

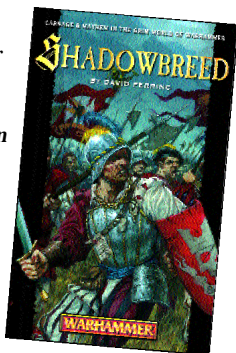
# SHADOWBREED

*Book Two of the Konrad trilogy by David Ferring*

**THE SECOND CREATURE** ran straight onto Konrad's sword, impaling itself. Konrad's earlier vow had been fulfilled: drawing his sword had meant spilling skaven blood.

*A moment later, the next skaven's throat was torn out with a single sword sweep. It gurgled, blood bubbling from its mouth and pouring from its neck as it died. He wrenched his blade free, then plunged it into the chest of the next creature. Its hot blood spurted over him, and he laughed in triumph. Four down, a hundred more to come!*

IN A TIME of blood and darkness, the mutated hordes of Chaos rampage across the borders of the civilised world, sowing death and destruction in their wake. Driven by the power of his own mysterious destiny, Konrad continues his fight against the evil forces that seek to destroy the Empire – but at what cost to his own soul?



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KONRAD SAT UP abruptly, wincing at the pain that wracked his whole being. The sun burned fiercely down upon his naked body. His throat was drier than ever, his lips cracked, he was covered in a crust of blood. The embers of the fire still smouldered, and the wisps of grey smoke were the only sign of movement. Everything else was still and silent; everyone else was gone.

From the angle of the sun, it was at least three hours since dawn. He seldom slept that long, yet there had been plenty of catching up to do. Although he was no longer so totally exhausted, he felt as if he could easily have found some shade, closed his eyes and slept through the rest of the day.

He resisted the temptation and studied his wrist. The two serpent bites had scabbed over, as had the cut in his arm where one of the inhuman girls had sliced the flesh. The elf who had saved Konrad's arm now seemed to have also saved his life. According to Kastring, Konrad should have been dead. That was why the marauders had left him here; they believed that he was. It could only be the residual effects of the potent healing magic which had saved him.

He stood up and went to examine the creatures' camp. At first glance, there was hardly any sign that they had been here. Even the headless corpses of the sacrificial offerings were gone. The blood had been absorbed into the earth, baked by the early sun.

The ground seemed very dry, and Konrad knelt down to touch it. It had no substance, was as lifeless as sand. The few clumps of grass and plants in the vicinity had become brown and brittle, and were wilting away. The nearby trees were covered in fungus and rot, decayed like those where the Forest

of Shadows was inhabited by beastmen. Whatever the invaders touched became corrupted, even the ground upon which they trod.

Konrad fingered his lips, remembering the goblet from which he had drunk, remembering Kastring's lips, wondering if that was why his own were now cracked...

But it was the lack of water, he told himself, the raging thirst that consumed him. Drinking wine always made him very thirsty the next day, and he had been parched even before his first taste.

'It transpires that you are as tough as you look.'

Konrad whirled around.

Kastring was a few yards away, mounted on a huge beast that must once have been a horse. Its skin was mottled, red and black, and its flanks were protected by armour. Instead of hooves, it had taloned claws; its mouth was fanged like a dog's, and a single spiral of dark horn grew from the centre of its skull.

Despite his own grotesque appearance, Kastring did not look as frightening in the daylight as he had at night. The horns on his head seemed to be a part of his helmet, his grinning teeth were like a mask he wore over his face. His hair hung almost to his waist, and he was clad in black fur and red leather, as well as gleaming brass armour. His snake-hilted sword hung at his hip, his two-crested shield hung from his saddle.

Konrad backed away.

'Have no fear,' Kastring told him. 'I have no intention of killing you, I assure you. Not at present. I merely wish to invite you to join our expedition.'

'If I refuse?'

'That question does not arise. My request was more in the nature of a command. You should be dead. Because that seems not to be the case, you intrigue me. You will join us. You will amuse me with tales of Ferlangen. I was fatigued last night, I must admit, and so my conversation may not have been very spirited. For that I apologize. We will share many hours of discussion in future, until...'

'Until?'

'Until you die. All things must come to a conclusion, even life, especially life. We are born to die. It is not knowing *when* we shall meet our ultimate demise that makes our lives so interesting, I'm sure you agree? And your own life, I promise you, will be extremely interesting.'

