

HELLHOUND #1
Chapter 1: “Keys to the Kingdom”
By Dean Zachary

PAGE ONE.

PANEL ONE.

CAPTION: *Transylvania, The Dark Ages.*

Night deepens in the Carpathian Mountains. In a black rock quarry under a full moon, cruel TASKMASTERS of the TRANSYLVANIAN LEGION crack their whips at scores of silver-chained WEREWOLF SLAVES. The slaves carry massive black stones on their backs in a slow moving procession toward a primitive construction site built around a mammoth well. This well is a crude stone tunnel in the ground about one hundred feet in diameter, which will ultimately be known as the WELL OF TOMBS.

PANEL TWO.

SFX: SSSRUMMMBBLE!

An ARMORED WARLORD (42), dark and commanding, is standing at the mouth of the Well of Tombs. He supervises the placement of the first large stone for the foundation of a castle. A whispering wind from the well builds to A BASS RUMBLING sound.

PANEL THREE.

NYCTURU, A PREHISTORIC BAT DEMON twice the size of a man, flies out of the well and envelopes the Warlord, lifting him up into the sky with its talons until both are silhouetted against the moon.

INSET PANEL.

SFX: Hssssss! Aaaaaaaaargh!

Nycturu bites the screaming Warlord on the neck.

PANEL FOUR.

Nycturu then flings the Warlord down at the Transylvanian Legion as it flies back into the Well of Tombs.

PAGE TWO.

PANEL ONE.

The Warlord's Second in Command, VORLOS (35), powerful and loyal, steps forward to examine his fallen lord. The Warlord opens his mouth revealing sharp fangs, grabs Vorlos by the head and bites him on the neck.

PANEL TWO.

The Warlord, the FIRST INCARNATION OF DRACULA, stands majestically with cape blowing, and raises a black flame bladed sword before the cringing Transylvanian Legion. He howls victoriously as his men chant, 'Dra-cu-la', meaning 'Son of the Dragon'. The terrified Wolf Men slaves have dropped to their hands and knees, fearfully howling in unison.

PANEL THREE.

The bitten Vorlos leaps forward and bites the nearest warrior in the Legion.

PANELS FOUR AND FIVE. (SMALLER)

Warrior number one bites another, who bites another, as the FIRST VAMPIRES are born.

PAGE THREE.**PANEL ONE.**

CAPTION: *Moscow, 1989.*

It is late evening. Young KGB assassin NICHOLAS VANELCHZENK (18), handsome and brooding, stands inside the open window of a tall building overlooking Red Square and peers into a sniper rifle scope. The rifle has a silencer.

1. NICK (THOUGHT): I am not a killer. I am a survivor.

PANEL TWO.

On the street below, COMRADE CHERENKOV (34), a well-dressed portly bureaucrat, hurries his energetic son PETER (7) into a limousine. Cherenkov holds the leash of a striking SIBERIAN HUSKY as he shuts the door.

2. NICK (OFF PANEL THOUGHT): Comrade Cherenkov is a father. Another KGB test of my commitment as an assassin.

3. They could have told me.

PANEL THREE. (Through cross hairs)

Nick positions the cross hairs at Cherenkov's temple just below his fur hat.

4. NICK (THOUGHT): I never knew my father.

PANEL FOUR. (Through cross hairs)

The limo's rear window rolls down. Cherenkov musses his son's hair playfully as the boy embraces the affectionate dog that licks him goodbye.

5. NICK (OFF PANEL THOUGHT): the KGB recruiter offered me a "better" life away from the filthy orphanage.

PANEL FIVE.

Nick hesitates and pulls away from the scope with a lonely look. He is waiting for the limo to drive away.

6. NICK (THOUGHT): A life of dealing out death. If I refuse...

PANEL SIX.

As the limo drives out of sight, the silenced shot hits Cherenkov in the back of the head. He is falling to the sidewalk as the Siberian Husky looks up at the direction of the shot.

7. NICK (OFF PANEL THOUGHT): ...I die.

PANEL SEVEN.

The Husky's clear gray eyes fill the panel, glaring with accusation and foreboding.

PAGE FOUR.

PANEL ONE.

CAPTION: *Bucharest, Romania. Present Day.*

Establishing night shot of the outskirts of Bucharest. Snowflakes fall as a solitary UAZ-469 Russian Jeep crawls away from the city.

PANEL TWO.

Nick's eyes are seen in the same configuration as the Siberian Husky's eyes in Panel 7 of the previous page. They are a sad, melancholy deep brown.

1. NICK (THOUGHT): Sometimes I feel like I have already died...and gone to Hell.

PANEL THREE.

In the rear of the vehicle, FOUR KGB AGENTS in military fatigues guard a HANDCUFFED PRISONER, KGB AGENT NICHOLAS VANELCHZENK (34), ruggedly handsome and sad. ANTON (22), a particularly mean looking agent, speaks to GUSTAVE (37), the squad leader. Gustave is a thick bruiser of a man.

