

# Night of the Balkyrie



## The story...

*Transylvania, 1492*

Fearing an imminent Ottoman invasion, the Voivode of Transylvania decides to forge a military alliance by marrying his daughter to some powerful house. “It will do her good, anyway,” he thought, as he wrote the letters to the nobles, inviting them to a grand feast. “Mariska is far too headstrong at the best of times. Better to marry her off now while I can still control the girl at all.”

On the night of the feast, however, although the princess was obedient to her father’s wishes, inwardly she was cursing her fate. The thought of a life spent married to any of these grim, ageing warlords, all of them caring more for the prestige and wealth they would gain from the alliance than for her, was such a miserable prospect that she half considered gathering up her books, saddling her palfrey, and riding away in secret. “But to where?” she thought. “Even if I could, my father would be dishonoured, and then defeated by his enemies. I could never do that to him.” So she remained, a picture of courtly misery, until she was approached by a mysterious noblewoman, dressed all in black and flashing her an enigmatic smile.

“I know what ails thee, child,” she greeted her, “and I believe I know the way to help. If you had power in your own right, then would your father need to pair you off with any of these decorated barbarians? Come, take a turn of the castle grounds with me, and I will show you a much better alternative.”

The feast was in full swing, and the two women were gone for several minutes before their absence was noted. Urgent shouts from the guards finally drew the voivode's attention, and he rushed out into the grounds only to find the princess... dead.

She lay upon a stone bench, pale and staring, her neck pierced with a gruesome bite-mark, and an elegantly handwritten note pinned to her bloodstained dress. Distraught, the voivode took the note and read it, but it gave him very little reassurance:

*My Lord,*

*I cannot count the friends, sisters, brothers, lovers, and children whom I have lost to the savagery of you and your priests. Since you invited the Holy Inquisition into this country, they have massacred my people, although we were keeping peacefully enough to ourselves. No more. I return your daughter to you, and perhaps when you see that she is no soulless vermin, you might think twice before exterminating any more of my kin. Or, you could be true to your convictions and decapitate her before she is able to revive, although I somehow doubt you will have the stomach for it.*

*My compliments, by the way: she put up quite a fight for a spoiled brat of mortal nobility. I don't suppose you'll have much luck marrying her off now, but you could always just loose her on the Turks as she is. I wouldn't envy them.*

*Your servant,*

*Countess Carmilla Zaleska, c/o the Vampire Underground.*

Unable, however, to destroy his own child, the miserable voivode quickly crumpled up the note and ordered the guards to carry the princess's body to the castle crypt. When the nobles had left, greatly confused, he visited the crypt to find Mariska alive again... after a fashion. Her skin was still as pale as chalk, her tearful eyes were as red as garnets, and her long, sharp canine teeth erased any doubt as to her fate. "My own

daughter... a strigoi,” he thought, bitterly, and wondered if he should have destroyed her to spare her tainted soul and to save his family name from dishonour, but before he could take any action she spoke, her voice full of remorse:

“Kill me, father,” pleaded Mariska. “I have failed you, and brought shame on our house. If the people learn what has become of me, they’ll rise up, and the church will desert you. My foolishness has cost you your alliance, but I will not be the cause of your total downfall. Please, kill me before they start to suspect the truth.”

“Never,” declared the voivode, now unable to repress his own tears. “Not now that I see and hear you. You are my daughter still, and innocent. We will keep you here in secret for now, and think of a way to persuade the people to accept you.” But even as he left the crypt, he dreaded to think how that could ever be.

Over the next few nights, Mariska adjusted to her new existence, and found that it had its advantages. Shape-shifting, flying, and pyrokinesis were all fascinating distractions from the sad fact of being a social pariah. Unfortunately, her father’s regular requests to the castle butcher to supply fresh blood quickly started the rumours flying, the peasants started gossiping, and after the incident at the feast became common knowledge, it was not long before the church took an interest.

“We know the truth, Your Highness,” declared the officers of the Inquisition to the fearful voivode, “and you cannot hope to cover it up indefinitely. But entrust your daughter to us, and we vow that we will cure her of this demonic contamination. We will return her to you in purity. If you do not, we cannot be held responsible should the common folk learn what she has become, and take matters into their own hands... and it may even be our sacred duty to help them, if you turn away from God.”

The threat greatly disturbed the voivode, but before he could come to a decision Mariska walked into the midst of the court. The priests, nobles, and servants all gasped at the sight of her, protected themselves with crosses and icons, and in a few cases ran for the doors, but the princess just walked through the commotion with sombre dignity, until she reached her father’s throne.

