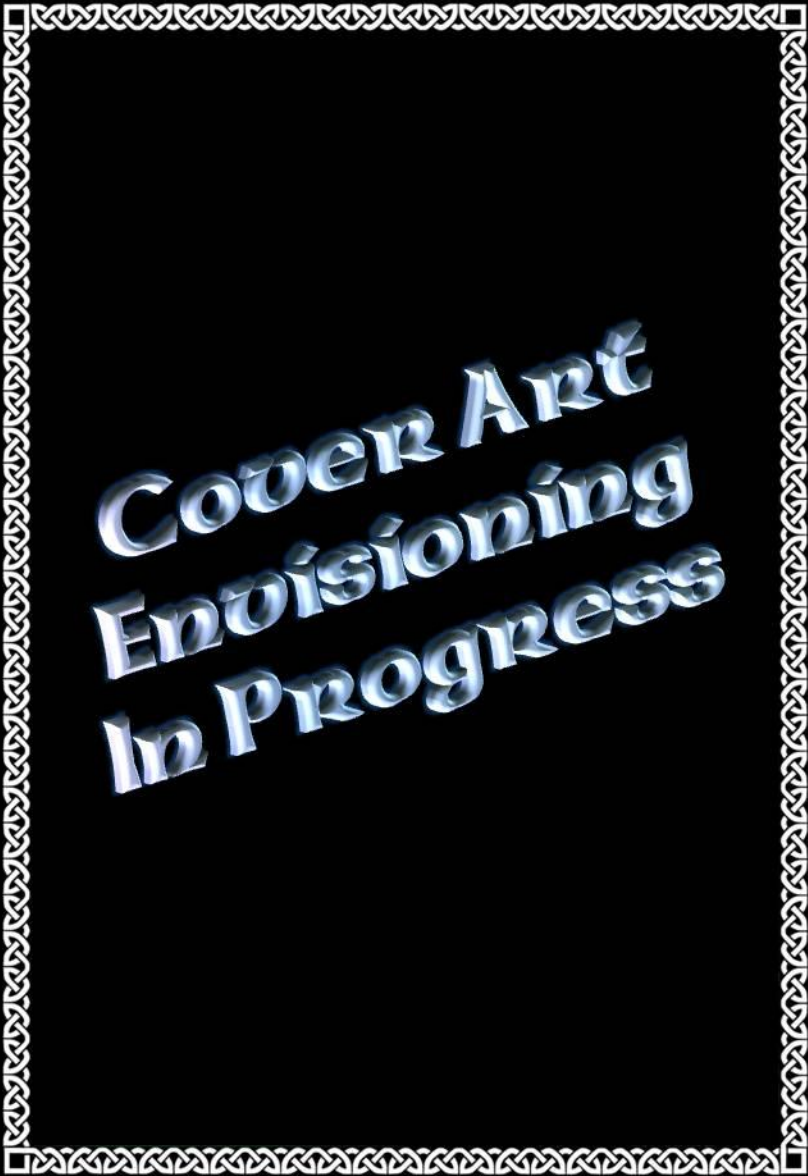


**Morrigan's Brood:
Dark Alliance**



**Cover Art
Envisioning
In Progress**

**Heather Poinsett Dunbar
& Christopher Dunbar**

**The following excerpts
are from:**

**Morrigan's Brood:
Dark Alliance**

by

Heather Poinsett Dunbar

and

Christopher Dunbar



**Book three of the
Morrigan's Brood series**

Please note that this preliminary free read has been edited but not proofread, so there may still be punctuation, spelling, and grammatical errors. However, prior to printing, our proofreader will give a thorough read-through of the text.

Excerpts from pages 11-16

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Prologue

Rome, 801 C.E.

The warm rains pelted his body as mists danced over the moonlit woods. The muggy scents and heat grew as Mandubratius moved closer to his next meal. The rain dripped from the cowl of his cloak, joining the small drops that muddled the sylvan paths. Green warred with the nighttime skies. Clouds shifted, separating the stars and moon from the landscape. A chill breeze swept through the leaves. The foliage started moving together, creating a beautiful sound that seemed to spread across the forested glen from one tree to its surrounding neighbors.

He sensed his prey shift its movements, darting around branches as if teasing him. A strange scent of honeyed sweetness greeted his nose, and with a start, Mandubratius realized that Rome had disappeared over the horizon and that he could be in the wild lands of Briton or Eire.

His senses reeled as he noticed movement towards him.

A soft tap on his shoulder sent a shiver through his frame. Mandubratius turned around and scrutinized a pair of glowing, green eyes. The Deargh Du studied him from a distance. Mandubratius tried to discern its features, but darkness shrouded all but its eyes.