2. ANTON: <Brackets to indicate Russian> <He doesn't look so good, Gustave. Do you think he will live long enough? >

3. GUSTAVE: <Patience, Lieutenant. This is the great **Nick Vanelchzenk**.

4. The Defense Minister's pet who never lost a target. A traditional firing squad is much too common. I have something special in mind for him.>

5. ANTON: <I was passed up for promotion three times because of this punk!>

PANEL FOUR.

Anton smashes the butt of the AK-47 across Nick's cheek.

PANEL FIVE.

The other Guards join in on the beating. Heavy boots and massive gloved fists slam into Nick.

SMALL INSET PANEL.

Closer on Nick's eyes staring off distantly. His mind is elsewhere. Anywhere but here.

6. NICK (THOUGHT): Alexa...

PAGE FIVE.

PANEL ONE.

In the foreground along the remote forest trail, we see THREE WOODLAND TRIBESMEN crouching in the shadows. The tribesmen are garbed in primitive Eskimo-style clothing. They watch as the vehicle stops near a CLEARING in the woods.

1. ANTON (OFF PANEL): <Best of the best. He couldn't even kill a woman. >

PANEL TWO.

The five KGB agents have escorted the handcuffed Nick to the center of the clearing. Gustave stands apart from the group. Anton holds his AK-47 to Nick's head.

2. GUSTAVE: < You should have killed her instead of falling in LOVE with her. The Defense Minister's WIFE? Tell me, Nicky. Was she really worth all this? Not to worry.>

PANEL THREE.

Gustave leans forward to whisper in Nick's ear.

3. GUSTAVE: <Maybe I'll find out for myself.>

PANEL FOUR.

Gustave pulls back the slide on his 9mm automatic.

<End Russian Brackets>

4. GUSTAVE: I love the West, Nicky, don't you? Western films especially. In 'From Russia With Love', the enemy assassin has 007 at gunpoint. How did it go?

PANEL FIVE.

Nick's nimble fingers work a LOCK PICK on his handcuffs, while his arms remain deceptively still.

5. GUSTAVE: You will not die by the first bullet. Or the second. Or the third. Depending on your stamina, you may live for quite some time.

PAGE SIX.

PANEL ONE.

Anton smiles sadistically while aiming his AK-47 at Nick's crotch. Gustave is standing a safe distance away from Nick, motioning for Anton to proceed.

1. GUSTAVE: Excellent choice, Lieutenant. We begin by eliminating the source of his troubles. I hope she was worth it, Nicky.

PANEL TWO.

Having unlocked the handcuffs, Nick swiftly grabs the rifle in one swift motion and adeptly spins it toward Anton's crotch, firing. *This shot is tastefully posed for off camera violence.*

PANEL THREE.

Nick shoots GUARD NUMBERS TWO and THREE as they run for cover and return fire. There is no sign of Gustave, as he has taken cover.

PANEL FOUR.

A MARTIAL ARTS MONTAGE follows featuring Nick and GUARD NUMBER FOUR's brutally efficient expertise in Karate and Jujitsu. Kicks, punches and throws abound.

PANEL FIVE.

SFX: Snap!

After a vicious melee, Nick finally breaks the man's neck in a submission hold. *Again, this can be shown in shadow to tone down the violence.*

PAGE SEVEN.

PANEL ONE.

Gustave bolts from the underbrush and CHANGES FORM as he leaps at Nick. WHITE FUR bristles at his neck and wrists. His snarling face transforms into a furious HYBRID TIMBER WOLF*, growling and spitting saliva. His hands become fur covered CLAWS.

**Note: In 'Hellhound' continuity, a COMPLETE WOLF is a werewolf that appears as a four-legged feral canine. A HYBRID WOLF has a humanoid torso and legs with an oversized wolf's head. A HUMANOID WOLF is all humanoid with furry face, pointed ears, and clawed fingers and toes.*

1. GUSTAVE/WEREWOLF: YEAARRRGH!

2. NICK (THOUGHT): I must be delirious!

INSET PANEL.

The Gustave/Werewolf BITES NICK on his upper left shoulder!

3. NICK: AAAAAH!

4. GUSTAVE/WEREWOLF: Rrrrrggglsh!

PANEL TWO.

SFX: BRAKABRAKABRAKA!

Scrambling, Nick reaches for a fallen AK-47 submachine gun and fires into the monster's chest repeatedly, lifting the roaring creature off of him.

5. NICK (THOUGHT): Not a delusion.

PANEL THREE.

Scrambling to the Jeep, Nick climbs in. Blood pours from the shoulder wound.

PANEL FOUR.

SFX: VRROOMM-CRUNCH!

Nick runs the GUSTAVE WEREWOLF down with the Jeep before speeding away.

