

# THE RISEN

'WOOD, FIRE, SEA, SAND  
ALL ABOUT, SEVERED HANDS  
FATE, FURY, FEAR, DREAD  
ALL AROUND, THE RISEN DEAD..."

KATO

All is ruin, all is rot, all is terror and despair. The sun dims, the leaves blacken and fall, and night rises earlier and earlier, winter it would seem, is upon us. The hearth fires burn and crackle, heating hovels, feeding families, spreading warmth and beating back the chill. I walk outside the hamlet, unseen, unheard, a spectator to this grand charade, this pantomime we call life...

My path tonight takes me through the winding village, past the lowing water buffalo, and irritating dogs who turn tail and skulk away from me, too fearful to even bark. My nose catches the aroma of woodsmoke, I find it, and the inclusive memory, tantalising, to say the least, it reminds me of what my life was like before the scales fell from my eyes and I gazed upon this world for what it truly is.

Tonight I seek not memories, but vessels to subjugate to the cause of the Cult. I leave the lights behind me as I make my way further up the hill as the moon bloats and bobs on the horizon like the body of a drowned Jung pirate. At the top of the hill is the place I seek, the freshly turned soil my reward. I heard the sad story in the marketplace this very morn. An entire family poisoned by a jealous business rival. A father, his dutiful wife, and two strapping sons that will be perfect to swell the ranks of the Cult. Night's purple robe of majesty is tightly wrapped around us as I begin the summoning. In the distance, amongst the cacophony of frogs and cicadas, is the squeaky wheel of Gok's wagon heading toward me. He is after all the Corpse Collector and I am in need of his mindless brawn. His lantern bobs, wisp-like among the shrines and grave markers as he winds his way toward me. The breeze, now devoid of wood-fire, brings the sweet aroma of the recent dead, raw, and rotting, dripping with promise toward me. He arrives, slack mawed and grinning, enjoying his work immensely. He digs the soil while I smoke and let my thoughts sway this way and that until I'm brought back from my reverie by the sound of shovel on a coffin. With a grunt and a shove, he delivers the first casket from that darkened, earthy womb.

I wait until all four lie resplendent before me before beginning the ritual. The coffins are opened and every corpse is a pearl, a treasure, a dark gift to our cause. The bodies are surprisingly pliant, their faces serene, while their souls gambol in the spectral fields of their ancestors, willing participants of the afterlife and all that eternity has to offer. I almost feel sorry for them. No, not really.

I sit beside them and listen to their confessions that echo toward me from their apparent heaven. All is quiet, all is still, Gok leans on his shovel staring wide-eyed at the moon. The minutes slide slowly toward the hour like blossoming blood in the water. I feel a tremor, and the realisation of my sheer power leaves me exultant as I have brought them back without even using a mask. The silence is disturbed by a low moan and a twitch as I see the shape of their terror forming on their once-dead faces. Their once joyous path through the afterlife, disturbed, shattered, brought to a rude and abrupt end. An eternity of reward for a lifetimes worth of good conduct snatched away by the cold, manipulative, hand of the Cult of Yurei.

The tremors escalate until my four wards become the Risen.

They rise, my pretties, they rise!

They are different from the masked ones, the Kairai. Because what it means to be human still lies faintly upon them, even though they slipped through Death's door, there remains an echo of existence. The spark of life may be snuffed out, but the chamber that bore that most vital of sparks still remembers that important heat. While the terror, the sheer, undiluted terror, when they realise that an eternity of freedom has been replaced with aeons of servitude to the Cult, well, it forces them to huddle together, in some mock display of humanity.

Now, in their infancy, the Risen are weak and must move and attack as a collective, a shared experience of what I command. It's only over time that they come to realise that this is their lot in, death. Ha!

Eventually, they may strike off on their own to do what we bid, but until then, we will use your families and friends as Risen, to pull you under and twist your will to ours.