

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD - Book 1 - PRINCES OF IORDEN

Chapter 1 - "The Prince of Iorden"

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NARRATOR (cont'd)

makes the whole thing seem kind of unfair. Then again, Peter was not nearly as prolifically successful a procreator as Mr. Fluffy Toes. So, win some lose some. But I digress.

2

SAME - A FEW MINUTES LATER

2

Peter of Brimshire would not normally have been out hunting, least of all at this hour. But the remoteness of Peter's Inn meant that when a nobleman of no small wealth and power asked for a room, Peter was strongly inclined to cater to his every whim. Including his bizarre request for rabbit stew in the middle of the night. He was actually surprised when he made the shot.

He had removed the arrow and was about to start skinning the mortal remains of the late Mr. Fluffy Toes, when the faint orange glow of fire, off in the distance, caught his attention.

He crept clumsily towards the glow and found it to be coming from a clearing. Peeking into the clearing, he saw a vat of burning oil casting an angry, orange light around the trees.

From among the trees emerged a figure in a black hooded cloak, its face invisible. Peter quickly ducked back into hiding, and then slowly peeked back out.

Dozens more cloaked figures emerged from the woods and gathered around the edge of the clearing. Four broke through the crowd, dragging behind them a man in chains.

It was all Peter could do not to cry out in alarm, for the chained man was the very nobleman who had sent him out rabbit hunting, the crest of House Guernatal emblazoned proudly on his chest. It occurred to Peter that his entire hunting trip had been for naught. It did not occur to Peter that, had he not gone hunting, he would have been at his inn when the scary cloaked things came to abduct his guest. As I said, not too clever, that Peter of Brimshire.

Where was I? Ah, yes, the figures in cloaks. They threw Peter's wealthy guest down, and nailed his chains to the ground with iron stakes so that his limbs were splayed apart. Two of the wraith-like things knelt by his wrists with daggers, while a third one, larger than the rest, unsheathed a two-handed sword.

Peter's sense of duty overcame his earlier, selfish thoughts. He could not sit idly by while the High

(MORE)

Prince - his High Prince, was murdered. With a shaking hand, he reached for an arrow. That's when the fear paralyzed him.

Because at that moment, an awed silence came over the cloaked congregation. They parted to make way for another figure, slight of stature and feminine of gait. Her appearance was not what petrified Peter, but rather the staff she carried. It was sharpened at the bottom, and the markings on it were...wrong. The shapes on it...were not things that *should be*. At least in Peter's mind.

She removed her hood, but her back was to Peter. She was too far away for Peter to hear the following exchange, but we sprites, as I said, hear all.

PRINCE

Not your most imaginative work.

WOMAN

You haven't seen the interesting part yet.

PRINCE

See you soon, my dear.

WOMAN

Will you, now?

NARRATOR

The woman nodded, and with chilly resolve her minions opened the chained man's wrists as the greatsword came down on his neck. The pointed end of the eldritch staff pierced his heart.

The last thing Peter of Brimshire's eyes ever saw was a flash of brilliant light.

Somewhere, not so very far away, a newborn infant slid through a flash of brilliant light, and into the world.

END OF PROLOGUE.

EPISODE ONE:

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EXT. SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL - MIDDAY 3

NARRATOR

Until indicated otherwise, what follows is admittedly hearsay. I have it from a friend sprite. A toilet seat bacteria sprite, if you must know. For indeed, even among the sprites, some draw the short straw career-wise. But my friend is honest and not overly-prone to exaggeration. So I shall relay her story to you, and you may take it as salted as you please.

My friend lives in a land that is called 'North East Pennsylvania' by its inhabitants. In this land there is a school, and in this school there is a bathroom, with several toilet stalls.

The story my friend told begins with a boy and a girl in one of those toilet stalls. They had 17 and 16 years, and were called Billy and Jen, respectively. He wore a red and gold jacket which signified his captaincy of the school's football team, and she wore the traditional garments of what is called a 'cheerleader,' also in red and gold. They were both quite handsome, and well-formed of body, and were thus drawn to each other, as humans of that age are wont to be.

JEN

You sure about this, Billy?

BILLY

Babe, I told you it'd be all right, didn't I?

JEN

But what if--

NARRATOR

--Billy pulled her in for a kiss and she quickly forgot her reservations.

Until, that is, the door of the bathroom flew open. Several athletes marched in - teammates of Billy's, in fact - carrying another boy by the collar of his red, button-down, short-sleeved shirt. This boy was called Nelson. He had 16 years, dark skin, and wore spectacles. The athletes threw him down onto the window sill.

FOOTBALL PLAYER 1

You fucked me over, you little shit! I was counting on your answers to pass pre-calc! Now I can't play this weekend.

NARRATOR

Nelson knew it was in his best interest to remain silent or possibly apologize, but could not stop himself from blurting out--

NELSON

--I'm not even good at math. Maybe you should do your own work.

FOOTBALL PLAYER 2

What was that? What the fuck was that!?

FOOTBALL PLAYER 1

You gotta watch your mouth, faggot.

NARRATOR

Nelson looked frantically for some means of escape. He saw a device built for alerting people to a fire, and activated it. An ear-piercing bell rang out!

FOOTBALL PLAYER 1

Shit, man, we should bail.

FOOTBALL PLAYER 2

We'll get you later, queermo.

NARRATOR

As the athletes scattered, Nelson breathed a sigh of relief. Billy popped his head out of the toilet stall.

BILLY

The hell's going on out here?

NARRATOR

In marched a stern-looking man who was called Archibald Connor, but who demanded the students call him Principal Connor. Billy and Jen dove back into their stall and closed the door before he saw them. For what they had been doing was counter to rules enforced by Archibald Connor.

CONNOR

What in God's name...? Nelson! Who pulled that alarm?

NARRATOR

Connor looked on the floor under the stall, but could only see Billy's legs.

CONNOR

Is that you, Williams?

BILLY

It's me, principal Connor, sir.

NARRATOR

Connor reached up to the wall and shut off the warning device.

CONNOR

Did you set off that alarm, Williams?

NELSON

It was me.

CONNOR

Nonsense, son. Don't insult my intelligence.

NELSON

But Principal Connor--

CONNOR

--I'll hear no more of it. You don't have to cover for him. Captain of the football team isn't above the rules.

NELSON

But it really was me. You see, I was--

CONNOR

--It was?! Well I must say I'm very disappointed in you. I was more than happy to set you up with counseling for your trouble socializing and poor grades--

NELSON

Well, I do my--

CONNOR

--But we can't stand for you endangering other students. For shame. Oh well, detention for you.

NELSON

But it was only self-de--

CONNOR

No excuses, young man. We've got a zero-tolerance policy here. If I make an exception for you, I'll need to make one for everyone.

(INTO THE STALL)

Hey, Williams. I also need to talk to that idiot center of yours. He hasn't been in here recently, has he?

BILLY

Just me. You wanna help me hold it?

NARRATOR

Enraged by this show of disrespect, Connor burst into an adjacent stall, climbed onto the toilet, and peered over the divider to see Jen crouched on top of the toilet. She looked mortified.

4

INT. HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY -

AFTERNOON

4

Now, in the land of Northeast Pennsylvania, students were commonly punished by being forced to stay at school when their classmates had left, typically while confined to a particularly boring area of the school. (For those wishing to learn more about this custom, my friend tells me the definitive text on the matter was penned by a bard called John Hughes.)

So it was that Billy, Jen, and Nelson found themselves incarcerated in the library of Valley Central High School one fateful afternoon. With them were their personal effects. Namely, Billy's sporting armor, or "football pads," Jen's collection of assorted accoutrements in a "handbag," and Nelson's gaming token which was called a "d20" by those skilled in its use, and which he wore in a vial around his neck.

Also with them, less importantly, was one more detained student, who...well, let's just call him an herbalist, who had become overfond of certain plants.

On a library table in front of Nelson were several writing utensils, which Nelson had arranged in order of size and color. For, you see, a tiny part of Nelson's mind - the part that men cannot, or will not speak of - feared that if certain things were not in a certain order, some calamity would befall him. But more on that later.

Jen examined herself in a small looking glass, or "compact," and fixed her hair nervously.

BILLY

This is bullshit. I need to be at practice.

JEN

I can't believe he caught us making out. Shannon's never gonna let me live this down.

NARRATOR

Jen threw her compact into her handbag.

BILLY

I told you she was a bitch.

JEN

Yeah, but she's still captain.

BILLY

She's captain 'cause she's a bitch.

JEN

She's captain 'cause she's skinnier than me.

BILLY

Nah, babe, you're way prettier. Girls just love picking on each other.

(TO NELSON)

Hey why'd you have to pull that alarm? I should kick your nerd ass.

NELSON

Your teammates were in the process of assaulting me! I didn't even know you were in there!

NARRATOR

Nelson grimaced again at his own candor.

BILLY

Hey, watch your tone.

NARRATOR

Nelson lowered his eyes and kept them down. The herbalist removed a dessert, infused with his favorite plant, from his backpack and took a bite.

BILLY

You musta did something to deserve it, anyway.

JEN

Aww, Billy, I don't think Nelson meant to cause trouble.

BILLY

Hey! I don't need you taking his fuckin' side.

NARRATOR

Jen also lowered her eyes.

STONER

(UNDER HIS BREATH)

We don't need you to throw so many fuckin' interceptions.

BILLY

The fuck did you just say, Dennis?

NELSON

My guild needs me.

BILLY

What?

NELSON

My "World of Warcraft" guild is going on a huge raid in twelve minutes, and they're counting on me. I'm the only Level 85 in the group.

NARRATOR

Billy stared at him for a few seconds, before making a hand gesture that simulated self-gratification.

NELSON

I can't believe I'm thinking of doing this, but maybe I can give Charles my login.

NARRATOR

As Nelson got up and walked towards a machine called a "computer," there was a flash of lightning and a rumble of thunder.

JEN

(TO BILLY)

At least you're not missing practice anymore.

BILLY

Fuck that, I'm not scared of some rain.

NELSON

Darn! Principal Connor must have had them cut off internet to these computers after school hours.

NARRATOR

Jen pulled some "lipstick" out of her "handbag" and applied it.

NELSON

Darn, darn, darn!

NARRATOR

Nelson, in his frustration, proceeded to make an obnoxious racket on the computer machine.

BILLY

(SNAPS)

You're a nerd, can't you just reroute the encryptions or some shit like that and shut up about it?

NELSON

...Oh, I see. You must have been taken in by the popular misconception that everyone smart knows how to hack a computer. Or that computer hacking is magic...or that encryptions are a thing that can be rerouted.

NARRATOR

There was a particularly violent thunderclap, which startled Jen into dropping her "lipstick," and somehow extinguished the lights. My friend has not explained to me how exactly this happens.

NELSON

Everyone stay calm! I always keep a flashlight in my backpack.

NARRATOR

Nelson walked back to his table and rummaged through his belongings.

JEN

Did anyone see where my lipstick fell?

NARRATOR

Jen got up to look.

BILLY

SOME REAL QUALITY SHIT YOU GOT IN HERE, CONNOR!

JEN

I think it rolled over here somewhere...

NARRATOR

She bent down to look for it under some desks.

NELSON

Got it!

NARRATOR

The lights popped back on, and as Nelson looked up, his eyes were drawn straight to Jen's posterior, which she was holding up in the air as she looked for her lipstick. Billy's attention was similarly captured, but as soon as he realized that Nelson was looking --

BILLY

Hey!!

NARRATOR

Jen started at this eruption, jumped up, and bumped her head.

JEN

Ow! Shit!

BILLY

What the fuck, you little perv?!

NARRATOR

Oblivious to Jen, Billy grabbed Nelson's collar with one hand and made the other into a fist.

BILLY

What do you take me for, looking at my woman like that?

JEN

Billy, take it easy.

NARRATOR

Jen ran over and got between them.

BILLY

You stay out of this, Jenny.

NARRATOR

Despite the imminent threat of bodily harm, Nelson's gaze had drifted out the window, where he realized that the sun was out and sky was bluer than he had ever seen it.

Then, with an ENORMOUS THUNDERCRACK, the sky changed back to stormy. A lightning bolt burst through the window and immolated Billy, Jen, Nelson, and their belongings, in a blinding pillar of light.