Konrad sensed another figure behind him, and he turned. It was the surviving death dancer. She was clad now, wearing sandals and a short loose robe, her body cleansed of gore. Her hair was tied back, but was still the colour of blood; so were her eyes and her feral teeth.

Her forehead was marked with the main symbol that was on Kastring's shield; the cross with two bars had been carved into her flesh, leaving a vivid crimson scar. She looked far more gaunt, far less seductive than she had in the haunted moonlight, but no less terrifying. The spiked band was still around her neck, but now she also wore a necklace through which her knife was looped. The necklace seemed to be made from bones, human fingerbones.

'I don't believe you have been formally introduced,' said Kastring. 'This is Silk. Or maybe Satin. I'm afraid I never could tell them apart. No matter. Like myself, she has no need to know your name. She does not speak Old Worlder, but you will learn to do everything that she commands. From now on, you and she will never be more than a yard apart. Perhaps much closer. She can be very pleasant company, I assure you. And then one day, maybe soon, maybe not, she will kill you.'

Kastring spoke to the girl, who nodded solemnly. All the time, her eyes were on Konrad, studying his naked body. When Kastring had finished speaking, she raised the blade of her knife, kissed it, and blew Konrad the kiss. He shuddered, staring at her lips, remembering her forked tongue and the way it had licked his blood last night.

'She appears to like you,' Kastring commented.

Konrad remained silent. It would not be him who died, he promised himself. His erstwhile torturer would be the first to meet death. Either her or Kastring...

'The Empire, Ostland, Ferlangen!' called Kastring, as he tugged at his mount's reins. 'Our beloved homeland awaits

our return!' The horse reared up, caracolled, then galloped off towards the south-west.

'Any chance of some water?' said Konrad to his guard. 'Something to eat? Anything to wear?'

He saw her tail twitch. She spoke, a few grunted syllables, and pointed in the direction that Kastring had taken. Konrad kept watching her and remained motionless. The girl withdrew her knife and raised it at a throwing angle. She was too far away for him to reach before she could hurl the blade, but too near for the knife to miss if she threw it.

Konrad turned and followed the rider; his escort followed him.

HE HAD WALKED from the Empire to Kislev, leading Wolf's packhorse. Now he walked back, this time with a deadly shadow close behind every step of the way. It was a longer walk, because without any boat journey it was much further – and because there were so many interruptions for fighting battles, sacking villages, sacrificing captives.

Konrad saw very little of this, and he saw very few of Kastring's motley regiment. They were not like a regular army, taking orders, marching together. They split up into smaller units, choosing their own routes, then came together again for a raid or a massacre.

He was allowed to clothe himself with garments taken from the victims. They soon became ripped, sliced when Silk gave him an order that he did not immediately understand or when he did not respond with sufficient alacrity. His body was covered in tiny stab wounds, as if he had been bitten all over.

He had very little chance of escape, and even less chance of success. Every minute, Silk was within a few feet of him. And beyond her were Kastring's warriors and beastmen, each of whom was eager to kill, craving the offering they could make to their foul lord by spilling fresh blood. It was hard to judge how many there were in Kastring's band. The numbers were forever changing, increasing when they appeared to recruit new members from the areas through which they passed, declining after every clash of arms.

Sometimes they travelled by night, other times their journeys took place during the day. Often they would be on the move for a whole day and a night, then they would halt for a few days. Konrad never understood why. He never asked, and no one ever told him.

They carried few supplies with them. There were no baggage wagons, although there was one chariot. It was always well guarded, and Konrad realized that it must have borne the sacred brass armour which composed the altar.

The troops had to forage for food, or plunder from the farmsteads they destroyed. Most of them were on foot, which meant they could carry very little. A handful of warriors rode on horseback – horses that had begun to mutate in a similar fashion to their riders. These were an elite corps, true fighting men with professional weapons and armour.

They seemed oddly out of place amongst the rest of the warband. They were more like disciplined knights than berserk savages. They had their own warped code of chivalry, and it seemed their only destiny was to fight, that they honoured their chosen deity by the shedding of blood upon the field of battle – either their own blood or that of their vanquished foes. But then the opposite would happen: when the lesser moon was full, more blood sacrifices would take place, but on these occasions it would be helpless captives who were ritually tortured and foully murdered to satisfy the obscene cravings of the Chaos cult.

