

A still life photograph of a cigar, a glass of cognac, and a crystal ashtray on a wooden table. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm glow from the cognac glass and a wisp of smoke rising from the cigar. The background is dark, making the objects stand out.

Kindred Shades of Blood

Written by Wendi Coffman Porter

World Design by Richard W. Porter III

“ Family. Have you ever had a member of your family, that somehow warps the word for you? When you think of them and say the word family, your skin crawls? Far too often, we associate with and possibly even love someone that we would never even consider being near. If it weren't for the fact that they were, family. It's funny though, if we have no family, as with Shade, we often invent them. ”

-Leon Hamilton

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Rune 12th, 26,552

Sadie stepped out onto the deck of her ship and breathed deeply. She could hear the soft hum of the engines and the grav-plates that were holding the ship in place, a few feet into the water. The newly designed Lion's Shade looked nothing like her predecessor. Nor did it match any of the other vessels in the Viniccia harbor. She was now a single hulled air ship. But she didn't float on the water at all, but above it. However, as they had approached the harbor, they slowed to a crawl, and lowered themselves into the water enough that the other vessels and captains wouldn't feel the need to consider them a threat. The crew aboard the ship would draw enough attention just being themselves. There was no need to make it worse by hovering in the air above the other vessels.

Viniccia hadn't changed. Which was both awe-inspiring, curious, and welcome. She bustled with easily over two-hundred vessels and their crew. For Sadie, it was a welcome sight. In her day, sailing vessels were almost an endangered species. Owned exclusively by sport sailors and wealthy eccentrics.

In this post-apocalyptic world, there were a much higher number of sea-going vessels than she had seen in her time. Yet, the sheer cacophony, that was Viniccia, was somehow still soothing. Vendors barked offers at docked vessels. Advertisement billboards were still in their usual locations. Blasting ads from their massive screens and speakers. Each announcing this week's sales. Even the sound of the various crew members arguing with anyone that would argue back was comforting.

In her time, the port rarely had ships in the water, but the air above it crammed vehicles into every empty space they could find. Air cars, smaller atmospheric ships and shuttles all parked in the sky overhead, and it sounded exactly as it did now. The only difference was the missing platforms drifting slowly between the parked vessels.

They had spent most of the morning and early afternoon exploring the city. And strangely, nothing was different, except for the people themselves. The stores, restaurants, landmarks, street names and culture were exactly the same. The stores still sold the same items they sold five thousand years earlier. How? She had no idea, but she was beginning to suspect it had something to do with the canal sludge. Even the

smell of Viniccia was still there. It had never really been a horrific smell or anything, though it certainly wasn't the smell of fresh clean air and water.

But compared to the horrific pollution of her home city of Horin or the more modern ports filled with sewage, she couldn't complain. At least wasn't the smell of fecal matter and disease. No matter what, love it or hate it, Viniccia was a sense of normalcy that she hadn't really expected.

The trio had ended their time in the city after creating a rather disturbing scene at the Lover Way bridge. The crowd that had gathered to watch the wastelander commune with the sludge grew rather hysterical when golden canal sludge dumped three boxes onto the bridge. The local magistrate had to shoo them off and requested that Sadie get her friends and the boxes out of town as quickly as she could.

It really hadn't gone the way she expected. But based on the reactions of the locals, it hadn't gone the way anyone expected. Apparently Zerrick's odd propensity to speak to things that others wouldn't even consider talking to, won the day? Using the word won, was likely not appropriate, though. The apparently intelligent canal sludge liked him, like most things did, and gave them three highly irradiated boxes.

Shaking her head, Sadie sighed.

"No matter where we go, I can't seem to stay under the radar." She grumbled. "At least not if those two are anywhere near me, that is." She reached up to scratch the lizard on the jaw.

A slit appeared in the stone-like skin, as an eyeball rotated to peer at her through the cracked eyelids.

"Yeah, I know, you're not the right one to be bitching at." Shrugging, she pat the creature roughly. "At least it didn't take me three years to find it."

Strolling across the deck, towards the door into the ship. She passed into the darker common room ambled up to the bar. Pouring herself a drink, she mused quietly to herself. The two young humans were below decks working on their new projects. The wastelander was using something he called, wasteland soap, to wash the radiation off the boxes in the contamination shower in engineering. And the wizard was doing some kind of research with the sludge samples in the alchemy lab. The sludge samples were from scrapings that they'd gotten off the boxes and radiation bags that Sadie had used to get the boxes to the ship safely.

