, empathy, doubt. With his blood anointing, you could do a great many wicked, wicked things."

Out of the mist suddenly appeared the father from the pew and his daughter. Both walked as the priest did before—their steps slow and mechanical, their eyes glazed and listless. Both glowered. Henrika's manicured nails—black and sharp, the claws of an aged feline—extended with a strident hiss. The orders already fixed in his mind, the father approached his captor and lifted his chin to her.

"Will you serve?" Henrika asked, directing her question to Thalia.



“Olivia Voldaren!” shouted Thalia. “Lady of Lurenbraum, progenitor of the Voldaren line, made a pact on behalf of all vampires on Innistrad. She agreed—she *promised*—no vampire bite or blade would draw human blood until the war was over. She and the other vampires are still fighting out there. All other bloodlines are fighting so that this Plane can survive. You *must* honor that!”

“Unless that demon blood took all sense of honor, too,” Odric added fiercely.

Henrika’s eyes narrowed on Odric so sharply that she could have torn away his flesh with her stare. “I don’t believe, Sir Odric, we *inferior* bloodlines were included in their lot “

Without the slightest hesitation, Henrika slit the throat of the father. His body crumpled like a fumbled sack of wheat, his blood spilling out beneath him. Three eager Domnathi vampires, who stood patiently observing nearby, reverted to wild beasts and began to devour him.

Unmoved by the display, the young girl approached. She lifted her chin just as her father had done.

“Damn you!” Odric shouted. “Leave the child alone! She means nothing to you!”

“But she means something to you, does she not, *human* ?” She extended her finger and brought it to the girl’s throat.

“Take me!” ordered Odric through clinched teeth. “Let Thalia and the girl go. You can have me.”

“Oh, I will have you, commander “ smiled Henrika, her eyes flashing, “I will have you for my very own. But Ormendahl needs his cathar army replenished now that you’ve slaughtered them. Therefore, I ask again

With great force one of the Domnathi vampires thrust Thalia’s arm out to Henrika. Her fist clenched and trembled as she tried to resist them.

“Will you serve?”

Thalia turned to Odric, tears in her eyes from the pain of this moment and the pain surging through her weakening body. “I serve “ she began. “I serve “ In that moment her face turned defiant. “I serve the soft light of the moon that holds back the terrors of the night. They will be avenged, I swear it. I will bring them to the Blessed Rest, and I will watch you burn!”

At the exact moment Henrika’s finger began to bend, the voice of the priest, deep and delighted, snaked in. “Bring the girl to the altar.”

Odric’s eyes widened with horror as he turned to behold the priest, who now stood tall, his wounds mended and spirit lifted. His eyes were like polished black stone, and new lines were drawn in the devil’s blood upon his forehead.

“Our lord yearns to baptize his first disciple,” he announced with cheerful vigor.

Henrika straightened. Her claws retracted.

“Hmm. To the altar, dear,” she sighed, almost disappointed.

The girl obeyed, passing through Odric and Thalia, traipsing through the puddles of her father’s blood, and went to stand at the priest’s side. Thalia watched in horror after her, but Odric kept his eyes fixed on Henrika, knowing that she was not satisfied; she would have the answer she wanted. And he was right: in the moments it took the child to move, Henrika had picked up Thalia’s sword and raised it, prepared to strike a devastating blow to her wrist.

In a final attempt to prolong what now seemed inevitable, Odric gave a scream and erupted from the fanged shackles of the vampire horde. He leaped in front of the sword moments before it was to take

Thalia's hand and accepted the full force of the attack across his chest. Blood spurted and spilled out of him like a fountain.



Hero's Downfall | Art by: Chris Rallis

"Honorable to the very last!" Henrika guffawed, surprised at Odric's final attempt.

The other vampires joined her revelry; all except for one who stumbled away from the group, clutching at his collar. He was the smallest of them—a thin, handsome creature with long, wavy hair. He turned to Henrika, looking paler than he had before.

"Madam Henrika," he whispered, choking, barely able to speak. "I don't feel so " But she was distracted, all her attention on her victim.

Odric, coughing and spitting, stared into Thalia's eyes, as the last bit of life within him drained away.

"Odric, no," Thalia cried, watching him quickly succumb to the blow. "Don't die! Don't you die on me! We have a Plane to save!"

"No, no, no," Henrika sneered, lifting Odric's chin. "A quick death would be a mercy. I've got one better."