At the other end of the scale from the warrior knights were the brutal subhumans, dressed in rags, bearing whatever weaponry they had been able to steal. Between these two extremes lay the majority of Kastring's renegades, beings that were neither man nor monster, but some hideous combination of the two.

These were the kind that Konrad was most used to fighting on the frontier, fighting and killing: the creatures whose limbs had become weapons, who had extra eyes or ears or mouths, whose faces were set in their chests, who were part insect, with huge pincers for arms, who were part bird, with great wings on their backs, who were part reptile, with their

flesh covered in scales, who had the heads of animals on human bodies – or human heads on bestial bodies.

Their bodies were predominantly red and black, the colours of blood and death; and their fur or feathers or fins or pelts or shells or hides would be striped or streaked or spotted with variations of these two hues. Many of them had eyes which were completely white, without any pupils. They seemed blind, but they could see.

And they were united under the same symbol, the same emblem that was on their banners, the same device that was on Kastring's shield, the same pattern that was on Silk's face – the vicious sign of Khorne, the god of blood.

Khorne, one of the four great powers of Chaos.

The runic design was the mark of death, as if it were the Huntsman of Souls's own unholy signature.

Silk proclaimed her allegiance to her dark lord with his rune emblazoned upon her forehead, and others of the creatures were similarly marked. Many of them had horns which were twisted into the design of Khorne's elaborate cross.

His devotees worshipped their lord through slaughter, through combat on the battlefield, through blood sacrifices. Every death was dedicated to the greater glory of Khorne, and it was not only enemies who could become such offerings. When a death was called for, then it could be the death of another cultist – as had happened when Silk slew Satin.

To Khorne's followers, everyone else was a potential sacrifice. They had no friends, no allies, only future victims. Every day that passed, it seemed more likely that Konrad would become the next blood offering. But until then, every day that he survived was another victory.

And the days went by, the weeks, the months... until the hideous regiment had crossed from Kislev into the Empire, every mile of their route marked by the death of another innocent – or the occasional ally.

Konrad found himself praying that the marauders would find enough victims, that they would slay someone else, anyone else, so long as he survived. He had to survive in order to kill both Silk and Kastring. At first, that was all he

cared about, the central idea which kept him going as he took every step.

Krysten had receded to the back of his mind. Already he was beginning to forget the girl. He had known her less than a year, and whenever he tried to picture her it was always Elyssa whose image he saw. He did not want to remember Krysten, because he felt he had betrayed her. Had he not gone off with Wolf and Anvila, then Krysten may have still been alive. She must surely have been dead by now. He hoped for her sake that she was, because the only reason the legions of the damned ever took captives was for torture and degradation and ultimate sacrifice.

He never felt in immediate danger himself. It was almost as if all the carnage and mayhem he witnessed had nothing to do with him, that he was watching from a distance, an uninvolved spectator to the events happening around him. Even his own punishments seemed to have very little to do with him. His body might be in pain, but his mind was elsewhere. He felt that he was simply travelling in the same direction as Khorne's warband.

They shared the same route, and that was all they had in common.

Konrad was aware that this state of affairs could not continue, that something must happen – and something would happen. Reality would return when he came face to face with the inevitable death that Kastring had promised. Either that, or he would be awoken from his trance in some other fashion. He could not imagine what might prompt his reawakening, but he would recognize it when it occurred.

He was uncertain why Kastring was keeping him alive. He seemed to derive macabre pleasure from Konrad's long torment. Maybe they would reach Ferlangen, and there he would be finally executed in what Kastring believed was his home town. Kastring knew Konrad was a soldier, but he wanted him to die like some beast on a butcher's block.

'You are a veteran of many battles,' he remarked one evening, as he sat opposite Konrad and his tailed captor.

The girl was throwing Konrad scraps of food. His arms were tied behind his back, and he had to eat from the dirt. It



was only a minor torture, but Kastring and the blood girl were vastly enjoying themselves.

'You have caused many deaths,' Kastring continued, 'and so your own death is of greater significance than that of someone who has not themselves taken life, not shed the blood of others. You are too valuable to sacrifice for no good reason. I do believe that I will save your demise as a celebration for some special occasion.'

