

CHAPTER 5

Sig had the feeling again. Like in a sauna filled with rotting garbage. The hairs on the back of his neck bristled and his nose wrinkled.

Grampa saw the reaction. “What’s wrong?”

Sig looked towards the barn door. “The Watchers.”

Grampa Thor’s head swiveled in the direction Sig stared. “Watchers? What are Watchers?”

“The weird handymen across the road; they’re out there.”

“What do they look like?”

“I feel when they’re around, but I never see them clearly.”

Grampa Thor cocked his head sideways. “Never see them?”

“They look blurry, like 3-D without the glasses. Two shifting images. It hurts my head.”

“Let’s look at them.” Grampa limped toward the barn door.

Sig grabbed Grampa’s arm. “No, they never come here. But, they’re right outside, near the corner of the barn.”

“How do you know?”

“I told you. I feel them.”

Grampa Thor looked at him speculatively. Then he pointed, “At the corner there?”

Sig nodded.

“C’mon.” Grampa went into an empty stall and opened the upper half of the outside door. He looked out to the right.

Sig stood behind him and craned his head to look.

There were six of them. Features rippled in his vision. His head began to ache.

Grampa raised an arm, made a funny gesture, and mumbled something. A light glowed around the handymen and at last Sig saw them clearly. He wished he couldn’t.

Grampa grunted, rubbed his chest, and muttered, “Zombies ... covered in simulacra spells. Get back.”

Sig saw rotting corpses carrying pitchforks, shovels, and axes turn and shamble towards them. Grampa shoved him back and slammed the top of the door. It cut off the vision of rotted and peeling skin that hung and flopped as they came.

Grampa Thor looked around. “You can’t kill them. They’re already dead, but they respond to the laws of physics. Hack off a leg—they can’t walk. Lop off an arm—they can’t grab; a head—they can’t see. Is there anything in here to use, an axe, machete, sledge hammer?”

Sig ran down the central aisle and into the storeroom, emerging with two pitchforks, two small sledgehammers and a machete. Grampa took a sledge, stuck it in his belt, and then grabbed the machete and a pitchfork, leaving Sig with a sledge and a pitchfork.

“Keep them away from with the pitchfork but be careful. If it gets stuck in them, they’ll pull it out of your hands. Use the sledge to break bones to disable arms and legs.

You can also smash their eyes so they can’t see. Works real well on a zombie that already only has one eye. Let’s go out the back. Lead the way.”

Banging came from the stall where they had been. Horses screamed in fear. Sig heard Bjørn’s scream.

First Book in the Battle Wizard Saga

Grampa Thor shouted, "Come on, let's get out of here. They won't hurt the horses; they'll follow us."

Bjørn needed him; he had to help.

Grampa Thor said calmly, "The horses will be better off if we leave." Sig hesitated and then ran down the aisle to the back of the barn; Grampa limped behind.

Sig stopped at the back door, and then turned to the last stall on the left, which was empty. "Come this way. There are zombies outside the back door." He opened the lower outer door on the stall and waited outside, holding it until Grampa ducked through, and then closed it quietly.

Grampa whispered, "Did you feel them?"

Sig nodded.

"Are any between us and the house?"

Sig moved his head around, eyes unfocused. He whispered, "No, over there and there"; motioning to the rear and the far side of the barn.

"OK, let's get to the house. Shotguns can disable them. Do you have the samurai sword I gave your Dad?"

Sig nodded. "In the den."

"Perfect."

Sig ran to the house. He turned to see Grampa limping behind. A zombie came around the barn, lumbering after Grampa, moving almost as fast.

Grampa looked behind and shouted at Sig, "Go get the sword and shotguns. Don't wait for me. Have Meredith take a shotgun. Then come back and help."

Sig ran into the house shouting for his mother. She was in the basement by the gun safe. She handed him the sword and opened the safe door. "I heard. Grab what you need. I'll take my shotgun into the kitchen."

Sig nodded, gave her a strained smile, and grabbed two shotguns and stuffed six boxes of shells into a backpack. He heard Grampa cursing and the sound of thumping. Upstairs, he stopped to put on his shooting vest, and load both shotguns before he opened the front door.

Grampa was on the porch, holding one zombie away with a pitchfork and chopping on another with the machete. A third lay twitching at the base of the steps, missing an arm and a leg on one side. Several more advanced across the yard. Others came around the corner of the barn.

