

Dark Ages Inquisitors



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I have never cared much for sunsets.

The glorious array of colors across the western sky is nothing to me but the harbinger of twilight, and the night to come. And I have never found the night to be a time of rest, but rather of horror, for night is when Hell is strongest and those of us who stand strong against it must be most vigilant.

Tonight, I fear, will be no different. Death stalks the streets of Foix, and its cause lies on the table before me: a heavy black tome, bound with bronze clasps and marked with infernal sigils etched into the leather and bronze of its bindings. I have not had the courage to view its contents — nor do I need to. The book stinks to me of carrion; a charnel odor clings to its very pages such that I can barely tolerate its presence, an odor my companions cannot perceive. Yet it is not the only such volume in my possession, and if I condemn our Brother Renier for desiring such a thing, or falling unwittingly under its spell, then I also condemn myself....

—From the private journal of Brother Leopold von Murnau, Inquisitor, Order of Friars Preachers



PRELUDE: FINAL ABSOLUTION

Brother Leopold von Murnau had not expected to feel welcome in Foix, and with good reason. Until a scant handful of years ago, Foix had been the capital of heretical resistance, its bloodthirsty Count Roger Bernard only recently having been brought to submission to the will of his King and the Church. However, as Brother Leopold knew very well, *submission* did not necessarily mean *surrender*.

The townspeople on the narrow, winding streets stared suspiciously at him and his companions, and they drew together in little clumps to one side of the street or the other. No one spoke, as if in fear the monk was listening. The hooves of their mounts on the rough-hewn cobbles echoed distinctly in the uneasy silence.

Sir Baudioun le Breton urged forward his roan to come alongside Leopold's mule. The knight's eyes remained watchful, his hand resting on his mailed thigh, close to the hilt of his sword. Behind them trailed Philippe, Baudioun's young squire, riding his own horse and leading the pack mule and his master's destrier, as well. Both knight and squire wore white, though only Baudioun's mantle bore the broken red cross that identified him as a Poor Knight of Acre, as much a servant of God as the Dominican in white and black who rode beside him.

Leopold ignored the stares and tried not to think of the risk, but of their mission. They were not here to hunt heretics — the Church had other, even more dangerous enemies.

"I do not envy our fellows their commission, Brother," the knight commented in a low voice. He spoke French, the only language they had between them, for Baudioun was not conversant in Latin.

"In God is our refuge and strength," Brother Leopold replied, "and as He watches over the sparrow, He shall watch over us as well." He took a small book from the pilgrim's satchel that hung at his side and consulted it. "The chapter-house should be at the end of that lane there."

They had barely dismounted, however, when a beggar huddled in a recessed doorway lurched to his feet and staggered toward them. Baudioun did put his hand on his sword then, stepping between the ragged creature and his companions.

"Wait," Leopold murmured, laying a restraining hand on the knight's arm.

The beggar was cloaked in a ragged blanket, but as he pushed back its folds from his head, he revealed a monk's tonsure — though the once clean-shaven crown was now rough with stubble. "God be praised," he whispered hoarsely. "I had almost given up hope—" Then, belatedly, he added the code words, "*Sed libera nos a malo.*" But deliver us from evil.

"*Et ne nos inducas in tentationem,*" Leopold answered, deliberately using the prior verse. And lead us not into temptation. "I am Brother Leopold, and this is Sir Baudioun, our brother in the Lord's work."

Now that he looked more closely, Leopold could see the beggar was younger than he'd first appeared, despite his bedraggled state. Beneath the filthy blanket, he wore the red robes of the Order of St. Theodosius. "Brother, is something wrong? Or is it now the custom for your Order to embrace poverty and beg for your bread?"

The young monk didn't even flinch. "It is not," he admitted, "but it has kept me safe. A devil hunts these streets at night, Brother. I fear of all our brethren, I am the only one left alive."

†††

"God's blood," Sir Baudioun murmured as they stepped inside the remains of what had once been the Inquisition's chapter-house, a cramped dwelling above an empty shop. Then, at Leopold's reproving look, he added, "Forgive me, Brother. But what in the name of Our Lord happened here?"

Barely a stick of furniture had been left unbroken. Shutters had been torn from the windows, mattresses ripped open and bedclothes slashed into rags. And over it all was a sickening odor of old blood and burnt flesh, though Leopold was not certain how much of that scent was common to the room and how much was in his nose only. The blood, at least, must be real; he could see places where the debris was marked with red-brown stains.