He watched as Silk poured a trickle of water onto the ground, and Konrad thirstily lapped it up. Then he spoke to the girl, and suddenly her foot was pressing Konrad's head into the dirt, her dagger at the main artery in his throat.

'Or maybe I won't,' Kastring added. A few seconds later, he issued another command, and Silk released her prisoner.

Kastring delighted in the humiliation that Konrad suffered, that a warrior had become a slave, and that he was commanded by a female. Konrad felt only hatred, and it became deeper with every passing day. It was a cold, calculating hatred, not the futile fury of impulse.

Silk and Satin had been too much for him on that very first night, when he had been weak and exhausted. He could have taken them both now, but there was only one.

He knew he could kill the girl – he could even kill Kastring – and often he considered that the price of his own death would be worth the payment. But then he would reason that he had too much else to do with his life, that ultimate revenge upon his enemies was not worth his own death. Not while he knew he would live through another night. And not while he was still awaiting the time he knew must come.

Several nights would pass without any sacrifice, and during that interval the number of captives held by the raiders would increase. And then the time of torture would arrive once more, he would be bound by the throat and wrists, and once more he would become the only hostage to witness the dawn.

That was the one time he was left alone, when Silk went off to play her part in the obscene ceremony. She would finally return to him, naked and covered in blood, excited by the pain and terror and final death she had inflicted upon

her helpless victims. Despite her appearance, she was far more like an animal than a human. Her tail, her forked tongue, manifestations of her true bestiality.

‘Or possibly you should join us,’ Kastring suggested on another occasion. He was in a good mood, having destroyed a small garrison of road wardens during the afternoon. ‘We are always eager to recruit a good man. Although you need not be a man, of course, or even good...’

The idea was utterly repulsive, but Konrad pretended to consider it as he watched Kastring across the fire. It might keep him alive a little longer.

‘What would I have to do?’ he asked.

‘Kill. You have done that before, I believe. But now you would kill in the sacred name of Khorne. You’re a mercenary, I know, that is why you were in Kislev. You killed for money. What kind of reason is that? Would you not prefer to kill for a holy purpose, to glorify the greatest of the gods?’

It was not true that Konrad had killed for money. He had received hardly any payment during the years he had worked with Wolf, but that had not been his motivation. He did have a purpose in slaying, he had been protecting mankind’s northern frontier against the incursions of the creatures from the frozen wastes, the realms of Chaos...

And now he was in the midst of those very creatures. He felt like a traitor to his race for being here, for being alive when so many others had died.

The heathens had broken through humanity’s first line of defence, making their way across hundreds of miles of territory. Yet it had hardly been an infiltration. Kastring’s raiders had burned a fiery trail into Ostland, the first province within the borders of the Empire. The savages had made no attempt to disguise their presence, and this had resulted in more and more opposition being directed against them.

At first, Konrad had wondered whether this was part of the master plan. Kastring’s marauders were creating a diversion, drawing away the Imperial troops while the massed legions of darkness prepared to invade elsewhere, striking at the larger townships. Yet such a scheme was far too organized for the blood clans. Kastring appeared calculating and cunning, but

he was no different from the creatures he commanded. All he craved was blood, all he wanted was to kill, to destroy.

That was how he maintained his authority, by providing his followers with enemies and with victims. The more troops lined up against them, the more opportunity there was for slaughter, and the more prisoners there were available for sacrifice.

'Who do I have to kill?' Konrad asked, knowing what the inevitable answer would be.

'We have several suitable captives, I believe,' Kastring told him. 'Perhaps you would care inspect them, to choose the one which you wish to give to our great lord and master.'

**KASTRING WAS RIGHT:** Konrad had killed before, many many times. But he had never murdered. Now, it seemed, there was no alternative. If he did not take human life, then he would also become a victim. Even if he refused, that would not save the person he had to slay. The victim would die no matter what. Konrad must kill. But he could kill quickly, giving the merciful release of instant death instead of the lingering agony of torture.

'They gonna kill us, sir?' asked the small figure tied up next to him.

He was about fifteen years old, his eyes wide with fear. He had been brought in with a group of other captives, militia from the nearest town. The others were taken elsewhere, but the youth had been dragged away from them and thrown down with Konrad. His clothing was stained with blood; his face was dirty and bruised, streaked with tears.

