

# BLADE: TRINITY

A novel by  
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Based on the motion picture  
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# ONE

It had been a quiet night in the meatpacking district until the building exploded.

Seagulls shrieked overhead as the massive explosion ripped through the grimy industrial building, white fire shooting out of its windows and rolling upwards towards the sky. The earth itself seemed to tremble as the shockwave surged outwards like a fiery tsunami, blowing banks of tempered windows out in a shower of shining glass. Oily black smoke belched out in its wake as the ancient brick walls of the building split and crumbled in the intense heat, raining debris down onto the sidewalk below.

Moments later, a second explosion shook the building. A screaming, burning man shot up into the night sky, thrown out of a window by the force of the explosion, trailing fire like a human comet. Below him, the factory door flew open and rebounded off its hinges, revealing a raging inferno within. The cold

night air was filled with the sounds of yelling and running as more men raced out, most of them on fire.

Pandemonium reigned.

Then the roiling flames parted for the briefest of moments and a powerful-looking black man strode calmly out of the blaze, seemingly unaffected by the intense heat around him. He was tall and heavily muscled, and his impressive silhouette bristled with an arsenal of high-tech weaponry. Leaping flames reflected across his designer wraparound sunshades as he walked away from the conflagration, his footsteps ringing out above the sounds of the fire like the drumming of the damned.

The man's name was Blade, and he was just beginning to enjoy himself.

At the sight of him, the majority of the burning factory's escapees fled even faster into the smoke-filled night. But Blade wasn't interested in them. His sights were currently set on a far greater prize—a small group of figures that were running in the opposite direction to the rest.

For these ones were vampires.

Blade smiled wickedly and drew his gun. There were always a number of rules governing the chase, he knew. Number one was obvious: don't get caught.

The vampire gang fleeing across the parking lot ahead of him seemed very keen to avoid that fate. Their boots skidded on the wet asphalt as they hurtled across the lot, tripping and tumbling over each other in their efforts to get away from Blade. There were three of them, each one more ugly than the next, and they snapped and snarled at one another as they ran in a desperate bid not to be the one at the

back. Had they stopped to think, they might have come up with a better plan, or indeed, any plan at all.

Because after all, if you run, there is always the chance you'll get caught.

Reaching the edge of the parking lot, the trio of vampires jumped a chain-link fence and sprinted towards their double-parked vehicles, two modified street-racing cars and a pair of customized motorbikes. Gedge, the youngest of the trio, leaped into the Eagle Talon car as it started to pull out without him, already commandeered by two fleeter-footed vampires. The other car, an old-style Mustang, did a high-speed three-point turn and zoomed towards the exit to the parking lot. It revved its engine in a mocking salute as it passed the Eagle.

*Time to ride.*

Gedge slammed the door closed behind him and thumped the lock down, his lips pulled back from his sharpened fangs in fear. He glanced nervously through the cracked windshield as Stone and Campbell, his two workmates, climbed atop their stretched and lowered hardtail chopper motorbikes. They gunned their engines, preparing to flee.

Across the parking lot, Blade's head snapped around at the noise. He started to stride towards them, picking up speed as he went. His hand blurred and suddenly there was an automatic Mach pistol in it, the barrel of which had been fitted with a silencer. He fired the gun without breaking pace, spitting a volley of silver death at the retreating vampires. The streets rang with the aftershocks of the shots, the individual echoes blurring together to create one long explosion.

The driver of the Mustang stamped on the brakes as bullets tore through the car's bodywork, pinging and

plinking across the trunk. Cursing, he slammed the Mustang into reverse and viciously floored the accelerator, aiming to grind Blade into the asphalt. Blowing up his buddies was one thing. Shooting the hell out of his beloved car was another.

The Daywalker was gonna pay for this.

The racer screamed backwards towards Blade, smoke billowing from its oversized tires as the car swerved towards him, burning rubber.

Before Blade's mind had consciously registered the situation, his body was already airborne. Leaping upwards from a standing start, he athletically arced his body over the hood of the speeding car as it flashed by beneath him, drawing his second pistol as he did so. Hanging upside down in midair, Blade swiftly fired off two sweeping rounds of bullets, one through the Mustang's roof, one through its engine block.