"It happened six nights ago," Brother Renier told them. "By God's grace, I was not here when the demon struck. But all the others... Brother Herve, Brother Raimond, and Sister Berengaria..." He shivered, wrapped his ragged blanket more tightly about his thin shoulders. "I gathered their bodies, the parts I could find. I don't think Brother Herve even woke up, he was still in his bed. And Sister Berengaria, she must have tried to run even after she was first struck... I found her body lying in the yard. And her head... I found that only a short distance off—"

Baudioun crossed himself. "May God have mercy on their souls," he murmured in a low voice.

"How do you know it was a devil who did this, and not men?" Leopold asked. "The Count and his men have done such things, and even boasted of it."

"The Count has been in Toulouse these past weeks, or so the prior at St. Volusien told us," Brother Renier said. "And the door was still barred when I returned. When no one answered my knock, I finally pried open one of the shutters downstairs. And when I came upstairs—" Renier's voice trailed off; a helpless gesture toward what lay across the room finished his sentence for him.

"Now this is odd," Sir Baudioun said as he crouched on the littered floor to stir the debris with the point of his drawn sword. "You see that bloodstain on the wall there? Where the very plaster has been cracked? Something hit the wall there, and hard. Yet, look — no sign of blood here. The rushes would



have soaked it up like a sponge." He stirred the debris again. "See? All clean, and bone-dry."

"Brother Raimond's head was... was smashed in like an eggshell," Brother Renier added. "But he was over there, by the window."

The knight rose to his feet and strode to where Renier pointed. "Not much blood here, either," he reported. "Some... you can see where his head must have rested, here. But still..."

Brother Leopold glanced down at the floor, then looked out the window. A precipice fell away beneath that side of the house, down a steep boulder-strewn hillside to the river, 50 feet below. He could just make out the splintered remains of a pair of oak shutters on the rocks near the water's edge. The window ledge was scored heavily as well, as if torn by iron hooks.

Coming back inside, Leopold reached inside the satchel. The first book he pulled out had a reddish-brown cover in intricately tooled leather; with a hiss of irritation, he pushed it back inside and drew out the smaller volume he'd been consulting earlier. He opened it, ran his finger down a page, then stopped suddenly and looked up.

"Brother Renier," he said, viewing the wreckage of the chapter-house with new intensity, searching for the obvious — which was nowhere in sight. "Where are the books?"

†††

The priest was saying a well-attended funeral mass in the main sanctuary of St. Volusien when Brother Leopold arrived there, so the inquisitor retired to a quiet place in the apse to wait and pray. The notes he had from the Council did not tell him how to contact any Oculi in Foix; he could only hope, if he made himself accessible, that one of them would contact him. Baudioun and Philippe had gone to see about stabling for their animals. Brother Renier had scuttled off as well, saying something about retrieving his possessions, though Leopold did wonder what possessions the young monk could possibly have.

He had reached for his missal, but what he drew forth from his satchel was the same red-brown volume that had made itself inconvenient earlier. The title was embossed on the cover, along with a fanciful design of interwoven leaves and vines.

Libellus Secretum Sartaelis.

"Have you no shame?" he hissed at it. "Will you torment me even in the Lord's House?"

He started to put it back, but paused. Clearly, something demonic was at work in Foix; perhaps the *Libellus* might provide some clue as to its nature. On the other hand, as Leopold knew, its author was hardly a trustworthy source.

He hesitated for a moment longer, then turned and left the hallowed ground of the church to seek a private place in the cloister beyond. Only then, in the seclusion of a recessed archway, did he open the book to a random page to read the elegant Latin text:

I was beginning to fear you had forgotten all about me.

"Would to God that I could," Leopold muttered. Then he quickly shut the book and set it aside, because someone else had entered the cloister.

One of the monks had left the church, even though mass was not yet over, and was walking briskly along the passage beside the church. He paused at the corner and waited until he had Leopold's gaze. One of his hands moved in the sign language monks used when required to keep silence.

Brother, we must talk.

Leopold slid the *Libellus* back into his book satchel and followed the man.

†††

When Brother Leopold returned to the chapter-house, Baudioun and Philippe were busy cleaning up some of the worst of the debris, salvaging what furnishings might be repaired, and consigning the rest as firewood. Renier had been sorting through the scattered contents of cabinets, which had held materials from cooking utensils and herbs to scriptorium supplies. He had even found a wax-stoppered vial of holy water, blessed by the Bishop of Toulouse and miraculously unbroken.

