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Opening extract from

Keeper of the Realms: Crow's Revenge

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Charlie Keeper is stuck in the realm of Bellania - a place of myth, magic and evil lords with very bad attitudes . . .



Crow's Revenge

With a start Charlie awoke from a terrible dream. Her brow was slick with sweat and her stomach churned from the memory of it. Even now faint flashes of her grandmother trapped at home with Mr Crow, Bane and a pack of Shades fizzled across her sleep-befuddled mind.

A shadow moved beneath the door.

'Jensen, is that you? Salixia?' Then she realized that she could still hear the hiss and spine-chilling scream of the Shades from her dream. She pinched herself to make sure she wasn't still asleep. 'Ow!'

She rubbed furiously at the blotchy mark on her skin. *Well, if it hurts*, thought Charlie with a puzzled frown, *then I can't be dreaming*. But if she could hear Shades while she was awake, then that meant . . .

The door began to rattle and bang. Shadowy black tendrils eased under the door as it started to buckle and bend, losing its shape. Finally it exploded from its hinges as fierce guttural cries filled the room. With shark-like grace, the Shades streamed into Charlie's bedroom. Howling and hissing, they swept across the floor and poured on to her bed, eager for blood.

She wasn't there.

Screaming their fury and frustration, they scrambled around the room, searching for

any sign of her. They sniffed and scratched at the carpets, tore at the panelled walls and overturned wardrobes, tables, chairs and closets.

It was the flutter of curtains in the breeze that gave away the girl's escape route. Snarling, they scampered out on to the balcony, screaming in triumph when they saw their prey.

Charlie took one look at the shadowy, hungry mass that streamed towards her and, swallowing her fear, jumped. Arms outstretched, she barely reached the woodwork of the neighbouring balcony. Her fingers scrabbled for purchase and her hips slammed heavily against the railing. She gasped in relief as she secured a handhold. Ignoring the pain and the tears that leaked from her eyes, she pulled herself up and over to drop breathlessly on the other side. She then scrambled to her feet, her eyes wide in sheer horror

when she saw the Shades scuttling across the wall in a lizard-like fashion.

Quickly she tried the door that led into the neighbouring tower but it was bolted from the inside. Spinning round, she hurriedly took stock of her options.

There weren't many.

'Blast, blast, blast, BLAST!' she spat.

The fetid, cold, corpse-like breath of a Shade on her shoulders told her that she had run out of time. Gulping in a huge lungful of cold night air, she took aim, bent her legs and jumped.

'Oof!'

The smooth wooden plumbing that ran down the side of the tower knocked the wind out of her, but she held tight and began to slide down the drain like a fireman on a pole. Faster and faster she descended, the windows of the tower blurring past. As she got to the bottom she closed her eyes tight and, sucking up all her courage,

she kicked off and leaped away from the building.

'Ouch!'

Dusting herself off, she scrambled to her feet. In her opinion, her rough landing on to the bridge should have been a lot more graceful. She'd be sure to talk to Kelko about her K'Changa training. Maybe it had something in it that would help with falling and hopefully include some advice to prevent her from landing on her bottom.

The screech and shrieks of the pursuing Shades soon had her focused and running down the bridge.

'Help! Help me!' she hollered as loud as she could. 'Help!'

But no one appeared to hear and Charlie soon shut up. *Screaming seems to work well for people in the movies*, she thought as she raced along the roads of Sylvaris, *but not so well in real life*. Putting her head down, she concentrated on pushing her legs as fast as

she could. It seemed a wiser option than just screaming like a little girl.

Unsure where to go, she headed towards the tower of the Jade Circle. Surely there would be someone there who could help. She'd even put up with the obnoxious Delightful Brothers if it meant she was safe.

Glancing back, she caught sight of the Shades leaping from Jensen's tower and on to the bridge. They quickly gave chase and, to Charlie's horror, soon began to narrow the distance between them and her.

She really began to panic. Looking from side to side, she hunted for any means of escape.

Any. Means. Of. Escape.

Running close to the bridge's edge, she looked over the side. Nothing. Veering over to the other side, she again peered over. There! Another bridge, graceful and sleek in the pale moonlight and not too far away. Could she make the jump?

She'd have to.

Backing up a couple of paces, she dug her nails deep into her palm, then sprinted as hard as she could and leaped . . .





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