

The Characters Torvald 'Tor' Svensen, Conrad (Parks) Svensen , Victoria Connell-Svensen (Sands), Valerie Connell, Barbara Caine, Elizabeth Caine-Sands, Luigi Tagglionne, Ivar Johnsen, Denise Berger, Sheriff Tom Huxley, Lawrence Cerruti, Pastor John and Lisa Aranow, Alexander, Maurine and Corrine Merriweather, Mitch Bolton, Theodore, Catherine, Walter and Laura Chevarez, Rocky Robbins, Reverend Stan Marchese, Roger Woodall, Melvin Platt, Algernon Forrest, Asbeel Wildehond Lycaon, Catarina Dunkel, Pastor Seamus Maclachlan, Doc James Bischer, Karl Jenson, Robert Sands, Matthew, Jonathan, Anna, Nicholas and Thomas Sands, Wilhelmine Andersdatter, Axel Torvaldson, Gytha Torvaldsdatter, Dana Torvaldsdatter , John Parks, Candace Ewing Parks, Frode Gunnarson, Wilhelmine Marie Kurzweil, James William Kurzweil, Milton Heydeck, Ralph Carapina, Coach Rebecca MacNaughton, Steven Nanomantube, Coffee 2 Go and Computer Shack are the property of Ray Stankewitz and may not be used without permission

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'The Price Of Worship'

By R C Stankewitz

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Chapter 12

“Showdown At The Svensen's Cottage”

“... 3!?”

The wolf tried to make a run at the tigress only to lose a portion of his left paw to her broadsword as she quickly sidestepped him. She spun and hacked at his side as he ran by, laying open a huge gash that almost rivaled the one delivered by Thammuz to her stallion. What shook her up was the look that the wolf gave her after examining his injuries, oblivious to feeling the pain at all.

“You will have to do better than that!” he admonished as he turned and charged towards her with his sword held high. What he didn't notice until it was too late was the energy orb that Uriel threw at him. Algernon was sent flying and landed in a heap beside the woodpile only to quickly stand and face them once more, the front of his shirt destroyed and what was left of the fur on his chest smoking from the orb's impact.

“Minion! I am waiting for you!” the berserker shouted as he brandished his Dane axe at the wolf. “You must die for your actions! I dare you to come and face your destroyer!!” Torvald screamed out as he prepared himself for battle. The huge fur made a charge at the demon's disciple, intent on dispatching him on the spot. What he didn't expect was the wolf's ability to use energy spells too.

“You are not strong enough to defeat me!” the dark agent shouted as he gestured with his paw at the stallion, causing him to be thrown through the railing of the porch, landing against the front wall of the cottage. Victoria looked over to see

Torvald laying motionless where he had fallen in a heap, the sight of this causing her to snap and charge at the wolf with her sword.

The wolf in the meantime looked very satisfied with his handiwork to the stallion and he was getting an evil smile on his muzzle that quickly changed to a look of complete confusion as he dropped his weapon. He looked down to observe a broadsword blade poking out of his chest.

“How do you like me now?!?” the tigress asked him in a sarcastic tone of voice as she pulled the sword from his body and plunged it in again, giving it a vicious twist. “Oops, My bad. I seem to have skewered you with my sword once more, you sorry sack of shit that hurt my husband!”

“He seems to have a definite problem, tigress” Asbeel stated as he came around to face the agent wolf. “He's now injured by a celestial agent's sword. Your sword to be exact. I'm not sure if there's anything we can do to help.” The canid angel held his broadsword in his paws, trying to decide whether or not to run him through too. It did seem inviting but there was no reason to now; the agent was doomed. Algernon then dropped to his knees from his injuries as the light of reasoning came back on in his eyes.

“Zagam forced me to do this” he said in a strained voice as he grimaced in pain from his injuries. “I didn't want to kill...” He coughed up some blood as he sat down on his heels. “I don't deserve damnation for something I had no control over...” He was dying and it was obvious that he was getting scared by this prospect. “Please, Help me. Do something, please...”

