



OLIVER NOCTURNE

THE ETERNAL TOMB

KEVIN EMERSON

 SCHOLASTIC

OLIVER NOCTURNE



TOMB

KEVIN EMERSON



SCHOLASTIC INC.

NEW YORK TORONTO LONDON AUCKLAND SYDNEY
MEXICO CITY NEW DELHI HONG KONG BUENOS AIRES

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

ISBN-13: 978-0-545-05805-6

ISBN-10: 0-545-05805-8

Copyright © 2009 by Kevin Emerson

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc.
SCHOLASTIC, APPLE PAPERBACKS, and associated logos
are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

9 10 11 12 13 14/0

Printed in the U.S.A.
First printing, April 2009

40

Contents

Prologue	1
1. Infiltrating the Inquisition	7
2. New Ashes, Old Answers	21
3. The Firefly and the Message	32
4. A Day Older . . . And Farther Away	40
5. Selene's Last Breath	57
6. Underneath the Christmas Tree	74
7. Nathan's Window	91
8. The Final Journey	99
9. The Backup Plan	114
10. Uneasy Alliances	122
11. The Darkling Ball	138
12. The Last Betrayal	158
13. The Anointed	173
14. The Old Ghost	188
15. The Triad of Finitiy	203
16. Hope	212

Prologue

By most measurements, Necresium was a small world. It consisted of only a few billion stars, a hundred worm-holes, and eighteen planets that held life. That wasn't much compared to Necresium's closest neighboring world, where Earth was located, whose galaxies secretly contained thirty-one planets with alien ecosystems.

Necresium was located above, to the east, seventeen minutes earlier, and 8.2 gravity degrees away from Earth. It had little matter, and to humans it would have looked like a messy watercolor painting. They would never have understood that the long, fluttering bands of color were actually the brilliant, thousand-year-old Necresians.

There was, however, one being in Necresium that certain Earth creatures might have recognized. He owned a drug and alchemy emporium in one of the smaller cities. And he had just invited two guests to his shop for an important meeting.

The shopkeeper stood patiently behind a tall counter, watching the guests walk slowly down the aisle toward him. One woman was older, with long white hair. She was dressed in faded jeans, a long leather coat, and a cowboy hat, as if she'd just stepped out of the Wild West, which she had. The younger woman had wide, dark eyes and wore a flowing white gown and sandals, her hair braided, as if she'd just stepped out of ancient Greece, which was also true.

The younger guest held a diamond-shaped hand mirror with a jade border. She glanced to the wall behind the shopkeeper, where a similar mirror was hung on the wall. White lights seemed to dance in that mirror, as they also did in the one in her hand.

The guests' eyes darted around the shop, noting the neatly organized shelves of black bottles, the brightly lit ceiling, from which faint, tinny music played, and the tiled floor, on which their sandals and cowboy boots surprisingly made no sound.

Welcome, the shopkeeper said in their minds.

The guests paused, feeling a ripple of fear. The shopkeeper wasn't surprised. He had black, scaled skin, short yellow horns, a mouth of enormous saber teeth, and apple-size gold coin eyes. He also had ten legs and sixteen arms. The eight fingers on each hand came to long, razorlike points. He clicked them against the hard countertop, one then the next, like a slowly ticking clock.

Who are you? the younger guest thought to him.

I am Dexires. He smiled at her. *Have you enjoyed our gift?*

The young woman regarded the mirror in her hand. *I have. It — it's quite powerful.*

Of course.

Why did you ask us here? the older guest asked. She avoided looking at him.

I have something else for you, said Dexires. He placed a black bottle on the counter.

What is it? the older guest asked suspiciously.

Dexires didn't answer. Instead, he peered at the young woman and asked, *Do you know what I am?*

Yes, I believe I do, she answered.

And do you know what YOU are?

I —

It's not a trick question, Margaret.

Then . . . yes, Margaret Watkins answered.

Indeed, said Dexires, his smile widening, baring his glistening teeth fully. *Then you understand that what is about to happen on Earth, with the Nexia prophecy, must be stopped.*

Selene has delivered the key to undoing the prophecy to the vampire boy, said Margaret, nodding to the older guest.

And how did that go? asked Dexires.

Fine, said Selene. *Things got complicated, but*

luckily Oliver's older brother came along and helped relay my instructions.

Word has it that you were killed to raise the Artifact, said Dexires.

That's good to hear, said Selene. *We made it appear that I'd died and hid me in the past.*

It was very convincing. And are you enjoying Arcana? Dexires asked, referring to the town where Selene was hiding.

Well enough, said Selene.

There's something wrong, isn't there? Margaret asked worriedly.

Dexires nodded. *I'm afraid so. It's come to our attention that a certain party has taken an interest in the prophecy as well.*

Who? Margaret asked.

