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VAMPIRE HUNTER D 14: DARK ROAD

PARTS ONE AND TWO

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ONE FROM THE VILLAGE OF THE DEAD

CHAPTER 1

I

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The road lay in shadow. To either side of it were endless rolling plains. Though they were dotted with what looked to be rocky mountains and woods, these did nothing to lift the air of desolation. Spread with gray clouds, the sky occasionally carried the growl of distant thunder. It would probably rain.

All day a horse had been advancing through the wilderness. The continuous stretch of dull tones and identical scenery would drive all emotion from the heart of any rider in the saddle. Anger, joy, and sadness all fused with the ash-gray world, leaving a dull weariness in command of the soul. At Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 times Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 like this, travelers might even wish they were dead.

However, this rider was a gorgeous exception. The eyes beneath his wide-brimmed traveler's hat gave off a light that it seemed even the void would fear, and as he rode into an almost imperceptible breeze, the face he had turned forward was so beautiful it could convince anyone that it was not of this world. Men and women Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 alike were paralyzed by it, and even the beasts undoubtedly adored him with one look. However, his beauty was such that all who saw him understood that when his black-gloved hand reached for the hilt of the curved sword peeking over his shoulder, he wouldn't be Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 done until death colored the blade of his weapon.

Both the ashen sky and the ochre plains seemed to exist solely to highlight the rider's magnificence as he and his horse went down the highway. What awaited him at his destination—life or death?

When the grumbling of the heavens had grown quite close, a flickering image resembling a village began to take shape further down the road. The sea of clouds lit up. Blue zigzags connected the sky and earth, with thunder audible just a short while later.

Perhaps this was some signal to welcome the rider and his mount. For with that flash of Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 light, the rider caught the stink of blood on the almost imperceptible wind. It had blown out of a village—a village that lay more than six miles away.

An hour later, the horse and rider came to the town. At the end of a smaller road that branched off to the right of the highway loomed a high palisade and a wooden gate. The gate was open. And the stench of blood definitely came from within.

The rider, however, showed no signs of turning his mount in its direction. Not displaying the slightest hesitation, he rode forward without revealing an ounce of fear. All he had for the village Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 that stank Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 of blood was a stern indifference. Had any survivors known of this, they might've held it against him for the rest of their lives. No, they would've undoubtedly forgone that. That way, they were spared having to choose death over a life of writhing pain.

After the young man had gone five or ten feet past the road to the village, his ears caught a faint sound and a voice. The Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 sound was footsteps, and the voice was that of a young woman.

“Help me!”

The young man's action betrayed the image he projected. Halting his horse, he tugged on the reins and wheeled it around. He gave a light kick of his heels to his mount's flanks, and the cyborg horse began to trot back in the opposite direction.

On passing through the gate, the rider was greeted by a scene like any other Frontier village. Wooden houses were scattered between the trees. There Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 were a square and a well, Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 stock pens and rows of storehouses. However, no one called out to the visitor, and there was no sign of vigilance-committee members to surround him with swords, spears, and firearms in hand.

The rider went straight down the main street of the village. But despite everything that was wrong about this scene, he didn't seem to raise so much as an eyebrow on his cold and beautiful visage.

On the left-hand side he saw the sign for the general Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark

Road Parts 1 & 2 store: *Yarai's*. It was the local branch of a chain that had stores far and wide across the Frontier. At the same time the horse halted in front, the door swung open from inside and a pale figure staggered out. Taking a couple of steps down the raised wooden sidewalk, she then thudded down on her face. Her flaming red hair shook.

Getting off his horse, the rider went over to the girl. Before he came to a stop, the girl put both hands against the sidewalk and Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 tried to rise. Surely she'd noticed the rider's approach, but she didn't even look at him as she got back Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 up. Though she was gritting her teeth, her face was that of a beautiful young lady of seventeen or eighteen. Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 Rubbing her tear-wearied eyes with one hand, the girl then looked up at the rider. Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 Her eyes instantly opened wide with fascination, and a rosy hue tinged her cheeks. For even mired as the girl was in weariness, resentment, and despair, the rider had a countenance so gorgeous it made her lose herself.

"Who are you?" the girl asked in a dazed tone. "I'm Rosaria."

"D."

Just then the wind blew by, stirring the young man's hair and making him hold down the brim of his hat.

"That sounds like someone saying goodbye," the girl—Rosaria—said, Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 squinting her eyes.

"What happened?" D asked.

"Everyone's been killed," Rosaria replied weakly. With a pale finger she pointed to a black scarf around her neck. "You must know without even looking. There's a pair of teeth marks under this. I was bitten by a Noble."

The sky glittered. Half of the girl's face had a white glow to it while thunder rumbled in the distance.

"Show me," D said.

"No. I don't Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 feel particularly good about it, and Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 if you were to run off on me, I wouldn't be able to go anywhere."

"I'm a Vampire Hunter."

Rosaria's eyes opened as far as they could go. Yet they still seemed to have a sort of gauze over them, due to the beauty of the young man before her.

“You’re a Hunter . . . Would you by any chance be a dhampir?”

“Yes.”

With that, Rosaria collapsed on the spot. The threads of tension that’d supported her had been cut. Shoulders rising and falling as she took a deep breath, she looked up at D with hatred in her eyes.

“So, this is the end for me?” she asked.

“Why do you say that?”

“Don’t play innocent with me. I’m a *victim*. When a Vampire Hunter finds someone like that hanging around, he doesn’t let it slide. It’s your ilk who did this to the village!”

So, Vampire Hunters put the stench of blood all around the place?

“What happened?” D asked once again.

“Your colleagues came in and ran around Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 killing everyone. That’s all—why don’t you see for yourself?”

Suddenly, Rosaria got right back up on her feet and headed for the door of the same general store she’d come out of. She acted as though her earlier call for help had just been the sound of the wind.

Stroking the neck of his horse, which seemed somewhat on edge, the Hunter then followed Rosaria.

The interior of the store was soaked in blood. Not the floor or the ceiling—the very air. By the counter, two villagers lay face down. Apparently they’d been attacked from behind, and the ends of iron stakes jutted from their backs. Judging by the length and thickness of them, the stakes had to weigh over twelve pounds each. Even if they’d caught these people off guard, the person who’d used them must’ve been endowed with incredible strength.

“Behind the counter is old man Meadow. He was the manager.”

D had already caught the scent of another person’s blood rising from back there. Turning to Rosaria, he asked, “Did you hide?”

The girl nodded. “I worked here part time. I was just in the middle of putting some sacks of flour into the storehouse out back. And then, all of a sudden, I heard these screams.”

Though she’d thought about coming out, her whole body had frozen. The screams had been that intense.

“Actually, they were screams from Mrs. Judd and Mrs. Laroque lying there. It’s unbelievable the noises a person makes when they’re dying . . . Then there was the sound of something hitting the floor, and old Mr. Meadow said, ‘Who sent you?’ But right after that—”

“Wasn’t there an answer?”

“Not a word. Once I heard the manager fall, there was some laughter. I’m sure there were four of them.”

Terrified as she was, this innocent young redhead had still been able to deduce their number from the murderers’ voices.

“I was paralyzed in Vampire Hunter D Volume 14: Dark Road Parts 1 & 2 the storehouse. And then I saw this huge flesh-eating rat down by my feet. It didn’t surprise me, but it managed to knock over a mountain of canned goods. I—I was certain I was dead. They came into the storehouse!”

“How did you survive?”

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