

Two for Eternity

By Carl Alves

Introduction

By the time the coroner carted the three corpses out of Raiken's house, the sun had risen. They had questioned him repeatedly about the men who shot up his house. He told them he knew nothing about the gunmen and why they had tried to assassinate him.

He requested time to sleep before the next round of questions. They left, except for three police officers who guarded his house.

He went inside his battered house where Dalia and Sally waited for him. Thank God his wife and sister had survived this hellish ordeal. It would have shattered him if either had died.

"Scott, we need to talk," Dalia said.

During the attack, the gunmen destroyed the kitchen chairs, so Sally sat on the floor. "I know you were lying to the police, and we've had enough of your lies."

"We want to know what's going on," Dalia said, "and we want to know now!"

"And we're not just talking about why these guys shot the house apart while trying to kill you. We want to know everything."

"It's impossible for a person to do what you did tonight." Dalia paced around the kitchen. "You moved so fast, I couldn't even follow you with my eyes."

Sally looked up at him. “Not to mention that you know about, oh I don’t know, sixty languages or so, and talk about places that you’ve never been to as if you’ve lived there your whole life.”

“It doesn’t add up, Scott. We want you to explain everything.”

Raiken tilted his head back and closed his eyes, clutching the bandaged area above his hip where the bullet had pierced him. Weariness sank deep into his bones as if the past twelve millennia had crept up on him.

Raiken gave a harsh laugh that made Sally and Dalia jump. “I’ve never told anyone my story, but for the first time I *need* to let someone know the secrets I’ve buried for so long. You want to know the truth? You’ll have to forget what you thought you knew about the world.”

Dalia’s face tightened. “After what we saw tonight, that won’t be too hard.”

Raiken took a deep breath. “What I’m about to tell you is a tale that spans thousands of years. The pyramids in Egypt weren’t even a thought when I entered this world. This is a tale of good and evil. It’s a tale of betrayal, heartbreak, and revenge. But in its essence, this is a tale of two people. Scott Mullen is the latest of many names I’ve had. The other is my dark twin, who is responsible for tonight’s attack.” Raiken closed his eyes and sighed. “Where do I even start? I guess the only place to start is in the beginning.”

Part One

Chapter I

Central Africa 2625 B.C.

A loud noise rang in the distance. Seconds later, a shout came from outside. Raiken grabbed the sword he kept close to his bed.

Screams filled the night, waking his wife, Irisi, and the baby. Raiken clenched his fist as he peered outside. Looking into the darkness, he saw nothing.

He walked out of his house and spotted a villager running across the dirt road. Blood streaked down his face. Raiken's face tightened as three invaders chasing the villager came into view. Up ahead two houses had caught fire. Raiken crept back into his house. Before getting involved in the fighting, he had to make sure his precious Irisi and Nafrini were safe.

He grabbed Irisi's hands. "We're under attack. Get Nafrini. We're going downriver to the grain storage building."

Isiri's eyes went wide and her face turned pale.

Raiken's gaze met hers. He had danced with death countless times and felt the calmness of eternity. Irisi was a kind and gentle woman. She had never faced this kind of danger. "I know you're afraid. Follow my instructions, and you and Nafrini will make it through the night. I will ensure no harm comes to you."

Isiri nodded, then wrapped the baby in swaddling clothing. Meanwhile, Raiken took a spear from the adjacent room. When he returned to the bedroom, Irisi and Nafrini were ready. They

followed him out the back door. It was hard to remain calm as he heard villagers, people he had come to know and like over the past five years, getting slaughtered. Cries and screams filled the night. The smell of blood was thick and heavy. Houses and farms burned, and animals got caught in the blazes.

Raiken turned to his wife. "Don't make a sound." He was thankful that Nafrini was not crying. His daughter's lips quivered. He bent down and kissed Nafrini on the forehead. "I'll bring you to safety, my child."

A fire blazed in the distance. Heat radiated from the wild conflagration. That and the stars from the night sky provided the only illumination.

As they passed a nearby house, his neighbor, Semni, emerged, his face ashen. "What's going on out here?"

"We're under attack," Raiken replied. "I'm taking my family to the grain storage building. Gather your family and join us."

Semni nodded. Fortunately, they were quick. Semni, his wife, his sister, and his three children followed him. They made their way through the village, staying away from the main road. Before long, other families had joined them. Raiken would save as many as he could.

Raiken tensed as an invader approached. He had no idea why this soldier was alone. Perhaps he was looting. With so many people in their party, it would be difficult to conceal themselves, so he didn't try. He ran hard, planted his feet, drew back his spear and flung it into the soldier's chest. The soldier fell to his knees. Raiken ran toward him, pulled out the spear, and jabbed it into the man's neck, making sure his end came quickly.