'No,' Konrad lied. 'If they wanted to do that, they'd have done it by now.'

'What's gonna happen to us?'

'I don't know,' he lied again.

Silk was squatting directly opposite the two captives, and she was grinning, humming a tuneless tune to herself, tapping the blade of her knife on her bone necklace.

'Where you from, sir? When they catch you?'

Konrad said nothing. He wanted to avoid any communication, because he knew from the look in the girl's red eyes

that the youth had been chosen as the one he was to slaughter.

'They are gonna kill us, sir. I know it!'

'No,' said Konrad, trying to reassure him. 'They caught me a long while ago, and I'm still alive.'

'She wants to kill us,' the boy said, lowering his voice to a whisper. 'I can tell.'

Silk stared at him, but he looked at the ground and would not meet her gaze.

'She one of them "mutants"?' He spoke the word as though it were the first time he had dared use it.

Konrad realized that the youth knew far more of the world than he himself had done at a similar age; he had never heard of mutants until after he had left his native valley. The village had been overrun by them, and he had not even known what they were called.

Chaos mutants.

The source of their deformities lay in the corrupted regions north of Kislev.

'I don't wanna die, sir!'

'Neither do I,' said Konrad, softly, thinking how the price of his own life was probably the boy's death.

He gazed up at the dark sky, lit only by the stars. Mannslieb would not rise for several hours, that was definite; the lesser moon was far less predictable, both in its hour and its phases, but it seemed that tonight Morrslieb would be full.

The frightened boy kept talking, asking questions. Konrad said as little as was necessary. Meanwhile, Silk watched and waited, then finally the irregularly shaped moon rose above the horizon – and a hideous scream broke the silence, a long ululating scream of absolute agony.

The assembled beastmen, the mutants, the warriors of Khorne had greeted the arrival of Morrslieb by sacrificing their first captive.

The boy gasped, and Silk laughed. Without her partner in torture, she was not always the main executioner, although seldom an evening of death went by without her taking some part in the orgy of mutilation.

From where Konrad sat, he could not see into the area where the altar had been erected. Since the first night, he had always been out of sight of the killing zone; but he had always been close enough to hear the ritual slayings.

Tonight, he was on the outskirts of the marauders' encampment, on the very edge of a wooded slope that led down to a valley beneath. Below him, he could hear the distant rush of water. As the blood ceremonies commenced, he tried to concentrate on the sounds of the river instead of the sounds of painful death.

There was screaming from the sacrifices in the distance, and screaming from the boy next to him.

'Stop it!' Konrad yelled, turning to the youth and shouting directly into his face. 'Shut up! Listen to me!'

The boy became silent, his eyes wide with fear. For the moment, he was more terrified of Konrad than the fate which awaited him.

'You'll be all right. We'll both be all right. That's why you're with me. That's why they took you away from the others. You're not to be killed. They haven't killed me. They won't kill you.'

The boy stared at him, and his expression hardened.

'You're one of them!' he accused, and he spat in Konrad's face. Then he turned away.

At least he was silent, thought Konrad. But he kept thinking about the boy's words: *You're one of them.*

In a way, he supposed it was true. He had been with the savages for many weeks. And if he were forced to kill the boy, that would indeed make him one of them – or almost.

Kastring had invited him to become one of Khorne's followers. If he slew before Khorne's effigy, would that serve as an initiation ceremony? No matter his motive, or his intention, would the slaughter be the first stage of his own descent into the abyss of bestial mutation? Kastring had begun as a man, a human. How had he started to change? Had it happened in the Chaos Wastes, or could the mutation occur anywhere?

Konrad had considered that he could save his own life by taking that of another, by killing the boy; but did sacrificing

before the shrine automatically mean acceptance of Khorne as his deity? In that case, his life would no longer be his own – he was lost forever. It was more than merely his life that was at stake: if he joined the barbarous clan, Khorne would also claim his immortal spirit.

He wished he knew more. Konrad had never been religious. There were so many gods who were worshipped within the Empire and Kislev, but he had never had much contact with any of their followers and rituals. He knew most about Sigmar Heldenhammer, who was venerated as a deity. Wolf had belonged to the cult of Sigmar, and he always offered a prayer to the founder of the Empire before going into combat.

