

The Town Drunk

Presents

A VAMPIRE AND A VAMPIRE HUNTER WALK INTO A BAR

Keith R.A. DeCandido

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“About time you arrived. I already got your drink.”

“Red wine again? Do you never tire of that joke?”

“Apparently I do not.”

“Is it at least a Chianti? I’d hate to have to choke down one of those American atrocities.”

“Of course. Do you take me for a philistine?”

“I take you for a Dutch lout with the taste of a pig.”

“And you’re an Eastern European dandy, but you don’t hear me complaining.”

“I’ve heard you do little else for the past several decades, my friend. And you have nobody to blame but yourself, you know.”

“Myself? If you’d been kind enough to stay dead just once, then maybe I wouldn’t have sought out that Gypsy woman for that immortality spell.”

“I could have warned you about the Romany, you know.”

“As if I was going to consult *you* about finding a way to hunt you down more efficiently. And as if I would have listened to your advice in any case.”

“It would have saved you considerable amounts of grief. And we would not be where we are today.”

“No, I would be in the ground, and you would be out draining some young lass of her life’s blood.”

“It is what I do.”

“I should have sued that woman.”

“Sue the *Romany*? You are aware, are you not, that they are not overburdened with material assets?”

“Yes, but think how much fun it would be to subpoena them.”

“I will take your word for it.”

“*I’m* being sued, you know.”

“You are joking.”

“No. Some American woman I foolishly agreed to train. One of your kind killed her family.”

“Not *another* revenge-obsessed last survivor?”

“Yes, another. Really, if you people insist on wiping out an entire family, the least you could do is be efficient about it and kill *all* of them. This business of leaving behind youngsters with visions of revenge dancing in their heads does get out of hand. All they do is cause trouble.”

“This particular girl is taking legal action against you?”

“Yes. Apparently I violated the terms of our agreement, whatever *that* means. *She* came to *me* begging for help, and because I did not transform her into a reasonable facsimile of that blonde girl from television, she felt I did not perform my task adequately.”

“The popular culture hasn’t done either of us a favor, has it? It’s been over seventy years, and I’m still living down that cape-wearing Hungarian drug addict.”

“Well, you *did* wear a cape.”

“Of course I wore a cape *then*! *Everyone* wore a cape *then*! I would hardly wear such an absurd anachronism now, yet everyone expresses shock because I’m not dressed in the same clothing I happened to be wearing in a previous century. I have always dressed at the height of *current* fashion.”

“True. I understand suits of armor and bloody swords were all the rage in the fifteenth century.”

“They were in the circles *I* ran in.”

“Ran through, more like. Still, that Armani you’ve got on now looks good on you. I suppose it cost you someone else’s arm and leg.”

“At least I give some care to my appearance. Have you shaved at all since 1850?”

“What possible reason do I have to look good?”

“An excellent point. Why start now?”

“My line of work hardly requires it. Certainly not to the extent yours does. It’s hard to convince beautiful young women to invite them into your boudoir if you look like—”

“An unshaven, slightly mad Dutchman with wild hair, battered clothing, and the lingering scent of week-old grime?”

“Touché.”

“It should be pointed out, however, that I have not been able to enact such a scenario for some time. Gaining ingress to a lady’s bedroom has gotten much more challenging with the advent of electronic security. It is difficult to mesmerize an alarm system.”

“I hope you’re not asking for sympathy.”

“Quite the opposite—I view it as a challenge. I certainly get more joy out of that than the actual conquests. I find myself simply killing them more often than I do turning them. It hardly seems worth the time, given how tiresome they become.”

“Oh?”

“We are creatures of the night. We are hunters, predators—killers. Yet vampires nowadays wish to loaf about and put their hands to their foreheads and bemoan how awful unlife is. It’s revolting—they’re so full of—full of—”

“Shit?”

“I was going to say ‘angst,’ but, yes, excrement fits the bill quite nicely. They have been given the gift of immortality, of power over others, and all they do is wonder about the meaning of existence and other such philosophical rot.”

“Blame the literature. Or better yet, blame the Americans.”

“Not that I disagree with the sentiment, but why them in particular?”

“Besides the fact that they produce the most egregious examples of the literature that propagates the very notions you’re complaining about, the fact is that Americans think about things too much.”

“I have been around since long before there *was* a United States, and I have never heard such a complaint.”

“Of course not, because people don’t pay attention. It’s how your kind has survived so long, despite the efforts of men like me. But Americans, with their insistence on educating *all* their children rather than a chosen few, and their notions of universal literacy, have produced a race that does nothing *but* think. Most of them think only about the most foolish things, but they *do* think.”

“That is a fascinating theory.”

“Thank you.”

“It is also utter rubbish. Nobody ever thinks. If they thought, they would go mad.”

“Who says they have not?”

“An excellent point. Also my last. The sun will be up soon.”

“So? This place is open twenty-four hours. It’s not as if you’re going to burst into flames.”

“I still prefer to avoid the sun’s gaze where possible. That, at least, is something for which I may thank the cinema. That German fool did our kind a great favor by perpetuating that burn-in-the-sun nonsense. Especially when dealing with *your* ilk. I do so love the looks on the would-be vampire hunters’ faces when they expose us to the light and we *don’t* catch fire. It’s very amusing.”

“You still needn’t leave yet. You haven’t even touched your wine.”

“Nor will I. You have, as is your wont, put something in it that is inimical to my continued survival. As you always do.”

“And you did not fall for it, as you never do.”

“I do appreciate the irony, since I do not drink—wine.”

“Indeed. Until tomorrow night?”

“Of course.”

“Good-bye, my old enemy.”

“Good-bye, my old friend.”

Keith R.A. DeCandido is the author of over thirty novels, most of them set in various media universes ranging from *Star Trek* to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *World of Warcraft*. His short fiction has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines over the years. Learn more at his official web site, <http://www.decandido.net>.