“We could take him to see the boss” Uriel said to Asbeel as he joined his partner. He knelt down in front of the dying fur and assessed the situation before he spoke directly to Algernon. “You would be judged quite severely for your actions but it is your only choice besides eternal damnation for your actions and affiliations.”

“Take me...” he said as he put out a paw on the ground to steady himself and to keep from falling down. “I will risk it... I am ... growing weak ...” he whispered as his eyes flickered, the lights slowly going out on his existence. The canid angel carefully took Victoria's blade from the wolfs' body and shimmered out of sight with him.

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While all of this was going on, the tigress had went to see about her mate lying motionless on the porch. “Torvald! Wake Up! Wake Up you crazed berserker stallion!! Don't you dare even think about dying on me!!” she screamed as she straightened him out on the porch and checked his vitals. He was still breathing and his pulse seemed strong enough to her as she hurriedly checked him over for injuries.

“I think he will be OK” the feline angel said as he sat down on the porch nearby, leaned up against a post and lit up a smoke. “I do this all the time. It's my job, you know” the winged feline angel of death stated. “He will not need my services as I am positive he will not die today.” Momentarily the huge fur stirred from his resting place.

“What happened to me?” he asked as he sat up rubbing his shoulder and then remembered what had happened to him. “I hope you killed that damned wolf” he added as he picked up his axe and checked the blade for damage.

“He regained his reasoning before the end” the angel stated and blew a smoke ring in the air. “We took him to be judged by the boss.”

“He will be dealt with quite stiffly by the boss for his actions, if you ask me” the stallion said as he leaned back against the front wall of the cottage and collected his thoughts. “That wolf would have had better luck with Odin since our religion would have let the wolf judge himself” the stallion pointed out as he rested a bit. “I will need some time off after all of this insanity” he added, getting back to his hooves and dusting his clothes off, getting irked by the rip he found in his favorite work pants. “I will ask Christopher for a real vacation this time. No missions for at least one month!” Victoria was nodding her head in agreement with her husband's idea.

“Torvald, sit down for a while” the angel begged as he patted the porch steps. “Take a load off of your hooves. You look real tired, buddy.”

“I -am- real tired” he replied. “First Thammuz, now the wolf. This mission is wearing me down.” As he sat down next to his tigress on the porch steps, he made a comment. “Can anything else happen to us today?”

“You have lived your final moments as infernal white agents!” the voice called out from across the yard. The trio looked up to see a huge winged black bull standing there with an impossibly huge sword in his paw.

“Son Of A Bitch ... I spoke too soon!” Torvald commented sourly as he stood to face the demon with a crooked smile on his muzzle. “There just went the rest of the afternoon” he pointed out as he grabbed his Dane axe and got his grip set. “All right demon, I don't have all day. Bring it on” he shouted out, motioning with one paw for the demon to approach him. The huge stallion's eyes were glowing bright with white power as he prepared himself for the inevitable clash.

“You have turned one agent of Lucifer, destroyed another and sent one to be judged by his infernal celestial lordship!” the bull said as he walked calmly across the grass towards the equine, brandishing his sword with great flourish. **“I will now judge you and your tigress myself and find you two no longer worthy of living!”** He pointed a huge bovine index finger at the berserker as he said with a sneer, **“I intend to eliminate your interference in my plans right here and now by killing both of you!”**

“I have been hacked on, cut up and thrown around like a rag doll today!” the berserker shouted back to the demon as he stood his ground, his eyes shining like two white

beacons. "It's been a long day, I'm tired of all of this crap and I will relish killing you in that mortal shell that you may not leave once I have injured you!"

"You cannot kill or even injure me, you idiot white agent stallion!" the demon shouted out confidently as an evil smile crossed his muzzle.

"I am Zagam! I am King and High Ruler over thirty-three legions of demons! I -CAN- and -WILL- destroy you!"

"Yeah, yeah. You and who's army is gonna try to destroy me!?!?" the huge fur taunted as he stepped onto the grass with a murderous look on his muzzle. "I will destroy you in the name of all that is righteous!" he added as he threw a Francisca at the demon with deadly precision, cutting off a large portion of his right wing and causing blood that was pitch black to begin to drip on the ground. The second Francisca landed squarely in the demon's chest, causing the huge beast to momentarily stagger before removing the axe and throwing it to the ground. The stallion got an evil grin on his mug as he began to advance on the demon.

