

HISTORY'S SHADOW BEGINNINGS:

ALEXANDER



K. DZR

History's Shadow Beginnings: Alexander

An insight into one of History's Shadow's most powerful and mysterious characters.

by

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History's Shadow I: Legends Born

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Thanks to my Mom—who thinks everything I do I do good—my Grandma (I wouldn't even know what a book was if it wasn't for her) and Annetta Wellman for all her hours of work to make this possible.

“Though you will never see his name in a history book, nor his likeness in a museum, there are few with greater songs fairies sing than of him.”

I.

Xandero stood sentry outside the arctic cave. His slit eyes scanned the dark horizon for signs of movement. His pronged tongue flicked in and out, while his ears focused and nostrils quivered. The fox, Akihi, and her unborn pups were vulnerable; if there was going to be an attack, now would certainly be the time.

The sounds of her labor seemed to go on without end. *Mammals make everything so complicated. It's no wonder we're all in the trouble we're in.* Fortunately, time was on their side. Unfortunately, it was the only thing.

With the exception of the sounds coming from the cave, all was quiet. The air was so cold it crystallized and floated around him, refracting the soft light from the moon and stars; above him, bright colors danced in the dark sky. He flexed his leathery wings to break the thin layer of ice that kept forming. Most would perish under such conditions, but for a Dracara in hiding, it was perfect. The fire deep within kept his bowels warm, and his fire in the frozen cave gave warmth to Akihi as she birthed her young.

“Xandero.” Her voice was soft, but to his sensitive ears, it was sufficient. He rose to his hind legs, increasing his height and line of sight two-fold. There was nothing, nothing as far as the eye could see. He dropped down to all fours and snaked his head into the cave. It was narrow in places, at times he might have feared getting stuck, but his rough scales, spikes, and horns just carved the ice cavern wider as he pushed forward.

“Yes?” He hissed.

“Aren't they beautiful?” Akihi showed him the two pups nursing. To the giant, they looked more like slimy little shrews.

“I don't care what they look like,” he answered. “Are they healthy and did the spell work?”

“I need more fire.”

“The cave's already melting.”

“I'm cold.”

“Hmph.” Xandero softly blew onto the small fire until it grew to an acceptable size. “Well?”

“Thank you,” she said, between licking the pups clean. “Yes, they are healthy, but it's impossible to tell if the spell worked or not. They haven't even opened their eyes yet.”

Xandero examined the newborns: a male and a female. He found them both disgusting, the female even appeared slightly human.

“You can keep the female, I will take the male.”

“You will not,” the fox snarled.

“I risked everything for these creatures; he is just as much mine as yours.” Xandero hissed and smoke rose

from his nostrils.

“I am his mother, and neither of them will leave my side until I decide. He will not survive without my milk and you have no idea how to care for a Kitsuné pup. When they are ready, you may take the male, but not until he is strong and you have returned me and my daughter to safety.”

“Agreed.” Xandero growled. “I will have to hunt soon, for both of us. Gather your strength, Fox. We travel soon.”

Akihi watched the Dracara's head slither out of the cave. She wrapped her body around the pups to keep them warm, and lovingly cleaned them with her tongue.

“You, my beautiful girl, I will call Asuka,” she cooed. “Because one day you will be a bright light for us all. As for you, my son, you will carry with you the strength of Dracara and be a leader of armies. I will call you Alexander.”

II.

As soon as the pups were strong enough, Xandero carefully lifted the family in his mouth and flew south to warmer climates. For months they remained hidden in mountains far from civilization, far from the hunting grounds of other Dracara and places wizards were known to meet.

“I owe you nothing more, Dragon,” Akihi snarled. “Do not bother me again.”

“Go.”

In an explosion of smoke, Akihi and Asuka vanished, leaving Alexander alone with Xandero.

“Come, we must keep moving.”

* * * * *

“Xandero!” His son's roar sent birds scattering from their perches as he slammed into the rocky mountainside where Xandero made his home.