At once, three of the surrounding vampires moved into action: one restraining Odric's arms, another grasping a fist full of his hair and forcing his head back, and a third who crushed his cheeks together and pulled his head to the side to expose the beating vein that ran the side of his neck. The loss of so much blood made Odric weak, and he could not resist them.

"You shall serve a master," Henrika hummed. "And that master will be me."

With her nail, she made a deep cut in her tongue. Blood flowed thick and red over her lips, and with a quickness, she descended upon him, biting into his neck, allowing the cursed blood within her to putrefy his own. Immediately, he felt the cruel poison take hold—the beat of his heart slowing and the thirst for blood rising. He beheld the light of the full moon, glowing upon him through the hole in the roof. Again, Thalia's words rang in his head as he struggled to keep any part of him that was human, any part that was moral and good, alive. Then the moon became awash in blood red as the rest of the Plane did but not only from his cruel transformation, but from something else

“MADAM HENRIKA!” came a cry for across the room, and all eyes turned in its direction. The pale Domnathi who had left the group was now standing in the middle of the room. Black veins were snaking up his neck like vines and had marred his face. His skin was smoking, charring in places, as if he were burning from the inside. *“Something is. . .something is wro—!”*

Before the last word could escape, his body burst open, his insides erupting out of him in a thick plume of boiling blood.

A chain reaction of chaos followed, as the bodies of the other Domnathi began to boil and explode around him. The vampires that had held him and Thalia were each ripped apart from the inside out, sending waves of blood and dead flesh crashing against the walls and floor. Henrika herself was drenched in their remains. And like them, her skin too began to boil and burn.

*“Blessed water—?!”* she screamed in disbelief. *“There is blessed water in your blood—?!”* The revelation was cut short, as the point of a thin sword speared her through the side.

Looking over her shoulder in horror, Henrika beheld Thalia, staring up at her, eyes fierce and determined. Her gaze was then torn away by a warrior’s cry and met the eyes of the one who would end her. Odric was now charging through the air, eyes glowing the color of two crimson suns, fangs flashing, and the sword of Avacyn glowing brighter than ever before.



Odric, Blood-Cursed | Art by: Chris Rallis

“This—is not—over,” Henrika screeched as she turned to swirling mist and escaped through the chapel doors.

The sword of Avacyn passed through the haze and hit its mark. Odric, in his new vampiric form, landed hard on the floor and shook the chapel to its foundation. The momentum of his swing did not halt. He launched his sword straight at the altar, where the priest was readying to submerge the girl beneath the unholy waters.

The blade severed the priest’s head and lodged in the bowl of the pool. Fissures sprouted along the stone basin like spiderwebs, and through them, the cursed tears of Avacyn, Ormendahl’s vile ablution, spilled onto the floor. Before it could touch the child, Thalia scooped her up in her arms and made their retreat to the chapel doors. Odric moved after them.

The pool burst open. A deafening roar like thunder chased after them, erupting from the great wave of devil's blood. Ormendahl's horns, his fiendish skeletal visage, and his dragon-like claws, all of them laced with dripping crimson, rose out of the flood to catch them. But the demon's terrible form could not be sustained. Just before reaching the toes of the cathar's boots, the flow ceased, and the agonized demon, still reeling from his defeat, sank back into oblivion.

Thalia and Odric stood in silence for a long moment, surveying the devastating scene. Then, Thalia turned to Odric, whose eyes were already on her and the child. She clutched the girl tightly to her, even turned her shoulder away from him to shield her from Odric's gaze. Odric breathed deeply, struggling to accept what he had now become; hoping that his friend would somehow accept him, too.

"Can you—see the moon?" Thalia asked softly.

Odric understood her meaning. Vampires could not cross running water that reflects the light of the moon, and looking into it would be a testament to how much Henrika's poison had penetrated his heart. He stared up through the hole in the roof. But where he had expected pain and trepidation, he felt peace. Utter peace.

Slowly he made his way across the blood-laden sanctuary and pried his sword from the bowl of the pool. It flashed angelically in the moonlight as if still blessed by some higher power. The blade, turned flat in front of him, held his reflection. In it he saw his blackened vampiric eyes but found no monster staring back at him; no woeful abomination. He simply saw himself as a younger man—a cathar full of great ideals and morals, a champion of man, a righteous protector of the soft light.

He looked back to Thalia.

"Yes, I can see it."

She nodded back.

They stood together in solidarity, both cathars and something other, perhaps something more; each one of them knowing that this would be the beginning of a new chapter in the war to save Innistrad. A terrifying adventure lay ahead.