Damn their tricks.

The Deargh Du stared at him, as if trying to ascertain his motives. Mandubratius did not move. He considered reaching for his sword, but he could see no malice in those strange and radiant eyes.

Before Mandubratius could debate his choice, he extended his right arm and opened hand to the other blood-drinker. This could be his last movement. A slender yet strong hand clasped his. He exhaled, relieved that no sharp blade greeted his limbs.

A scream shattered his thoughts, causing him to jump, as he released the Deargh Du's hand. Mandubratius landed and then spun to face the Deargh Du, only to observe the other blood-drinker fall to its knees as it covered its ears. The Deargh Du uttered a soft cry, as if pain overwhelmed it. An unnamed dread curdled Mandubratius' confidence. He tried to spot the source of the scream from his crouch, but the growing horror of nameless childhood fears began to overwhelm him.

The featureless Deargh Du grew silent. It stared at something over Mandubratius' right shoulder, revealing an apparent confusion and growing fear. Mandubratius turned his head, staring into the darkness. He could discern nothing at first.

Then the dull remembrances of his childhood horrors became crystal clear, as the monstrous shadows roared. Fearing for his life, Mandubratius drew his blade. A nondescript black form took shape before moving forth from the darkness. Soon its features coalesced, revealing a familiar face that he wished to forget.

"Your strength fails you now, Awvarwy," the beast taunted him, calling Mandubratius by his true name. It knocked the sword from his shuddering hands. He heard an unseen woman begin screaming, as the monster turned away from him, and loped to an altar in the distance. The terrified shrieking grew louder as the beast landed on a mortal woman. The beast howled with glee and pleasure as it began to tear the mortal to shreds on the altar. The woman cried in agony and fear. Her heartbeat became a furious drumbeat. Mandubratius considered running away into the looming forest, as he had in every nightmare as a mortal child, but he resisted the urge to flee.

One glance back at the Deargh Du revealed that it still remained immobile. How could the other blood-drinker continue staring blankly into nothing?

Mandubratius inhaled to calm his nerves. He felt a strange compulsion to study the monster and its victim, so he turned his head to face them. As always, the two beings faded into a shrouded and mist-filled darkness. Yet, even as the figures faded, howls of fury, pain, and pleasure seared his ears.

After a few seconds of focusing his vision, while trying his best to ignore the nightmarish screaming and growling that still echoed in the woods, Mandubratius glimpsed a third figure lurking in the darkness. A grinning and repulsive skeletal face leered at him from behind the shadows. Its eyes revealed madness and a joy of tormenting others by manipulating fears.

"Strigoi?" Mandubratius murmured. His whisper seemed louder than the moans of pain and shrieks of pleasure.

The Strigoi's orange eyes glowed as it examined him. These blood-drinkers from the East lived to draw out horror in mortals and other blood-drinkers.

The Strigoi's insane laughter nearly drowned out the dying screams of the poor victim. Mandubratius looked away from the Strigoi to see the monster and what remained of that poor woman, but as soon as his eyes returned to the monster, it looked up from its dead prey and lumbered towards him. It pulled out a bloody scythe. The Druidic tool fused with the beast's dirty hand and became a claw.

Mandubratius remained still and closed his eyes. This was just a mandrake-influenced fantasy.

Then a shrill banshee scream made him cover his face in fright, as his deep-rooted fears from the battlefield in Eire resurfaced. Pain tore at his very being, and Mandubratius felt himself begin to scream in terror.



"Shhhh. You were screaming, my love." Soft and gentle hands caressed his shoulders. "What happened?"

Mandubratius stared at Amata. The mandrake started to fade away like fraying fuzz from silk in his brain.

"I was hunting a mortal," he began, retelling the dream as he watched her pull away to write down notes. "A Deargh Du joined me, and then I experienced an old nightmare from my mortal childhood. It melded with a newer fear," he admitted. Amata stopped writing and ran her fingers through his hair.

"That fear is not here. We are safe in the Temple with our patrons." Amata leaned in and kissed his brow.

Mandubratius closed his mouth, wanting to give no more away. These fears once threatened his leadership in the Lamia.

He stared at Amata. "No more mandrake, ever," he said.

"But it gives us insight," she answered.

"It gives you insight, and it only gives me fear and harm," Mandubratius whispered, before sitting up.

"However, it may give us clues to what has befallen so many of our number," Amata said. Her hand caressed his bearded cheek, and she turned him to face her. "You are not the only one who has experienced this fear. However, you have fortitude, Mandubratius. You had the strength and will to overcome your concerns and terror after our time in Hibernia." She kissed him again, this time on the lips, and released him. She then pulled away, pushing her long dark hair behind her ears.

