

COLD VENGEANCE

In the snowy Montana mountains, Tenet rides beside old friends to help defeat a threat that lurks amid the icy spires. Unknown to them all is that this vicious threat has an agenda of its own—one driven by rage and revenge. Further, the threat itself is far greater than either Tenet or his companions could ever imagine.

Another in the series of action-packed, supernaturally-laced stories known as Tenet's Tales, *Cold Vengeance* is sure to please fans of *The Dresden Files*, *The Sandman Slim Series*, and *The Secret Histories*.

"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."

- Romans 12:19



February 18, 1887

Near Sun Ranch, Montana

There are not many times that I am thankful for my thick grey woolen cassock, cloak, and hood but the middle of February in Montana was one of those times. I'd spent the last thirteen hours tracking something through the scrub-filled foothills and lowlands west and north of Echo Peak and despite my thick layers, I could feel the cold creeping in like an inexorable, freezing tide. I had no idea how the two humans riding with me were able to stand it.

I guess they grow them hardy in Montana.

Israel Ammon Hutchins scanned me with his pinched, dark eyes. "What'ya thinkin' Tenet?" The rancher wasn't much one for words, but in the short time I'd known him, he'd impressed me. He was tough, but fair. Hardworking and darn near fearless. He possessed a canny sense for things that were just off from center, and he never backed down from hard work, or a hard fight. We'll just say he embodied some of the better qualities of his namesake.

I replied, condensed breath rolling out of my goat-bearded lips like fog. The west wind ripping up the ridge banished it as quickly as I made it, however. "I am thinking that it is a hard three hour ride back to your ranch, and that we'll be riding into the teeth of a snow storm with darkness at our back, my friend."

Israel laughed. "You gettin' scared, Holy Man?"

I shook my hooded head. "No, and I'm not a Holy Man." My words trailed off as we heard a low, undulating cry from further up the mountain.

"Sounds like Ol' Jo's found somethin' up there. Giddyup!" Israel urged his horse into action with only words. In the two months that I'd been in the valley, I'd never seen him put spurs or stick to an animal. It was another of his positive qualities.

I tried, unsuccessfully to coax Sham, my stalwart steed, up the steep rocky slope, but it took some doing. In general, horses do not take to me well, and Sham was only barely better than most by comparison. This, of course, gave Israel no end of amusement but there was little I could do about it. There's a reason why I walk almost everywhere I go, after all.

I finally arrived in the snow-and-stone filled rill to see Israel and our third set of eyes, Joseph Sherwood, a local doctor, veterinarian, and taxidermist examining a freshly torn carcass. As I approached, I expected a friendly chiding from Israel regarding my late arrival and lack of horsemanship, but he only took off his wide brimmed hat and rubbed his thinning auburn hair. A frown dominated his craggy features as he took in the gory scene of the mutilated body at his feet.

"What'ya reckon, Doc, a wolf?"

"Yup, it's a wolf alright. A big 'un too. Looks like it was a male." Joseph replied in his slow, twangy drawl.

"What in the world would do that, ya reckon? A cougar?" Israel asked, limbering his Colt in his holster.

Joseph nodded. "Maybbeso. I ain't ne'er heard of a cougar gettin' the better of a wolf, tho'."

I was looking at the tracks, ignoring the torn body of the canine in the quickly freezing sanguine pool. Whatever had done this had done it recently.

And then, I saw it.

"It was not a wolf, a cougar, or anything else that is from these mountains," I said, scanning the quickly darkening skies. The snow was coming in slow, in big soft waves, but soon it would be piling up and it would severely hinder our movements. We had to get out of here now.

"Whaddya mean, Tenet?" Israel asked.

"This thing is a Shunka Warakin." I said, fear taking the life from my words.

Joseph chuckled, standing with a creak of leather.

Israel slapped his hat on his hand and plopped it back on his head. "Them thing's ain't so bad. I kilt one last year and Ol 'Jo here mounted it fer me."

I nodded, the knot of fear growing tighter in my belly. "Then that would explain why you're both here and why all of the spoor we've found has led us to this spot."

Israel and Joseph looked at me, confused.

"This thing has been baiting you both. It wants revenge for killing its child. I'm not sure if we'll survive the night, gentleman."

"Whad'ya mean, Tenet?" Israel asked. He was picking up on my uneasiness, as was his horse, Bandit. The sorrel mare was whickering and throwing her head a bit. There was something on the wind. Israel went to her and tried to comfort her, pulling his rifle from his bedroll behind the saddle as he did so.

"I mean your actions last year may well have set our fates for this night. The creature that you killed and that Joseph stuffed," I pointed my goat-bearded chin towards Doctor Sherwood, "was likely a Shunka Warakin, as you claimed. But there's something you don't know about these creatures."

Joseph slipped off his small, round glasses and wiped some of the wet snow from them--it was falling faster now--before perching them again on his nose. His thick, bushy moustache was quickly filling with fat white flecks as well.

"Speak plainly, Tenet. Some of us don't kin to any of this supernatural hogwash, ya'know."

I looked down at the mangled corpse of the alpha wolf at our feet. "This was the piece of the puzzle I lacked, well, this and the fact that there are no tracks here...whatsoever."

The Doctor cocked a bushy eyebrow and scanned the ground again. Apparently, this was a detail that he'd overlooked.