Sig remembered Grampa's words as he raised his shotgun to blast the zombie on the end of the pitchfork in the head. At this distance, the head disintegrated as the blast knocked the zombie backwards. Chunks of brain matter sprinkled the snow. The zombie slid off the pitchfork, and fell backwards. It started thrashing like an insect on its back trying to right itself.

With a last machete chop to the neck, Grampa severed the other zombie's head. The head thumped as it bounced down the stairs from the porch. "Here give me a shotgun."

Sig handed it over. "It's loaded. Here's a box of shells." Grampa shot the headless zombie in the leg and it toppled over. He pointed at it with the shotgun and said to Sig, "Be careful of it. It might grab if it feels you near."

Sig lifted his shotgun toward a zombie coming up the steps and blasted it in the head. It stumbled and stopped. It fell over when he blasted it again in a knee. Before he could push more shells into the shotgun, another zombie came across the porch at him from the right. He

First Book in the Battle Wizard Saga

unsheathed the sword and with a single sweep, its keen edge sliced through the zombie's neck. Its rotten state made the task easier. The zombie stumbled around aimlessly.

After loading the shotgun, Sig's next shot knocked that headless zombie over the porch rail. Grampa's shotgun was empty. Before he could bend to grab shells from the box at his feet, another zombie attacked him. Sig shoved his shotgun toward Grampa. "Here." Grampa dropped his shotgun, took Sig's, and shot the zombie.

Sig picked up the shotgun Grampa dropped and reloaded it with shells from his shooting vest.

They both stood at the top of the stairs blasting advancing zombies. They continued firing and backed toward the house. The yard around the porch looked like a body part garage sale. Many still twitched, some even trying to rise.

Only two continued to advance toward them. Sig and Grampa rested and waited for them to climb onto the porch.

Sig heard a shotgun blast and looked to Grampa. Grampa looked at him. Neither had fired. There were two blasts in rapid succession from the back of the house.

"Mom!"

Sig turned and ran through the house to the kitchen. Meredith stood in the back doorway and blasted again. She glanced back as Sig burst into the kitchen. "I keep shooting and they keep coming."

"Shoot them in the kneecaps. Then they can't walk."

She shoved two shotgun shells into her gun and fired again, aiming lower. "There, that works. Thanks." She gave him a strained smile over her shoulder.

"Watch out if you get close to them. They can still grab you." Over her shoulder, he saw a zombie on the ground, one headless zombie wandering aimlessly, and a third with gaping holes through its body trying to mount the steps. He put his hand on her shoulder. "Here let me through. I'll disable it with this sword. Let's save ammunition when we can."

He sliced through a leg on each of the mobile corpses. They both collapsed, but the one with the head still tried to crawl up the steps. Sig cut its head off and kicked it to roll erratically across the backyard.

Looking back up at his mother, he realized he didn't hear any firing from the other side of the house. Sig raced around the house carrying his sword and shotgun. Rounding the corner to the front yard, he felt relief to see Grampa at the head of the stairs, kicking body parts off the porch.

He looked at Sig. "OK, now we chop them up some more to make sure they can't move. Do you have axes?" Sig dashed off to get two axes from the woodshed behind the house.

Grampa grabbed a double bladed ax and walked through the litter of bodies, dismembering corpses into smaller pieces. Sig reluctantly followed his lead with the other ax.

Meredith walked out of the house, "That's all in back. I don't see any others."

Sig looked up just as a zombie came out of the house, reaching for her. "Mom! Look out behind you!"

She ducked and ran forward down the steps, pursued by the last one. Sig raised the axe and hurled it at the zombie. The blade sliced into its chest and knocked it backward onto the porch.

First Book in the Battle Wizard Saga

The tip of the blade sticking out of its back pinned it to the porch floor.

Grampa hollered, “Good throw.”

Sig looked over at him. “Dad and I used to practice axe throwing. That’s the first time I’ve done it since...” He picked up the sword from where it leaned against the porch and walked over to chop the zombie on the porch into manageable pieces before it could free itself from the axe pinning it.

Meredith stood watch with her reloaded shotgun while Sig and Grampa continued dismembering the barely mobile corpses.

When finished, Sig looked around and said, “Are we done? There are a lot more here than I thought were working across the road. There’s well over a dozen. Maybe fifteen or twenty.” All these bodies chopped up and no blood on the snow. Weird.

Grampa said, “Count the feet and divide by two to figure out how many.”

Sig looked over at him, shook his head, and collapsed to sit on the porch steps.