“Son,” Xandero hissed, emerging from his cliffside cavern. The two Dracari clawed the rocks searching for solid footing.

“No action goes unseen, Father,” Xanderick said. “The trees whisper of dark magic.”

“We have been reduced to little more than crocodiles,” Xandero snorted. “The humans have retained all of their power, yet they are the cause of this situation. You expect me to blindly trust their plans? For all I know, the humans may have planned this from the beginning. No, humans have failed us, and shown us their trickery. They may have their rules and laws, but we are Dracara. We have minds of our own and laws of our own. I've given them everything and I owe them nothing more. When their plans fail, or when they turn their backs on us, we will have Alexander. Mercy on them all.”

“What is he, exactly?” The two Dracari watched the pup barking up at them from the cavern opening.

“A unique creature: one part wolf, one part Kitsuné, with Dracaran blood in his veins, forged through magic the humans banned hundreds of years ago.”

“You put me in a difficult position.” Xanderick sighed. “That magic was banned with good reason. Where did you even learn it?”

“To defeat your enemy, you must understand your enemy—know what they know. I have my methods, my

spies. I'll leave it at that. But trust me, Xanderick, their plans are far darker than anything I have done.”

“You have spies within the Brotherhood?”

“Of course.”

“Why haven't you shared this knowledge with the Council?”

“Now why would I do that? If you didn't have doubts about the Council, why would you be creating a griffin army? Does the Council know about that?”

“No,” Xanderick hissed. “But there is no law banning an army.”

“No, there is not. Then why haven't you told them about it?” Xandero smiled. “Because you know they wouldn't approve, and you don't trust them any more than I.”

“True.” Xanderick circled his father. “But these laws are not just the laws of man, they were agreed upon by representatives of all: Dracara, driad, sprite—even the Kitsuné understand the risks of such magic. You know this.”

“What if I told you this half-breed pup could shape shift? Not just into human form, but any form. What if he possessed powerful magic, the intelligence of the Dracara, stealth of the fox, and loyalty of the wolf. And like a wolf, he was meant to be part of a pack. You need a leader for your army, do you not? Can you think of a better spy or warrior? When the Sons of Sphinx have succeeded in raising their dark lord, and I assure you they will. Can you think of any being better equipped to face that challenge?”

Xanderick pondered these things. As a member of the Council and Elder of Fire, his father knew well the risks he took by creating such a creature. Yet he did it anyway. His words were true, his passion strong, and if he were correct they had in their possession an extremely powerful ally.

“He is all these things you claim?”

“And then some.”

“You take too many risks.” Xanderick shook his head. “One of the Eyes has gone missing, the shrine to Nefirr ransacked. The Council is suspicious, and if they find proof of your actions, you will be sentenced to death. There would be nothing I could do to help you...Nevertheless, if what you say is true, a powerful weapon we have gained indeed. When the pup is old enough, bring him to Eagle's Nest and we will see if a wolf can lead an army of griffins and gnites.”

Both Dracari smiled.

“I thank you for the warning.”

Xanderick grunted.

“Promise me this,” Xandero drew closer. “When the time comes, take him, train him, teach him to be everything he was meant to be, but do not let him fall into the wrong hands. In the end, he may be our only hope.”

“I swear it.”

“Good.” Xandero turned to head back into his cave. “You should leave. The less you are seen here the better.”

“Agreed. The wisdom of the fairies be with you, Father.”

“And also with you.”

With a flap of wings, the giant reptile took to the sky and soared out of sight.

* * * * *

As soon as his son was out of sight, Xandero snatched the pup in his claws and leapt to the sky. The pup whined and yelped as the dragon weaved between rock formations and dove into a volcanic crater. He plunged deep into the abyss. The sweet aroma of sulfur filled his nostrils. The darkness gave way to the warm glow of molten rock. He would normally relish a flight through the depths of the earth, but Xanderick's warning meant he likely had little time.