"You have forgotten the rules regarding the use of a mortal avatar, you damned stupid demon! You are injured and you are now stuck in that mortal shell, you bastard from Hell's depths!?" the huge equine pointed out. "Your sorry ass is mine to destroy as I please!?" he added as he gripped his axe, brandishing it at the demon. The bull stopped and apparently tried to leave his body, only to fail miserably. A look of horror crossed his muzzle for just a moment before he looked at the huge fur with a look of death on his face.

"If I die here today by your paws, you bastard white agent"
the bull said in a very dark tone, **"I will kill both of you and take you with me to eternal damnation!!"**

Victoria was watching all of this with a look of disbelief on her muzzle. "Torvald! NO!" she cried out but it was too late. The berserker was already making a headlong dash at the injured demon, screaming out a war cry in his native tongue with his Dane axe held high to strike him. He was so worked up from the moment that he was actually frothing at the mouth just a little. She had seen this before and she knew he was in a kill-or-be-killed berserker mindset so it was up to her to keep him from being destroyed if she could. "We have to do something" she said to the angel as she hopped off the porch with a broadsword in one paw and a staff in the other as she began trying to flank the demon.

Torvald made his horrific collision with the bull, managing to hack off a good portion of Zagam's left horn in the process. He hacked and slashed over and over at the demon with his Dane axe, putting huge dents in the bull's sword as Zagam tried to defend himself against the incredible strength of the enraged power-driven stallion.

"You are doomed! I will kill you!" the bull screamed as he tried to back away from Torvald and gain some fighting room, all the while with the huge equine advancing on him, hell-bent on hacking the giant bovine to shreds. The

berserker was totally oblivious to his surroundings, the bull's death being the one and only objective in his sights at the moment.

“Stand still so I can send you back to hell's depths!!” the huge fur screamed out at the bull as he left no room between them for the bovine demon to exploit. It was clear from the numerous deep cuts to his bovine body that Zagam was having extreme trouble just staying out of the berserker's reach. He quickly stepped back to get some room and kicked Torvald in the chest, sending him flying across the yard and knocking the wind out of the berserker.

As Zagam began to approach the fallen equine, he was hit with a staggering blow to the temple by the tigress' staff. “Get away from my husband!!” she screamed as she circled the demon and beat on him mercilessly in critical pain zones that the berserker had taught her. “You should have left when you had a chance!!” she shouted as she hit the bovine in the jaw with a round house swing of her staff, staggering the demon once again. “I intend to beat you to death if I have to, you bastard!!” she added as she struck him right below the left ear, almost knocking him out. Before the bull could recover, she swung her staff like a baseball bat, knocking the ring out of his nose and causing extensive damage to his nasal septum and upper lip in the process. This momentarily dazed the bull again, causing him to grab his nose in pain.

“Get out of my way, you damned Whore!” the demon shouted as he used a sweeping gesture of his paw to send the tigress across the yard. Victoria hit the ground very hard, leaving her severely dazed and out of breath. **“Stay right there like a good agent and I will return to kill you!”** he said as he turned his attention back to the berserker.

“I will finish you off now, stallion!” the demon shouted as he advanced on the huge fur's landing spot as an evil smile crossed his muzzle. **“You will be doomed to go to Hell where I will make you one of My warriors! For all of eternity you will serve me as my faithful soldier!”** the bull added as he pulled back his sword to strike the equine. The berserker rolled out of the way to dodge a slashing blow by Zagam at the same time Victoria ran the bull through from behind with her broadsword.

“Leave my husband alone, you Damned Horned Asshole!” she shouted as she ran him through with her sword once more. The demon got a look of utter amazement on his muzzle as he looked down to see her sword's tip protruding from his chest. “I'm sick and tired of all of you damned demons trying to kill us! You don't have a snowball's chance in hell of surviving against us now!!” she screamed at the top of her lungs. She suddenly sprang up from the ground with all of her leg strength, reached around his huge head from behind and deftly raked her claws through his eyes, blinding him.