Grampa came over, sat down with Sig, and said, “What’s wrong? We just saved our bacon and wiped out more than a dozen zombies. You should be happy, not despondent.”

“I’ve always thought magic was neat and wanted to have some. Now this.” He waved at the yard full of body parts. “This is terrible. It makes me feel like I’ve been eating sewage. I’m glad I don’t have magic.” Sig looked at him. “But you have magic don’t you? You made Bjørn speak and you made the zombies visible.”

Grampa sighed. “There’s magic and there’s magic. He nodded toward the zombies. “That’s black magic, evil magic... Necromancy. No, you don’t want that kind of magic.” His expression was grim.

“Yes, I have magic. I planned to tell you in a less dramatic fashion. I was going to tell you when I talked to you about your magic.”

Sig said. “My magic?” I told you I don’t have any magic.”

Grampa clapped him on the shoulder. “Let’s check out the house before we clean this mess up. We can talk about it later. Don’t mention my magic to your mother.”

CHAPTER 22

It was time for his appointment to meet the blond Amazon, Arianna, for a Karate match.

The address she gave him turned out to be a small warehouse a few miles from campus. He parked and grabbed his gear. Two women carrying gym bags entered ahead of him.

Inside he looked around. Amazon women filled the space. About twenty women were engaged in activities. Some lifted weights. Others sparred. Some engaged in hand-to-hand combat and others practiced with staffs or wooden swords. Several turned to look. Some stopped what they were doing. It felt like a spotlight was shining on him. He wanted to run. Instead, he looked around for a familiar face.

Arianna sauntered up in karate gi; a black belt around her waist. “You made it, good. We’re next on the mats in about five minutes.”

First Book in the Battle Wizard Saga

Sig hefted his bag. "Where can I change?"

Arianna's eyebrows rose. "Change? We usually come dressed or..." She gestured over to the two women who preceded him were stripped down to underwear and donning workout clothes.

Sig wrenched his eyes away, trying not to stare. Tall, muscular, and shapely, they were staring material.

Arianna said, "We use facilities at the gas station down the block if we have to go potty. The women's side is clean. Or, you can change by that bench over there." She looked at him with a challenge in her eyes, "Do you go commando?"

Sig blushed. "No, the bench will be fine."

He sat down, untied and pulled off his boots, stood and dropped his pants. Not sure why, but it seemed the spotlight intensified. He pulled off his shirt and donned his gi. He wanted to cover the flush that suffused his body.

He heard quiet clapping. Turning toward the sound, he saw Giselle, the redhead. "Nice, I like boxer briefs. I bet Arianna didn't mention the storeroom where men change."

Sig looked at Arianna who was smiling. She said, "Storeroom? I guess I forgot. Well, no one was injured."

Giselle shook her head, smiling broadly. "Don't let her get into your head. She'll go for every advantage she can, not that she needs it."

Sig gritted his teeth while he nodded and smiled back. "No harm done. Good trick. I'm learning the rules."

Giselle laughed. "Honey, there aren't any rules."

She and Arianna looked at each other and laughed. Several nearby women smiled.

After a quick warm up, he met Arianna on the mats. Sig was conscious that she was at least two inches taller and he guessed she massed as much. Her legs were longer than his were, but his arms were longer.

They met and bowed. Before he straightened, she dropped into a leg sweep. Half expecting it, based on Giselle's warning, he sprang into the air and blocked the kick to the groin that followed the leg sweep. He landed, spun, and lashed out with a kick to her side she only partially blocked. He managed to pull his leg back before she grabbed it.

He began the match thinking he would have to ease up, but realized he could get hurt if he didn't give it his all. She was good, using her leg reach to good effect and surprising him with her strength.

After five minutes of a very even match, he was feeling battered and winded. He decided he needed to end the match if he could. He went for one of his favorite passing strike combinations. He kicked at her thigh. She managed to avoid it, but he raked her knee on the return. She lost balance. He whirled and kicked at her head. She leaned to the side to miss the kick and unbent just in time to catch his returning heel in the back of her head.

Stunned she dropped to one knee. He grabbed and twisted her wrist, pulled her arm out, and kicked her in the side with his heel. With full force, it would have broken her ribs. He spun and drove his knee against her extended elbow, pulling up short so he didn't break it.

He stepped back, put his hands together, and bowed. She shook her head groggily as she

stood and bowed back.

Sig heard clapping and turned to see Rick with a group of women who had stopped to watch.