Inside the car, the two vampires screamed as Blade's bullets riddled their bodies. Ordinary bullets wouldn't kill them, but these were something special: hand-cast silver shells filled with a garlic-oil compound. To a vampire, this was a deadly combination. All vampires were severely allergic to allicin, the chemical that gave garlic its pungent taste and smell, and catastrophically allergic to silver. Taken internally, this particular combination caused a chain reaction in a vampire's body that would take a human several dozen pints of ingested gasoline and a flamethrower to achieve.

White-hot flames burst out of the vampires' bulletwounds and raced up their torsos, igniting their clothing with a loud *whumph*. Their screams were

swallowed up in an impressive fireball as the Mustang exploded, flipping over as its fuel tank ignited and blew the chassis apart. Large chunks of debris rained down all over the parking lot, littering the asphalt with flaming junk.

Blade landed gracefully a few paces away from the blazing wreckage.

Rule two of the chase? Get them before they get you.

As rules went, it was a good one.

Blade spun on the spot, aiming and firing in one smooth movement as the Eagle Talon and the two motorbikes peeled out of the parking lot behind him, their tires laying smoking track marks as they roared out onto the street beyond.

Then they were gone, swallowed up by the night.

Blade kept firing until he was out of bullets, the adrenaline pumping through his system keeping his finger tight on the trigger. A human would've died several times over by now, but then Blade wasn't human.

At least, not entirely.

As the last of his spent shells clattered to the ground, Blade sensed a presence behind him. He froze, his ears ringing from the din of the gunfire.

"No more bullets, Blade?"

Blade slowly turned to see four tall, shadowy figures move forwards to form a semicircle around him. They were vampires, and they were pissed.

"Guess it's time for you to fall down and go boom." The vampire who spoke was called Ellingson. He ran this show, and he had heard a lot about Blade. Certainly enough to want to kill him. And especially now

the sonofabitch had set a torch to his business, single-handedly slaughtering two-thirds of his staff.

Ellingson's eyes flashed like quicksilver and one of his hands trembled in pain as his singed flesh slowly cracked in the cold of the night. He glanced around as his gang of heavies closed in on Blade and smiled grimly. It was time for this freak to die.

Blade took in the speaker's smoking clothes and general air of inexperience, and relaxed. Holstering his pistols, he idly turned his head from side to side, popping the taut muscles in his neck. Then he brushed a hand over the wicked-looking chain knife strapped to his leather-clad thigh, and allowed himself the merest hint of a smile.

Taking this as an insult, Ellingson snarled and rushed at Blade, fangs bared.

Blade whipped out his knife and clicked down one of the buttons built into its base. *Zzz-zing!* The knife-blade ejected from the hilt and shot out at high speed towards the charging vampire, six feet of razor-edged chain snaking out behind it. The solid silver blade sunk into Ellingson's chest with a sound like a mallet going through fresh butter. The vampire gasped as a mini-geyser of fire belched out of the impact site. A wave of superheated flames quickly spread outward and upwards, ripping through his body like wildfire, engulfing him in seconds.

With a shriek, Ellingson exploded. The flesh flew off his bones in a grisly shower of carbonized matter, leaving behind a burning skeleton that flailed around angrily for a few moments before disarticulating and dropping to the ground.

Before the charred remains had finished disintegrating, Blade hit the second button on his knife. The weapon rapidly retracted as the spring-loaded chain whirred back into the hilt. Then Blade spun around and triggered the first button again.

Behind him, one of Ellingson's vampire flunkies tried to duck as the knife sped towards him, but he wasn't quite quick enough. The sharpened chain wrapped itself around his throat like a whip and tightened, snapping taut. Blade gave the chain a casual tug, and the vampire's head detached as cleanly as if it had been removed by a surgeon. The stump glowed white hot, tendrils of fire racing downwards and setting the vampire's torso ablaze.

Without slowing, Blade kicked the twitching body over, sending bright orange sparks scattering across the parking lot. The vampire disintegrated in a cloud of fine white ash and was instantly whipped away by the wind. Then Blade triggered his knife again as the remaining two vampires advanced on him, one in front, one behind.

