

My name is Nethander, although some call me “Snake”.

I was born and raised in the mighty city of Calimshan. I’ve never met my parents and as long as I remember I have lived in the gutters of that gruesome town.

I recall my youth as one filled with stealing, begging and fighting for my life. I’m one they usually refer to as a Tiefling. Somewhere in my heritage a vile creature from the lower planes has mated with one of my ancestors (or so Blade has told me once). The effects are all to visible, I’m of almost mediocre length but I weigh only half of what I should weigh normally. If that is caused my malnutrition in my youth I’m not sure. Anyway, my body seems to function fine, although I’m not so strong I move around with a lot more grace than normal people.

My heritage comes becomes most visible in my appearance. I was born with a small snakelike tail, I do not know what sick joke destiny played, because I really cannot see any benefit in it. Also I have a few small bony horns running from my forehead to just above my neck. Fortunately I can hide those with my Mohawk haircut.

More obvious signs of my heritage are visibly in my face, my eyes are completely jet black without irises and my skin is exceptionally pale, combined with raven black hair it completes a face most people are afraid of.

I really tried to fit in society, I even went to the orphanage, only to be chased away. I spent my days hiding in the shadows, watching other people have normal lives. But as most normal people had dinner, followed by a night’s rest under a roof, I had to steal for my food and sleep in the gutter.

As years went I finally found my place in Calimport society, sleeping in gutters and abandoned warehouses, doing some jobs and generally being a lice in this corrupted societies hide.

Then finally my luck turned, I met a strange looking fellow carrying a beautiful sword. Well actually he was a drunk who came here without an apparent motive, but somehow he spotted me looking at him from the shadows. For the first time in my life my ancestry did not stand in my way and somehow he accepted my presence. At first he did not give me any attention but in the end he decided to approach me. Blade he called himself... He wasn’t very forthcoming in sharing his past, but I could sleep near him and I shared my meager spoils with him. In a few months he even started to teach me some tricks with his beautiful sword.

Months passed and I became his apprentice, what a fine feeling it was to have somebody to trust! We crossed sword together several hours a day and he taught me the basics of his fighting style. This was not the typical brawler style, no strength did not matter! His deadly dance consisted of finely placed thrusts with his fine rapier. Starting out on the defensive, prodding and reading the others movements. Sometimes attacking tentatively and making misleading moves. I was a true dance of grace, waiting for the other to overextend and dropping his guard, falling for one of the misleading moves we made. The when the opening finally came he thought me use that moment to place that one important hit to finish of the duel.

This was a happy time in my life, not that it was easy, but finally I felt I was part of something. Blade teaching me how to fence, Blade telling me what to do, the only thing he never spoke about was his past. Somehow he became a changed man whenever I brought up that subject. I finally stopped bringing it up. To be honest my conversations with blade were a bit one sided anyway. When he was sober we were dancing the graceful dance of death, or he had errands for me to do, but in the evening he mostly minded his bottle of cheap liquor. What inner demons he must have had. During his more extreme drinking episodes he mumbled about Darkhold keep, but in the end I new better than to bring that up when he was sober again...

Then on a day I returned from one of his errands. I had found the brooding one armed beggar with the faded dragon on his torn cloak and given him the small package Blade gave me. On the way back I managed to rip off a merchant of his last bottle of Brandywine and returned home. When I was nearly home the hairs on my back started to tingle, cautiously I entered the little shack we

called home and there I found my horror. Blade was sitting in his chair, a bottle of wine with the contents spilled over the floor. From his chest his own sword protruded out. He was clearly murdered! Finally when thing turned out for the better, my master was slain, but what was that. On his lap a neatly folded parchment lay. I took the letter and read:

*Blade,*

*I'm terribly sorry that it had to end this way. But finally you can have your rest now.*

*An old friend...*

It did not make sense, did this friend come from this place called darkhold keep or not? Strangely enough I felt a terrible void in my chest and I felt tears coming up, but finally my wits kicked in. From the past I knew that I would get into very big problems if people saw me together with a dead body. Act now and mourn later was my motto. I quickly took all my belongings and I also took Blade's rapier and swiftly I fled scene.

In the next weeks I mourned over Blade's demise and swore to revenge his death. Somehow the void inside me did not go away. I felt restless and the city did not really appeal to me anymore. One I woke up and decided to fill in the blanks regarding Blade's past and I decided to travel to darkhold keep.

Darkhold keep, just a name from my dead masters voice, the only thing I new was that Blade came from the north. To the north I went. At first nobody seemed to react to the name "darkhold keep" But after a few weeks people stared at me and without approaching me anymore they pointed in a general direction. I was used to this kind of reactions, my heritage never got me any friendly reactions, but at least everybody left me alone.

After traveling for what seemed for ages I met a caravan with several guards and a very impressive caravan leader. Somehow he had inner strength and he too seemed not to be distracted by my looks. When I asked him about the general direction of Darkhold keep he invited me to join the caravan because he was heading in that direction. I could ride with him for two or three weeks and provide extra protection in exchange for food.

So it happened, I traveled along, they didn't give me too much food, but I didn't need much. The guards didn't really like me and the caravan master didn't even see me. But I saw him, at first I was awed by his behavior, but in the end I came to the conclusion that their was something vile about him. I traveled along, walking on the fringes of the caravan, being close to the wagon itself was an unnerving experience because it seemed like their were living things inside. But knowing when to decide "not to know and care" had become a major part of my survival in Calimport I just stayed away, deciding to go along until I decided it would be better to go my own way.