Rick stopped clapping, "Now that you've beaten their number one, they'll want you to teach them how you did it." Several of the Amazons nodded.

Sig shrugged and winced. "I'll be happy to. I need the workout, but first I need to ice these bruises. I feel like I lost. That was the toughest fight I've ever been in."

Arianna punched his shoulder. "You charmer; I bet you say that to all the girls. Let's plan to do it again, but right now, that ice sounds good. If you feel bad, just imagine how I feel." She rubbed the back of her head.

Rick asked Arianna, "Who owes who?"

Arianna rolled her eyes, pulled out five dollars, and handed it to Rick.

Sig looked between them, wondering what now.

Rick smiled. "You didn't use the gas station down the street to change. I won."

Now it was Arianna's turn to shrug and smile.

Sig grabbed his bag, and pushed Rick toward the door.

CHAPTER 24

Rick waited when Sig got back to the Professor's. They had arranged to go out for supper. Sig wasn't looking forward to it. His sessions with the Amazons and the Professor left him physically sore and mentally drained.

However, Rick had the boundless energy of a Were and was ready for the social scene. Sig couldn't let him down.

As they walked to the car Rick said, "Oh by the way, a kid was riding a pony in the dark, past the Professor's fence when I arrived." An eight-foot, magically shielded fence surrounded the three-acre estate.

"There are several horse lots in the neighborhood."

"Yeah, but a kid riding in the dark, cars might not see him."

"OK, I'll be careful and watch for a kid."

At the street, Sig stopped his truck and looked both ways. Rick pointed past Sig, "There's the pony."

Through the shadows, a person mounted on something the size of a small horse was running toward them. It didn't move right for a horse; it bounded at them.

Sig's eyes widened. Evil approached. "That's not a horse..."

Rick shouted. "It's a wolf."

Sig stomped on the gas, but before the truck rolled more than a few feet, a sword cleaved through the roof, the window behind his seat, and into the floor. Broken glass sprayed. The truck stalled.

Rick dove out of the passenger door. Sig clutched his medallion and shouted "Aðalbrandr"

First Book in the Battle Wizard Saga

as he shoved the door open. He managed to push the huge wolf and rider back. His head slammed into the roof as he grew into a Battle Wizard. The push gave enough clearance so that he could duck, squeeze out, and unlimber his sword.

He blocked a sword slash to his head, dove, and rolled away. The wolf pivoted and Sig blocked blows the warrior rapidly rained down upon him from the wolf's back.

The midnight black wolf dove low and snapped at his ankles. Sig managed to shove its head into the ground before it could fasten on his leg. Sword blows continued to slam at him. Sig blocked blows with the sword Aðalbrandr while he clutched the back of the wolf's neck.

The wolf pulled free and reared on two legs. It was tall enough to go for Sig's throat. He seized the wolf below the jaw before its teeth snapped closed. He held the wolf away while the rider's sword strikes rained down. The wolf's jaws gaped wider, wider than any real wolf, and its teeth lengthened, stretching toward Sig's face.

Another wolf slammed into the black beast, grabbing and savaging its ear as the two rolled away in a writhing ball.

Rick to the rescue.

The rider leapt to the ground without a glance at the wolves ripping and snarling at each other. He advanced on Sig in a shuffle step dance, slashing and stabbing. Sig gave ground, back toward the fence. Even though the attacker was barely more than half his size, Sig was fighting for his life. He had never faced such a quick and expert opponent. The rider forced Sig back into the fence. He was pinned.

There was a squeal from the fighting wolves. Sig's adversary paused. Sig took the opportunity to slice through a 3-inch diameter tree next to the fence. His opponent was looking at the wolves when Sig swung the tree. It struck the rider in the helmet, which looked as if it were made of feathers, knocking him to the ground.

On the ground, the man in the feathered helmet gestured. The tree in Sig's hand burst into flames. Startled, he flung it at the rider. The flaming tree caught the feathered helmet on fire.

The rider rolled to his feet and screeched, like a hawk. The black wolf disengaged from Rick, the rider jumped on the wolf's back, and they bounded away, flames trailing from the burning helmet.

Rick started to give chase but Sig stopped him. He didn't know if the blood covering Rick was his or the other wolf's.

A roar made Sig whirl and raise his sword. A huge flaming ball hurtled toward him. He swung his sword at it and knocked it aside, away from Rick. Another followed and he batted it back in the direction it had come from.

Sig held his sword up in a guard stance, but nothing else materialized.