As the light faded away, an unnatural fire broke out in the library, spread, and then extinguished as quickly as it had appeared. At this point, I'm told the herbalist very quickly put away his dessert and looked around warily for several moments.

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INT. ROYAL BEDCHAMBERS - AFTERNOON5

Thus concludes the hearsay portion of this story, at least for a while. I can tell you firsthand about the bedchambers of Dagmar Guernatal, nee Greenhorn, who was called High Queen of the Human Realms of Iorden. I can tell you of how the curtains were drawn, and the lavish room dank and dark on the day that her lifeblood ran out from her womb. I can tell you about the philosopher who held a mirror under her pale nose, hoping against his better knowledge to see it fog.

SHORTLY THEREAFTER

And I can tell you about Brennen, the baseborn warrior whose battlefield exploits as a young man had earned him a Generalship, and a seat at the High King's right hand, and not a few scars, but never lands or a title. And now, in his sixth decade of life, it fell to Brennen to tell Gunther Guernatal, who was called High King of the Human Realms of Iorden, of his young wife's untimely demise.

King Gunther had reached his seventh decade, but not easily. His body was sound for his age, but his face had the weary look of a man who has seen too much tragedy. When Brennen told him of his Queen, he winced as though he had just been mortally wounded.

GUNTHER

And the child?

(BRENNEN HAS A TINGE OF SCOTTISH OR MAYBE CORNISH IN HIS ACCENT.)

BRENNEN

I am sorry, your Grace. You know I grieve with you.

GUNTHER

Why, old friend? Why has Galadon forsaken us?

BRENNEN

Soldiers cannot concern themselves with the will of the gods. Only that of their King.

GUNTHER

They will come, General.

BRENNEN

Yes, your Grace. As soon as they find out.

GUNTHER

How long to mobilize and arm the reserves?

BRENNEN

With fortune on our sides, two or three days.

GUNTHER

Then we must conceal it at least that long. The Th'ar lo-Hyyl must not find out. Station our most loyal men at the gates. No one in or out of the inner hold without my orders.

BRENNEN

Your will be done, your Grace.

GUNTHER

And Brennen, tell all our patrolmen garrisoned in the village: be on high alert for any unfamiliar travelers.

7

EXT. DEEP, DARK WOODS - A FEW

MINUTES EARLIER

7

NARRATOR

And it was around that amount that there was a flash in the sky, above a forest a few miles from Guernatal's castle.

Down tumbled three young human bodies, their falls slowed by the branches and bramble. Slowed enough that the impact wasn't fatal, but not so much that they didn't lose consciousness when they hit the ground.

And as you may have guessed if you've a flair for the dramatic, those bodies belonged to Billy, Jen, and Nelson.

END OF EPISODE ONE.

EPISODE TWO:

8

EXT. DEEP, DARK WOODS - EARLYEVENING

8

NARRATOR

It was a little before dusk when Jen began to stir. She was the first of the three to come to, as they had all suffered quite a fall, you remember. She sat up, bruised in places she didn't realize could bruise.

JEN

Billy?...Hey, Billy?

NELSON

[GROANS]

JEN

Oh. Nelson...

NELSON

Are you okay?

JEN

Where the hell are we?

NELSON

From the looks of it, a wooded area in a northern temperate zone.

JEN

These trees are so pretty...

BILLY

[GROANS LOUDLY]

JEN

Billy?

BILLY

Did we win, coach?

JEN

Billy, wake up.

BILLY

(GROGGY)
Shit. You okay, babe?

JEN

I don't think I'm hurt, but where are we? What's the last thing you remember?

NELSON

(THOUGHTLESSLY)
Your buttocks.

NARRATOR

Billy, taking this as a personal slight, found it in himself to throw a handful of dirt in Nelson's general direction while remaining prone.

BILLY

Kowalski. I remember being in detention with Dennis Kowalski. That freak musta slipped us something.

JEN

The sun's still up, so I don't think we've been out that long.

NELSON

Darn! What time is it?

JEN

Going by the sun, it can't be much past 6, can it?

NELSON

No no no no no. I missed the raid. My guild will be furious. They might kick me out!

NARRATOR

Billy dragged himself to his feet.

BILLY

Don't worry, Jen, I used to go hunting with my uncle. Now the sun's setting that way...And the moss is growing that way...Which means...wait...

JEN

I don't know if you can go by that. I think we read in bio class about lots of things determining moss growth. Didn't we?

BILLY

Be quiet, Jenny. I need to think...Okay, so what direction from school are the woods?

NELSON

All of them. We're from NEPA.

BILLY

Right. All of them.

JEN

[STARTLED GASP]

BILLY

Jen, wha--

JEN

Shhhhhhhhhhh!

JEN

(WHISPERS)
Did you guys feel anything?

NARRATOR

Billy and Nelson shook their heads "no." They all sat in silence, for several long seconds, as Jen collected herself.

JEN

I coulda sworn this log just moved.

BILLY

Don't be silly, babe. You're just--

NARRATOR

--Jen was lifted into the air and thrown down by the log, which, if you hadn't guessed, was in fact a massive serpent with skin like tree bark.

The three young travelers looked up, petrified, as the beast poised to strike, when suddenly, there was a wet thud. An arrow had embedded itself very deep into the serpent's eye. The creature, to its credit, managed to continue resembling a tree trunk as it crashed to the ground, stiff and dead.

JEN

[SOBS HYSTERICALLY]

BILLY

Holy shit.
(TO JEN)
We're alright, babe.

JEN

(THROUGH TEARS)
What the hell was that thing!?

NELSON

Maybe we're in New Jersey.

(YELLOWYYN HAS A WASP-Y TWANG TO HIS VOICE.)

YELLOWYYN

What are you doing out here?

NARRATOR

Bounding down from the trees, bow in hand, came an elf. If you've never seen an elf on the hunt, the best I can do by way of description is to ask you to imagine the speed, grace, and strength of a panther were somehow transferred into a man-shaped body. Like all elves, he had pale skin. His long, blonde hair was tied into several beaded braids, as was fashionable at the time for adolescent elves.

YLLLOWYYN

What are you doing out here? And what in Selbirin are you wearing?

NARRATOR

At 173 years old, this elf, who was called 'Yllowyyyn,' was at a particularly obnoxious stage of elvish adolescence.

YLLLOWYYN

I've been out here for three days tracking that kill. You nearly scared her off.

NELSON

Wow...this is the best cosplay I've ever seen! I can't even see the seams on your ears. Are those latex or polystyrene?

YLLLOWYYN

...Yes, well...
(RE: THE SERPENT)
All's well that ends well, I suppose. She'll still make a suitable trophy.

NARRATOR

He knelt by the head of the snake and unsheathed a golden hunting knife of elven design. As Billy pulled Jen aside for a private conversation, Nelson noticed the ornate carvings on Yllowyyyn's bow.

NELSON

That bow is SO EPIC. Where's it from?

YLLLOWYYN

(ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?)
The Sacred Wood of the White Forest.

NELSON

Is that that kiosk at the mall in Scranton?

NARRATOR

Yllowyyyn began to saw through the neck of the serpent with his knife. Now, at the time, Yllowyyyn was serving
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

as Kalth'yr to House Guernatal. (Kalth'yr was what elves called an advisor; many young elves were keen to acquire these positions, as they made one's petition for membership in the Elven High Council much more attractive.) This fact will become relevant to our tale soon enough.

JEN

(WHISPERS)

So what's your read on this guy? Is he like a psycho, or what?

BILLY

(WHISPERS)

Nah, he's one of these backwoods survivalists. They're not all bad, just a little off.

YELLOWYYN

I can hear you perfectly well.

NARRATOR

The fact that elves can hear exceptionally well is also relevant to our tale. Having never met an elf before, though, Billy still believed he was talking to a strange man with deformed ears, and Yllowyy'n's eavesdropping caught him off guard.

BILLY

Okay, lemme guess. You're in some kind of a militia or something.

YELLOWYYN

My clan has a proud military tradition, if that's what you're asking.

JEN

...Nelson, honey, you wanna take a few steps back from the *heavily armed klansman*?

BILLY

(TO YELLOWYYN)

And I bet you and all your kin can trace your lineage back to the civil war--

NARRATOR

--Yllowyy'n was at Billy with a forearm on his throat.

YELLOWYYN

What do you know of Civil War!?

JEN

Woah! I think he meant "the war of northern aggression." Didn't you, Billy?

YELLOWYYN

So the attack'll come from the north? Leif of Felghir! I knew I never liked that bastard.

BILLY

What the hell are---

YELLOWYYN

How'd you come by this knowledge? Speak, while you're still able!

JEN

Please don't kill my boyfriend, mister. We really don't know anything about this leaf guy. We just wanna get back to school in one piece.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyyn relaxed his grip just enough for Billy to speak.

BILLY

[CHOKES]

YELLOWYYN

Choose your words very carefully, human, for they may mean your life. What knowledge do you have of a civil war?

NELSON

(SIMULTANEOUS)
Abraham Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation, Gettysburg Address!

JEN

(SIMULTANEOUS)
Harriet Tubman, Sherman's march, Appomattox!

BILLY

(SIMULTANEOUS)
Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Hitler!

NARRATOR

Yllowyyyn stared back in confusion. Cautiously, he further relaxed his grip on Billy. Jen, registering what she heard, reflected quietly to herself:

JEN

(SOTTO VOCE)
--Hitler?--

YELLOWYYN

Where did you study history?

BILLY

Valley Central High.

NARRATOR

After sizing the three humans up for a few seconds, the elf let Billy go. They all stood around for a moment, as the proper etiquette for this particular situation was unknown to them all.

NELSON

So, where are we right now?

YELLOWYYN

You're in lands claimed by His Majesty, Gunther Guernatal, High King of the human realms of Iorden.

NELSON

Is that a new expansion pack?

JEN

Why dont we--

BILLY

Jen, let me handle this.

(TO YELLOWYNN)

You think you could point us to the nearest town without going schizo on me?

YELLOWYYN

I'm heading that way myself. I suppose I could escort you, since you're obviously in no place to defend yourselves.

BILLY

What the hell does that mean?

YELLOWYYN

It means you were very nearly a serpent's supper, human. Speaking of which, as long as you're heading back to town with me, would you mind helping me with that?

9

EXT. PATH ON THE EDGE OF THE WOODS

- A WHILE LATER

9

NARRATOR

So it came to pass that the three humans found themselves walking down a path on the edge of woods, with Billy and Nelson dragging the body of the serpent behind them by some leather straps. Yllowyyyn strode in

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

front, with the serpent's head under one arm, and looking very satisfied. Billy and Nelson looked considerably less satisfied.

JEN

You sure you don't want my help?

BILLY

(PANTING)

Don't be silly, Babe. Nelson, are you pulling at all? Come on, man.

NELSON

Not all of us are made to feel welcome in the school weight room.

NARRATOR

The great spire of Castle Guernatal appeared over the horizon.

JEN

Oh wow! I didn't know there were any castles in Pennsylvania.

NARRATOR

After a few more minutes of walking, the four came upon a large boulder. Had the three humans been outdoorsmen, they would have noticed the strangeness of this boulder, as the surrounding land had no large rocks. They did, however, notice the strangeness of the boulder being in a small crater and smeared with dried blood.

BILLY

Hell was that?

YELLOWYYN

Very easy way to kill a bear, if you're a dragoness looking to feed her young.

NARRATOR

This led to some very troubled looks between the humans.

BILLY

What's that they say in that movie with the monkeys?

NELSON

Take your stinking paws off me you damned, dirty ape?

JEN

I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore?

BILLY

That's the one.

10

EXT. GUERNATAL CITY, OUTER HOLD -

AN HOUR OR SO LATER

10

NARRATOR

It took them about an hour or so to arrive at the Outer Hold of Guernatal Castle. It was a modest village with wooden walls, over which the tall stone walls of the inner hold always loomed. Only a few sideways glances were cast at the giant carcass Billy and Nelson were dragging.

YELLOWYYN

That's far enough, thank you. You can put her down.

BILLY & NELSON

[RELIEVED GROANS]

NELSON

(PANTING)

So, what's your gamertag? I could put in a good word for you with my guild, if you want.