Objects in the shrine of the temple grew clear and focused. He could see the statues of Mars and Venus staring at him, Mars' eyes, bold and demanding, and Venus' coy and playful. The smell of incense now seemed too strong. The constant smoke and scent seemed to stifle him. One could scarcely draw a clean breath within the temple. It would always be home, but it felt suffocating at present.

Mandubratius sensed a desire to run outside of the temple and into the warm and welcoming night. He also experienced an odd and ever-increasing longing to sail to his ancient home in Trinovantum. Yet, the prevalent forests of his mortal residence disappeared with each invasion. First Rome arrived and cleared the forests. Then, the swell of Saxons,

Angles, and whatever else those barbarians called themselves took over the place.

His descendants had moved to the marshes in the west. It seemed such a shame. Then again, the true Britons remained in their new home, and the Saxons became the rulers of the various kingdoms throughout the former Briton.

The presence of a nearing Lamia kept him seated in place, on the gilded cushion next to the luminous Amata.

He heard the door open. Amata called to the visitor.

A messenger stared at them. "Dominus and Domina, the holdings in the North and East are overrun! Lamia have been lost! Our legions are decimated."

"What do you mean?" he asked the messenger, trying to regain his senses. Damn that incense. Perhaps it was time to make the underlings clean everything out and open the doors one night. Then again, the city itself stank of dung during the late winter and burgeoning spring.

He wondered what would smell worse, dung or incessant incense?

Mandubratius returned his attention to the messenger.

"They were attacked, Dominus. A few survived, but they suffer from a lingering madness. Each night brings some improvement, yet they are still not themselves."

Mandubratius looked over to Amata. Her blue eyes settled on his.

"Strigoi," he whispered.

"Messenger, go wait for further orders outside," Amata directed the other Lamia. After the door closed, she turned herself to face him. Her long, graceful arms rested against her knees.

"Did you see one in your visions?" she asked. Amata's voice grew querulous. He could see growing fear in her eyes.

"Yes," he whispered, grasping her arm.

"What about this Dearth Du?" she asked, stroking his brow with cool fingers. She prompted him to rest his head in her lap. His worries kept his mouth shut on matters regarding her pleasure. He looked up at Amata and remembered her question.

"I think it was him, Marcus, I mean. At least that is my suspicion. Against this threat, it seems we need the Dearth Du as allies," he whispered, "or we will face something... I am not sure if it is annihilation or an opportunity. It may give us a chance to rejoin our brothers in Constantinople, but I cannot see that future clearly. After all, we have lost so many Lamia, we have to move past old quarrels and

commence our strategies. It is time for our friends to do what needs to be done, Amata. I will think more clearly when this dream fades into oblivion." He met her clear, blue eyes, feeling a calmness radiate from her being. Gods, he loved feeling her soft hands caress his hair.

Amata smiled at him with supreme gentleness, looking much like a radiant Venus. "After all we have done to each other, dear brother, do you think the Deargh Du and their friends would accept us as allies? Do you not remember what happened in those times after we returned? Of all we have been through in the last few decades?"

Mandubratius shuddered. "Do we have a choice, or do they for that matter?" he whispered, leaning into her shoulder, seeking comfort. "I am almost certain that the Deargh Du will see it as their divine duty to Morrigan. The Strigoi would disrupt their precious balance, after all. Now it is time to entertain the idea of visiting someone who will not welcome us with open arms. Rather, you. Marcus would receive you with much courtesy, I feel. Do watch out for her, though. Maél Muire may not be as welcoming to you or to Patroclus."

"Patroclus?" Amata asked. "He was with our northern legion. He may not be... alive," she whispered.

"Patroclus wouldn't die on us. Besides, the Legate and Marcus respect one another, or so I believe." Mandubratius closed his eyes for a moment. "Patroclus is devoted to you and me. He believes in the solemnity and dignity that we give to the Lamia, Amata. He will protect you from the Deargh Du and not fall to the glamour of that beautiful Maél Muire." He opened his eyes and studied Amata's entrancing eyes. "Part of me would love to see Maél Muire again so that I can continue my games with her, but I must have the upper hand at our next meeting."

Amata chuckled. "I know very well you look forward to a game of cat and mouse with her, sweetheart, but I wonder which of you will be the cat."

"That will be what makes the game fun," Mandubratius purred. "Yet, it is not a game worth risking you in. That is why Patroclus will join you. He is honorable and not into games and mind-bending, as are most Lamia."