“Get off of me, You STRIPED BITCH!!” the demon cried out in pain as he shook her off of his back and tried desperately to clear his destroyed eyes that could no longer see. **“I will kill you now, tigress! You will**

live no more when I am done with you, you abomination from Heaven's gates!!" he shouted out as he began to swing his sword wildly in a vain effort to injure at least one of them. Victoria was barely able to roll away from the sword's sharp edge as the bull tried to get her with a spinning slash, sensing her presence near himself.

"You are done for now, you steaming pile of kali dung!" the berserker shouted as he stepped forward and dropped his Dane axe on the demon with all of his strength, cleaving the bull wide open from shoulder to groin. He quickly stepped back as the demon dropped to his knees, then fell forward to a prone position on his paws with most of his vital organs spilling out on the ground underneath him, making a soft squishing noise in the process.

"This is not over with! I am not done with you yet, you son of a bitch white agent!!" the demon shouted out in vain, struggling to stay conscious from extreme loss of blood while failing at locating his sword that was just outside of his reach.

"I AM ZAGAMI! You cannot kill..." Zagam's rant was cut short by his head parting company with his shoulders courtesy of the berserker's Dane axe.

"How do you like me now, Ass-Hole?!?" the huge fur spat out as he kicked Zagam's head across the yard like a soccer ball. "I need a vacation..." he muttered as he lowered his weapon and let the white power begin to dissipate from him. He didn't finish that statement because he was flat exhausted from all the fighting he had done today. He staggered across the yard and sat down hard on the steps beside the angel, dropping his bloodied axe in the yard in front of him. "I need a long, long vacation" he muttered, pinching the bridge of his muzzle as the headache from the dissipation of white power began to make his head pound. Victoria slowly made her way across the yard, dropping her sword by her mate's axe as she sat down beside him and leaned back over the steps to rest and nurse her own headache.

###

...Some time had passed and the trio were still sitting on the front porch of the Svensen's cottage quietly. They were patiently waiting to see what else could possibly happen to them next this afternoon. The weasel was still lying in the grass off to the right of them, the flies beginning to come to the corpse which was getting riper by the minute. Zagam's headless body was lying out in front of them, slowly bleeding out while his head that the equine had kicked was leaning at an angle against a rock. It was sitting over by the back door to the General store off to the left of them and it still had a look of utter curiosity on it, no doubt from the sensation of being beheaded by the berserker. Torvald had bummed a smoke from Uriel and he was taking another drag off of it before he finally broke the silence.

"Today felt like Vietnam all over again" he commented before he took another drag from his cigarette. "It was a killing field, I'm telling you. No more, no less. Nothing but kill or be killed. The only things missing were the rice paddies, 5.56 and 7.62 rounds flying through the air, the punji sticks and the leaches."

“I agree, stallion. It was bad” the angel replied. “I hate war of any kind, Torvald. That's what I do but I still hate it.”

“I don't even remember the Tet Offensive being this bad” the equine stated, shaking his head in disbelief. “I will have much trouble forgetting today.”

“So why didn't you help us with the demon?” the tigress asked the angel as she sat there, totally exhausted from their battles.

“You looked like you had it under control” Uriel replied. “I didn't want to get in the way of you two having fun.”

“I'm not sure if I can call this fun anymore” the tigress stated. “What we really need is a vacation. A nice, long vacation with no phones, no demons and no missions. Just the two of us and a comfortable bed to sleep in.”

“OK, that's it” the stallion said as he stubbed out his smoke and stood up. “We're going to talk with him right now about a vacation.” Torvald stepped out into the yard and took a deep breath to clear his mind. “Christopher, we need to talk!” he shouted out as he looked skyward. “Come on Christopher, we need to talk to you right now!”

The world around the trio suddenly went white...

###

Once the whiteness turned back into scenery, they observed that they were in Christopher's celestial home. The lion was sitting at his favorite glass topped wrought iron bistro table, waiting for them to arrive.