PANEL FIVE.

Rising in the foreground, the angry monster lets out a soul-rending howl spewing clouds of steaming breath. The bullet wounds expel steam as they heal themselves.

6. GUSTAVE/WEREWOLF: OwwROOoooo!

PAGE EIGHT.

PANEL ONE. (SMALLER)

In contrast to the dark events in Romania, bright sunlight shines down on the exterior of CIA headquarters in Virginia.

CAPTION: *CIA Headquarters. Langley, Virginia. Special Intelligence Service Division.*

1. DIRECTOR CALLAWAY (OFF PANEL): The SIS considers it a privilege to work with our colleagues in the Defense Department and British Intelligence.

PANEL TWO. (LARGER)

Inside the SIS situation room, THREE US GENERALS and TWO BRITISH COLONELS sit near one end of a conference table covered with coffee cups and TOP SECRET file folders. The grizzled US GENERAL HARKER (60), the beautiful DR. SOPHIA WYNDAM (27), a notable British geneticist, and the wise-cracking PROFESSOR STANLEY BUSCEMI (42), the notorious American 'ghost hunter' are seated near the large overhead VIDEO SCREEN.

DIRECTOR CALLAWAY (46), seasoned and commanding, paces in front of the screen featuring a MAP of ROMANIA. Color graphics highlight the CARPATHIAN

MOUNTAINS along the ARGES RIVER. Callaway cues the display with a remote control.

2. DIRECTOR CALLAWAY: As you know, the SIS collects intelligence about unexplained phenomena for practical military application.
3. The “supernatural” is undiscovered science that we could use to defend ourselves.
4. Our *experts* on this case are DR. SOPHIE WYNDAM, Britain’s Nobel Prize winning geneticist from MI-6,
5. And at the First Lady’ request, PROFESSOR STANLEY BUSCEMI, the notable paranormal investigator from the ‘Ghost Hunter’ TV series.
6. Recently, in Romania, there is evidence of an unknown terrorist cell experimenting with biological weapons near the Carpathian Mountains.

PANEL THREE. (SMALLER)

Stanley is looking bored and drumming his fingers. He gets a scolding glare from the composed Sophie.

7. STANLEY: Excuse me, Mr. Director, sir. Where did third world SHEPHERDS get biotechnology?
8. Russia? France? Iraq?

PAGE NINE.

PANEL ONE.

The video screen displays nightmarish CRIME SCENE PHOTOS of DEAD SHEPHERDS and FARMERS torn limb from limb. With the tastefully hidden gore, we see twisted bloodstained bodies and fallen rifles near a red splattered livestock fence. Bloody handprints smear the fence posts.

1. DIRECTOR CALLAWAY (OFF PANEL): At first, local authorities were flooded by reports of ‘giant man-size wolves’ slaughtering livestock.
2. Local farmers formed an armed militia of 36 men to defend themselves.
3. None survived the ‘Militia Massacre’. Yes, General Harker?

PANEL TWO.

GENERAL HARKER speaks up as Sophie raises her hand to respond.

4. GENERAL HARKER: This is all very tragic, Jeff.
5. What proof do you have this isn’t just a pack of hungry wolves doing what hungry wolves DO?
6. SOPHIE: Actually, General, most wolves do not attack humans unless starving or territorially provoked.
7. It is UNLIKELY that wolves could overcome a large group of armed men.

8. GENERAL HARKER: What does this have to do with military intelligence?

9. SOPHIE: MI-6 has a *contact* deep within Russian Intelligence once connected to the Cold War 'Battle Dog' program. He and I have worked together before, and he is...His INFORMATION is reliable.

PANEL THREE.

In the foreground, Sophie and Stanley's faces frame the shot as they argue. Just beyond them, Director Callaway cues the video screen in the background. The screen shows a snarling COMPLETE WOLF leaping toward at the camera.

10. STANLEY: I've seen better Halloween costumes. Do I get a federal grant for joining up? Monster hunting ain't cheap ya know.

11. SOPHIE: Professor, I thought your life's work was PROVING the existence of ghosts and goblins?

12. STANLEY: Actually, my 'life's work' is proving GENUINE psychic phenomena to educate—

13. DIRECTOR CALLAWAY: Professor? Save it for AFTER the briefing?

PANEL FOUR.

A solemn Director Callaway stands in silhouette against grisly forensic photos of two slaughtered CIA FIELD AGENTS. Their bodies, dressed in commando assault gear, are torn to ribbons.

14. DIRECTOR CALLAWAY: Bio-Engineered Mutants is our theory. A *hybrid man-eating canine*. These are the remains of our best agents.

15. Their wounds contain DNA not found on ANY database. Bouldin and Hall were personal friends of mine.

16. The White House approved the mission. A Delta Force team, along with Dr. Wyndam and Professor Buscemi, leaves for Romania in 24 hours.