He dove deeper, through the smoke and heat, ignoring the small pup wailing in his grasp. The Dracara slammed into the side of the crater and dug his claws into a familiar crevice. He clawed at the rock and dirt to un wedge a golden talisman. Despite being covered in dirt and ash, in the heat of the volcano it glowed, or perhaps, from the magic it contained. He snatched the relic and snapped the chain it hung from.

Between the Great Battle and the creation of this pup, there was precious little magic left in his blood. He prayed to his ancestors that it would be enough, and his sacrifice wouldn't be in vain. With the talisman and the pup in hand, he leapt from the wall of rock onto a ledge big enough to cast one final spell.

Xandero pinned the pup down against the hot rocks. Alexander yelped and struggled against the giant's clawed hand.

“Be still!”

The Dracara closed his eyes and held the talisman close to his face. He whispered the incantation and blew fire on the ancient relic. The dirt, ash, and grime melted, revealing a shining green gem surrounded by delicately carved markings. He continued his mystic chant, the talisman glowed with power. He opened his eyes and pried the pup's mouth open.

“You will swallow it,” Xandero growled. The talisman was nearly the size of the pup's head, but he forced the smoldering metal into the squealing pup's mouth. The pup gagged, choked, vomited, and cried, but the magic worked. Soon the talisman found its way into his chest, where it would stay, giving him eternal life.

Xandero released the pup to give him time to recover. He scurried away, sobbing and weak from the ordeal.

“The pain will pass,” Xandero explained. “The power you have been given will not.”

By Xandero's calculations, a young mammal could likely survive in such conditions for only a day or two, with the talisman a little longer. It would no doubt prevent him from aging beyond his prime, but without nourishment...well, he wasn't sure. There was not time to waste.

“Pay attention, Alexander. You have much to learn, and if you want food, water, or to see daylight again, you will learn it.”

For the following days, and through the night, he lectured the pup on the history of the Dracara, the legends of Atlantis, the stories of the first and second Great Battles, and the lessons to be learned from both. At the first sign that he may be losing interest, the pup received a swift slap that sent him tumbling in the black, rocky chasm.

Xandero knew it was difficult, his demands for one so young unreasonable. But when the stakes are high, the expectations must be set higher. There was too much to lose, too much already lost. This pup had to know the history; he had to learn the lessons from the failures of those before him. Without a strong compass, it would be far too easy for one with such power to become lost.

By the time they emerged from the volcano, the pup was thin and dehydrated, but he possessed hundreds of years of Dracaran history. He knew all the battles, heroes, enemies and tricksters. He knew the enemies he would face and the price of failure. Perhaps he didn't understand it all; but he knew it. One day that knowledge would guide him through the darkness. His body was beaten and weak but he had proven his mind and spirit were strong. Stronger than Xandero imagined. Still, nothing—no matter how strong—could survive without sustenance.

* * * * *

Xandero soared over treetops, valleys and mountains, searching for a place to find water and food. He landed near a clear pool; prey was sure to be nearby. Alexander raced to the water and gulped as much of the crisp water as his stomach could hold.

“Xandero, you stubborn Dracara.”

“Nayani,” Xandero hissed without turning to the driad. “I've been expecting you.”

Xandero drank his fill of water before facing the sprouting tree. He watched branches and leaves stretch up towards the heavens. The tree swayed and danced to life. Vines shot out and snatched the pup, trapping it in a cage of branches, while roots sprouted from the ground to ensnare the Dracara. He could have fought, but made no attempt. Thick branches, roots, and vines encased his body and pinned him to the ground. By the time the driad finished her attack, he could barely move his mouth to speak.

Xanderick's shadow cast the grotto in darkness as he circled overhead. The Dracara swooped down and landed lightly near his father. Pillars of smoke exploded as one by one, wizards of the High Council appeared all around them.