“Torvald! Victoria! It's so nice to have you visit me again!” he said as he gave them his best disarming smile. “Uriel, what are you doing?” he queried as the angel took another drag off of his cigarette.

“Uh, sorry boss” the angel said as he stubbed out the butt in his paw and put the remains into his robe pocket. “I forgot about your rules regarding tobacco use in your home” he added sheepishly as he sat down with them.

“Torvald, what did you want to see me about that was so urgent?” *The Son* asked of the huge fur. “You sounded quite upset when you were calling me.”

“I guess you could say I was upset. You remember what we talked about the last time I was here?” he asked as he tried to get comfortable in his chair. One of his legs was badly bruised where he had landed on the porch and it was still quite tender at the moment, not being fully healed yet.

“You wanted to know if there was something else you could do for the gods” the lion responded. “We have talked it over amongst ourselves and maybe it's time to give you a short but well-deserved vacation. You could try out a different duty while you rest up for a month.”

“What is this different duty?” the tigress asked. “I’m all for it as long as it doesn't involve demons, swords or firearms.”

“As I had told your mate previously, we have only so many husband and wife teams” Christopher stated to the tigress. “The total count is now down by two warriors.” The lion looked to make sure they understood what he meant by that.

“What happened to them?” Victoria asked.

“I doesn't bear repeating what exactly happened to them. It was ... gruesome to say the least” the god stated solemnly. “They're both here now, retired from active duty just a little too early for their children's benefit.”

“What does their demise have to do with the other duties?” Torvald asked. He just wasn't following where this was going.

“They left behind a son and a daughter” he said quietly. “Their children will need some guidance until they can be on their own.” He looked to make sure the immortal couple were paying attention to him. “That's where you two come in. You will be earthly guides for them and I think they would be a perfect fit with your household.”

“Well, if you say we can have a rest for a while, I'll go for it” the tigress told Christopher. “When would we start this 'vacation', if I may ask?”

“As soon as your mission is over with” the lion replied. “You still have much to do in that community before you are finished.” The immortal couple stood and thanked the lion for his time before he sent them back to the cottage to complete their mission.

###

Valerie and Barbara were watching a video with Conrad, enjoying the fact that everything seemed to be back to normal. They had talked with Elizabeth earlier in the day only to discover all was right in the Sands household.

“I wish there was some way I could call my sister” Valerie said to no fur in particular. “I would really like to know how she's doing and let her know the Berkeley family wants to buy that house she's showing in Saugus.”

“Yeah, I wish they could do some of their work from home” the young tiger stated. “I miss them when they're gone on their missions.” While they were waiting for Barbara to make some more popcorn, Gabriel shimmered in with a smallish femme skunk and a male badger.

“Hello femmes and males” he said as he turned to see Valerie giving him an strange look. “I brought Denise Berger and Ralph Carapina with me. They're going to be coordinating the new 2nd floor addition.”

“Second floor?” Barbara questioned as she came back into the family room. “Since when do Tor and Victoria need a second floor?” She sat the bowl of popcorn down on the coffee table as she gave her lover a strange look.

“I’m with Barb on this” the tigress stated. “They have plenty of bedrooms unless you know something we don’t know.”

“Well, part of their new duties includes being earthly guides” the femme skunk proffered up. “They have two teens coming for an extended stay so they will need two more bedrooms.”

“Have you cleared this with Mom and Dad?” Conrad asked. “You’ll be toast if you didn’t! Mom didn’t like it when Dad tried to put his armor over in the other corner of the room! She’s fussy as all heck about her home!”

“I’m siding with Conrad on this” Valerie stated. “You had better be real sure before you start adding onto this house without their permission!”

“We have spoke with them and we have their permission” Denise said as she looked around the family room. “We promised that we would make it look like it’s always been a two story. We even have a permit” she added as she produced a legitimate city-issued remodeling permit to show them. Ralph pulled out a set of plans and began to roll them out on the coffee table to show them to the felines.