"You still think Patroclus will keep me safe?" Amata's blue eyes reflected the gold of the shrine. The fortunes of the Lamia returned now, thanks to Holy Mother Church.

Mandubratius closed his eyes. "I do not always care for Patroclus, but he will protect you, Amata. You are my co-consul. We have

weathered the storms of the past together. I need you at my side to meet the Strigoi.”



Published Works and Works in Progress

Title	Synopsis	Release
Morrigan's Brood Book 1	Eire is invaded by a race of blood-drinkers seeking an artifact they believe will restore them to power. Yet the Dearth Du, the protectors of Eire, are not prepared to defend the island. Only with the help of a Roman general from an earlier time can they hope to rise up against the invaders.	Dec. 2009
Morrigan's Brood: Crone of War Book 2	The Lamia expeditionary force has gained a foothold in Eire and has formed an alliance with a powerful Irish chieftain and his malevolent mother. To reinforce them, a massive Lamia army, which is departing Rome, will soon give them enough power to conquer Eire and find their lost treasure. Will the Dearth Du and their newfound friends be able to protect Eire from the invaders, or will the Dearth Du's suspicion of other blood-drinkers allow their enemies to be victorious?	July 2010
Morrigan's Brood: Madness Short-Story	Following the events of 564 CE, madness strikes one of the Lamia's most important personages. Can the Lamia march on, or will madness cast them into civil war?	April, 2011
Morrigan's Brood: Reckoning Short-Story	Following the events of 564 CE, the Dearth Du must come to grips with change or see old strife resurface, which could tear the Dearth Du apart.	May, 2011
Morrigan's Brood: Dark Alliance Book 3	A new menace threatens the Balance within the Holy Roman Empire as vicious murders of both mortals and blood-drinkers spread throughout the empire like wildfire. Can a hastily formed alliance between archenemies thwart this new menace, or will festering hatred bring about the empire's doom?	July 2011
Morrigan's Brood: Curse of Venus Book 4	The Strigoi, the Cursed of Venus, have spread through the Holy Roman Empire and parts beyond like a plague. In response, Pope Leo III takes advantage of the scourge to settle an old score with the man he placed on the throne: Charlemagne. Will their bitter rivalry send the Empire further into chaos and destruction, or will their Dearth Du "angels" save them from themselves and from Venus' Cursed?	TBD 2011
Morrigan's Brood: Shards of Light Book 5	Many sets of eyes peer through the mist, watching events unfold as the dark alliance seeks out an ancient device that they hope will uncorrupt the menace that has nearly brought the Holy Roman Empire to its knees. However, not everyone beyond the mist is content merely to watch.	TBD 2012

Other Morrigan's Brood Series titles include Morrigan's Brood: Odin's Chosen (Book 6, in progress), an as yet un-named Book 7, and Morrigan's Brood: Dynasties of Night (Book 8, in progress).

Other works include It's in the Cards (a novella, in queue for publication) and A Year and a Day (novel, on hold).

About the Authors

Heather Poinsett Dunbar

Born in Houston, Texas, Heather began writing her first book at age eight. While her grammatical structure left much to be desired, she continued to hone her writing and storytelling skills. During a college internship in London, England, her curiosity about ancient cultures and mythology intensified. She backpacked through Europe, fell in love with Scotland, cried at the retelling of part of Ulster cycle, garnered ghost stories from the Beefeaters at the Tower, wandered the Roman ruins in Bath, and danced around the stones in Avebury.

After spending all her spare time studying these new interests in many libraries and on the road, she began working on her masters in Library and Information Science at the University of North Texas. She now resides in the Houston area with her husband and three cats. She loves exploring the local culture as well as the many Celtic festivals and events in Texas. She works in the Houston Public Library system and her favorite authors include Morgan Llewellyn, Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett, Evelyn Vaughn, Alison Weir, and Randy Lee Eickhoff.

Christopher Dunbar

Chris Dunbar was born in Greenport, Long Island, New York and then moved to Texas as soon as he could, at least that is the story he tells to native Texans, such as his wife. Chris keeps searching for ways to leave Houston, like moving to Auburn Alabama, Dallas, and even San Antonio, but Houston just keeps reeling him back. Chris' day job is performing Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery, but his night job is coming up with creative ways to wound and maim the characters he and his wife Heather created. For fun, Chris enjoys the occasional novel and video game, but he also likes to delve into his Scottish ancestry and tool leather. When he can find the time, Chris pretends to play the Bodhran and the didgeridoo, much to the chagrin of his cats Lucius, Ophelia, and Clyde, not to mention his wife Heather.