Drink in hand, Sadie stepped up to the bookshelf and perused the titles.

"Kindred Shades of Blood, well, that looks interesting." Pulling the book free, she made her way back out to the main deck and lowered herself into one of the overstuffed lounge chairs. Taking a sip of the drink, she opened the book and read the foreword.

Family. Have you ever had a member of your *family*, that somehow warps the word for you? When you think of them and say the word *family*, your skin crawls? Far too often, we associate with and possibly even love someone that we would never even consider being near. If it weren't for the fact that they were, *family*. It's funny though, if we have no *family*, as with Shade, we often invent them.

In Shade's case, her *family* was a morally stunted confidence man, that most of my readers already know, simply as, Robert. His full name, though, was Robert Fetharous vonMeerin. Unbeknownst to Robert, he resulted from a rather powerful Senator and his elven victim. To keep the elf quiet about the abuse, the senator kept her supplied with whatever she wanted. A small house in the country, groceries, cars, etc... But when the senator found out that she had a child from his repeated abuse. Well, things took a wrong turn, and the elven woman turned up dead. Committing suicide by shooting herself in the back of the head, while on her knees.

The shooter, however, apparently missed Robert. The police found him, curled up with the family dog, sound asleep under the porch. He was far too young to understand what happened, or even remember his mother. Child protective services took him and tried to find an elven orphanage that would take him. But elves are finicky. And none of them would even consider taking a half-breed.

But as Robert would soon learn, humans didn't understand how to handle a child that took two hundred years to reach maturity. They passed him from orphanage to orphanage. And with each hand off, he grew more and more detached from reality. Until one day found himself in the inner city of Horin halfway across the planet from where he began his journey in life. It was there that he met the first person who was even remotely like him. Sadie Feelari, or as we know her, Shade.

Shade stepped into the raging nightclub. She had already adjusted her dampeners to prevent the noise from deafening her, but as the wave of sound crashed over her, she felt herself take a step back. Quickly she adjusted the dampeners to maximum and shook her head. This level of noise was seriously detrimental to anyone without internal dampeners. Even her advanced cyberware wasn't quiet enough.

Scanning the crowd, she frowned slightly. She hated places like this, but they were part of the job, no matter who or where she was.

A person tapped her on the shoulder, and she glanced over her shoulder to the bouncer standing directly behind her. The large orcish male pointed to a balcony high overhead. On the fourth floor, another bouncer was looking down at them. When they finally locked gazes, he waved his hand up towards himself.

"Stairs?" She yelled over her shoulder.

The arm shifted to point along the back wall.

"Outstanding," she grumbled. "Straight through the chaos."

The song shifted, and the party-goers began bouncing to a different rhythm. Pushing her way through along the left wall, she made her way to one of the four bars on this floor. As she passed by a pair, fucking up against the wall to the rhythm of the music, she rolled her eyes. As an elf, sex was simply an entertainment, but when you were so high that didn't know what was going on, it was just a waste of time.

"What can I get ya?" A human bartender smiled at her.

"What's the best stuff you have down here?" She hollered back at him.

"Nothing." He shrugged. "Most of these people don't care what I serve them."

Pointing to the balconies above them, she arched her eyebrows. "Do they have better up there?"

Nodding, he rescued a glass from the counter just before a barely aware patron stumbled into the bar.

"Thanks, I'll try my luck up there."

Turning towards the stairs in the distance, she pushed her way carefully through the crowd. Ignoring the repeated offers of drinks, drugs and sex, she skillfully avoided the more aggressive patrons. Four times, however, she wasn't able to avoid the stealthier ones. In each case, she deftly diverted the needles, filled with who knows what, back into the person carrying them. One individual even fell to the ground below the bouncing crowd.

By the time she reached the stairs, the large troll standing there ignored her as she passed. His massive hand, however, snaked past her suddenly, to close on the face of the person who'd been following her. Pausing, she turned to look over her shoulder. A human male, with a drink in one hand and a needle in the other had an enormous hand currently closed over his face. The troll glanced up at her and she shook her head, frowning.