The knife hit the end of its chain and Blade jerked it upwards, whirling it over his head with a sound like a bullroarer. Blade swung the chain faster, eyeing up the two vampires. Then he suddenly dropped low on his haunches, whirling the chain downwards in a singing blur of silver.

The chain cut through the first vampire's legs, slicing through sinew and bone without so much as slowing. The hapless creature screamed as he tumbled down onto the asphalt, his amputated legs imploding behind him in a burst of superheated ash. He reached out imploringly towards the other

vampire, inadvertently betraying his position to Blade as he begged for help.

Before the second vampire could move, Blade whirled and thrust the silver knife backwards through the creature's abdomen, his movements fluid and unhurried. The creature didn't even have time to open his mouth to scream as the deadly white fire rushed through his body, chargrilling him from the inside out.

Blade retracted his knife with a flourish, straightened his leather duster and brushed some vampire ash off his sleeve. Third rule of the chase? Don't kid yourself that someone else will rescue you. Because usually, they won't, and then you'll look really stupid.

Not to mention dead.

Pausing only to decapitate the legless vampire with a casual swipe of his knife, Blade strode off to round up the other escapees.

Out on the main road, the surviving members of the vampire gang were several hundred yards away and accelerating fast. They cut across the traffic in a blare of horns, twisting the handle grips of their powerful motorbikes as they accelerated down an on-ramp onto the busy street below. The vampires didn't so much as glance back to see if their workmates had made it out alive. When it came to the crunch, it was every vampire for him- or herself. Only humans were stupid enough to go back and save their wounded, let alone stick together and try to fight.

Blade emerged from the car park entrance behind them, sprinting along the sidewalk in hot pursuit. Even on foot he moved at an incredible speed, faster

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than any human was able to run. He cut across a derelict gas station forecourt before charging out onto the concrete overpass, thundering along like a bull on steroids.

Through the darkened glass of his sunshades, Blade saw the vampires' bikes disappear out of sight as they left the main freeway. He gave a small grunt of annoyance, then touched a hand to the side of his head, where a tiny transparent receiver lay tucked behind his ear. He clicked it to transmit mode. "Whistler! I'm on the Stonebridge Overpass at Clemons."

The receiver cracked in response as the tinny voice of Whistler came over the earpiece. "Got it! Heading eastbound. I'm just beneath you..."

Blade leapt off the sidewalk and ran diagonally across the road. A passing car honked its horn and slewed wildly as Blade jumped onto the trunk, using the car as a moving springboard to launch himself up onto the safety rail of the overpass.

Crouching precariously on the narrow rail, Blade coolly scanned the traffic, apparently not bothered by the dizzying drop into three lanes of whizzing cars that lay before him. His eyes lit up as he saw a big-rig cab approaching, hauling a semi trailer behind it.

The cab thundered beneath the bridge, sounding its air-horn three times in rapid succession. Blade's mini-receiver crackled again. "Go!"

Without pause, Blade launched himself off the overpass.

Blade relaxed completely as he dropped, his long, leather coat streaming out behind him like great black wings. Time itself seemed to pause and he

spread his arms slightly to steady his descent through the whistling wind.

Then the top of the moving trailer came sailing up to meet him in a rush of sound and color, and Blade expertly flipped his body over in the air, forcing himself to relax the muscles in his legs to avoid dislocating his knees on impact. He landed hard atop the semi, throwing out his arms to stabilize himself.

But despite his many years of training, Blade had misjudged the jump by a fraction of a second. He found himself tumbling forwards as the truck's momentum grabbed onto him like a giant hand, dragging him off his feet and sending him rolling over the edge of the rig.

Sheer instinct caused one of Blade's hands to snap upwards and snag one of the steel safety cables strung around the outside of the trailer roof. He jerked to a halt, hanging one-handed off the edge of the trailer. He dangled from the cable, breathing hard, and glanced fitfully down at the road flashing by beneath him. That could've been messy, he thought. Not for the first time that day, Blade was glad of the protection offered by his thick-cut leather gloves. The safety cable was strong, but it was also thin, and for the moment it was taking his entire bodyweight plus three dozen pounds of weaponry.