“I will agree to this ordeal, father,” she declared, sadly but firmly. “I am no ravening demon, but nor am I any kind of daughter to you if I leave you to be

excommunicated and lynched... as these 'holy' men seem to be suggesting. If they believe they can purge me of this, however, then I will brave their trials."

The voivode nodded, dejectedly. What else could he do? The whole court had now seen his vampire daughter, and although a few of them had been impressed at her conduct, he knew that would not be enough to save either of them. "Very well," he agreed. "Cure her, then, but you had better do just that. Priests or not, play me false and I will make you look forward to Hell as a welcome relief."

Begrudgingly, the inquisitors bowed their assent, then escorted the princess from the throne room and back down into her crypt. For several minutes faint noises could be heard issuing up the stairway: the echoes of chanted prayers and hymns, the ringing of bells... and then a horrible, high-pitched scream. The voivode immediately ordered his guards to intervene, but by the time they returned, dragging the blood-spattered inquisitors along with them, he knew from their faces that it was too late.

"My condolences, Your Highness," said the lead inquisitor, with badly feigned sympathy. "The monster was uncontrollable and had to be put down, but her soul is now pure and at peace, as we promised. I might also add that any violence inflicted upon us could well be taken as an act of war by His Holiness in Rome, and thus by the whole of Christendom."

Unable to deny this, the voivode was forced to release them. A few days later, while he was deep in mourning, a letter arrived for him written in an elegant and disturbingly familiar hand:

*My Lord,*

*Apparently I misjudged your stomach as well as your hatred of my kind, but do not delude yourself that your daughter is now at peace. Her soul screams in Limbo, and you are not the one to release her. If we are bloodthirsty, I know not what to call you, but your reign is cursed by the death of an innocent, and your sordid pact with the holy butchers will not save you from your enemies. I do hope the Turks enjoy playing catch with your severed head, and cat's cradle with your bowels.*

*Cordially Yours,*  
*Countess CZ.*



*Transylvania, 1942*

Deep within Axis-held territory, SS Panzer Division 6 have set up a dedicated prisoner-of-war camp to interrogate Allied commandos. It is guarded by stormtroopers, artillery pillboxes, motorcycle patrols, and armoured units. To mount a one-man-charge against such a place would be suicide, but this glaring fact was of no deterrence to Sergeant Joe Harker (Royal Marines).

“It’s the last thing they’ll be expecting,” he insisted. “I storm in, machine gun blazing, chucking grenades all over the shop, and I can always pick up more of those if I run out. No doubt they’ll have left grenade caches everywhere, the lazy, careless Fritzes. I’ll break their lines before they even know what’s hit ‘em and set our lads free.” Impressed by the sergeant’s courage, his CO approves this “plan” of attack, such as it is.

It does not go very well...

Five minutes into the battle, out of both bullets and grenades, and badly wounded, the sergeant takes refuge in the only hiding-place he can find: an ancient crypt, beneath the crumbling ruins of a castle. He makes his way to the deepest chamber and crawls up against a stone sarcophagus, sculpted with the worn image of a young woman and bearing the letter “M” in Gothic script. His blood trickles into the earth as he lies there, exhausted, and for awhile he loses all sense of his surroundings. Suddenly, harsh voices and the click of machine gun bolts rouses him to a very troubled awareness. He feels the cold barrel of a gun pressed into his head, but in a last act of desperate defiance, he seizes a rock from the ground, swings around, and clubs the stormtrooper in the face. The soldier falls to the ground, bleeding and cursing, but this small success does Harker no good, as a second soldier

slams the butt of his gun into the sergeant's back, leaving him with no realistic option but to keel over in agony.

"Get this scum out of here," the SS-scharführer orders to his men, "and get the medic to patch him up. Kommandant Reinhardt will want him fit and healthy... at first, anyway, although after his interrogation he might wish we'd just left him to rot. The rest of you men, search this old bone-house. We might find something worth looting. Move it, at the double."

As the stormtroopers drag the wounded commando away, none of them notice as a weird red mist starts to rise from the earth where the sergeant's blood had fallen. When they have all left the chamber, the mist gathers into a solid form...