Silk rose to her feet. At the same time, Konrad became aware that there was silence. The last victim had died.

The last but one – or two...

The girl kicked off her sandals, shrugged out of her robe, let her necklace of fingerbones fall, untied her blood-red hair and shook it loose. She stood naked, armed with her knife; she was ready to kill. She spoke a few words. Konrad recognized the command. She was telling him to get up, but he ignored it. She sprang towards him, her blade at his throat. The tip drew blood.

She repeated her order.

She would not kill him, he knew, but she was an expert in pain. With a few swift and accurate knife strokes, she could inflict excruciating agony. Instead, she transferred her attentions to the boy, jabbing him in the shoulder. He cried out in agony. She gestured for him to rise, and he obeyed. She swiftly cut away his garments, and he was naked, his hands still tied around his back.

She looked at Konrad, then she slowly drew the point of her blade diagonally down the boy's chest, right to left. He screamed as the blood began to flow. She did it again, left to right, her red eyes watching Konrad. She was carving the mark of Khorne on the boy, he realized, and she would continue unless Konrad obeyed.

He did so; he stood up. But Silk did not cease her mutilation. With two rapid strokes, one to the left, one to the right,

she completed the pattern. The boy's torso glistened with trickles of blood.

He swayed, as though he were about to faint, but he held himself upright. His screams had ceased, and now he sobbed. He was not badly hurt. Silk had not wanted him dead. Not yet.

Now she stepped towards Konrad, and her knife flashed. He winced as she sliced his cheek for disobedience. Her blade kept working, and after a few seconds he was also naked. She growled a command, and Konrad began walking slowly towards the shrine. She pushed the boy, and he also began to move.

The worshippers awaited them, dark silhouettes who encircled the armoured effigy of Khorne. One of the shadows stepped forward. 'Delighted that you could accept our invitation,' said Kastring. 'Is this your guest?'

The boy stood motionless, dazed, his eyes fixed on the shrine, staring at the skulls and fresh heads at the feet of the seated brass figure.

'I'm going to kill you, Kastring,' Konrad hissed.

'You seem to misunderstand the situation,' Kastring replied. 'The only killing you are going to do involves this young gentleman. Neither do I believe this is the most appropriate time for you to threaten me. I'm the one who issues the threats. And, as I once promised, I will have you killed. Eventually.'

Silk's knife severed Konrad's bonds, and Kastring held out a dagger to him, hilt first. Konrad accepted the blade, and as he did he felt the tip of the girl's knife at the base of his skull. As Kastring stepped back, so did Silk.

Konrad and the boy were left in the centre of the area, in front of the altar. The ground beneath their feet was wet with blood.

The boy turned away from the shrine to look at him, at the knife, then at Konrad's face.

'I knew you was one of them,' he said, very quietly, and he lowered his head.

Konrad wanted to deny the accusation, to tell him that he would dispatch him swiftly, whereas any of the others would

have slain him slowly and horribly. But there was no point. He would only have been speaking for his own benefit, not the youth's.

The idolators began to chant their hymns of blood.

'Do it!' Kastring commanded, his voice louder than all the sacrilegious prayers.

Konrad gazed at the shadowed shape which had spoken, and he held the knife loosely in his hand, testing its balance, weighing it for its flight through the night – and into Kastring's throat.

Before he could act, the blade was suddenly knocked from his hand. Silk had hurled herself silently at him, and she shouldered him aside. Unbalanced, Konrad fell into the mud. He instantly rolled away, believing that the blood girl was about to dive on him. Instead, her target was the young Ostlander.

Her blade plunged into his chest, and his cry was terrible, long and ear-piercing. He fell, and Silk went down with him, her knife carving deep into his torso. After a few seconds, she sprang up. In one hand she held her knife, in the other was a lump of raw human flesh. It was the boy's heart.

His beating heart!

There was a roar of approval from the worshippers, and she reverently placed the gory organ at the feet of the brass figure.

Konrad had been unable to find the dagger and was back on his feet, and he became aware of a dark shape moving towards him. He heard a sword being drawn from its oiled scabbard, and he knew it was the sword with a coiled serpent as its hilt.