For one heart-hammering moment, Blade felt himself slipping as the strain of holding onto the thin wire made his hand cramp. He lunged upwards just in time and seized hold of the cable with his other hand, spreading his weight. Then he began swinging his body back and forth like a pendulum, ignoring the alarmed stares of passing motorists as he built up

momentum. After the third swing, he tensed his heavily muscled arm and swung himself around the edge of the rig, right into the open back of the trailer.

Then he let go, vanishing inside.

A few seconds later there was a flash of flame in the darkness. The blast of an exhaust sounded from within its shadowy depths, followed a moment later by the roaring thunderclap of a high-performance engine turning over.

A midnight-black 1969 Dodge Charger rocketed out of the back of the trailer, sailing straight over the roof of a car full of aging boy racers who had been tailgating the semi for the last few miles. The Charger landed hard in a spray of sparks, bounced once, and then accelerated, heading into three lanes of oncoming traffic at high speed. A cacophony of horns instantly blared out as the oncoming cars slewed and spun away, their drivers screaming abuse and making obscene gestures through their windows.

Inside the air-conditioned cool of the Charger, Blade calmly ramped down through the gears and hit the brakes, sending the battle-scarred car into a spin. He held on tightly as the car was buffeted around in a series of bone-jarring cracks and thumps, rebounding off cars in the surrounding lanes as they sped past him.

Now facing in the right direction, Blade touched the brake. Ignoring the frantic horn-blasts all around him, he glanced into the rear-view mirror to check his hair, and then put the pedal to the metal once more.

He had vampires to catch.

The Charger accelerated at breakneck speed, its dashboard-mounted tachometer redlining as Blade

swiftly pulled alongside the big-rig. Up in the cab, a gray-bearded man with a weather-beaten face grinned down at him and tooted the horn, giving Blade a cheery little salute as he passed by.

Behind his sunshades, Blade's eyes creased briefly in amusement. He may be smiling now, but Whistler was going to kill him when he got a proper look at what he had just done to his car.

Shrugging, Blade reached between the seats. After only the briefest of pauses he activated the newly installed nitrous-oxide fuel-injection system.

Blade's trusty Charger had put up with a lot from him over the years, but even he had to admit that he was pushing his luck with this new gadget. Installing it had meant ripping out the ancient car's guts and replacing them with a fuel-delivery system that would make NASA green with envy, and easily get him banned from driving on every continent on Earth.

That was, if they could catch him.

The Charger shot forward with an ear-splitting whine as the nitrous injection system kicked in, boosting the car's engine by an extra three hundred horsepower. Flames belched from the exhaust pipe, quickly leaving Whistler and the enraged auto owners far behind him. In less than thirty seconds, Blade caught up with the vampire escapees and their modified motorbikes.

Stone and Campbell took one look at Blade's black Charger bearing down on them like an angel of death and drew their TEC-9 pistols. They opened fire, causing surrounding traffic to veer away in panic. Their bullets raked and sparked across the Charger,

chewing up the bodywork and gouging long streaks in the paintwork. But the bulletproof windshield held, as did the Kevlar body panels protecting the fuel tank and engine.

Blade breathed a secret sigh of relief. Whistler had done yet another grand job.

He gave his car another jolt of nitrous fuel, homing in on the kill.

The Charger surged forward at breakneck speed, swiftly overtaking Stone and Campbell. The vampires immediately fell back, veering onto opposite sides of the lane in an attempt to split the target they presented. Their bikes growled in protest at the high-speed maneuver, forcing them to use every ounce of their superhuman strength and reflexes to keep the heavy bikes from flipping over and spinning off the road.

Blade had perhaps two seconds to decide on a course of action before the bikes were too far apart to catch. Timing was everything, especially where catching vampires was concerned. So he checked their position in the rearview mirror, and then slammed his booted foot onto the turbo-brakes.

The Charger bucked and skidded like a wild bronco as its speed dropped from a hundred miles per hour to less than fifty in a heartbeat. Blade casually crossed his arms over the padded steering wheel, narrowly avoiding smashing his face on the wheel as the momentum kicked his head forwards. Somehow, he kept in lane. A second later, the Charger rocked with the bone-shattering impact of two heavy-duty motorbikes rear-ending it. Glass and metal sprayed across the road as the riders were unceremoniously ejected

over the handlebars of their bikes like vampire crash-test dummies.