Princess Mariska looks around at the desolation, both afraid and excited. The time she spent in Limbo, dark and senseless, seems like a hideous eternity to her, and the simple freedom to move and feel again is a blessed salvation, but the castle she knew of old is now dank, lifeless, and ruined. She knows in her heart that everything she once knew has passed away, probably even including the treacherous woman who made her this way. "So I live again, but what is left for me?" she thinks, then she looks at the blood that still clings to the side of her tomb. "Unless..."

She takes a drop on her finger and tastes it. "A warrior's blood... young... not very clever, perhaps, but brave and true," she senses, with revived hope. "Some knight errant must have heard my sad story, and has taken pity on me. He has sought out my grave, and spilled his own blood to resurrect me. Surely, then, he will not refuse to share this strange existence with me. At least I shall not be alone... but where is he?" As she looks around, confused, her gaze falls upon another patch of blood on the ground near her tomb. She tastes it, and her face twists in disgust as its character hits her: cruelty, hatred, and slavishness, accompanied by horrible images of brutality, torture, and murder. Among the images, however, she sees a young man wearing strange green clothes, along with a metal helmet covered in netting and leaves, and she feels a deep connection, as well as an inhuman rage. "My knight... captured by these barbarians," she realises, horrified and incensed. "They mean to take him to their castle and torture him. Not while I live and... Well, not while I have

anything to do with it, anyway.”

Thus, four and a half centuries after her death, Princess Mariska finally found a purpose worthy of her mettle...



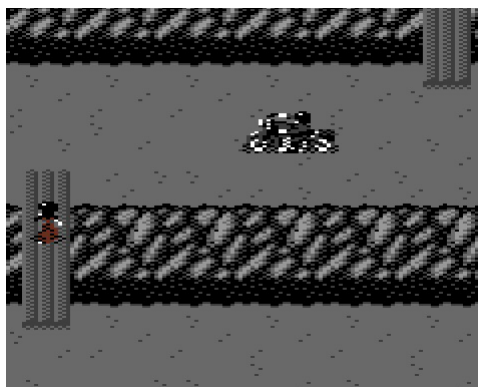
## **The instructions...**

Joystick port 1 controls the princess. Press fire to use her pyrokinesis to blaze enemies from afar. Human enemies, however, can be killed by draining their blood: simply touch them in a way that avoids their attack. The more blood Mariska drinks, as indicated in the brown score / energy meter, the better her chance of progressing to and surviving the final challenge (10,000 points earns her one extra drop icon).

Beware of the army chaplains, though. These soldiers wield crosses instead of guns or grenades, and for all her innocence Mariska is still a vampire. If she touches the chaplains, they will exorcise her and cost her a life, so avoid them or attack them at long range. They are slightly tougher than the standard SS grunts, having some spiritual protection against your powers, and will thus take two shots.

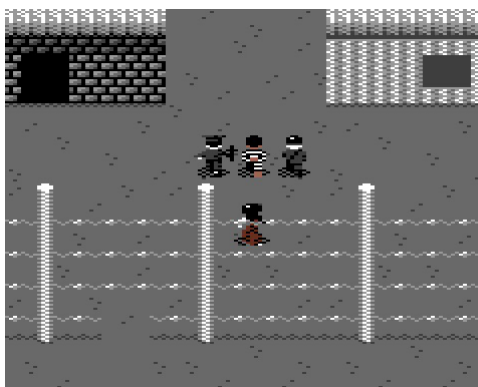


Also, enemy vehicles and materiel are bloodless, and should just be destroyed or avoided. This includes the motorcycles: the riders may have blood enough in them, but it is not worth the blunt trauma of a speeding BMW R-12 smack in the face. It might not be a stake in the heart, but it certainly won't do you any favours.



From stage 2 onwards, the stormtroopers will be issued with consecrated silver bullets that are capable of harming Mariska. Thankfully, they will only use them sparingly, but be sure to time it carefully if you decide to tackle them head-on.

In stage 3 (the POW camp), imprisoned commandos can be freed, and a little blood may be taken from them as recompense. Since the blood of the righteous is far more nutritious than that of evildoers, this is well worth the effort. Touch the prisoners quickly, though, as even without their SS escorts they will soon panic and try to run away. Mariska is many things, but a reassuring sight she is not.



Other deadly hazards include fire, artillery shells, bombs, and grenades. Modern warfare can be almost as dangerous for the undead as it can for the living. Survive the main quest having drunk enough blood (to gain at least one extra drop icon), and you will get to face the kommandant in battle. Defeat him, and your path will be clear to your true love, even if he has yet to be informed of the fact. You can always worry about the details later...