YELLOWYYN

I certainly don't care.

NARRATOR

Jen looked at Billy, and motioned towards the elf in such a way as suggested Billy should talk to him. Billy shrugged in such a way as made clear he hadn't quite got the hang of understanding Jen's wishes.

JEN

Listen, Mr...

YELLOWYYN

My name is Yllowyyyn.

BILLY

Yellow ween? Your name's Yellow Ween?

YELLOWYYN

Yllowyyyn.

JEN

Okay, well, pleased to meet you. I'm Jennifer. Thank you for walking us back to town.

YELLOWYYN

Yes, yes. Merely doing my civic duty as an officer of the King's court.

BILLY

I can't believe this asshole's name is Yellow Ween. How many ass-kickings did you get in school?

JEN

Mr. Yllowyyyn, if you could point us in the direction of Lackawanna, Pennsylvania, we'd sure appreciate it.

YLLLOWYYYN

I've never heard of it. Now, if you'll excuse me, I find the three of you very odd, and I don't care much for your company.

NARRATOR

He handed Jen a small coin purse.

YLLLOWYYYN

So, buy yourselves a meal or proper clothes or something, and leave me alone. Fare well.

NARRATOR

He hoisted the carcass over his shoulders with no effort, and walked off towards the castle.

JEN

Wait, Mr. Yllowyyyn! We could really use some help getting back home. Even if you know somebody--

YLLLOWYYYN

(FAR-OFF)

--Sorry, urgent business to attend to.

BILLY

Thanks for nothing, jerkoff.

NARRATOR

There comes a moment in every great adventure (the songs and tapestries usually gloss over this part) when the heroes haven't a clue in the world what to do next. This was that moment.

JEN

Well, shoot, wherever we are we gotta eat, right?

BILLY

Maybe one of these losers can give us directions.

11

INT. MEDIEVAL TAVERN - A LITTLE BITLATER

11

NARRATOR

A little while later, they found themselves in a wooden tavern - the sort of place where anyone on the social ladder can get what was at least nominally a meal. The sights, and, frankly, smells, of the tavern did nothing to make the three young humans feel more at home.

JEN

At least it's charmingly quaint.

NARRATOR

Billy took a seat at the bar, and his companions followed suit. They were approached by the barman.

BARTENDER

What would you care for?

BILLY

Two beers...
(MOCKINGLY)
...and a milk for the kid.

NELSON

I'll have a mead.

BILLY

The fuck is mead, you weirdo?

NARRATOR

Nelson then found it necessary to remedy some minor imperfections in his place setting.

BARTENDER

Anything to eat?

BILLY

Steak.

JEN

...I'll have whatever the chef recommends, please.

NELSON

How's your mutton?

BARTENDER

Smelling a bit ripe today. I'd go with the pheasant.

NARRATOR

Under the bar, Billy grabbed the coin purse out of Jen's hand...

BILLY

And keep a little something for yourself.

NARRATOR

...and threw the purse on the bar.

BARTENDER

What's that?

BILLY

...money?

BARTENDER

Well, how much is in there?

JEN

...We're not really from around here.

BARTENDER

I don't know how the exchange of coin for goods and services is handled where you come from, but around here, things have a price that you pay. You don't just throw an arbitrary amount of money down and forget it.

(A BEAT)

BARTENDER (cont'd)

All right, all right, I didn't mean anything by it. Let's just see what you have here.

BARTENDER (cont'd)

15...30...45...60...

NARRATOR

...He sized the travelers up once more...

BARTENDER

...65, 70, 75. That covers it.

JEN

(WHISPERS TO BILLY)

Did those all look like the same type of coin to you?

BARTENDER

Be back with your food!

NARRATOR

He rushed off.

BILLY

Score. They didn't even card us!

GATES - SIMULTANEOUS

NARRATOR

At about the same time, Yllowwyn reached the gates of the Inner Hold, still carrying his trophy kill effortlessly.

YLLLOWYYN

Evening, constables.

GUARD 1

Halt! State your name and purpose and await permission to enter.

YLLLOWYYN

Pardon?

GUARD 1

Come no closer, or you will be fired upon.

YLLLOWYYN

I am Kalth'yr to His Majesty's court. What is the meaning of this?

GUARD 2

Apologies, m'Lord. His Majesty's orders. No one in or out without his word.

NARRATOR

Realizing that this was rather irregular, the elf finally put down his snake.

YLLLOWYYN

Did something happen?

NARRATOR

The guards looked at each other, shocked that the Kalth'yr had not heard of the recent developments.

GUARD 2

You haven't, by chance, seen any suspicious strangers around, have you?

NARRATOR

At which point Yllowwyn recalled that he had indeed seen three peculiar strangers very recently.

13

INT. MEDIEVAL TAVERN - A FEWMINUTES LATER

13

It was a few minutes later, and Jen, Billy, and Nelson were staring into three flagons of ale which were decidedly warmer and...chunkier than they were used to when the tavern doors burst open. Yllowwyn marched in, followed by a dozen of the castle's garrison, pikes gleaming and at the ready.

YLLOWWYYN

(RE: THE KIDS)

That's them, Captain. Arrest them!

NARRATOR

And so it came to pass that the three travelers found themselves detained for the second time in one day, and for the first time in their lives at the uncomfortable end of lethal weapons.

END OF EPISODE TWO.

EPISODE THREE:

14

DREAM SEQUENCE: ENDLESS, MISTYWOODS - TIME UNCLEAR

14

NARRATOR

Brennen dreamt of an infinite forest. Well, not really. We sprites can comprehend the infinite. But the minds of mortals are, by nature, limited and must approximate. So really, Brennen dreamt of a very, very, very big forest.

Out of nowhere, a young girl materialized in front of him. She looked the very picture of innocence. Or, at least, she would have were not for the gaping puncture wound in her chest. She opened her mouth to speak.

YOUNG GIRL

There are seven things you must know to save me. The first thing is: my killer has died as well, but has not yet joined me.

NARRATOR

The general looked on silently, because any mortal who claims to know how he'd respond to that is a liar.

YOUNG GIRL

You should run, Brennen.

NARRATOR

He did decide to look behind him, and that's when he saw it. I'd describe what he saw, but what it looked like to him isn't important. Imagine you're in your bedchambers late at night, and you put out the last light. A sliver of moonlight creeps through the window and spills onto your bed. Make a list in your mind of the five things you'd least want the moonlight to reveal, then imagine you saw all of those things at once. That was what this moment in the dream felt like to Brennen.

Brennen, though, was ever the warrior. His first reaction, when faced with indescribable horror, was to try to murder it with an axe. He unslung the twibill that had been the woe of so many of House Guernatal's enemies, and swung with all of his might at the terrible thing. Unfortunately, this was a nightmare, and he could not get any speed on the thing despite his considerable strength.

The thing easily dodged the blow, and then took the form of a huge bear. Less effective than its previous form at making a man question that he'd ever known

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

anything good, but quite handy at knocking a battle-axe out of man's hands with a swipe of its paw, and then biting out the throat of a young girl.

Brennen ran for his axe, hoping against hope to save the girl, or at least make the beast pay. But he was distracted by a bird. No common bird, but a spectacularly beautiful bird, with feathers of red and gold. Soon it was joined by two other birds, one of all red and one of all gold. This caught the attention of the beast, and also of the blood-soaked but still alive young girl.

As the three of them stood there, mesmerized, four grey birds joined the flock, one of which wore a crown.

That was when Brennen heard the disembodied voice...

VOICE

General...

NARRATOR

And saw the intense light from some unknown source.

VOICE

General...

15

INT. BRENNEN'S BEDCHAMBERS - MIDDLE

OF THE NIGHT

15

NARRATOR

Brennen jolted awake in his sparse quarters to see one of his officers standing over him with a torch.

SOLDIER

Sorry to wake you, sir.

BRENNEN

What's happened?

SOLDIER

The elf found some suspicious travelers in the eastern woods. His Majesty has called an emergency meeting of his court.

BRENNEN

Thank you, Lieutenant.

16

INT. CASTLE GUERNATAL DUNGEON -SIMULTANEOUS

16

NARRATOR

The travelers - our travelers - were at that moment in a cell of a dungeon several stories below Castle Guernatal. Billy and Jen sat together on a stone bench that could never be mistaken for comfortable, while Nelson was curled up asleep on a different bench.

JEN

How late do you figure it is by now?

BILLY

Late. If I'm lucky, my old man'll be too plastered to notice I'm not home yet.

JEN

Billy, I'm scared.

BILLY

Don't get all worked up, honey. Somebody's always doing this reenactment shit. People get carried away sometimes. They'll let us out soon, and if they don't I'll start kicking some asses.

JEN

But what about that snake?

NARRATOR

A piercing clamor badly startled Billy and Jen and jolted Nelson awake. The castle jailer was banging his shortsword against the bars of their cell.

JAILER

Up, vermin! Don't keep the King waiting.

17

EXT. PRISONER PROCESSING AREA - AFEW MINUTES LATER

17

NARRATOR

They were led up several flights of stairs and out into a small, walled-off courtyard in between the dungeon and the castle proper. The courtyard was dominated by a large hedgemaze, a man tall and then some. The pikes of patrolling soldiers were just barely visible over the tops of the hedges.

JAILER

Wait here until someone comes for you.

NARRATOR

The Jailer headed back towards the dungeon and out of earshot.

NELSON

(WHISPERS)

I can get us out of here.

JEN

What?

BILLY

No, you can't.

NELSON

I've beaten every single Legend of *Zelda* game.

JEN

But those are games.

NELSON

You can see their pikes over the top of the hedges. We can use them to map their patrol routes.

NARRATOR

Nelson watched the motion of the pikes intently for several seconds.

BILLY

Look, nerd--

NELSON

Shh! On my signal, run into the maze and turn right.

JEN

Now, let's just--

NELSON

Now!

NARRATOR

Nelson darted into the maze. Jen and Billy, realizing their dearth of better choices, ran after him.

It must be admitted, it was wise of Nelson to notice the pikes, and skillful of him to have discerned the patterns of the patrols so quickly. It must also be admitted that it was quite foolish of him to fail to notice the guard tower that overlooked the courtyard, since this was, after all, a castle.

Two bowmen in the tower each nocked an arrow and aimed.

BOWMAN 2
Halt down there!

NARRATOR
The three young humans stopped in their tracks as every guard in the hedgemaze converged on them. The jailer stormed back out from the dungeon, fuming.

JAILER
WHAT IN SELBIRIN ARE YOU THINKING?!

NELSON
I didn't expect there to be guard towers.

JAILER
You didn't expect--THERE ARE VISIBLE GAPS IN OUR PATROL ROUTES!!

NELSON
Yes, I noticed those.

JAILER
Some castle we'd be if we didn't account for those. Might as well build the walls from cow shit. You lot are lucky I've orders to keep you alive, or I'd wring your necks right here. Come on, then.

18

INT. CASTLE MAIN HALL -SIMULTANEOUS

18

NARRATOR
As the three travelers were being led to the throne room, High King Gunther Guernatal was addressing his court. His court, which looked precisely like it had just been dragged out of its respective beds, comprised humans of all skin colors and from all walks of life. And Yllowyyn. And, from "all walks of life" you can of course imply, "provided they were wealthy." Humans in Iorden at that time placed tremendous value on how much gold one's father happened to possess at the time of one's birth. In fact, the only member of Gunther's court whose father was not tremendously wealthy was conspicuously absent at the moment.

GUNTHER
I hope by now you see that the measures I've taken have been necessary. In chaotic times such as these, vigilance is the last weapon of order.

NARRATOR
Brennen strode in hurriedly, despite the weight of all his armor. Had any other baseborn man interrupted a meeting of His Majesty's court, the uproar would have
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

been deafening. But the King's regard for this man, along with his many military triumphs and decorations, stayed their contempt. Not to mention the gigantic battle-axe and dozen or so throwing axes he wore.

Brennen took his seat at the right hand of the King.

BRENNEN

(WHISPERS)

Sincere apologies, your Grace.

GUNTHER

Sorry we had to wake you, friend.

BRENNEN

Old soldiers are used to not sleeping the night.

GUNTHER

(TO EVERYONE)

As I was saying, our young Kalth'yr has taken my message of vigilance to heart, and brought us three possible spies that he encountered in the eastern woods.