The appropriately named Stone hurtled through the air and smashed through Blade's back windshield, pulling the window frame with him as he flew through the car like an unguided rocket, plunging headfirst into the front seat well. Campbell didn't fare much better, bouncing over Blade's roof and sliding down his front windshield in a rain of blood and glass. As he slid across the Charger's hood, he made a desperate grab for one of the windshield wipers, jerking himself to a spread-eagled halt across the front of the car.

Inside the Charger, Blade tightened his grip on the wheel and heaved a small, put-upon sigh. This was turning out to be a bitch of a day. Not only had he trashed his newly refitted auto in less than a minute, but now he had two new problems. One of them was currently wedged upside down in the front seat, howling for vengeance, and the other was stuck to his hood like a giant road kill, obscuring his vision and twisting one of his wipers into a completely unusable shape.

To make life even jollier, now he'd got windshield glass in his lap.

Trust him to wear his new leather pants today, of all days.

Blade instinctively ducked as one of Stone's steel-booted feet whistled over his head, then growled as a shard of glass dug painfully into his inner thigh. He glared at Stone as the vampire struggled to right himself, kicking and clawing in his frantic efforts to get free. This was no good. Blade locked one hand on the

wheel, holding the speeding car steady as he reached quickly between the seats behind him. His fingers closed on the cold metal barrel of his twelve-gauge shotgun and he flipped the muzzle up towards the vampire, not really bothering to aim as he pulled the trigger.

The shot was deafening in the confined space, but it did the job. Stone shrieked and jerked in the seat as the silver-coated shotgun pellets penetrated his ribcage. His body ignited in a flash of blue and white fire and began to combust violently inside the car, the flames scorching the glass of the side window.

*Shit.* Blade thumped his hand on the wheel. *Nice one.*

Before Stone's body could turn into a cloud of interior-ruining ash, Blade hit the door auto-release button on the dash. The passenger door swung open, spilling the dying vampire out onto the road, right into the path of an oncoming bus. The bus jolted once, and Stone's remains were instantly pulverized, ground to dust beneath its wheels.

Back in the Charger, Blade slammed the door shut. One down, one to go.

Blade turned his gaze back to Campbell, who had managed to pull himself up high enough to hook a hand under the air ducts at the top of the hood. The vampire began hammering away at the reinforced windshield with his other fist, trying to get into the car. Despite its toughness, the windshield was slowly developing spider-web cracks under the onslaught.

Speeding up, Blade swerved the car from side to side, trying to shake the crazed creature off, but it was no good. The vampire was holding onto the car

as though superglued in place, like an ugly, bloody hood ornament.

There was a sudden burst of glass inside the car and a hole appeared in the windshield. Rearing backwards, Campbell punched his clawed hand further through and groped blindly for the steering wheel, smearing the inside of the glass with dark blood. Without missing a beat, Blade swung his shotgun up and shoved it back through the cracked glass, ramming the end into Campbell's snarling mouth.

Muttering an oath to the god of road safety, Blade pulled the trigger.

There was a loud *boom*, and the vampire's carbonized remains hit the windshield in a billowing black cloud, completely obscuring Blade's view.

Automatically, Blade hit the wipers. No good. The broken wiper flopped around uselessly, its servos wining as though in pain. Unable to see, Blade activated the washer jets and hopefully sprayed on some window cleaner. The vampire's remains instantly turned to a sticky black sludge, making his view even worse.

Blade swore.

Up ahead, the Eagle racer containing Gedge and his vampire buddy accelerated down the highway, weaving in and out of traffic. The driver thumped the wheel, whooping with the adrenaline rush of their getaway. Gedge sat back in his seat and fidgeted, glancing over his shoulder from time to time. He had heard enough about Blade to know that despite appearances, they weren't out of trouble yet.

In fact, they were probably driving deeper into it.

The hairs rose on the back of Gedge's neck as he saw the characteristic blunt-nosed shape of Blade's Charger edging through the traffic behind them. The car was badly damaged and covered in what looked like thick black mud, but it was accelerating fast, heading right for them.

Gedge cried out in alarm, alerting the driver, who leaned out of the Eagle's window and sighted his automatic pistol on the Charger. Aiming at Blade's cracked front windshield, he squeezed off a couple of rounds. The slugs tore into Blade's car, completely shattering the weakened front windshield, which exploded inwards in a burst of safety-glass nuggets.

