# The Crimson Dirks, v2

# The Crimson Dirks
## Book Two

by

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In the year following its inception, the Crimson Dirks had more than tripled in size, and now numbered fifteen.

Tyra Blood-Fire had found her blacksmith in the Imperial City, an Orc named Yakhtu. She had recruited cunning battlemages in the Breton twins, Erwan and Edward. In Elsweyr she met M'Sharra, a street thief who had grown into a capable blade. There were the Wood Elf archers, Fathrys and Ehlhiel - one a hopeless romantic, the other cynical beyond his years. There was the Argonian Pale-Eyes, a loyal and true soul, and the Redguard Zaharia, a born leader of men. And lastly, she found her muscle in the Orc warrior Urgnok, and in the Nords Skjol and Bjormund, their bodies as unbreakable as the ice of their ancestors.

Altogether it had the makings of a full-fledged organization, rivaling that of any major guild. They had members pulling off jobs from Bruma to Dune, raiding warehouses and pillaging farms. With every crate added to their coffers, Tyra hoped their influence could spider across the breadth of Tamriel, earning both fear and respect amongst those who plied their trade in the shadows.

As bandits, however, they would rely first and foremost on the sacking of caravans. They would stalk the highways and thoroughfares for carriages full of goods, and quickly relieve them of their belongings. For this task the Khajiit, M'Sharra, found herself best suited. Her eyes were keen at identifying a heavy wagon, from the spin of its wheels to the tracks carving through the dirt. She could spot a weary guard by the slump of his shoulders or the pace of his gait. Her eyes saw clearly even in the dead of night, while others were slaves to the light of their torches.

And what she lacked in strength, the other bandits were willing to provide.

On this night, however, their victims put up little fight, their numbers comprised of monks and priests who were all too ready to unite with their makers. The wagon they plundered was destined for a temple, and its crates full of treasures that offered more tribute than gold.

"Do you think Tyra would like this?" asked M'Sharra, popping her head out from behind the wagon, an Amulet of Talos dangling from her ear.

"A bandit has no need for gods or prayer," grumbled Urgnok, wiping the blood from his battleaxe, "it's a terrible gift."

"Nonsense," countered Bjormund, unloading a crate, "all Nords love Talos, almost as much as they love mead!"

"Of course you would say that, frost licker," snarled Urgnok, "but by Malacath, Tyra is not like the rest of you idiots. She has taste."

If Tyra were like any other Nord, Urgnok would have never pledged her his axe. In his mind, the Nords were pale-faced, poetry loving giants who ate with their fingers and drank from a horn. Tyra, however, did not think or feel or smell like the other Nords did, and more importantly, did not fight like them. She preferred the acrid bite of a sujamma bottle to a snowback's honeyed drink, and despised poetry in all its forms. He surmised she might've been from Morrowind, but the Orc was not the type to pry into another's business.

"Oh?" said M'Sharra with a mischievous grin, the amulet swaying as her ears perked up, "and what are you planning to get her, Urgnok?"

"What? Why would I get her anything?" the Orc replied coldly, "you'll all be dead in a year anyway."

M'Sharra blanched at the words, unsure if the Orc was making a joke or speaking prophecy. While hardly a mage, Urgnok was known to dabble in dark magic, wearing tribal scars and marks on his body, and totems of bone around his neck. Unlike with the blacksmith Yakhtu, his anger seemed to stem not from the hardened nature of his blood,

but something deeper and personal, and it colored every conversation they had. The others stewed in silence at his remarks until the young Bosmer, Fathrys, broke the ice.

"Speaking of which, did you want anything for the holidays, Zaharia?" he mewled, a rose of blush affecting his soft brown skin. The Redguard, in return, paid him little heed as she examined the wagon's horses.

"If you want to get me a Saturalia gift," said Zaharia, pointing at the arrows lodged in the wagon's side, "work on your aim. I'll feel better about having you at my back when you can kill more than planks of wood."

"That is all well and good," interrupted M'Sharra, "but there is a far more important matter than life and death, for this Khajiit still does not have a suitable present."

"If it's from the heart," Fathrys said, eyes fixated on the Redguard, "the amulet will be good enough."

Two weeks later on a cold Saturalia night, Tyra Blood-Fire awoke to the sound of a crackling fire. A note was placed on her private safe, which she opened to find an amulet wrapped in cloth. The Khajiit had snuck into her room earlier and left the gift and the fire behind, as proof of both her generosity and skill.

Tyra was not religious by nature, but as she stood in that warm, reddish glow, something about the Amulet of Talos resonated with her. Perhaps it was the letter she received from Peladius that morning, about an encounter with the Thalmor in Dune. In that instance, a thought crept into her mind and soon blossomed into an idea. The following day she beckoned the blacksmith to her chambers, the idea having matured into a plan.

"I want you to forge me more of these amulets," Tyra said, placing the axe-shaped necklace on the table before her.

The blacksmith picked up the artifact and studied its make, thumbing across the intricate patterns grooved into the piece. Unlike other amulets, it was simple yet ornate, its blades casting a neutral tone that neither reflected nor absorbed the surrounding candlelight.

"This is made with dragonbone and scales," Yakhtu replied, "hard to come by these days, but a replica should be simple enough. I guess my only question is, why? Seems odd for bandits to turn to the Divines for help."

"Last week, there was a trade caravan traveling on the Silver Road, torched by Thalmor Justiciars," Tyra said, "Apparently they killed the merchant on suspicion of Talos worship. And it's not just here. I've gotten word from Peladius that the Thalmor are making an effort to eliminate anyone and everyone in possession of these amulets, whether it be men in the streets or wagons on the road."

"Wagons," replied Yakhtu, "like the ones we sack."

"Exactly. The amulets aren't armor or jewelry or tribute," said Tyra, "they're a motive. We place one on every caravan we sack, and torch the wagons when we're done looting them. The guards blame the Thalmor, and we keep the spoils."

Yakhtu nodded and took her leave, mind set on forging the amulets. Tyra knew well enough that the smith didn't need the artifact with her, having already committed it to memory. The blacksmith's genius was different from the others - quiet, removed, and matched only by her insatiable work ethic. The amulets would be done by daybreak, and there was no need for this one to be included.

Tyra returned the amulet to the safe, when she noticed another item nestled amongst the piles of gold and gems. It was the tooth of an Orc chief, one typically earned by besting its owner in single combat.

Tyra herself knew of one such Orc, a son who had been forced to kill his father against his will. Heartbroken, the son wore this tooth as a keepsake around his neck, fearing the day he would have to slay his future children. Until one day the son met a Nord bandit, who became Blood-Kin of the tribe and challenged him to a duel.

The bandit bested the Orc in single combat, and recognizing the pain that haunted him, freed him from his duties as chief. She asked not for his tooth, but his blade when the time came. Yet it wasn't until after the Nord formed the Crimson Dirks that she returned to that Orc, and asked him to make good on his oath.

Tyra smiled as she recalled the memory. She didn't know Urgnok had pulled the tooth,

but it didn't surprise her in the least.

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