Raiken turned to his party. "It had to be done. Let's make haste."

They made it to the Nile without further incident, passing two burning buildings in the process. The heat made Raiken's skin crawl. He had the various families board boats docked nearby.

As quietly as possible, they traveled downriver. Dawn had nearly arrived when they settled into the tall building made of mud and stone that Raiken had built a year ago, when he had helped transform this village from one that had been on the verge of famine to one that knew prosperity.

Raiken made the trip back up the Nile alone the following afternoon. Semni and the other men had volunteered to go with him, but he told them to stay behind. He would need them before this was over, but for now they would slow him.

As he went upriver, he reflected on his old life. He had thought he was done with the violence and bloodshed in this lifetime when he had left Egypt a decade ago. He had been under the service of the Pharaoh and had garnered a prominent position in his army. In fact, Pharaoh Huni had offered him the position of commander of the Egyptian army to convince him to stay. Raiken had been sick of fighting and could not be part of the Pharaoh's army for another moment. Now, he would have to battle against the soldiers he once led.

Raiken docked his boat and crept through the bushes, surveying the damage. Dozens of bodies littered the road. The invaders hadn't bothered to collect the dead.

A group of children hauled wagons around like animals. His hands bunched into fists at the sight of an old woman tied to a tree. What purpose could that possibly serve? She could do no harm. These soldiers, once his comrades in arms, had turned into savage brutes. He cursed under his breath. It was his dark twin's fault. Vrag's influence had spread upon them like a plague.

He nearly exploded with rage when he found soldiers whipping his neighbor. The onlookers included women and children being forced to watch this degradation.

He confirmed his suspicions that the invaders were Egyptian soldiers when he saw their uniforms. He even recognized a few of the men, but didn't dare reveal himself.

Later that night, Raiken returned to the refugee shelter where mothers were attempting to comfort crying children. Men paced around with lost looks on their faces. Dozens of people approached him with an unending list of questions. His wife, Irisi, hugged him as if the fate of the world depended on it. Her eyes sought comfort, but he had too much work to do.

The men gathered around Raiken as he addressed them. “The Egyptians have come to our village and stolen everything we have worked to build. Many of our people are dead. Others have been beaten and imprisoned. They will take the children as slaves.”

Loud protests of indignation rose from the men. Semni shouted, “Why have they done this to us? What gods have we angered?”

Raiken kept a calm gaze as he looked at each of them. “We have angered no gods. The Egyptians do this out of greed and thirst for power. But there is something they're not counting on, something I have never told you. Before I settled in Nairantu five years ago, I was in charge of the Pharaoh's security. I commanded his soldiers and know how they operate. They will not be prepared for a counterattack. That's why we must strike now. We are few, but we are strong. There is great risk involved, but we must fight if we wish to reclaim our village and save our children. I am willing to sacrifice my life and I ask the same from you. If you follow my lead, we will defeat them.”

All of the men stepped forward and volunteered to be in Raiken's new army.

Using great stealth, the men returned to the village.

Four Egyptians strolled down the road, speaking in loud, boisterous tones and gesturing with their arms. Obviously, they felt no threat from the people of Nairantu after their easy decimation of the village.

Raiken signaled to Semni, who charged out and threw an errant spear at the soldiers. They chased after him, shouting, looking to have sport with this villager who dared challenge them. When they drew near, Raiken and the others sprung from behind the high grasses. They attacked the Egyptians and killed the four soldiers. He looked into the eyes of his men. To his relief, they seemed only mildly shaken. None of them had ever killed before. Raiken only felt cold malice. It was never easy to take human life, but he knew what had to be done, and there was still much blood to be shed. He would save the remorse for when this was over.

Raiken ordered his men to hide the corpses by the river. Meanwhile, he crept along the road toward the schoolhouse. Yesterday he had seen children held captive in the village's schoolhouse. Two soldiers now guarded it. One yawned; the other had a far off look in his eyes.

Raiken pulled out his bow and drew his arrow. His aim was true, and the arrow pierced the first guard's throat. The man clutched the arrow and fell to his knees.

The second guard stared open-mouthed at his comrade. Before he could draw his weapon, a second arrow sunk into his chest.

Without hesitation, Raiken ran forward with his sword. He gripped it with both hands and rammed it into the guard's spine. He didn't have to worry about the first guard, since blood gushed out of the man's throat.