Blade ducked down as the glass flew into the car around him, embedding itself into the worn leather of the seats. He straightened and reached out for the dash, hitting a blue button marked "UV." There was a whirring sound as a bank of high-powered ultraviolet spotlights folded out of the top of the Charger's roof. Swiveling in their mounts, they hummed for a moment, warming up. Then they clicked on, bathing the car ahead and its vampire driver with a lethal wash of ultraviolet light.

The Eagle's driver was caught by the full force of Blade's UV Day Lights. He screamed and threw an arm across his face in a frantic attempt to shield himself, but he was too late. His exposed skin stiffened and cracked apart like sun-dried leather, and his clothing caught light as flames belched out of the bone-deep cracks in his flesh. The fire burned furiously for a moment, then snuffed out as his entire body froze into a statue of solidified ash.

An instant later the car jolted over a pothole, jarring the vampire driver's charred carcass. It fell forwards and burst apart, showering messily across the seats. Driverless, the Eagle slewed to one side, out of control.

Gritting his teeth, Gedge scrambled over into the drivers seat and grabbed the wheel, wincing as hot vampire embers cracked and popped like bubble-wrap on the seat beneath him. The air in the car reeked of burnt cat hair and sulfur. Gedge wrinkled his nose in disgust. He grabbed at the steering wheel in panic as the Eagle rocked with a bruising side impact.

He glanced out of his side window in panic. The Daywalker was ramming his car! Was he insane? He would kill them both at this speed!

Over in the Charger, Blade adjusted his mirror, then rammed the Eagle again. The two cars ground together in a blaze of sparks, before disengaging once more. Unrelenting, Blade twisted his steering wheel a third time, giving the Eagle another bone-jarring slam, trying to force it off the road.

That did the trick. The Eagle lurched sideways as Gedge lost control of the vehicle. The steering wheel ripped itself from his hands as the car's wheels locked hard to the right, sideswiping several parked cars before running up a builder's ramp and launching itself off the top of a cement parking barrier. The ruined car flew through the night air, engine revving as its wheels spun in empty space. It came back down to earth with a thunderous crunch, smacking down hard on its roof and riding halfway up onto the busy sidewalk.

Its weight and momentum carried it along the sidewalk for several dozen yards, smashing through telegraph poles and newspaper vending machines as it went. Tourists out enjoying the night air dived for cover as the car headed on towards a sidewalk market. Tables piled high with cheap goods went flying as the Eagle skidded onwards, rolling over onto its side as it went.

Finally, its mangled front end hit an iron streetlight, bringing it to an abrupt and noisy halt. The street-lamp creaked alarmingly and crashed down across the wreck with an air of finality.

As the dust settled, the street slowly came back to life. Bystanders emerged from their hiding places and gathered around the smoking wreck, murmuring amongst themselves in shock and concern. At the bus stop, someone dialed 911. The bystanders respectfully kept their distance, fearing the worst.

Then a collective gasp went up as the Eagle's door slowly opened, now facing skyward. Gedge winced as he dragged himself from the tangled remains of the street racer, ignoring the bystanders. He was bloodied and bruised, but alive.

Using the car as support, he pulled himself to his feet and stood swaying for a moment, then reached back determinedly into the wreck. With some difficulty, he opened the upended glove compartment and pulled out a silver pistol. He clicked off the safety catch and threw a hunted glance over his shoulder, then limped away down the street. The crowd parted around him like the Red Sea.

Blade's Charger pulled up to the curb ahead of him and creaked to a halt, its engine making plinking noises

from the heat of the chase. As one, the gathered crowd's eyes turned to the tall, dark figure as he stepped out of the semi-destroyed car, shotgun in hand.

The bystanders put two and two together and started to fall back, a mother screaming as she picked up her toddler and ran for safety. Blade ignored them completely. What was about to happen would make no sense to any of them, even if they saw it happen right under their noses: he would chase and shoot the vampire, who would explode into dust and vanish, leaving no trace of his existence behind.

It was handy, that. Blade had seen it happen a thousand times, and never failed to appreciate the convenience.