COMPANY

[GASPS AND HUSHED TALKING]

GUNTHER

I have called this meeting so that we may try to discern their motives. Guards, send them in.

NARRATOR

The doors of the main hall opened, and our three young travelers were marched in a few inches in front of the jailer's sword. There were many murmurs regarding their garb, which seemed entirely bizarre to Gunther's court. Their attire also caught Brennen's attention, but for a different reason. As you may have noticed, they were clad in the same colors as the birds in Brennen's dream.

Yllowyyn stood to give a report.

BILLY

Oh great, it's Weenie.

YLLOWYYN

Thank you for the floor, your Grace. As you can see, their attire is completely unfamiliar. And you can take my word that their manners are equally alien. Furthermore, if you'll look at the puny one, you'll see he wears tokens of Garedian around his neck.

NARRATOR

He was of course referring to the token that Nelson called a "d20," which was considered relatively inoffensive back where Nelson came from, but mortified gasps broke out throughout the court nonetheless.

BILLY

I swear to God, Nerd...

GUNTHER

Silence!

YELLOWYYN

Your Grace, I would have brought them to the court's attention sooner, but I had been out hunting and did not hear of the Her late Majesty's tragic demise until I returned.

GUNTHER

(TO YELLOWYYN)

I understand, Kalth'yr.

(TO THE KIDS)

Where are the three of you from?

BILLY

N! E! P! A!

GUNTHER

I've never heard of such a place, and I am High King. Who claims those lands?

BILLY

Um...the governor of Pennsylvania?

JEN

His name is Tom Corbett, I think.

NARRATOR

Billy looked at Jen, just the slightest bit taken aback. Very much taken aback by the proceedings was Ardel of House Redmoor, a somewhat petulant lord of 24 years and no small influence in Guernatal's court. Until this moment, he held his tongue. But his more mild-mannered twin, the maid Arlene, who sat with him, had noticed the signs of his anger growing ever more dire. At the mention of fantastical-sounding lands and governors, he could no longer remain mute.

ARDEL

This all sounds made-up. What manner of game do they think they're playing at?

NELSON

Well, the setting is very similar to *The Elder Scrolls* series, but the introduction seems a bit lengthy, even for a Bethesda game.

GUNTHER

I assure you I do not have time for games.

BILLY

You don't have time for games? I'm glad you guys are having so much fun with your little renaissance fair, but we need to get home.

GUNTHER

You will go nowhere if you don't tell me what you were doing on my lands. I believe in justice, but DO NOT TRY MY PATIENCE!!

BILLY

You can't just keep us here!

GUNTHER

GUARDS!!!

NARRATOR

Three soldiers emerged from the crowd, swiftly pushed our travelers to their knees and put swords to their necks. Billy and Nelson finally joined Jen in the realization that this was a very appropriate time to be frightened.

GUNTHER

Now...WHAT WERE YOU DOING ON MY LANDS?

JEN

Listen, your Maj...your Grace. We honestly don't know how we got here. We were in trouble at school, and then there was a storm, and then something with my ass, and then there were trees--

BRENNEN

--Were they wearing those clothes when you found them, Kalth'yr?

YLLLOWYYN

Indeed they were, General.

BRENNEN

Where did you get your clothes, children?

JEN

(SCARED, SIMULTANEOUS)
Central High Varsity Athletics

BILLY

(SCARED, SIMULTANEOUS)
Central High Varsity Athletics

NESLON

(SCARED, SIMULTANEOUS)
My grandma.

GUNTHER

Speak your mind, General.

BRENNEN

It's probably nothing, your Grace. But I may have had a dream about these three.

NARRATOR

This caught the attention of the clergy who were present at court. The Bishop of Guernatal's dominion spoke up.

HEAD PRIEST

What sort of dream?

BRENNEN

I was in danger, and was rescued by birds. Of the same colors that these three wear.

NARRATOR

The clergy talked quietly but excitedly amongst themselves.

GUNTHER

I would know what you are saying.

NARRATOR

The Bishop stood, which required great effort. This was because he had lived for just about as long as any man had a right to live, and then kept on living for another few decades. He wore elegant purple robes, and on a silver chain around his neck was a golden disk. On it were some inscriptions, but more on those later.

HEAD PRIEST

General, had you seen these strangers at any point before these things were dreamt?

BRENNEN

I had not, your Eminence.

HEAD PRIEST

And have you ever heard of the scrolls of Baradir?

NELSON

Those sound SO epic.

GUNTHER

Time is of the essence, Bishop.

HEAD PRIEST

They are writings, your Majesty. Their veracity has been refuted by the Elders, but they have not been declared outwardly heretical. As such, they have become the domain of scholars such as myself, who study them as anthropology rather than theology.

NARRATOR

Had the Bishop's eyes not been far too old to function properly, he may have noticed the epidemic of yawning that had broken out in the throne room.

HEAD PRIEST

The writer speaks of a time of Garedian's reign.

HEAD PRIEST

(UNDER NARRATOR)

A time of war, and fear, and darkness, and pestilence, and weeping, and gnashing of teeth, and war, and fear, and...

NARRATOR

(OVER HEAD PRIEST)

At this point, Billy had managed to doze off while still on his knees with a sword at his throat. This embarrassed Jen to no end.

HEAD PRIEST

...Forgive me, my Lords. I forgot what I was saying.

NARRATOR

A younger priest could take no more.

YOUNGER PRIEST

(HURRIEDLY)

An Anointed One will save us from the dark times. The prophet of the Anointed One's coming will be a great warrior, and the sigil of the Anointed One will be a bird.

NARRATOR

There was excited chatter throughout the hall. Fortunately, it covered up Billy's snoring long enough for Jen to nudge him awake with her elbow. Lord Redmoor, however, was having none of it.

ARDEL

You can't expect us to give weight to this prophecy, Bishop. You said yourself that the Elders refuted it.

HEAD PRIEST

Indeed. Very few still put any faith in the scrolls of Baradir, and I am not among them. Yet, you must admit, the details are uncanny.

GUNTHER

What would you have us do, Bishop?

HEAD PRIEST

It may be prudent, after our host is assembled of course, for me to take these three and a small guard to see the Elders.

ARDEL

Come now, your Grace. War is at our doorstep. We should put them to death in the town square.

JEN

What?!

ARDEL

We shall make an example of them to discourage any who sow dissent.

NARRATOR

Arlene Redmoor could no longer ignore the look of innocent terror on young Jen's face.

ARLENE

With respect, your Grace, what harm can they possibly do from within the dungeon?

NARRATOR

Ardel turned to look at his sister with fury in his eyes.

ARDEL

The harm of seeming too weak to act.

GUNTHER

Lord Redmoor speaks wisely. We cannot afford to seem weak.

YELLOWYYN

If I may, your Grace, Maid Redmoor may have a point. Your Grace, do the commons know I've captured these things?

BILLY

(UNDER HIS BREATH)

Why don't you capture my--

JEN

Shhh!

GUNTHER

Not yet, Kalth'yr.

YELLOWYYN

Then if they are villains, House Guernatal will be praised for killing them in a few days just the same as if they are killed tomorrow. If they are no one, you can do with them as you will with no consequence. And if the Elders do deem them important...Bishop, what would it mean for the Kingdom if one of them were the so-called Anointed One?

HEAD PRIEST

His Majesty's victory in any future conflicts would be all but assured.

YELLOWYYN

Best to not discard such a potentially powerful weapon in our haste to seem powerful, your Grace. Just my humble opinion.

NARRATOR

The King took a few long moments to ponder, as the travelers took the same moments to realize that perhaps their deaths were not imminent.

GUNTHER

...Sound reasoning, I must admit. Wouldn't you agree, Lord Redmoor?

NARRATOR

Relief passed over the faces of Billy, Jen, and Nelson, but Ardel had not taken his eyes off his sister for an instant.

ARDEL

Yes, your Grace.

GUNTHER

Then it is settled. Guards, let them up.

NARRATOR

The soliders sheathed their swords and pulled the three young humans to their feet.

GUNTHER

These prisoners will remain here until it is deemed safe to unseal the inner hold, at which point they will be taken to the Elders to determine their import.

NARRATOR

Suddenly, one of the King's soldiers burst into the hall at a full sprint, struggling for breath.

SCOUT

(CHOKES)

Pardon, Lords.

BRENNEN

Catch your breath, boy.

SCOUT

(GULPS FOR AIR)

Traft's army crosses the Black Mountains. Fifty thousand strong. Foot, horse, bows, and siege engines.

GUNTHER

And the Knights of the Wood?

SCOUT

...Watched them cross.

NARRATOR

Where before there were excited murmurs, there was now all-out panic. Billy, Jen, and Nelson did not know what they should be panicking about, but it was clear that some very bad news had just been given. In fact, Brennen and his King were only ones in the room who kept their composure.

GUNTHER

Your haste in returning has saved countless lives, and the Kingdom thanks you. The rest of you, I will unseal the hold so that you may make whatever arrangements you wish. We have at least two dawns before Traft arrives. For those of you who seek the protection of this keep, it will be open to you, but we will seal the gates again at dusk tomorrow. We shall do our utmost to keep you safe.

NARRATOR

The court leapt from their seats and scurried off in myriad directions.

GUNTHER

General, I would have words. Kalth'yr, wait outside with the prisoners.

YLLLOWYYN

Your Grace.

NARRATOR

Yllowwyn motioned for our travelers to follow him, and, not having the slightest idea what else to do, they obliged.

GUNTHER

There is a traitor among us. There is no other way news of the Queen's death could have gotten out.

BRENNEN

I'm afraid you're right, old friend.

GUNTHER

I need you to track down the traitor.

BRENNEN

I will send our best men.

GUNTHER

You will send yourself. If we've been betrayed, you're the only one I can trust.

BRENNEN

I would not leave your side in these dark times.

GUNTHER

It gives me no joy, but that's an order, General.

BRENNEN

...Yes, your Grace.

GUNTHER

Take Yllowwyn with you as well.

BRENNEN

An order as well, your Grace?

GUNTHER

A pompous little shit, I know. Even for an elf.

YLLLOWYYN

(O.S., MUFFLED THROUGH THE DOOR)

I can hear you.

NARRATOR

They both shook their heads.

GUNTHER

But his skills as a tracker will be very useful to you. You might as well come back in now, Kalth'yr.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyyn re-entered with his charges in tow.

JEN

Your Grace, I'm really sorry all this stuff is coming down on you, but I swear on my mother we had nothing to do with it, and we just wanna go home and see our families.

GUNTHER

I'm afraid we can't let you leave. At least for a while.

BILLY

Hey, all due respect here your Kingship, sir, and thanks for not having us killed, but we do *not* wanna get wrapped up in this.

GUNTHER

YOU ARE WRAPPED UP IN IT! War is coming, boy. Funny thing about war. Doesn't give half a starving man's shit what young men want from their lives.

BRENNEN

[GRUFF CHUCKLE]

GUNTHER

For your own protection, you will accompany General Brennen on his journey. Now, have the three of you any supplies that might be of use?

YLLLOWYYN

The tall one was carrying armor of some sort when I found them.

GUNTHER

Good. Take them and retrieve their effects from the dungeon. The five of you will leave as soon as you are able.

YLLLOWYYN

Yes, your Grace.

NARRATOR

They turned to exit.

NELSON

I think we just got our first quest!

BILLY

Shut it, Nelson.

JEN

Nelson, I don't think they're fooling around.

YLLLOWYYN

Indeed. We'll likely be in danger every step of the way, and the more you talk the more dangerous it becomes.

NELSON

Welcome to my life in Pennsylvania.

NARRATOR

Brennen was about to leave as well when Gunther grabbed his arm. They waited until everyone else was out of earshot - human *and* elvish earshot.

BRENNEN

Your Grace, I cannot help but think they would be safer in your keep than on the road with me.

GUNTHER

Galadon help us, Brennen, if Traft is coming and the Knights of the Wood sit idly by, Felghir will follow soon enough. And when he does, these walls will not hold forever. You know that as well as I. If one of them can save us, I would not lose them to my own frailty. Keep them safe, and when you have completed your two other missions, see them to the Elders.

BRENNEN

Two missions, your Grace?