Raiken found the children huddled in a room. He put his fingers to his lips and motioned for them to come with him. He had always had a strong connection with children, having fathered hundreds during his existence. They followed without question.

He led the young ones to the river where men waited with boats to take them to the camp. Pure joy flowed when daughters and sons reunited with their fathers.

He grabbed Semni's arm and pulled him aside. "Make sure they return safely."

Semni frowned. "You're not coming with us?"

“No. I’ll meet you later tonight. First I must observe the enemy.”

On the third night following Raiken's initial raid, he led a dozen men up the Nile in boats. When they neared Nairantu, they left the boats and traveled on foot. His party had lived here their entire lives and had little difficulty blending into the surroundings.

They waited until long after midnight. Earlier when he had scouted the area, Raiken had found three barracks. His target was the one that housed the fewest soldiers.

Two sentries patrolled the front and one at the rear. He had devised this strategy. It worked well in identifying approaching armies, but was less effective against a small group intimately familiar with the geography of the land.

He positioned his best archer to the rear of the barrack to eliminate the lone sentry. Raiken would handle the other two. He signaled to Semni, who relayed the signal to the others along the line until it reached the archer.

Raiken hid behind a tall tree. The first guard stood less than twenty feet away. He would have to take out these men quickly and quietly.

From his satchel, he removed a blowgun and darts wrapped tightly in leaves. Earlier, he had soaked the tips of the darts in a poisonous concoction. He put the blowgun to his lips and eyed the sentry. The poison, a deadly substance he had learned to formulate from the chief assassin of the Hittites many years ago, would paralyze him instantly and kill him within minutes.

With fierce concentration, Raiken locked in his target. He slid the dart into the blowgun. It had been a while since he had tried this, but he trusted that his technique would not fail him. He was generally not so callous in taking human life, but the Egyptian soldiers deserved this for what they did to the people of Nairantu.

He shot the dart and kept still as it soared through the air. The sentry turned ever so slightly at the last moment. Perhaps he had heard the whooshing through the air and reacted to it. Instead of penetrating his neck, it went into the man's larynx. Good enough. The sentry fell to his knees and thrashed on the ground.

Raiken took out another dart. The second sentry ran to his fallen comrade. When he was in range, Raiken shot the dart. It was dead on, sinking into his artery.

Raiken emerged from his concealment along with seven villagers, all armed with swords and spears. They ran into the barrack past the dying sentries. He had told his people earlier to show no mercy, since the Egyptians had shown them no mercy. It had been hard to convince these normally peaceful people to fight with ruthless aggression.

They hacked and slashed the sleeping soldiers, the coppery smell of blood prevalent in the air. From the other entrance, the remaining villagers in his party attacked the Egyptians. The barracks became a slaughterhouse, the screams of the dying soldiers filling the night.

Raiken gave a loud whistle and his men stopped. Regardless of whether they had killed all their opponents, he didn't want to be here for more than a few minutes. The noise would rouse the other soldiers, and he wanted to be long gone when they arrived.

Without speaking, his crew followed him. In the blackness of night, they ran down Nairantu's main road and stopped at a cell housing prisoners from the village. In their arrogance, the Egyptians left it unguarded at night.

Raiken had instructed Semni to bring an axe. He used Semni's axe to hack into the prison. With several strong swipes, he broke the chains on the front gate and set the prisoners free. En masse, they retreated down the Nile to the refugee camp.

With a shudder, Raiken woke. Semni shook his shoulder. Having stayed up the previous evening plotting his next phase of attack, he had slept during the day.

Semni had a guilty look on his face. "I realize you need sleep, but you have to know what's happening."

Raiken shook his head to clear his thoughts. "What is it?"

Semni took a long breath. He paced back and forth like a nervous dog. "There is big trouble. We don't know what to do."

Raiken's chest tightened. "Tell me what happened."

"A larger contingent of Egyptians have arrived in Nairantu."

Raiken gritted his teeth. He had hoped the invaders would be gone before reinforcements arrived. This made the situation more complicated.

He and Semni trekked back to Nairantu that afternoon. Hundreds of soldiers had descended upon the area. He wasn't misguided enough to believe he could thwart an army this size.

He and Semni remained hidden, observing the newcomers. He did a double take when he saw the commander of the new forces. It was Vrag, dressed in regal splendor with a contingent of guards surrounding him. For a moment, he wondered why there was no atmospheric disruption that typically happened when they first met, until he realized that it was not that long ago that they were in each other's company.

Raiken pumped his fist. "Return to the village. I'll be back soon."

Semni frowned. "What will you do?"

"I'm going to surrender myself."