

The Raven Prince – chapter 11 – The Mortifera

By Martin S. Beckley

Unbinding energy seeped from the portal penetrating their bones and saturating them with a warm satisfied feeling. Their fears drifted away leaving them safe and contented. Trance-like, they stood motionless around the portal. Edward imagined he was warming himself by a crackling bonfire and watching fireworks. Nina pictured herself lying on a soft sandy beach under a hot sun. Olivia imagined herself relaxing in a steaming bubble bath. Corvidae placed her hand on Raymond's head and chanted, 'Temporarius egressus.' She continued to chant, forcing all her stored energy through her hand to shift Raymond outside of time. She needed him to remain a raven. Raymond's feathers frosted over. His glistening body – as solid and lifeless as black marble – was now safe from the unbinding energy that flowed in torrents from the portal. Corvidae stood in front of the portal and spread her arms wide soaking up as much energy as she could.

The cloud of birds surrounded Prudens and his people, herding them into a tight bunch. At the centre of the agitated crowd, Prudens closed his eyes and calmly absorbed power from the earth. All around him, his small army fired their crossbows. The arrows seemed to make little difference to the numbers of birds circling above. A blast of heat heralded the arrival of the unbinding energy. The birds landed quickly, maintaining their distance from Prudens. Their feathers retreated into their skin and they regained their original human forms. Ignoring their orders simply to detain Prudens and his people, the metamorphs charged in, taking on new monstrous forms as they ran. The arrows found the larger targets with ease but there were still too many. The beasts clawed and munched through the defensive circle that protected Prudens. Although he needed to

save his power to fend off the Mortifera, too many of his people were dying. He generated a protective field between his people and the metamorphs. Prudens then checked the sun's position - it was getting low. Night was not far away and the Mortifera would follow close behind.

The flow of energy ceased abruptly. Corvidae rushed to Raymond's frozen form, hoping that she had collected enough energy. Gradually, Raymond shifted back into normal time. He flapped his wings and perched on Corvidae's shoulder. A chilling breeze snaked from the portal, carrying a foul stench. 'Oh – bad eggs!' exclaimed Nina as she awoke from the trance. Edward turned towards the window, pinching his nose, 'I think I'm going to be sick.' Outside, he saw the sun duck below the horizon and the chamber grew dark. Warmth deserted them, leaving a cold dampness slithering from the walls. A sudden high-pitched squeaking broke free from the depths of the portal, hurting their ears. Nina, Olivia and Edward huddled together suddenly feeling very afraid. The flapping and swishing of immense leathery wings made the three friends step backwards as one. The darkness of the portal began filling with small, red, blinking eyes. The Mortifera had arrived.