Leopold appreciated their efforts, though the place still smelled befouled to him. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he felt a familiar hollowness somewhere in his belly, could almost taste the scent of evil somewhere disturbingly close.

"Well?" Baudioun asked. "What did Rodrigue's little spy have to say? Anything useful?"

"Perhaps. Jaufre the wineseller was found murdered in his rooms yesterday." Leopold stood next to the window, touched the deep scars cut into the wooden frame. Jaufre's window had borne similar marks. "The rooms and shop were all but torn apart, as if someone were looking for something. He had

possessed a few books from his youth, the spy told me; the chest where they were kept had been smashed open and the books taken. Yet his strongbox was untouched."

"Jaufre?" Renier whispered. "But — but he was not one of us...."

"Books again," Baudioun said as he scratched at his beard. "Odd, that. What would a demon want with books? Did this Jaufre deal in books as well as wine?"

"Not usually, no. A Castilian had offered him a book in exchange for a cask just a week ago, but Jaufre refused. He seemed to think it was heretical. The Castilian must have found a buyer, though, for he was back in the shop only an hour later with silver in his purse.

"In the meantime, Brother Renier," Leopold continued, turning to face the monk, "you had said that by God's grace you were not here the night the chapter-house was attacked and your companions killed. But I don't believe you said where you were... or where you've been these past six nights?"

Renier's eyes took on a haunted expression. "Anywhere. Everywhere," he said finally. "I've not dared take shelter in the same place two nights in a row, and even then I've hardly slept for fear of being taken in my sleep, as Brother Herve was."

"And the night the chapter-house was attacked?" Brother Leopold asked, once Renier fell silent. "Why were you not with your brothers that night?"

"I—I had the prior's permission to study in the library at St. Volusien. I found it easier to do my reading when the brothers were asleep."

"Then you must have made the acquaintance of Brother Jerome, the librarian."

"Yes... yes, of course."

"Who was in the infirmary that night with a fever and so forgot to unlock the book cabinets that evening — in fact, the abbot had to send a monk to get the key from him before morning prayers."

Renier's face paled, and he looked down at the table. His fingers played nervously with the unraveling edge of a coarse blanket, wrapped around a bundle that sat before him.

"You were not at the abbey that night, Brother." Leopold said sternly.

"No," Renier admitted. He did not meet Leopold's eyes. "Forgive me, Brother. I—I was at Jaufre's wine shop. I couldn't take it on hallowed ground, you see. Every time I tried, I found myself walking in the other direction—"

"What?" A cold chill touched Leopold's spine; he found himself inhaling almost expectantly.

"But I swear to you, I didn't *know*," Renier said, barely pausing between his words. "I never meant for this to happen... but then they were all dead, and I didn't know what to do—"

With fumbling fingers, Renier unwrapped the blanket. Within the folds of wool was a leather satchel, not unlike the one that Leopold himself used to carry his books when he traveled.

The hollow sensation in Leopold's belly grew even worse, and he distinctly smelled a fetid odor like that of rotting meat coming from Renier's general direction. Leopold watched without surprise as Renier opened the satchel and drew out a thick black tome with bronze clasps.

"The Castilian's book, that Jaufre refused," Renier whispered, hoarsely. "I bought it."

"You did *what*?" Baudioun practically roared. "God's balls, boy! What were you *thinking*?"

Renier burst into sobs, rocking back and forth, his hands over his face.

"*Baudioun!*" Leopold snapped, glaring at the knight. "That's *enough*! Now is not the time for casting stones. We have greater problems to *address*."

The knight scowled and folded his *arms across* his chest, but he said no more.

"Renier," Leopold said firmly. *When* the monk didn't respond, Leopold reached out and *took hold* of his shoulders, forcing Renier to look him in the face. "Brother, listen to me. *Listen*."

The younger monk *managed* a weak nod.

"Our Savior is merciful and will forgive even the greatest of sins. *But we need your help* now. What is this book you purchased?"

Renier took a breath. "It's a *nomen angelorum*," he said. "All the *known names*. Even those who followed Lucifer, and were cast out of heaven."

"A book of demon names. Dear Madonna have mercy," Leopold rubbed his forehead. "And this man, the Castilian — he had no idea, did he? He probably couldn't read it."