“The trial of Xandero: son of Xanderrien, Elder of Fire and Dracaran Representative of the High Council

shall commence,” one of the wizards announced, with an open scroll in hand. “You, Xandero, are accused of using magic forbidden by Atlantis in the creation of a strange beast, collaborating with the Sons of Sphinx and betraying the High Council.”

“Is this the abomination?” The wizard strode to where Nayani held the pup captive. He examined the malnourished pup; noting how his ribs protruded from his singed fur. Though far from healthy, he appeared to be like any other wolf pup. “We should add cruel and improper care of young to the list of charges, but I doubt it would change the outcome.”

“Where is the Eye, Xandero?” the wizard asked.

Xandero said nothing.

“We do not need your testimony to convict you; there is sufficient evidence to put you to death as it is. Tell us what you were doing with the Sons of Sphinx, and what you did with the Eye, and we may just sentence you to imprisonment.”

“Hmph. You think I trust you, human? Your threats, your promises, your laws...they mean nothing to me. The entire Council should stand trial before the Elders of Fire. Your crimes are far greater than mine.”

“What crimes have we committed? We have created these laws in conjunction with dragons...”

“We are Dracara!” Xandero roared. “Your continued bastardization of our name is just another example of the disrespect and lack of gratitude you show my people! Yes, I broke your laws. I worked with the Sons of Sphinx and the Kitsuné Klan and I learned something very interesting: you are no better than they! The Brotherhood's strength increases, while the Dracara grow weaker, and the Council more corrupt and power hungry. Who will stand and fight in the next Great Battle? You? You will not have the magic of the Dracara to fall back on. The day is coming. I assure you, it's coming faster than you expect.”

“Your serpent tongue is full of lies, dragon!” the wizard thundered. “You sacrificed your magic willingly; we did not force you. That was your decision, and as such, it is no excuse for your actions. We need no further testimony to sentence you and this abomination.”

“My father is not the only Dracara who mourns the loss of his magic.” Xanderick stepped forward. “Many feel there is an imbalance of power, that humans may have even planned this from the start. There could be rebellion.”

“Are you threatening us, Xanderick?”

“No. Merely making you aware. Actions need to be taken to reaffirm that we are all in fact on the same side.”

“The penalty for Xandero’s actions is death...”

“I am aware, and I do not suggest otherwise. The pup, however, has committed no crime, and Dracaran blood flows in his veins. It may not go over well if he is put to death for the crimes of his creator. Additionally, molded in the right hands, he would be a powerful ally. Do not forget: Nefirr, too, was created by dark magic.”

“Before it was banned, Xanderick,” the wizard snapped.

“Nonetheless, from darkness came light. Let me take the pup. I will raise him as Dracara, amongst the

Elders of Fire. The Xande bloodline has a long history of loyal members of the Council, heroes in the first and second Great Battles, wise teachers, and strong, powerful Dracara. There is none better suited to train him..."

"Than the son of a traitor?"

Xanderick's roar drained the arrogance from the wizard's face.

"You and I both know he is no traitor. His actions, though misguided, were in the best interest of the Council and Dracara. Do not disrespect my family's name, human."

"Easy, everyone." Nayani stretched her branches between the two. "Xanderick brings valid points; it would be wrong to take an innocent life, and there is unrest on the Isles of Iltrepidore. You would do well to offer a sign of peace and good faith. It may go a long ways to ease the tension. We've no reason to distrust Xanderick; he has cooperated at every step in apprehending Xandero."

"So be it. Take the wolf. Raise him as one of your own. But I want to know how he develops."

"But of course." Xanderick's eyes met his father's; though he said nothing, Xandero showed gratitude in his face that only another Dracara would see.

"As for you, Xandero, do you deny the charges against you?"

"I deny nothing."

"Then for your crimes of espionage, collaborating with the Kitsuné Klan and Sons of Sphinx, studying and using forbidden magic, abandoning your duties as Dracaran Representative of the High Council of Magic, and your undetermined role in the disappearance of the Green Eye of Atlantis, your seat on the Council is now stricken, and with it any rights, privileges, and authority such a position is entitled to. You are removed from your place among the Elders of Fire, and I hereby sentence you to death. May you find peace amongst your ancestors."