“Here’s the existing elevations and this shows what it will look like afterwards” he pointed out. “The stairs will be over there” he said, indicating where the stairs would go. “We will be starting in the morning.”

“Uh, where are we supposed to stay while you’re doing the work?” Conrad asked as he looked at the plans himself.

“We’ll have a nice motor home parked in front of the house for you” the badger stated. “We will be done before you know it.”

###

Torvald was getting cleaned up in the bathroom, trying his best to unwind. The huge fur was still keyed up from the day’s happenings and he was just unable to relax. His mate had asked him several times if he was OK, possibly because she could sense his tension.

“Torvald, why don’t we go riding?” she asked as she watched him trim his beard. “We haven’t done that in a long while.” He turned to look at his mate as he pondered her request.

“Yeah, that would be nice” he commented as he put the scissors away. “I’ll go saddle the horses for us.” He went to the barn only to discover that there were now three saddles on the tack rack. One was obviously Victoria’s sidesaddle, another was a regular saddle and there was another larger saddle that would work for the huge fur.

“Millie? Jeff? Which one of you wants to go out today?” he asked as he was deciding which one to ride. The two horses looked at one another for a few moments before Jeff finally stepped forward. Torvald saddled up the friesian and the red chestnut gelding before leading them outside to wait for his mate.

“Why do you have that saddle on Star?” the tigress asked, looking at the sidesaddle that Torvald had put on the red chestnut gelding. “I have a pair of riding pants to wear” she added, patting her dungarees that she had purchased from the General store and had tailored to fit her figure.

“OK, give me a minute and I'll change them” the huge fur said as the undertaker arrived with his wagon.

“I'm here to get the weasel's body” the woodchuck said as he put his hat over his chest out of respect.

“Go ahead, he's right where you saw him last” the tigress indicated and then added “There's a bull lying near him. See to it that he's buried too.” The undertaker nodded and went to tend to his work.

“OK, the saddles are switched out” Torvald said as he led Star from the barn. “Let's go riding.”

###

“Are you sure you can't turn the water back on yet?” Valerie asked the badger for the fifth time this afternoon. “We don't have a way to cook -or- wash up right now” she added, pointing at the motor home parked in front of the house.

“Let me see what I can do” Mr. Carapina replied as he looked at the plans on the table. “Our plumber said he would have the water back on this morning. You're telling me it's not on?”

“Nope, it's not on” the tigress stated. As they walked over to find the plumber, they spied the problem; the cabinet installer had parked his truck on the hose that provided water to the motor home.

“I'll get him to move his truck” the badger said as he went inside to find the culprit.

###

Torvald was sitting on the back porch of their cottage, enjoying the morning sun warming his chest and muzzle. He had gotten up early, unable to sleep in any longer due to the dreams of the previous day's events haunting his sleep. He was lost in thought when his mate snapped him back to the present.

“Sweetheart, are you all right?” she asked as she sat down beside him. “You looked like you were somewhere else right now.” She leaned over against his shoulder as she yawned from lack of sleep.

“I am tired, that's all” he replied. “I am looking forward to doing our new duties” he added as he gave his mate a hug. “No more demons for a while.”

As the immortal couple sat there enjoying each other's company, they were joined by Pastor Aranow. “Good morning” the feline said as he walked over to the steps and stood there. “I came to ask for your help, if you would be interested.”

“How can we help you out?” the huge fur asked as he motioned for the pastor to have a seat by them.

“I have heard from Mr. Johnsen that you worked in a sawmill” he replied as he sat down. “We will be needing some help to rebuild our church and if you are interested, we could use some fur that can run a portable steam driven saw mill.”

“I have ran a steam mill” the huge fur stated. “It is not hard at all. I will help you out by teaching one of your congregation to operate it safely.”

“We would appreciate your help” the leopard said as he got back up, shook paws with them and left for his temporary home at the hotel.

“This mission is the strangest one yet” the tigress commented. “This is the first time we have had to hang around after the mission appears to be over.”

“I don't know” the stallion retorted. “We may still have to deal with the Reverend Marchese. He was somewhat misled by Zagam and that wolf.”