Then, after he had gone and the initial shock had worn off, people would decide that they had seen a practical joke, maybe an elaborate prank set up by some trashy live TV show. Within the space of a day, they would've forgotten about it.

Blade smiled grimly to himself as he strode towards the fleeing figure of Gedge. Humans would always see what they wanted to see, and no amount of logic or plain old-fashioned common sense could persuade them otherwise, including the evidence of their own eyes. It was regrettable that he had an audience, but it was his duty to finish the job. If so much as a single vampire escaped today's carnage, he might warn the others who were next on his hit list, blowing his hard-won advantage.

Blade lifted his shotgun, revealing a new modification—a rapid-fire stake launcher welded to the underside of the barrel. It was one of Whistler's latest experiments and Blade was keen to test it. Before

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anyone in the crowd could draw breath to scream he had sighted on the battered figure of Gedge and squeezed the trigger.

A silver stake shot from the launcher in a jet of CO<sub>2</sub> gas and struck the fleeing figure in the back, knocking him sprawling onto the street. Gedge's pistol flew out of his hand, spinning off into the gutter. The bystanders screamed and began to fall back, diving for cover as Blade strode towards the prone figure lying in the dust.

In the distance, there was the sound of wailing police sirens, but Blade paid them no heed. He would be gone before they got close enough to see him.

Right now, he had a job to finish.

Gedge stared up at the dark figure of Blade looming above him, and was suddenly very still. Of all the ways Gedge had pictured himself dying over the years, this wasn't among them. He'd always wanted to go out in the heat of the battle, surrounded by beautiful vampire babes dressed in skin-hugging black PVC, all of whom would gladly devote the rest of their lives to avenging his noble death.

But at the same time, Gedge found a small amount of comfort in the fact that his death wouldn't be completely meaningless. After all, he was making the ultimate sacrifice, dying so that others might live, and so bringing the long journey of his life full circle.

It was just a shame that the guy who was about to kill him was wearing leather pants.

Blade looked down at Gedge, puzzled. The vampire was still alive. And what's more, he was laughing. Why?

Gedge flashed his fangs at Blade in a token gesture of defiance, and choked back a bout of hysterical laughter as his lungs began to fill with blood.

Blade crouched before Gedge, staring down at him in the manner of a cat watching a toad. "I staked you with silver. Why aren't you ash?"

Gedge began coughing violently, blood welling from his mouth as he struggled to speak around his ruptured insides. "Why aren't you smarter?" he hissed. He reached into his mouth and tugged at his fangs.

They came away in his hand. They were fake, prosthetic.

"Not a vampire, dumbshit... Set your sorry ass up." Gedge looked up past Blade and flashed an insane grin at something behind him. Then his eyes widened and he slumped backwards, letting out his last breath in a rattling wheeze.

A feeling of uneasiness stole over Blade. Unwillingly, he turned and peered upwards into the darkness. A large residential block lay behind him, its front crisscrossed with iron walkways. The roof was easily accessible and offered a perfect view of the whole scene.

Blade saw a dark figure perched there, female, hungry-looking.

Watching him.

As the figure felt Blade's eyes on her, she unhurriedly stepped backwards and vanished into the shadows.

A sudden blare of sirens drew Blade's attention away from the mysterious figure, away from the dead human at his feet and the fleeing crowds, to the end

of the street. The road was jammed with a solid wall of police cars advancing up the road towards him. The authorities had arrived in full force, and, for once, they were going to have some hard evidence to play with.

Blade rose to his feet like a ghost and pelted across the sidewalk to where the wreck of his Charger sat waiting. Jumping in, he gunned the engine and pulled out with a screech of tires. As the police cars closed in on him, he engaged the nitrous drive and accelerated off down the street into the darkness, desperate to get away from the mess he had made.

For the first time in his life, Blade found he hadn't a clue what to do next.

An hour later, in the high-rise comfort of the Phoenix Towers, Danica closed the door behind her and slipped a digital videotape into her slimline silver player. Sitting back onto her velvet-clad haunches, she pressed the play button on the machine.

A grainy image of Blade confronting Gedge flickered up onto the screen, filmed from a high angle. Danica's lips curved upwards into a smile as she watched the ensuing chaos unfold on screen.

*Perfect.*

She had the Daywalking freak now.