"I accept the consequences of my decisions."

The wizard's eyes glowed and the sky cracked open, unleashing a torrent of lightning bolts upon the bound Dracara. The roars of pain, drowned in roars of thunder, gave way to near silence as Xandero breathed his final smoke-filled breath.

The pup wailed and fought against Nayani's branches. Xandero was a harsh father, but his mother and sister were little more than a memory in his young mind. This Dracara, though he beat him and yelled at him, was his pack. He provided food and shelter, taught him to hunt, and protected him from predators. The pup whined in his cage. The lightning subsided; the skies cleared. The slain Dracara twitched as the residual electric particles coursed through his body. Nayani released the pup, allowing him to crawl to Xandero's side.

The wizards nodded to each other and vanished as quickly as they had appeared.

Nayani watched the pup whimper and lick Xandero's face. Xanderick showed little emotion as she laid a wooden hand upon his back.

"I am sorry, Xanderick."

"Hmph." Xanderick snorted. "He knew well the consequences of his actions. I just hope it was worth it."

"It will be." Nayani bowed and began her magical dance. Her branches and leaves withered into the ground;

the driad was gone.

“It is you and I now, Alexander.” Xanderick approached the pup. “Xandero sacrificed everything for his beliefs. You carry his name, you carry his blood, and you carry the burden of proving my father's death was not in vain. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

III.

Thus, the wolf pup, Alexander, was taken to the Dracaran Isles of Illtrepidore to be raised by Dracara, taught by the Elders of Fire. With an iron-clawed fist they trained him: to hunt, to battle, to know the laws and history of their people and of the High Council. Xandero had made grand claims for the pup. He did not disappoint.

For centuries he lived among the dragons using his unique skills as needed, earning himself a place of respect among creatures not known for respecting outsiders. All the while, Xanderick developed his army, a secret known only to a few. Before long, Alexander was training with them, mastering the art of battle against wizards.

After two previous wizard wars, Xandero had known it was only a matter of time until a third. They had won, but just barely. They may not always have such fortune. Many, including Xanderick, agreed with him. This time, they would be prepared.

Armed griffin riders, experts in the practice of diffusing magic, and headed by Alexander, would lead the attack. They would strike before the enemy could gather enough strength to start another war. They were many, they were powerful and they remained in hiding. Few, however, could hide from Alexander's acute nose and sharp eyes.

Under the cover of night, they would leave the Eagle's Nest and swoop upon their enemies. They had no elaborate strategy, no medals or recognition to be earned; they didn't need it. Alexander lived for the hunt, for the thrill of battle. He moved in and out of shadows changing form as he willed. With command of fire, lightning, wind, water and raw energy, along with his fangs, he had no shortage of ways he could launch an attack.

The speed of the griffins was unparalleled. They flew silently through the sky at heights threatening to leave the Earth's atmosphere. Their eagle eyes saw all, but by the time they were seen it was too late. The strength of their beaks could crush bone. Their talons ripped through flesh like a hot knife through fat.

Their riders, Gnites, a hybrid of gnome and sprite, stood a full head shorter than most humans, but were strong and agile beyond their size. Like a band of chimpanzees, they pounced on their enemies without mercy. Armed with swords and magic unique to their species, born and bred with one purpose, the Gnites of Atlantis left none to tell the horrors of their attack.

For centuries, they hunted the wizards deemed responsible for the wars; for centuries they killed and attacked the dark cult. Countless artifacts were recovered, countless sanctuaries reclaimed. As far as Xanderick was concerned, victory was nearly theirs.

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“You must call off the Gnites, Xanderick.”

“What?” Xanderick scoffed. “We are on the brink of eliminating the Sons of Sphinx! Why should I back down now?”