GUNTHER

Do you remember what I told you, after Prince Uther was killed?

BRENNEN

Has it come to that, your Grace?

GUNTHER

Would I mention it out loud if we had another choice?

NARRATOR

The King removed a sealed scroll from his pocket and handed it to Brennen.

GUNTHER

This scroll has a name on it, but cannot be read except by a mage practiced in the art of deception. Take it to the college at Armstrungard, and seek out the great wizard Ba'a lo-Ky'yr. This should go without saying, but divulge the importance of the name to no one.

BRENNEN

Which first? The traitor, or...

GUNTHER

Do you remember thirty years ago? The last words of my coronation speech?

BRENNEN

You said we would strive for a day when honor and justice would come before politics.

GUNTHER

Today is not that that day.

NARRATOR

Brennen nodded. He put the scroll in his pocket.

An odd thing I've observed about mortals with the capacity for speech: if there's one thing you can count on them to lie about, it is things that frighten them. Though these two men did not say anything plainly untrue, they spoke as though they planned to see each other again.

GUNTHER

Go with Galadon, Brennen.

BRENNEN

Till we meet again, Gunther.

NARRATOR

They embraced, briefly but warmly, and then Brennen was gone.

END OF EPISODE THREE.

EPISODE FOUR:

19

EXT. BEHIND CASTLE GUERNATAL - VERYEARLY MORNING

19

NARRATOR

At the bottom of the craggy hill on which Guernatal's keep was built was a hole through which sewage could be evacuated from the castle and town. Clever bit of engineering. Even more clever was a nearby secret door that looked exactly like the rock face when closed.

The door had not been used since well before Gunther's reign, but given the stakes, Brennen decided to do everything possible to conceal his party's movement. The door opened and out came Brennen, Yllowwyn, Billy, Jen, and Nelson. Brennen and Yllowwyn were armed to the teeth. Billy had his so-called "football pads," Jen her "handbag," and Nelson still wore his "d20" on his neck. As they emerged from the hidden door, they were greeted by the overpowering smell of human sewage, which was very unpleasant to the four humans but did not much bother Yllowwyn.

BRENNEN

We are headed 30 miles north.

BILLY

We're *walking*?

YLLOWYYN

Even if we had horses, do any of you know how to ride?

NELSON

Is that a prompt for a tutorial?

BRENNEN

It's easier to stay undetected this way.

JEN

At least we'll take in the scenery, right?

BILLY

This is horseshit.

YLLOWYYN

I've heard you speak endlessly of yourself as an athlete. Funny that a walk intimidates you.

BILLY

I was thinking of the lady.

JEN

We do have to train for cheerleading, Billy.

BILLY

No offense, babe. Lifting pom-poms isn't training.

NARRATOR

Brennen looked over his shoulder at Castle Guernatal once more, pausing for just a moment, and then put on his helm and turned away.

20

EXT. GRASSY ROAD - SUNRISE

20

NARRATOR

When the sun came up, it was snowing lightly. Soft, gentle snowflakes caught the light of the new day as they coasted to the ground.

The party had made respectable progress during the night. But as the dawn approached, Brennen and Yllowyyyn insisted on heading off the beaten path. Their three young charges were ill-prepared for the rocky terrain that this plan required.

BRENNEN

We need to pick up the pace. The road won't get any easier after dark, and Traft isn't getting any farther away.

JEN

I'm sorry, I'm trying.

BILLY

Did you have to pick the most busted-ass road you could find? You don't have an interstate or some shit?

YLLOWYYN

There are smoother roads for horses and wagons. But apparently I need to remind you that we're hoping to avoid detection.

BILLY

Do you have to remind yourself to think about girls when you jerk off?

NELSON

So we're going to some great magic academy?

YLLOWYYN

The College of Armstrungard is the finest scholastic instituion in human realms of Iorden.

JEN

I never thought I'd get to see a big school. I only ever visited community college.

BILLY

I bet they'll be like those preppy douchebags from UPenn.

NELSON

And we're meeting a legendary wizard, right?

YELLOWYYN

If we're lucky. It's a great honor to get a private audience with Ba'a lo-Ky'yr.

BILLY

...Ball licker? Yellow ween is taking us to see Ball licker? What is it with your guys' names, Weenie?

YELLOWYYN

Why does he keep calling me Weenie?

NELSON

I think he's trying to insult you. Where we come from, 'weenie' is a diminutive term for the male organ.

YELLOWYYN

Strange.

JEN

Any chance this wizard might know how to get us home?

BRENNEN

Where did you say home is again?

BILLY

Lackawanna county, NEPA.

YELLOWYYN

Ba'a lo-Ky'yr...

BILLY

[GIGGLES]

YELLOWYYN

...has traveled the world, even to the unmapped islands on the edges of Iorden. Perhaps he does know where this "Lackawanna" is. But remind me, General, why we are we going to see him?

NARRATOR

Brennen took barely a moment to search for a believable lie.

BRENNEN

He may have information about whomever betrayed House Guernatal.

BILLY

So where can I drop a duke around here?

JEN

Billy!

YELLOWYYN

What is his meaning?

NELSON

I think he's asking about the use of a privy.

BRENNEN

We haven't time to stop now. We'll dig a ditch when we make camp.

YELLOWYYN

But be sure to bury your leavings.

BILLY

How about I bury my dick?...In your mom!

YELLOWYYN

For someone so preoccupied with sexual congress, you seem quite confused about how it works.

BRENNEN

Enough.

BILLY

Yeah. Enough, Weenie.

21

INT. CORRIDOR IN CASTLE GUERNATAL -

SIMULTANEOUS

21

NARRATOR

At the same time, Arlene Redmoor was frantically making preparations to leave Castle Guernatal ahead of the impending war. She rounded a corner quickly, and nearly collided with her brother.

ARDEL

Where are you headed in such a hurry, dear sister?

ARLENE

To our father's house. Where do you think? We'll be safer there.

NARRATOR

Ardel struck his sister across the mouth, cutting her lip. Sadly, this was not wholly surprising.

ARDEL

We are staying right here.

NARRATOR

He leaned close and held his sister in place by her hair.

ARDEL

(WHISPERS)

And if you ever speak against me at court again, I will make sure everyone in Iorden knows you for the whore you are.

NARRATOR

He released her and strode away. Arlene refused to let water come to her eyes until after Ardel had turned the corner.

22

EXT. THAWING LAKE - MORNING

22

NARRATOR

By late morning, Brennen and his charges had reached a thinly iced lake. On a bank of the lake was an outcropping, which provided enough cover for a brief rest. The temperature was dropping, so Brennen was forced to build a small fire while Billy made use of the ditch that Yllowyyn had dug on the opposite side of the outcropping.

NELSON

Should we have sent someone to guard the privy ditch?

JEN

You're not gonna watch Billy go to the bathroom.

NELSON

Not me. Yllowyyn or something.

JEN

He'd love that. Besides, I think he's okay. Bad guys don't just appear out of thin air, right?

NELSON

Actually, in most Japanese RPGs--

BILLY

(O.S.)

--Holy shit, you guys.

NARRATOR

Billy sauntered over the outcropping, looking very proud.

BILLY

I just took the most amazing dump!

NARRATOR

Jen buried her face in her hands.

BILLY

You ever take such a big dump you need a nap after?

JEN

Honey, we haven't slept in almost 24 hours. That's probably--

BILLY

--No, no, no. Trust me, if you'da seen this dump I took...there was a rabbit watching me. He ran away when it hit the ground.

NARRATOR

That was when the wind changed direction, and Yllowyyn's elvish nose detected unmasked human feces.

YLLOWYYN

Please tell me you buried it like you were told.

BILLY

What? No, screw that, that's weird.

JEN

[SHRIEKS]

NARRATOR

A dozen cockroaches had scurried over the rocks. I should be clear that these were Iordic cockroaches. I'm told that where Billy, Jen, and Nelson were from they have creatures which they call 'cockroaches,' but which are only an inch or so long. Iordic cockroaches are the size of small dogs. Hence Jen's shrieking and hiding behind Billy.

YLLOWYYN

Billy, you idiot!

NELSON

Someone give me a weapon!

BRENNEN

Just charge them!

NELSON

What?

BRENNEN

[ROARS]

NARRATOR

Brennen ran at the roaches, waving his arms. They darted away extremely quickly, but after a few seconds of running, they rolled over dead, as is their wont.

BILLY

I think we got 'em. You all right, babe?

JEN

Yeah. I'm fine.

YELLOWYYN

Let's stay alert. If there's anything more fearsome nearby, it knows where we are now.

BRENNEN

Aye. You and I shall trade watches while they rest. And we should get them to an armorer when we reach Armstrungard.

JEN

Can we just go home, please? We won't even need armor there.

NELSON

We're gonna get our own armor?

YELLOWYYN

And maybe weapons, if we find some you can handle.

NELSON

Epic.

BILLY

Hell yeah. No sense messing up my hands if I don't need to.

YELLOWYYN

Well you've certainly proved yourself in battle so far.

BILLY

I was protecting the lady.

YELLOWYYN

Ah yes, the favorite excuse of cowardly men.

BILLY

What the hell did you say to me!?

BRENNEN

Stop it, both of you! Billy, keep your mouth closed.
Elf, go find us some supper.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn looked over to the dead roaches.

BRENNEN

With at most FOUR legs.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn shrugged, strung his bow and walked off.

NELSON

Do roaches around here always die just from running?

BRENNEN

Of course.

BILLY

Pussies.

NELSON

I thought I could at least learn to use a weapon
against them.

JEN

They're probably just too big.

NELSON

You have to expect vermin of unusual size early in the
quest.

JEN

But insects have open circulatory systems and no lungs.
When they're that size there's no way they could absorb
enough oxygen to run.

NARRATOR

This prompted a sideways look from Billy.

JEN

...I think.

MID-DAY

NARRATOR

It was around noon when Arlene Redmoor climbed into the bath. There was a chill in the air that day and steam curled out of the water to wrap around her body. Her handmaiden, Gwen, ladeled fresh water from a cauldron onto her. Gwen was of an age with Arlene and had become her handmaiden some ten years ago. Ever since, they had been as dear to each other as was considered proper for nobles and the commoners who served them.

GWEN

I hope you're not in too much pain, m'lady.

NARRATOR

Arlene self-consciously sucked in her lower lip, which had begun to scab.

ARLENE

It's nothing. They should fix the floors in this old dungeon, lest someone else fall.

GWEN

(WHISPERS)

It's not right he should do that to his sister.

ARLENE

(WHISPERS)

Gwen!

GWEN

(WHISPERS)

I'm sorry, m'lady. It just breaks my heart to see.

ARLENE

(WHISPERS, FRANTIC)

He'd break much more if he heard you!

NARRATOR

Arlene's lip split again and bled. She pulled Gwen in very close, so that her lips were almost touching the serving girl's ear.

ARLENE

(WHISPERS, EVEN QUIETER)

There will be a time for defiance, but this is not it.

NARRATOR

Gwen stood and retrieved a washcloth. She knelt back down beside the bath.

GWEN

You should talk to his Majesty about those floors.

NARRATOR

Gwen tenderly dabbed at Arlene's cut, running the cloth softly over over her mistress' lip. They looked into each other's eyes for perhaps a moment or two longer than would have been considered proper.

The door burst open and Ardel strode in, naked as the day he was born.

ARLENE

Brother!

NARRATOR

Arlene scrambled to cover herself.

ARDEL

You've had your turn. It's time for my bath.

NARRATOR

Arlene looked back at her brother, surprised. I had mentioned before that his callousness rarely surprised her anymore, but once in a while he still caught her off guard.

ARDEL

Was I not clear?

NARRATOR

His eyes were pure menace. Frightened out of her incredulity, Arlene climbed out of the tub and looked around for something to wear.

GWEN

I'll get you your night clothes m'lady.

ARDEL

(TO GWEN)

I don't recall dismissing you.

NARRATOR

Ardel climbed into the bath and looked back up at his naked sister, taking far too much pleasure in her discomfort.

ARDEL

(TO ARLENE)

It's not too far to your bedchambers. You probably won't encounter anyone if you go quickly.