"I don't think he knew," Renier agreed. "Else he would have charged me more. In truth, Brother, I would not be surprised to learn he stole it. He was *anxious enough* to sell."

"And now someone — or *something* — wants it back, I gather," Baudioun said. "Badly enough to kill and maim innocent men of God."

"Brother, what am I going to do?" Renier asked, his eyes fixed on Leopold for the answer.

Of course, Leopold reflected bitterly, *we Murnau are always the experts on things diabolical*.

"Burn it," Baudioun growled. "The thing is clearly cursed. It should be destroyed."

"No!" Renier snatched up the book and held it to his chest. "You can't!"

"We won't," Leopold said, holding up one hand to still Baudioun's protest. "Not yet, at least. I can see another use for it — if this creature wants to find it so badly."

"Ah, Brother, *now* I see your mind, and I like it." The knight grinned and laid his hand on the hilt of his sword. "Bait."

†††

A *lexicon of demon names*. Leopold shuddered even to think of such a thing; men had been burned at the stake for less. Certainly, it was something a sorcerer might send a murderous demon to retrieve.

Privately, he agreed with Baudioun; the book had to be destroyed. But such action was no guarantee of stopping the demon's deadly hunt. Its actions, even the killings, were those of a creature who lacked real understanding of what it sought. And besides, there was something in the inquisitors' souls that cried out for revenge — that no demon should kill three of their own and go free. And there was only one sure way to draw the demon in, where it might be dealt with.

The flicker of a few candles was all that illuminated their vigil at the chapter-house that evening, as night descended over the town. They had joined the monks at St. Volusien for vespers, right before sunset. Baudioun knelt in prayer, his freshly blessed and anointed sword held unsheathed and upright before him, his forehead pressed to its hilt. Philippe had been ordered to remain within the safety of the abbey — so that if the worst happened, at least one of their party might live to report to the Council of their fate.

Renier knelt as well, the precious vial of holy water clasped in his hands, and murmured his penances. His robe was not much cleaner, but at least his tonsure was freshly shaven. Leopold had heard his full confession and absolved him, though the matter of his status in the Inquisition would need to be referred to the Council of Faith in Toulouse.

Under the circumstances, Leopold did not feel qualified to judge him.

Having completed his own prayers, Leopold took a candle and went downstairs to the empty shop to see what else the *Libellus Secretum Sartaelis* might have to say on the matter. Even as he did so, he felt unclean; whether he was succumbing to the weakness in his own blood or his damnable curiosity, it didn't matter. It was his own secret sin, his thorn in the flesh — and for whatever reason, he could not resist opening its pages one more time.

Your knightly protector is right, you know. You really should burn that book.

That surprised him. For one thing, it wasn't like Sartael to offer its opinion quite so quickly, without any persuasion. That it also agreed with Baudioun's judgment, and his own, on this topic was doubly suspicious.

"I should?" he asked. "Why do you say that? I should think you'd advise the opposite...."

It's a dangerous thing to possess. I should hate to see you perish before your time. I've grown to enjoy our occasional conversations.

Leopold frowned slightly. Why would it want... ah, yes. Of course. He should have thought of it before.

"Your name is in that book, isn't it? Your true name? Is that why you want to see it destroyed?"

The thing that seeks that book has already taken five mortal lives. It is not a creature to be trifled with. Burn the book, and it will seek you no longer.

"You didn't answer my question."

The page remained blank, which Leopold took as an answer in itself. "How can you be so sure that burning the book will stop it?"

Are you asking for my assistance, Leopold? I could tell you so many things — about this beast and its master, what it is, where it came

from, what its fears and weaknesses are. All you ever have to do is ask.

It was all it ever wanted him to do... or at least, all that it would admit to. But as tempting as its offer was, he dared not accept it. *Better to be ignorant and in God's hands than even taste the knowledge of the Serpent and be shut out of Eden.*

"Perhaps," he said, just as he shut the book, so there could be no response, "that book is not the only one that should be burned."

But his threat was an empty one, and he knew it.

He went back upstairs to join the others in prayer. *Lord, have mercy on me, miserable sinner that I am, and forgive the weakness in my soul....*

†††

A noise alerted him some hours later from his prayers: The hollow sound of hooves on rock, the muffled jingle of harness. And a faint new scent of decay and carrion, came in through the window on a breath of wind.