Well, unfortunately, one of us.

One of you? Selene asked. *How is that possible?*

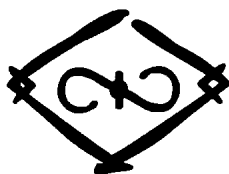
Anything is possible, dear, said Dexires tightly. *Unfortunately, it was always a danger given the extreme effects of Finité in your world. But as a result, she has made things more complicated.*

Margaret's face paled. *Does she know about —*

Emalie? Dexires asked. *No, none of them do. Yet. But they will. . . . The dark portents still surround her. She has gotten closer to the vampire than we hoped, and thus closer to danger.*

Unless the prophecy is undone, said Margaret.

Yes, well, about that . . . Dexires opened the small bottle on the counter. A misty cloud rose from it and formed a picture before them.



Margaret and Selene gazed at the strange image, brows furrowed, as they tried to understand its meaning.

It's a backup, Dexires explained. *Just in case things don't go according to plan.* He closed the bottle and handed it to Margaret. *Free of charge. Now, it's time for you to go back.*

A shadow passed across Margaret's face.

Dexires's eyes glowed sympathetically. *Sister, he thought to her affectionately, you know what needs to be done.*

They're going to capture me when I return, said Margaret quietly.

Some things can't be avoided. And remember, that, too, is part of the plan.

Selene put an arm around Margaret's shoulder. *It will work*, she said.

But we can't be sure, and Emalie . . . A tear slipped from her eye.

Take comfort in this, Dexires advised. *No one is ever truly sure what is about to happen. So the playing field is level. Just make sure to use that mirror when the time is right. And as they say on Earth, good luck.*

Margaret nodded, slipping the bottle into her woven shoulder bag. She and Selene turned to leave.

Dexires watched them go, feeling guilty for what he'd just said. There was no such thing as good luck. Only what came next. What was fortunate for one being was almost always unfortunate for another. Such was the balance of the universe itself.

He turned to the mirror behind him. Many lights danced on his face. *It is all we can do*, he replied to them. Now the rest was in the hands of a few otherwise insignificant beings on Earth. Dexires smiled. It was always amusing how this universe worked. Hopefully it wouldn't end anytime soon.

CHAPTER I

Infiltrating the Inquisition

Ready?

In the ink-black dead of night, a single red light flickered. Given its grave meaning, the light was surprisingly weak. It did not reach the dark waters below, lapping against an old, rusted ferryboat docked in a forgotten corner of an abandoned shipyard. It barely reached past the edge of the balcony on which its keeper stood. But the crystal sphere of magmalight, perched on a tall wooden staff, was bright enough to alert those who knew where to look.

I think so . . .

The light's keeper stood still, shrouded in a hooded black robe, staring straight ahead with a single, pupilless white eye. It didn't see the giant cargo ships slipping by on the water, nor the glow of sleepy houses on the far shore.

I don't know about this. . . .

What the eye of the Reader did see was the matrix

of forces intersecting from many worlds, specifically the force signatures of beings that might not be visible to normal sight.

Dean, just trust me.

Okay.

There was little for the Reader to see tonight. Other than the shimmering spirit of a dead bird fluttering aimlessly in the wind, the night appeared empty. All the guests were inside. Now it was a matter of keeping unwanted presences out.

Hello, a voice suddenly spoke in its head.

The Reader started, confused, sensing a strange presence in its mind — something living, a girl? But wait, it also felt like a demon. . . .

Cecitethhhh . . . The voice hissed, and the Reader's mind clouded, losing track of the forces around it. Blinded, the creature panicked, staggering —

Then the feeling was gone. The Reader's lidless eye, which had momentarily dimmed, began glowing brightly again, and its view of the forces returned. There was the still, dark night, the spirit of the dead bird. . . . The Reader sighed. His eighth-millennium birthday was approaching. Age did funny things to the senses.

Meanwhile, behind the Reader, two shadowy figures hurried down a dark metal hallway undetected, into the bowels of the ferry.

We're in, Oliver thought.

Great, Emalie said in his mind, and then popped into sight between him and Dean.

"Nice work," said Oliver.

"Thanks," Emalie replied, but then she stumbled and crashed to her knees. The sound reverberated up and down the hall. Oliver glanced worriedly back toward the Reader, but it didn't turn. It had no sense of sound.

Dean knelt and helped Emalie up. "I knew this was a bad idea."

"I'm fine." Emalie shook him free. She looked pale. Oliver noticed that her eyes had changed, as they did when she made contact with demons, her pupils turning white and her irises red. "Stop looking at me like that," Emalie snapped at Oliver. "I can handle it."