NARRATOR

Arlene only turned from her brother when she realized she could no longer hold back the tears of rage. Gwen was impotently furious as she watched her mistress and dearest friend dart out into the hallway.

ARDEL

Water, wench. Now.

24

EXT. THAWING LAKE - LATE AFTERNOON

24

NARRATOR

By late afternoon, Brennen and his charges had picked clean a small goose that Yllowyyyn had shot. They sat around a small fire, wiping the grease from their hands and faces. The three young humans were completely exhausted, but nonetheless, Nelson had found time to arrange the bones from his meal in size order.

JEN

I hope you aren't offended, but this really isn't our kind of place. You can see that, can't you?

BRENNEN

Aye, and I'm sorry that you must go through this. But you are here, and I have orders to keep you with me.

BILLY

Suppose we say screw your orders and run off while you're asleep.

YLLOWYYN

You're welcome to try.

BRENNEN

You're safest with us. I fear Iorden is about to get very violent.

BILLY

Because you had a dream about some birds?

NELSON

You mean prophecy. One of us could be the Anointed One, right?

BRENNEN

The coming war has nothing to do with my dream.

JEN

What does it have to do with?

YELLOWYYN

Several things, starting with House Felghir. We think Felghir may be planning an attack against Guernatal.

NELSON

So Felghir is the big evil General that everyone was scared of last night?

YELLOWYYN

No, that's a man named Traft. He leads an army of orcs and rebels down from the mountains in the east.

NELSON

'Orcs' is troublingly vague. Are we talking *Lord of the Rings*, *WoW*, *Elder Scrolls*--

YELLOWYYN

We're talking about beasts in men's bodies, who'll rip your throat out with their teeth and burn your mother at the stake for fun.

BILLY

This place is really goin' to shit, huh?

JEN

Why now?

BRENNEN

King Gunther once had a son, Prince Uther. His mother, Queen Helga, died from fever when he was a child, but he grew into a fine young man.

YELLOWYYN

Would have made a good King.

BRENNEN

Seventeen years ago, Uther was assassinated by enemies of the monarchy. His Majesty was devastated, but in order to produce another heir, he remarried to a lady in waiting named Dagmar. They tried to conceive for many years, but only succeeded a few moons ago.

JEN

This story doesn't end happily, does it?

YELLOWYYN

I didn't know until later, but apparently, Queen Dagmar passed shortly before I found you three.

BRENNEN

Something went wrong with the birth. Mother and child both were killed.

JEN

I'm so sorry.

BILLY

...And that's it? Three people eat it and your entire country is a free-for-all? Isn't there a line of...of...help me out here four-eyes.

NELSON

Royal succession?

BILLY

Isn't there a line of royal succession?

BRENNEN

The King is aging. Most people saw Dagmar's child as his last chance at an heir.

BILLY

That's a shitty way to run things.

NELSON

Usually these traditions of royal succession go back millenia. You should show a little respect.

BILLY

Where we come from, the people rule themselves.

YELLOWYYN

Commoners raised to kings? I'm sure you do a *great* job running the kingdom.

BILLY

We *suck ass* at it. But even we're smart enough that if the guy at the top drops dead, there's like 30 people in line to take his place.

YELLOWYYN

Are any of them qualified to rule?

JEN

I still don't get why this all started a war.

YELLOWYYN

Ever since the Second White Forest Concordat, the Th'ar lo-Hyy1 have sworn to defend the legitimate bloodline of the High King.

NELSON

Th'ar lo-Hyy1?

YELLOWYYN

"Knights of the Wood" in your tongue.

BILLY

No! Knights of the *Wood*? This is too easy.

BRENNEN

But the Knights protect the monarchy in general, not any one King. With Dagmar and her child dead, House Guernatal will have no claim to the throne once his Majesty passes.

YELLOWYYN

Thus the house is no longer protected by the Th'ar lo-Hyy1. And all her enemies crawled out from under their rocks.

BRENNEN

We tried to hide the deaths, which is why some feared you were spies. But word got out while you were in our custody.

BILLY

So then what's with the dream with the birds?

NELSON

Prophecy with the birds.

YELLOWYYN

That's why his Majesty's court decided not to summarily execute you.

JEN

Not that I'm complaining, but...because of a dream about some birds?

NELSON

We've had leaders go to war for less.

YELLOWYYN

To be expected when the rabble rules itself.

BILLY

Yeah, the kids of cousins are a better bet.

NELSON

I should point out that the prevalence of birth defects in the children of cousins is really no greater than in the general population. There are, however, birth defects among the children of siblings.

YELLOWYYN

Speaking of which: Marcus Mooncrest. What do you think his move is? With Traft on the move, the realm needs the civic guard intact. Surely he wouldn't call his banners now.

BRENNEN

Unless he's stupid enough to think Traft can be bargained with.

NARRATOR

It was then that Brennen noticed, far off beyond the horizon, a thin pillar of smoke rising into the sky.

BRENNEN

(TO THE KIDS)

Get a few hours of sleep. Then we need to keep moving.

25

EXT. Snow-Dusted Hill - Twilight 25

NARRATOR

And they did get some sleep. And they did keep moving, far too soon for the liking of the young travelers but not quite soon enough for Brennen's liking.

For all her exhaustion, Jen was mesmerized by the Iordic sky at night. Stars beyond counting in constellations she had never seen. The moon seemed to her so large and the aurora so vivid, she had a hard time believing they were real.

NELSON

How much farther?

YELLOWYYN

You just slept for *four hours*.

BILLY

(SLURRED SPEECH)

I'm doing fine.

NARRATOR

Billy then proceeded to trip over his own feet and nearly fall. But by then the party had reached the top of the hill they had been climbing for some time.

BRENNEN

Behold...

NARRATOR

The hill overlooked an enormous city, creeping around a river, with torchlights visible even at this hour.

BRENNEN

Armstrungard.

NARRATOR

A legion of stone buildings sprawled out across what seemed like the entire valley, and at the the center of it all was a shimmering white tower. A waste of a perfectly nice river valley if you ask me. But we sprites are just timeless manifestations of the Life Force who bear witness to all that is, was, and ever will be. What do we know?

No matter. For it was in this city - this expansive, shining, and in my opinion kind of tacky city - that Billy, Jen, and Nelson had a date, as they say, with legend.

END OF EPISODE FOUR.

EPISODE FIVE:

26

EXT. SNOW-DUSTED HILL - TWILIGHT 26

NARRATOR

From their position atop the hill, the party could see the shimmering tower stretching up to the sky, and the city of Armstrungard spread out around it.

BILLY

Lemme guess. Weenie's people designed that tower. It's called Cockingshirevilletownenburg or something, right?

NELSON

You're mixing Old English place names with Germanic place names. It's probably either Cockingshire or Cockenburg.

BRENNEN

That is the college of Armstrungard.

YELLOWYYN

And yes my people did build it, as a show of good faith to all Memyet.

JEN

How'd they get it so shiny?

BILLY

I got a few guesses.

YELLOWYYN

It was made from the tusks of great beasts that once roamed the northern deserts.

JEN

Elephants? There's elephants here?!

YELLOWYYN

(NO SELF-AWARENESS)
There were, before the tower.

NARRATOR

Brennen noticed Jen's face drop in disappointment.

BRENNEN

We've heard there might still be some on the other side of the mountains.

BILLY

Don't sweat it, babe. When we get back home I'll win you another stuffed elephant at the fair.

YELLOWYYN

My family owns a few stuffed elephants.

BILLY

Not helping, weenie.

27

EXT. ARMSTRUNGARD BUSINESS DISTRICT

- EARLY MORNING

27

NARRATOR

They entered the city shortly after dawn, and headed straight for its market district. Even this early, it was already bustling with merchants and buyers of all backgrounds and walks of life. Brennen guided them through the throng until they arrived at Bailey Brothers' Purveyors of Fine Arms and Armor...

28

INT. BAILEY BROTHER'S ARMORERS -

CONTINUOUS

28

NARRATOR

...wherein the man Bailey peddled his wares to Brennen over the din of a hammer and anvil.

(BAILEY SPEAKS WITH A BROGUE.)

BAILEY

If your charges don't find anything that suits them, we'd be glad to craft them some custom pieces for a small fee. But our pre-fabricated armor comes in styles to suit any body type and combat style.

NARRATOR

Indeed, Nelson had found a chain mail shirt that happened to resemble the buttoned, collared thing he had been wearing in size and fit.

NELSON

This is SO cool.

NARRATOR

Billy, similarly, had found a suit and helm of plate steel. The rounded design of the helm and pronounced shoulders of the suit did make them look somewhat similar to the attire Billy wore to play "football."

BILLY

I could kinda get used to this. Lot heavier than the stuff they gave us at school though.

YELLOWYYN

Heavy indeed.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyyn tore a tremendous gash into Billy's old attire, which lay on the floor, with his elven knife. Then, before Billy could react, he stabbed at the plate. His blade glanced off leaving nary a nick in the armor.

YLLLOWYYYN

But it might save your life.

BAILEY

It will certainly save your life. And has the lady found anything suitable? Myself, I think it's great when a girl wants to lend moral support out on a battlefield.

JEN

I'm not sure about this...

NARRATOR

It must be admitted the the "Ladies' Armor" available at this establishment did surprisingly little in the way of armoring and surprisingly much in the way of drawing attention to a young woman's...moral supports.

JEN

(TO BILLY AND NELSON)
What do you guys think?

BILLY & NELSON

(OVERLAPPING AD LIB., URGENT)
Yeah! Great! Awesome! (etc.)

JEN

(TO BAILEY)
Don't you have anything with a little more...coverage?

NELSON

Lots of female characters dress like that in games and comic books. It's for mobility.

BILLY

Yeah! What he said.

JEN

I think I could still be mobile if a little less of my chest was exposed.

BILLY

Think of it like your cheerleader uniform. You look great in your uniform.

JEN

...Okay, I guess. I'll take it.

BAILEY

Splendid. Now would you like to purchase any arms to go with your armor?

NELSON

Yes!

BILLY

This is for me.

NARRATOR

Billy noticed a large warhammer hanging on the wall, which he took down, only to discover he could not nearly lift it. He fell backwards under its weight, taking several posed suits of armor with him.

YELLOWYYN

Let's stick with the armor for now.

29

EXT. COLLEGE OF ARMSTRUNGARD GARDEN

- LATE MORNING

29

NARRATOR

You'll recall that the party's primary destination in the city of Armstrungard was the college at its center. I am told that, in some places, 'ivory tower' has become an expression for a place which shuts out the unpleasant realities of the world. No doubt this had its roots in reference to the College of Armstrungard, which was populated almost exclusively by elves and men whose fathers had a tremendous amount of gold at the time of their birth. And, of course, at its center was a literal tower of ivory.

Jen was thoroughly awed by these sights when the party entered the college. Enough so that she forgot her initial embarrassment over her exposed skin. Nelson, in his gleaming new mail, looked surer of himself than he ever had in the halls of Valley Central High School. Billy was less impressed.

BILLY

This place is lame. They don't even have a football field.

NARRATOR

Jen sighed quietly.

NARRATOR

Brennen was told that he and his charges could wait for the Elf he sought in a library, with books as far as the eye could see. The design of the room drew ones attention to a single, ornate desk, on which was perched an impressive candelabra. The candles were not lit, but rather the light in the room came from a large window behind the desk.

As the party waited, Jen examined the extensive collection of books, their spines bearing characters that were strange to her. Nelson was similarly transfixed by the elven artwork decorating the stacks themselves. Billy had found a store of feather quills and was throwing them at the ceiling trying to make them stick.

BILLY

Hey, honey, come here. I think I've got the hang of this.

JEN

I've never seen so many books in one place. These all belong to one guy?

BILLY

They're just books. Big deal.

NELSON

This stuff is amazing. I wonder where I can learn about these engravings.

BILLY

Ooh! Ooh! I know! In the exact opposite direction from a vagina.

JEN

(QUIETLY, TO NELSON)

Nelson, not for anything...you mean well, but Billy isn't into the stuff you are. Maybe he'd go easier on you if you didn't, you know, broadcast it all the time.

NELSON

Guys like him will always find something to make fun of me for.