Leopold rose to his feet, crept to the window and peered out.

On a little rise of land across the river, barely visible even in the moonlight, a cloaked and hooded rider came into view. Leopold did not need to smell it to sense its unnaturalness; the horse's eyes shone silver with reflected moonlight, and it moved far too surely on the rough terrain. The rider pulled up and pushed back the hood to reveal a cruel face that seemed unnaturally pale and was framed by a black beard and long hair. He lifted something to his lips: a whistle, on which he blew a high, clear note, like one might use to summon a hawk.

The answer, however, came not from outside, but from within: a low, rumbling growl that they not only heard, but felt in the beams of the floor beneath their very feet.

"God's blood...." Baudioun leaped to his feet, sword held at ready. Startled, Leopold turned, and felt his own blood chill at the peril that awaited them.

A demon — for it could be nothing else but the spawn of hell — was taking shape behind them, emerging out of the very wall. Easily as tall as Baudioun, and powerfully built, its features were bestial and grotesque, its massive jaw sporting great polished fangs. Its talons were long and viciously curved like a monstrous hawk's; its eyes glowed like live coals. And from its shoulders sprouted an unfolding pair of leathery batlike wings.

Even worse, it was closer to the table with the cursed black tome than any of them.

Baudioun raised his sword. "For Christ and the True Cross—" he began, starting forward boldly, but he never got close enough for a blow. The demon picked up the remains of a bench and flung it at the knight like a spear. The oaken missile hit Baudioun in mid-chest with the force of a trebuchet; he was hurled backward and off his feet into a pile of broken furniture.

He did not get up.

Leopold, however, had taken what advantage he could of Baudioun's attack, ducking and scrambling across the room to put himself between the creature and the book.

The demon's gaze followed him. Now that it had fully materialized, its hide was darkening to a mottled slate gray, rough and pitted as weathered stone. It sported a profusion of irregular warts and spikes.

It snarled, black lips curling back to display all its savage, jagged teeth. Then it raised one long arm and pointed at the black tome behind him.

"*Addicere libellus!*" Its voice was rough and harsh, little better than a growl, but its demand was unmistakable.

"No," Leopold said flatly. The creature's stench was worse now; the inquisitor's eyes threatened to water from the reek. He raised his hand, holding out his rosary and its silver crucifix defensively.

The demon cringed, almost as if it expected to be struck, though it did not back down. "*Addicere libellus!*" it repeated, though not quite so forcefully.

Renier stepped forward, clutching the vial of holy water in one hand; with the other he began to draw the sign of the cross in the air. "*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti—*"

The demon's head whipped around to face this new threat. Its nostrils flared. One massive fist slammed into the young monk's midsection; Renier doubled up with a strangled gasp. Another backhanded blow knocked him against the opposite wall, then the creature moved toward him, jaws opening wide.

"No!" Leopold grabbed the black tome and held it up where the demon could see it. "Is this what you want, demon? Is it? Leave him... *Leave him*, in the name of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, or I will destroy this book, and you with it!"

It understood his Latin; it hesitated, crouching over Renier's crumpled form, its eyes fixed on the tome that Leopold held. "*Addicere libellus!*" it said again.

Renier moved, slightly. One hand uncurled, to reveal the vial of holy water, yet unbroken. "Don't... give it," he managed to gasp out. He was struggling for his very breath. "Murderer—"

With a snarl, the beast turned back to the victim within easy reach, lips curling back from its fangs as it went for the monk's throat.

As the massive jaws opened before his face, Renier raised his arm and smashed the vial right between the demon's eyes.

There followed immediately a sharp tang of burned flesh, and a bellow of pain and fury from the demon. Its powerful, taloned hands slashed across Renier's body, and then the creature clawed at its own eyes as it staggered backward, ripping into its own flesh to destroy the source of its agony. Glistening trails of blood streaked down the creature's rough hide, which was clearly not made of stone after all, as it could bleed.

"God's... blood..."

Struggling for wind, Baudioun had raised himself to his feet. He leaned against the wall for support. Blood streamed down his face and matted his hair, and he held his free hand to his side — but in the other he still gripped his sword. "My turn now, you foul cur of hell—"

The demon dropped to all fours like a great cat, arching its back and spreading its wings slightly for balance as it turned to face the direction of Baudioun's voice. Between the searing of the holy water upon its cursed flesh and the deep gashes it had inflicted on itself in response, its face was a gruesome ruin. Of its eyes, only bloody sockets and shreds of flesh remained. The tattered nostrils flared as it turned its blind gaze from side to side, seeking its foe.