"If you say so," said Oliver. He knew better than to argue with her. Still, things like this had happened to Emalie before, and they were only getting more frequent. It wasn't supposed to be possible for a human, even an Orani, to speak with the dead the way that Emalie could.

They entered the cabin of the ship. Rows of seats were bent at odd angles, strung together with cobwebs. The boat had been out of use for decades, and looked it, which was the point. No one would expect a meeting of such importance to be held here.

"This way." Oliver pushed open a door into the kitchen. The steel appliances and cabinets were covered with graffiti, the counters littered with trash.

They reached another door and Oliver paused. He could hear the echoing voices on the other side. He turned and shot a severe glance at Emalie and Dean.

"We know," Dean moaned, "stay quiet and don't get found out and all that."

"Pretty much," Oliver agreed.

"I just wish I could go." Dean pouted.

"I tried, Dean," Emalie said sympathetically.

"I know, I know. No way to make a lowly zombie invisible." Dean rolled his eyes. "It's safer anyway," he said, fingering the smooth black pendant around his neck. "Just in case . . ."

"Right," said Oliver. As far as they knew, the hindrian charm Dean was wearing had been keeping him safe from his master's orders. Emalie had found an enchantment to power up the charm, and Dean had shown no signs of being under Lythia's command, but there was still a danger. The charm was only supposed to be temporary.

"We'll tell you everything," Emalie promised.

"Have a great time," Dean grunted with a wave of his hand. "I'll be here keeping watch."

Emalie nodded and vanished again.

Oliver spectralized, disappearing as well. Then he pushed open the door and stepped through. There was no floor on the other side. He concentrated, steadying himself against the forces, and slid onto a curved, metal wall.

You there? Oliver thought to Emalie.

Right beside you, Emalie thought back. She had been able to speak in his mind since the summer. It was convenient for situations like this, but it also meant that Emalie could hear Oliver's thoughts whenever she wanted. That had taken some getting used to.

Wow, Emalie said in awe.

Thirty feet below them, at the base of sheer metal walls, were three rings of chairs. Behind them, windows looked out into black water beneath the ferry. Magmalight globes swirled white-hot between the windows.

Every chair except for two was filled by a finely dressed vampire. All eyes faced center, to the circle of space occupied by two figures: Phlox and Sebastian. They stood beside each other, shoulders touching. Oliver tensed at seeing his parents. He could almost feel the dark emotions coming off them.

"Is there anything else you can tell us?" asked Tyrus McKnight, one of Sebastian's coworkers sitting in the surrounding crowd.

"I think we've explained quite enough," Phlox replied indignantly. "We know nothing of what Bane was up to. He is —" her voice hitched, and her eyes began to glow turquoise, "*— was his own demon.*"

Oliver felt a knot pulling tight in his stomach. This was the first reaction he'd seen from his parents about losing their older son. It had been two weeks since that night, when Oliver had returned home, stood in the living room, and delivered the news: "Bane's gone." He'd braced for his parents' reaction, expecting them to explode in rage, calling for vengeance against Lythia, Désirée, and even Half-Light.

But Phlox and Sebastian had barely moved. They'd been exhausted at the time, having spent many nights searching for Bane, not knowing until it was too late that Half-Light had been framing him for a series of human murders. Oliver's awful news had only seemed to press them further into the couch.

Since then, Oliver had waited nervously. Maybe their reaction would come the next evening, or the next. But the nights kept passing. Silent, tense, *empty*. Until now.

"There, there, Phloxiana," a thin voice said below. It was Mr. Ravonovich, head of Half-Light, a wiry old vampire with ancient eyes, pure white skin, and razor-sharp, parchment-colored teeth. "These are certainly unfortunate events."

“Why don’t you tell *us* what Bane was up to?” asked Sebastian, his voice quiet, dangerous. “You’re the ones who planned to slay him.”

“What *we* planned to do, Sebastian,” Ravonovich replied icily, “was whatever was necessary to protect the prophecy. We are here tonight to determine what *you* knew, not the other way around. And based on all the testimony, I think we can conclude that you were not aiding your son in his traitorous actions, which is fortunate.” Ravonovich raised his voice to address the chamber. “The case of Bane Nocturne is closed, and now we must turn our attention to the future. We have only a week before the Darkling Ball, and we must ensure that nothing jeopardizes the Anointment.”

Is that about you? Emalie thought.

I think so. Oliver figured that the “Anointment” was the ritual in which he would be given mystical power by the demon Vvette, power that would allow him to journey to Nexia. She would be summoned from a higher world using the Artifact.

It didn’t surprise Oliver that he hadn’t known the ritual’s proper title. He knew almost nothing about the procedure itself, and even less about what it meant. What kind of power was he even getting? How did one travel to Nexia? All he knew was that this power was critical to him making the journey and receiving his demon, Illisius. And to opening the Gate and freeing the