He backed slowly away, glancing quickly over his shoulder for another potential assassin. When he looked back a moment later, there was a slim figure between himself and Kastring. It was Silk, but she was facing her leader, threatening him with the reddened blade she held.

Kastring halted, said something in the heathen language. Silk said nothing, but neither did she move aside.

'She really does like you,' said Kastring. Then he forced a contemptuous laugh, sheathed his sword and turned away.



Silk looked at Konrad, and their eyes met. For some reason of her own, she had killed the boy when Konrad had refused, and she had defended him from Kastring's wrath. But she had also saved Kastring's life by knocking the dagger from Konrad's hand. Konrad had no idea why she had interfered in the ceremony, protecting him from Kastring. Whatever the reason, it must surely spell doom for both of them.

The dark shapes around them melted away into the deeper darkness, leaving them alone, alone with the body of the young Ostlander and the corpses of all the other victims who lay as gory offerings to Khorne's bronze altar.

As they gazed at each other, Konrad suddenly realized what she must once have been: human.

And he also knew that this was the moment he had been awaiting. It was the time of his awakening.

Konrad walked away and Silk followed. She was a pace behind him when he reached the spur of land above the river. He turned as the girl raised her knife, standing motionless while she thrust the point of the weapon into the trunk of the tree next to him. The blade glinted as it vibrated. Mannslieb had begun to rise, a sliver of brilliance on the horizon, already shedding a radiant light far greater than the dull glow created by Morrslieb. The river lay far below, and on the edge of his vision Konrad noticed another glimmer further down in the valley. It was also the reflection of moonlight on metal.

And he finally became aware of what he must do.

The girl pressed herself hard against him, turning her face up to his. No matter what, he hated her absolutely, but for a moment he remembered what he had thought when he first saw her and Satin: that they were the most beautiful women he had ever seen.

Until now he had always refused the temptations of her body, no matter what torments she inflicted upon him in reprisal. Because of tonight he owed her this one final tribute to her lost humanity, to her forgotten femininity.

Her flesh felt warm and soft, and that surprised him. He tried to ignore the blood on her skin, her feral eyes, her

forked tongue and tail. He sank to the ground, allowing her to assume the ascendant role, as if still accepting his subservience to her.

She was at her least animal, he at his most. When she cried out, it was not the rutting call of some bestial mutant but the sounds a woman made at the peak of passion. He was the one who growled primitively, driven by his deepest instinct.

This was the way life was created, the way of Konrad's unknown origins, the way that Silk herself had begun her true existence, before her body had become corrupted by Chaos, her spirit stolen and twisted.

Konrad reached up to her, beyond her, and for the first time he allowed her lips to touch his. Again, so warm, so soft. They kissed – and it was the kiss of death.

Silk sighed as he slipped the dagger into her back and plunged it deep into her heart. Their eyes met for one last time, and the girl's were wet with tears. She leaned back and smiled and she died as easily as if she were still human.

Konrad caught her as she fell, and he rolled free. He withdrew the blade and stared down into the valley, searching for what he had observed a few minutes ago, the glint of moonlight on armour.

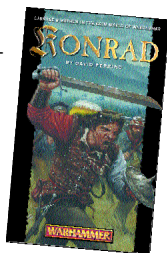
On bronze armour.

The adventure continues in  
SHADOWBREED!

## *Read the Saga of Konrad by David Ferring*

### **KONRAD**

DEEP IN AN isolated corner of the Empire, the young Konrad is flung into a life of desperate exile after the village where he has grown up is razed to the ground by marauding beastmen. In a constant battle for survival, he must seek the answers to his mysterious past in a savage land teeming with the foul servants of the Dark Gods.



### **SHADOWBREED**

IN A TIME of blood and darkness, the mutated hordes of Chaos rampage across the borders of the civilised world, sowing death and destruction in their wake. Driven by the power of his own mysterious destiny, Konrad continues his fight against the evil forces that seek to destroy the Empire – but at what cost to his own soul?



### **WARBLADE**

THE FORCES OF Chaos tighten their grip on the Empire. Beastmen and skaven run rife in the Old World, slaughtering all who oppose them in the name of their foul gods. As a deadly endgame is played out, Konrad struggles against desperate odds to thwart an evil plot to corrupt the very heart of the Empire. He cannot fail, or the future of humanity is doomed.