NARRATOR

From among the stacks came a woman in plain robes with skin similar in tone to Nelson's. She had just shy of 30 years and was called Nia. On her head was a purple headband, and around her neck was a disk similar in

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

shape to those worn by the priests at Castle Guernatal,
but made of old bronze instead of polished gold.

(NIA HAS A NEW ZEALAND ACCENT)

NIA

Good afternoon. I'm Nia, teaching assistant to Ba'a
lo-Ky'yr. How can I help you, m'lords?

BRENNEN

Well met, Nia. But none of us holds lands.

NIA

Sirs, then.

BRENNEN

Brennen will do.

NIA

General Brennen?

BRENNEN

The same.

NIA

It is an honor to meet such a lauded servant of the
realm.

BRENNEN

And this is Yllowwyn, Kalth'yr to House Guernatal.

NIA

Th'aluum, Hyylyet.

YLLLOWYYN

You know Hyyl'lyg?

NIA

Required of every divinity student at Armstrungard.
Now, how can I be of service to you?

BRENNEN

We humbly request an audience with Ba'a lo-Ky'yr on
behalf of his Majesty, High King Gunther Guernatal.

NARRATOR

As if on cue, the window turned opaque, plunging the
room into darkness. Anticipating some mortal threat,
Brennen unslung his axe and Yllowwyn unsheathed his
hunting knife. That was when every candle in the room
exploded with light to reveal the Elf-Mage who was
called Ba'a lo-Ky'yr. Centuries old but as imposing as

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

ever, with long white hair and beard braided into tails that wound down to his wrists, he raised his arms. The window turned transparent again, but now seemed to be tinted all the colors of a rainbow separately but at once.

Brennen and Yllowyyn dropped to their knees, pulling the young humans with them.

(BA'A SPEAKS WITH A WASPISH DRAWL SIMILAR TO YLLOWYYN'S.)

BA'A

Th'aluum, Memyet. What brings you to seek my council?

NARRATOR

Before they could answer, Ba'a noticed Yllowyyn

BA'A

(TO YLLOWYYN)
To your feet.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn obeyed without hesitation.

BA'A

Our kind do not bend the knee. You dishonor your heritage.

BILLY

[DERISIVE LAUGH]

BRENNEN

Forgive him, doctor. He only seeks to honor his commitment as Kalth'yr, by observing the traditions of men in my presence.

BA'A

You may rise.

NARRATOR

Brennen also obliged.

BA'A

To what do I owe the honor of a visit from his Majesty's court?

BRENNEN

Royal business that requires the art of illusion. His Majesty says you are its greatest living practitioner.

BA'A

I've studied these arts for many centuries.

BRENNEN

Your help in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

BA'A

To be sure. As I greatly appreciate offers of coin in exchange for my time.

BRENNEN

Respectfully, doctor, the heads of House Guernatal have been liege lords of this city since the Peace. They provide for its defense, and ask for no taxes in return. It is through their benevolence that this academy, and its faculty, have flourished. And now, House Guernatal humbly requests a small favor in return.

BA'A

(DISMISSIVE)

Right. Nia, I'm sure you can handle this.

NARRATOR

He turned to leave.

BRENNEN

His Majesty requested you by name, doctor.

BA'A

The girl is trustworthy. Now, you'll have to forgive me, my good man, but I've research to attend to, and I'm afraid it doesn't fund itself. Good day.

NARRATOR

Ba'a strode off into a smaller, more private office, and shut the door behind him.

BILLY

(AFTER BA'A)

Hey! Do you know how to get to Pennsylvania?

BRENNEN

(TO NIA)

We have gold if that's what the doctor so desperately requires.

NIA

Good luck. Once he decides something is beneath him, you'd just as easily pass an orc for a princess.

BA'A

(O.S., THROUGH THE DOOR)

I'm just working on your recommendation letter to the scholarship committee, dear. Anything you'd like me to add?

NARRATOR

Nia sighed, resignedly.

NIA

I haven't met your other companions.

JEN

I'm Jen. I have no idea how I got here.

NIA

Pleased to meet you, Jen. I felt the same way before I accepted Galadon into my heart.

BILLY

Billy Williams. Junior. Captain of the Valley Central High Hawks.

NIA

Billy.

NELSON

Can you do that thing with the windows too? That was epic.

JEN

This is Nelson.

BILLY

He's pretty weird.

JEN

He has an active imagination.

NIA

The first mark of a talented mage.

BILLY

What about whether you have pubes yet? Does that matter?

BRENNEN

(TO NIA)

May I speak with you in private?

LATER

NARRATOR

The room set aside for Nia's office space was comparable in dimensions to a particularly lavish coffin. The difficulty of Nia and Brennen conferring in it was compounded by the countless scrolls and tomes stacked on Nia's desk.

With some difficulty, Nia found enough arm room to unravel the scroll that Brennen had been carrying with him. When, after some time, she was able to break through the enchantment concealing the name on the scroll, her eyes widened.

NIA

This is for a criminal investigation, isn't it?

BRENNEN

What makes you say that?

NIA

The name on this scroll...Aerona Regan.

NARRATOR

Brennen looked back, blankly.

NIA

Does that name mean nothing to you?

BRENNEN

Should it?

NIA

They call her "the Thief Queen of Arumstrungard," but 'thief' barely captures her crimes.

BRENNEN

Criminal or not, it is vital that I find her. If thief queen she is, she'll have taken steps to cover her tracks, aye?

NIA

It stands to reason.

BRENNEN

A mage might prove very useful to me in my search.

NIA

If the whispers about Aerona Regan are true, she'll kill you before she bothers to say hello. I must graciously decline.

BRENNEN TAKES A BEAT.

BRENNEN

You are a student of theology are you not?

NIA

Among other things, yes. I hope to take my vows once I have my doctorate.

BRENNEN

The night before I met those three young ones, I had a dream. A great bird, with feathers the colors of their clothes.

NIA

Will they be brought to the Elders?

BRENNEN

That is my intent. But I must find this Aeron Regan first.

NIA

Why is that?

BRENNEN

She may be vital to a royal investigation.

NIA

Do you take the scrolls of Baradir seriously, General?

BRENNEN

I know too little of them to have an opinion.

NIA

Then why jeopardize your mission taking the children along?

BRENNEN

Because it is what my King commands.

NIA

As it happens, General, I take the scrolls very seriously. With what you've said about your dream, I'd be dishonoring my oaths by not going with you.

BRENNEN

There will probably be great danger. Have you any martial training?

NIA

I know quite a few spells that can keep people safe.

BRENNEN

Will your master miss you?

NIA

Master? I left my friends and family to study under the greatest wizard alive, only to learn that he wanted a free research assistant rather than a student. He can stick it in his pointy ear.

BRENNEN

As you wish.

NIA

Passage to the underground is known to be found along the canal. I'll meet you at the north gate after dark.

BRENNEN

Aye.

NARRATOR

They shook hands.

NIA

Until then, go with Galadon, General.

END OF EPISODE FIVE.

EPISODE SIX:

32

EXT. CREEPY ALLEY - MIDNIGHT

32

NARRATOR

After the young humans were allowed to sleep for much longer than they had in three days - and on mattresses no less! - Brennen led his party to the part of the city unofficially reserved for people whose fathers had very little gold indeed. Several such personages watched the party furtively from the shadows and alleys.

NIA

(WHISPERS)
General!

NARRATOR

Nia peeked out from behind a corner with a hooded cloak and a walking staff, and joined the group.

Soon they came to a small guardhouse in which a single guard snored loudly. The party easily hopped over the turnpike in his charge and descended a flight of stone steps.

33

EXT. CANALS - CONTINUOUS

33

NARRATOR

The stairs lead down to the canals of Armstrungard, which were lined by brick walls and stone walkways.

YELLOWYYN

What are we looking for?

NIA

I'm not sure yet.

NARRATOR

Nia looked at the end of her staff, and a faint blue glow radiated from it. When she touched the staff to the walls, the bricks around it glowed as well. Nia dragged her staff across the wall for a hundred or so paces until they came across a brick that did not glow.

NIA

A hollow brick. Makes sense. A thief's hands would recognize it.

NARRATOR

She pushed on the brick with her staff and quickly backed away. By some unseen mechanism, a previously invisible doorway opened in the wall.

CONTINUOUS

NARRATOR

The door led to a tangle of tunnels and subterranean shanties, interweaving as though it were a city unto itself. Echoing along from further down the tunnels, a raucous crowd was audible.

BRENNEN

(RE: THE NOISE)

I'm guessing that's a good place to start investigating.

NARRATOR

As they headed toward the source of the noise, the looks the party got from the lurkers-about down here made the looks they got above ground seem downright amiable. After walking a few hundred yards, they found the source of the noise to be a ramshackle but bustling tavern.

BILLY

Oh good. I love drinking in sewers.

NARRATOR

The sigil of this establishment, painted outside on a rotting wooden sign, was a rat impaled on a dagger. There seemed to be no fewer than half a dozen fistfights in progress out front of the bar.

BRENNEN

Nia, it's probably safest if you wait outside with the young ones.

NIA

Gladly.

NARRATOR

Brennen and Yllowyn headed off towards the tavern.

BILLY

Yell out if you need some backup.

NARRATOR

The General and the Elf deigned to dignify this suggestion with a sideways glance before continuing on their way.

NARRATOR

As it happened, the woman they sought - Aeron Regan, the so-called "thief queen of Armstrungard" - was taking her supper at that very tavern, as she did on many nights at about this time. But, by her own design, very few people could connect her face with her infamous name. Least of all people of any social standing, like Brennen and Yllowyyn.

She sat alone at a candelit table in an outfit so non-descript that the details have not made it down to posterity. Her hair was exactly as short as it could be without seeming strange on a woman. She was just about to start in on her supper, when a particular repugnant specimen of mankind - one of the few people who did know who she was - approached her table.

BRIGAND

Well fuck me sideways! Aeron Regan. Just who I was looking for.

NARRATOR

He sat down across from her. I'd compare his mannerisms to that of a slime mold, but I've met a few very charming slime molds.

REGAN

And I'm just *thrilled* you found me, Kelly.

BRIGAND

Aw, you don't sound thrilled.

REGAN

No really, by the gods, Kelly. My nipples are hard.

BRIGAND

Fucked up about Flowers and Needle, huh?

REGAN

Dangerous city.

BRIGAND

Dangerous line of work.

NARRATOR

Kelly grabbed the sleeve of a passing serving girl.

BRIGAND

(TO THE SERVER)
Ale, sweetheart.

REGAN

I'll be paying my bill.

BRIGAND

If you leave now, I won't get to tell you about a very lucrative business opportunity.

REGAN

[SIGHS]

Brandy. Strongest you've got.

NARRATOR

Kelly smiled at Regan.

REGAN

Make that a double.

36

INT. UNDERGROUND STREETS -

SIMULTANEOUS

36

NARRATOR

All the while, Nia and the young humans stood waiting a safe distance from the tavern. It was at this point that Nia could no longer keep quiet about the die that Nelson wore around his neck.

NIA

(TO NELSON, RE: HIS DICE)
You shouldn't wear the tokens of Garedian.

NELSON

But these are my lucky dice.

JEN

Nelson, I think they might mean something different here than they do at home.

NIA

What do they mean where you come from?

BILLY

That he's a virgin.

NIA

Here they mean you worship chaos. And everyone I know has lost something dear to chaos.

NARRATOR

It was then they noticed the five men with piecemeal arms and armor walking into the tavern. One of them shot Billy a dirty look as they disappeared through the doorway.

BILLY
Douchebags. They're lucky I'm just covering the door.

NIA
You're also unarmed.

BILLY
Just because I'm not some fairy with a bow and arrow everyone thinks I can't fight.

JEN
(SOOTHING)
No, no, of course you can fight, baby. We just need you out here to protect us.

NARRATOR
Jen pulled Billy into an embrace, but over his shoulder, looked at Nia as if to say "what else can be done?"

37

INT. THE BLOODY RAT - CONTINUOUS 37

NARRATOR
Back in the tavern, Brennen and Yllowwyn were still unsure what exactly they should be looking for, and even more unsure who it might be worth asking. So nothing caught their attention about a ragged man and non-descript woman being served drinks over in a corner somewhere.

REGAN
And what very reputable source brought you this business opportunity?

BRIGAND
You don't trust me?