“The Council does not believe this is the way. You have condemned hundreds, maybe thousands, to death without trial, without proof, without giving them an opportunity to defend their actions, or even state they are not guilty of any crimes. It has gone too far.”

“This is war, Li'Ang. We just barely won the last battle. And lest you forget, it is not yet over.”

“We have a very long time before they awaken. When you told me you wanted to create an army, I supported you because we were weak, we were few. We would have been easily defeated; we didn't have a choice. But it has gone on too long, too many have been killed. Now is the time to put down our weapons, strengthen our numbers, teach those who wish to learn, guide those who would stray.”

Xanderick growled.

“What motivates you, Xanderick?” she asked. “Is it justice, or thirst for blood?”

“You know very well what motivates me!” He roared and circled the woman before him. “We have lost nearly all of our magic. Dracara, not humans, were slain by the hundreds, while humans do nothing but talk and make laws that our adversaries do not adhere to.”

“We want to end this war, Xanderick, not keep it going for centuries to come. For every wizard killed, another is born. Will you kill them all? Will it never end? We must strive for peace. We must think in a new way.” She paused to pet her albino, winged tiger. The giant cat purred and snuggled his head against her delicate frame. “We are building a school, Xanderick, hidden in the tundra and have chosen Amalia as its head. By recruiting pupils, we recruit allies and deny them the opportunity to become our enemies. The school would benefit from Dracaran influence.”

“I've no interest in teaching, if that is what you propose.”

“Then suggest someone.”

“Do you really believe this is the best course of action? Not the Council, but *you*.”

“Thanks to the Gnites of Atlantis, we have proven ourselves powerful. Now it is time to prove we are also wise. I believe diplomacy is in order. I also believe it is the perfect guise to keep an eye on young wizards and to mold them into what we want them to be. So, yes, I support Amalia's proposal.”

“Hmm. Manipulating minds with your magic isn't enough for you, Li'Ang?”

“How much easier would it be to find those we seek if we can lure them to us?” She replied with a smile.

“You are a sly fox, indeed.” Xanderick sat in the cool grass and tapped his claw in the earth as he thought. “Take Darios the Black, he is young but wise; I taught him myself. He will do well in your school. I will scale back our attacks for now, but I will not dismantle my army.”

“Of course not. We will still call upon them as the need arises: special missions and the like.”

“So be it.”

“There is one more thing...”

“Yes?” Xanderick's eyebrow raised.

“I am in need of Alexander...I have a very special mission for him.”

History's Shadow Beginnings: Alexander

History's Shadow I: Legends Born

Legends Born is a tale of two heroes, in the other's eyes, each a villain. Two books, two sides, two missions: one story. A new spin on the timeless clash of opposing forces, where it is not so simple to discern good from evil. As is often the case in life, perspective is everything.

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Their journeys take them on paths that inevitably collide. In the end, there can only be one victor; on which side will you fight? Choose wisely, for the fate of the world may very well depend on it.

Travel the world through generations and uncover the secrets that hide in *History's Shadow*.

About the Author

K. Dzir is a web designer, author and artist living in Detroit, MI. A long time fan of sci-fi, fantasy and superheroes, she began collecting comic books and reading Terry Brooks novels at a young age. She spent most of her childhood drawing, writing and dreaming of fantastical places and characters, a hobby she continues to this day. Despite positive feedback on early written works, she had little desire to pursue a writing career and instead focused her creative energy into drawing and music. It wasn't until college, and after a lot of persuasion from her mother during a conversation about an idea for a comic book that she began writing her first novel, *History's Shadow*.

K. Dzir lives in Detroit with her dog, Eerie LeighAnne Bartholomew III, and enjoys traveling, fighting zombies, learning languages, building and customizing things and going on adventures with her cousin Bennie. Once *History's Shadow* is wrapped up, she will be working on her next novel: *Mustard*, a tale of a schizophrenic surviving in a post-apocalyptic world, due to be completed before the world ends.