Professor Herman pulled up in a Maybach 62S. Sig's mouth dropped open, forgetting the wolf and rider, while he gawked at the car. The Maybach was what a Rolls Royce would be if they added more technology and power.

The Professor surveyed the damage to Sig's truck with a quick glance, and took in the flaming tree blocking the gateway. "What occurred here?"

"We were attacked by a man with a sword riding a huge wolf."

Rick said, "It wasn't a real wolf, but it wasn't a Were. It didn't smell right." Sig was

First Book in the Battle Wizard Saga

concerned about the slashes on Rick's arms and shoulders. Blood ran from gaping cuts and soaked his shirt.

Professor Herman gestured toward the house. "Get behind the fence where it's warded."

Sig grabbed the tree and threw it to the side, changed forms, and jumped into his stalled truck. He was surprised when it fired up immediately. As he started to back up, he heard a screech and a sword sliced through the roof on the passenger side, spraying him with glass and ripping off the door. The truck stalled.

A fireball passing over his head struck the rider, knocking him off the wolf.

The Professor was standing with his upper body out of his car's moon roof. Smoke drifted from his hands.

Sig tried again and the truck started. He mashed the accelerator. Tires squealed as he backed up the driveway into the Professor's estate followed closely by the Maybach. The wolf started to pursue but an invisible barrier at the gate stopped him. The rider squealed again. He raised his arm and hurled a fireball. Sig held his hands up in front of his face instinctively, knowing it was futile.

The fireball splattered against the invisible wall. The fighter in the feathered helmet screeched again. The sound made Sig's teeth ache.

Rick and the Professor ran up the stairs onto the expansive porch. The Professor turned and hurled a flaming ball of energy at the rider. The warrior slapped it aside with his blade. The rider's shrieks crescendoed as he and the wolf paced back and forth in front of the entrance.

In his battle form, Sig's sword raised in a defensive position. Professor Herman shouted. "Get into the house. If he didn't bring his demon legions, we will be safe."

Sig sprinted up the steps, ducked under the doorway, and joined Rick in the house. The Professor followed more slowly, backing across the porch, watching for an attack. Sig turned to Rick to render aid, but his wounds weren't as severe as they appeared outside.

The Professor entered and checked the wards set inside the house. Satisfied, he walked to the parlor, and sank onto the divan.

Rick asked, "What was that about demon legions? Tell me I misheard." Amazingly, Rick's wounds had almost healed. The blood soaking his shirt revealed how severe they had been.

The Professor raised his hand, and pointed at the front door. "That is Andras, a great marquis of hell. If memory serves, he commands thirty legions of demons."

"Thirty legions? Isn't that approximately equal to a buttload of demons?"

The Professor considered the question. "His legions would be with him if he were here on his own recognizance. If a black wizard summoned him, he is here by himself."

"Since he's here, can't he just summon his demons?"

"He can't if he's controlled by someone else. It appears we're in luck."

Sig, back to his human self, turned and let the curtain drop back from where he had been looking out the window. "In luck? Have you seen my truck? What am I going to tell the insurance company? 'Some dude on a wolf tried to slice it in half while I was in it.'"

"Be happy you will be able to talk to an insurance adjuster and not to Samael, the angel of death."

Sig turned pale. "That puts a different perspective on it. But, if we don't have a visit from

this Sam guy, I need an explanation.”

“Why don’t we wait to see if he brought his thirty legions? If he did, your truck’s damage will be moot.”

“OK, my truck’s not important; got it. Nevertheless, he’s out there. Only the magic wards have stopped him. What if they fail against his legions?”

“Again, I don’t believe his demon host is here. Further, he is one of the most dangerous demons to summon. A pack of rabid dogs is easier to control. If the summoner plans to stay alive, he has to send Andras back soon.”

“The guy in the feathered helmet is a real badass, huh?” asked Rick. “Are your wards strong enough to keep him out?”

“The wards appear to be holding. That’s not a helmet. In his earthly incarnation he has the head of an owl, rides an enormous black wolf, and bears an invincible sword.”

Sig said, “It wasn’t invincible. He was good with it, but not invincible.”

“It seemed that way, because you also bear an invincible sword. The old question; ‘What happens when an immovable object meets an irresistible force?’ Now we know. It depends on the wielders.”

“C’mon Professor, you’ll make his head swell.”

“Ah, but the larger the head, the easier it is to lop off.”

Sig looked between them and felt uncomfortable. Were they pulling for him or viewing him as a science experiment?