REGAN
I don't trust anybody. And we both know you've got about as much business sense as my cunt has armor.

BRIGAND
I heard it was steel-plated.

REGAN
What's the fuckin' job, Kelly?

BRIGAND
Couple sellswords been around. Been asking about you.

NARRATOR
Subtly, almost mindlessly, Regan picked a long splinter off of the table and examined it.

REGAN

Some asshole's always looking for me.

BRIGAND

These assholes are offering a lot a money.

NARRATOR

She dipped the splinter into the candle, and watched it slowly burn, as one does who is trying to stave off boredom.

REGAN

So what are you proposing?

BRIGAND

I'm proposing I lead them to you, and then buy me the sweetest little whore in Armstrungard.

NARRATOR

Three of the threatening-looking men from outside emerged from the crowd and surrounded the table.

BRIGAND

I never said it was lucrative for you.

NARRATOR

This finally caught the attention of Brennen and Yllowyyn, who watched the situation unfold with their hands never too far from their weapons.

REGAN

It's a smart move, Kelly. I didn't think you had it in you.

NARRATOR

Her eyes did not leave her burning splinter.

BRIGAND

Silly bitch. Your mommy and your daddy never teach you not to play with fire?

REGAN

I didn't really have what you'd call a traditional childhood.

NARRATOR

She dropped the splinter into her brandy, igniting it in a bluish rush of air, and in the same motion, threw the flaming liquid into Kelly's face. He screamed, but his screams soon turned to gurgles as Regan's table knife punctured his neck.

The sellswords darted at her, but before they could react, Regan overturned her table and took refuge

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

behind it. That was when the first sellsword was introduced to a nasty little weapon called a razor star - Regan had thrown two of them into his chest before disappearing behind the table.

The second thought for a moment to avenge the first, but his hopes were dashed by one of Brennen's throwing axes. Yllowwyn had a shot lined up at the third sellsword until a fourth tried to ambush him from the side. The Elf unstrung his arrow, and jammed it through the fourth man's eye. He nocked another and killed his original target effortlessly.

38

INT. UNDERGROUND STREETS -

CONTINUOUS

38

NARRATOR

The crowd at the bar, while perfectly comfortable with a few drunken brawls each night, were not accustomed to mortal combat. They had begun to pour out into the underground street where the rest of the party was waiting. After a moment of calculation in which he made an accurate assessment that help might be needed and in inaccurate assessment of how much he'd be able to provide, Billy took off into the tavern.

NIA

Wait!

NARRATOR

Nia ran after him.

NELSON

I'm not staying out here without the wizard.

NARRATOR

Likewise for Nelson, leaving Jen outside the tavern, frightened, confused, and unsure of where she would be safest.

39

INT. THE BLOODY RAT - CONTINUOUS 39

NARRATOR

When Billy entered the tavern, he saw a sellsword running at Yllowwyn's back with weapon drawn. He took a deep breath, and lined up precisely the kind of tackle his football coach had taught him. It did nothing to knock down the much stronger man, but the form was impeccable. The sellsword delivered a knee to Billy's nose, breaking it and spraying blood everywhere. He raised his sword with intent of cutting short young Billy's life, but suddenly stopped and grimaced, as if in pain.

True to her promise, Nia's magic had saved Billy. The lightning spell emanating from her staff had not done much harm to the sellsword, but had stopped him long enough for Billy to dive out of striking distance. Their foe turned to strike Nia, but a devastating blow from Brennen's battle-axe cleaved him nearly in twain from neck to flank. What was left of him crumpled to the ground, spilling blood and bone and bowels onto the sawdust-covered floor.

Nia turned away, barely able to stomach the sight and stench. Nelson and Billy immediately vomited. Naught remained in the Bloody Rat save for Brennen, Yllowyyyn, Nia, Billy, Nelson, and the broken bodies of the sellswords. Brennen soon noticed this.

BRENNEN

Where in Selbirin is that woman?!

REGAN

Drop your weapons!

NARRATOR

They wheeled around to see Regan holding hostage a terrified-looking Jen with a Mooncrest-style dagger at her throat.

40

INT. THE BLOODY RAT - MIDDLE OF THE

NIGHT

40

BILLY

I don't care if you're a girl, I will stomp your ass if you don't let her go!

NARRATOR

Regan looked Billy up and down, more amused than anything.

REGAN

(TO BILLY)

Try it.

(TO JEN, BUT AUDIBLE TO ALL)

I got nothing against you, but if your friends don't drop their weapons right now I will fucking gut you like dinner.

YLLOWYYN

Scratch her and we'll come at you with all our might.

REGAN

And I'll kill you all too.

BRENNEN

Might be that you are able. But then we'll all be dead.
And you don't want that.

REGAN

Says who?

BRENNEN

You were outside before we even noticed you were
missing. What did you come back for?

REGAN

All right, grandpa, well-played. What's going on? Why
did two groups come after me at the same time, why's
one of them wearing the King's crest, and why are
people I grew up with turning up dead?

BRENNEN

I can only answer as to why we're here. But it will be
much easier to talk if we put our weapons away.

REGAN

I've heard that one before.

BRENNEN

Please, unhand the girl. She's not harmed you.

REGAN

And who says you won't?

YELLOWYYN

I suppose our word as members of the King's court would
mean little to you?

REGAN

You have five seconds to answer my gods damned question
or she dies.

NELSON

Wait!...You said your friends are turning up dead?

REGAN

'Friends' is a bit strong, but near enough.

NELSON

Are you a bastard, orphan, cripple, ethnic minority, or
otherwise scorned by society?

REGAN

Yes, yes, no, no, and yes. Great investigating, anyone
coulda told you that.

NELSON

Brennen, there's something about her that's important on its own, separate from this whole traitor thing...Isn't there?

REGAN

What in Selbirin's this kid talking about?

NELSON

Whenever the heroes meet a bastard or an orphan or a one-armed priest or whatever, and someone powerful is going around killing all the one-armed priests, they're always important later on.

YELLOWYYN

Ignore him. He's just a boy with too many poems and fables in his head.

REGAN

I know a fable about a pretty girl who died because her friends talked too much.

BRENNEN

The boy's right.

YELLOWYYN & NIA

(INCREDULOUS)
What?!

BILLY

(CONFUSED)
...what?

BRENNEN

There's a good chance those sellswords were hired by one of the enemies of House Guernatal. Felghir if I had to guess.

REGAN

Why?

BRENNEN

Let the girl go and we can talk.

REGAN

So some big fancy lords and ladies want me dead. But you guys just wanna talk? Convenient.

BRENNEN

The enemy of my enemy is my friend, is she not?

MALE VOICE

[PAINED GROAN]

NARRATOR

All eyes darted over to the sellsword with the razor stars in his chest.

REGAN

(TO BRENNEN, RE: JEN)

Would you wager her life on this Felghir thing?

BRENNEN

I'd wager my own.

NARRATOR

Brennen cautiously laid his axe at his feet. Nia did the same with her staff. Reluctantly, Yllowwyn lowered his bow and returned the loaded arrow to his quiver.

Regan searched the party for a short eternity with her calculating eyes, and then released her hostage. Jen dashed over to Billy and shook as he held her. Regan knelt beside the wounded sellsword, who was nominally conscious but drooling blood, and put her dagger to his throat.

REGAN

Why are you here?

MERCENARY

Fuck off, I'm dead anyway.

REGAN

Death doesn't need to be an unpleasant experience, but I promise it can be.

MERCENARY

My father taught me a man should never die on his knees.

REGAN

It's a good lesson. Whether or not it applies to you depends on how you define a man.

NARRATOR

She cut loose his belt, pulled down his leggings, and put her dagger...not on his throat.

MERCENARY

A bounty!

REGAN

Who put it out?

MERCENARY

General Traft!

NARRATOR

This greatly disturbed Brennen.

REGAN

Good boy.

NARRATOR

She brought her knife back to his throat--

NIA

Wait! Not like that.

NARRATOR

Nia came over to Regan and the sellsword. After sizing Nia up for a moment, Regan shrugged, stood, and walked away. Nia knelt beside the dying man and pulled up his leggings.

MERCENARY

I'm cold.

NARRATOR

Nia kissed him on the forehead and put her hand over his heart.

NIA

(QUIETLY, AN INCANTATION)

Quiet, child. Fear neither cold nor darkness of night. For soon you shall bask in the infinite light, Of Galadon's loving embrace. As the spirit leaves the body, so both return to their rightful place.

NARRATOR

If you had been there and looked closely, you might have seen the wisps of ice curling out of her fingers. You would certainly have seen the man's breathing greatly quicken, then slow, then stop completely. Nia traced the circle around his heart, closed his eyelids, and then stood somberly.

The young humans looked rather forlorn, having never watched anyone die before today. Nelson chose to deal with his fear and grief by re-setting the places at the bar.

BRENNEN

(TO NIA)
Your first.

NARRATOR

Nia nodded.

BRENNEN

It was a mercy. You did right.

YELLOWYYN

What did you do?

NIA

His heart was already crawling. It only took a simple frost enchantment to stop it.

(TO REGAN)
Painlessly.

REGAN

Well we're all very impressed, Ms. Holy. How about you bring some of that frost enchantment this way?

NARRATOR

Regan held up her throwing hand, which had begun to blister. She noticed the young humans wincing.

REGAN

Advice for the young ones. If you ever find yourself in a fight where you're improvising with fire, something's gone very wrong.

NARRATOR

Nia picked up an abandoned flagon of ale and set to work again with her frost enchantment. This was when Regan noticed Jen's "morally supportive" attire.

REGAN

The fuck are you wearing?

JEN

...Armor?

NELSON

It's good for mobility.

REGAN

Mobility? I've never lost a fight because my tits were too stiff.

BILLY

Hey! She feels sexy in it.

(MORE)

BILLY (cont'd)
[SNIFFS]

NARRATOR

He dabbed at his profusely bleeding nose.

REGAN

That's lovely. But I bet she'd prefer not to get stabbed. Am I right, dear?

JEN

...Billy, I think you need some ice too.

NARRATOR

Nia had turned the ale into frozen slush, of which Regan grabbed a handful and let it melt in her hand. After she had walked away, a still frightened Jen grabbed a handful as well and dabbed it on Billy's nose.

REGAN

All right, Grandpa. Now would be a great fuckin' time to tell me what this is all about.

BRENNEN

If Traft put out the bounty, our situation is even more dire than I feared.

(TO THE PARTY)

I'm sorry that I misled you all. I hoped that by keeping this knowledge from you, I might better protect your safety and our mission. I doubt our enemies know everything, but they clearly know some, and will piece together the rest soon enough. It's time you all knew as well.

(TO REGAN)

What do you know of your forbears?

REGAN

I don't have forebears. You rich people have forebears. I had a beggar mother and a whore grandmother.

BRENNEN

Good. You know that much. Three days ago, Her Majesty High Queen Dagmar died in childbirth. The child was lost as well, leaving no known heir to the High Throne, and enemies to House Guernatal closing in.

REGAN

You'll forgive me not shedding any tears for the decline of the monarchy.

BRENNEN

The family I have served my entire life is in tatters. And the King I am sworn to protect is possibly dead or imprisoned as we speak. I do not doubt that you've had a harder life than most kings, but if you've any decency left, show some respect.

REGAN

I'm sorry about your friends, okay? But I need to know why people with 'Lords' in front of their names give a shit about me all of a sudden.

BRENNEN

Did you know that King Gunther studied here as a young man?

REGAN

Most of his kind do.

BRENNEN

Gunther grew into a great man, but he was not immune to the weaknesses of young men. It was known to most of his court that he had once fathered a bastard. It was also known that his bastard died around 20 years ago. What was not known to anyone but Gunther and me, or so I thought, was that his bastard had a bastard. Who would now have about 20 years.

NARRATOR

A look of realization crept over Jen's face.

REGAN

And now you're here. Talking to me.

BILLY

I'm still confused.

BRENNEN

(UNDER HIS BREATH)

Of course you are.

(FULL VOLUME)

Aerona Regan is the granddaughter of His Majesty, High King Gunther Guernatal. As of three days ago, she is his last living kin, and thereby, heir to House Guernatal. Tomorrow, we begin her campaign for the High Throne of Iorden.

END OF EPISODE.