Baudioun advanced, but moving slowly and holding his side; Leopold could see he was in pain. *Dear Madonna, give him strength!* Then Leopold began to pray aloud: "*Dominus illuminatio mea et salus mea quem timebo. Dominus protector vitae meae a quo trepidabo—*"

The demon, though blinded, was not deaf, nor had it lost its strength. With one sweep of a wing, it struck Leopold knocking him off his feet. The black tome fell from his hands and skidded across the floor.

The demon's head followed the sound. It fumbled blindly after the book, snatched it up in its talons, and then leaped toward the open window.

Baudioun met it halfway, swinging his sword into the thing's torso with all his remaining strength. The

blessed blade cut through the armor of its hide, slicing deeply into inhuman flesh and bone.

With a wail of agony the demon fell, convulsing on the floor at their feet. Despite its terrible injury, it still gripped the black tome with one arm. Desperate now to escape, the creature used its remaining limbs to drag itself toward the window again. "Magister! Magister!" it cried, its ravaged face straining in the direction of the opening. "Adiumenti Petros, Magister—"

"Go to Hell, you ugly bastard," Baudioun growled, and he brought his sword down on the demon's horned skull.

It gave one last, piercing screech, though from what remaining organ, Leopold could not tell, for Baudioun's blow had split its head in twain clear down to its breastbone. The thing's body collapsed and almost immediately began to wither. Its flesh dried up and crumbled away before their eyes, until all that remained was a coarse pile of gravel and ash, and the cursed tome the demon had sacrificed itself to recover.

"Thanks unto God!" Baudioun sank to his knees and leaned against the wall. "See to Renier, Brother. I'm broken, but I'll mend."

Leopold picked his way around the ashen remains and knelt at the stricken monk's side. The front of Renier's habit was soaked in his own blood; another stream of it now issued from his lips. "Bless... me..." the monk whispered, lifting one hand.

Leopold clasped it between his own. Renier was dying; there was little he could do but remit him to God's hands. "Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimittis peccatis tuis, perducatur te ad vitam aeternam. Amen."

"Deo Gratias" Renier said, after which his lips moved, though no sound came forth. Then he moved no more.

Baudioun crossed himself and murmured a prayer. Leopold bent to gently close the monk's unseeing eyes. Why, Lord? Was this his penance, that he should die like his brethren? Why him? Why not me — for my soul is no less tainted. Why do You spare me still?

Leopold rose to his feet and went once more to the window. Across the river, the cloaked figure turned his monstrous steed and rode away, vanishing into the night.

* * *

Dawn is coming now, far more welcome than twilight. My candle is all but guttering, but shortly I shall no longer need its light. I have written a letter to the Abbot at Laurendine, informing him of the tragic loss of four of his Order, and assuring him they died in the service of Christ. Our brave Brother Renier will be laid to rest with his brethren here in the churchyard of St. Volusien, and I will arrange to have masses said for all their souls. When I return to Rome, their names shall be added to the growing list of holy martyrs in our sacred cause.

The black tome is in its satchel again, sitting on the table here. Baudioun, before his weariness and injuries finally persuaded him to sleep, once again bade me burn it. I cannot fault his reasoning in this, yet the reason I have not yet done so sits at my right hand, appearing innocent, though like the words that appear on its pages, deceptive in that very appearance.

It goes against my very soul to do anything it wants of me, lest by doing so I make myself more open to even greater temptations, and greater sin. Yet its advice is in keeping with Baudioun's in this matter, and with my own instincts: This cursed tome must be destroyed. Is my hesitation due merely to my distrust of its motives, or because its evil has already planted a seed in my soul? And if Sartael — I can write its name here, though I refuse to honor it by its utterance — wants something, does that make that action evil by its very nature? Or is it deceiving me yet again, pretending one thing, knowing I will likely do the opposite? The fiend that summoned the devil-beast still walks the night, and might yet send even greater horrors to recover its property. But dare I trust Sartael's assertions that if the book is destroyed, the fiend will simply give up and go away?

Holy Mary, Mother of God, give me strength! For I know what I must do....

—From the private journal of Brother Leopold von Murnau, Inquisitor, Order of Friars Preachers