

# Bourne toWrite...

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## Followers of Khan

by Nick Barrett

The Great Khan sat armoured astride a battle horse, flanked by his generals on grassy tundra in front of the City that would soon come under his sword. His horde stretched behind as far as could be ridden in half a day.

The envoy came flanked by an honour guard of three-score, one son from each of the City's noblest families, heavily armed with jewel encrusted swords, riding horses as fine as any of the Khan's horde - who could tell greatness in a horse from half a league - had ever seen.

The party stopped in front of Khan, terms were curtly delivered and the party turned back to the City in dejection. Khan's horde looked forward to plundering a City that had wealth such as these riders foolishly dared to display where it might be seized at will.

Khan gave a signal and three-score arrows flew straight through the necks of the bodyguard, who had not been promised safe conduct, the surviving envoy was politely told.

For three days and nights, promises broken, the horde rampaged through the surrendered City's streets and homes, before Khan ordered them to march on, leaving behind General Tsi Zan and his men to slaughter the many who still lived. None were to survive, by order of the Khan.

His men tiring after days of slaughter, the General, anxious to catch up with Khan before he reached the next City, forced the survivors through the desert, hoping the waterless march would kill them.

After a few more days what looked like a haze was seen advancing from behind; they know it is no dust storm, nor mirage. The General conferred with his officers: it must be dust thrown up by another horde. They resume killing with greater purpose, to leave any alive and the Great Khan's order unfulfilled is unthinkable. All the while the distant disturbance comes ever closer.

The General and his men watch it take shape....it is people, he thinks... a host, on foot, not a horde or an army, no weapons, but just people... yet not people... spectres?

A panic spreads. The general forbids his men to run, ordering slaughter of the remaining City dwellers. Now unsaddled, he is lost in a frenzy of spear thrusts, sword stabs, dagger slashes, throat cutting, skull crushing. Soon the spectral host is upon them, swarming over his army who turn on the spectres, which having shape but no form, pass through them and march inexorably on the trail of the Khan's horde.

Another sword thrust, but the intended victim does not flinch or fall. "Why did that not kill you," the General shouts.

"You cannot kill what is already dead," his victim said.

"You are not real. Get back from me spectre, or whatever you are," he yelled, jumping back, ready to strike again.

"Put down your sword. As you see, it is harder to kill a phantom than a reality," said the spectre.

"I know you, you are an Elder from the City. You say you are now dead? How did you die?"

"A phantom cannot remember its own death, but I well remember yours, an arrow in the throat from one of your own men. It seems we all follow your Khan together now."