

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book I - PRINCES OF IORDEN

Chapter 10
"The Evening Redness In The West"

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Based on a teleplay by
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COLD OPEN:

1 EXT. PLAINS WEST OF FREEHOLD - DARKEST NIGHT

1

AN UNNATURAL WIND ROILS THROUGH THE AIR.

*MARCHING FOOTSTEPS BUILD AND SWELL AS THE TEMPLARS
CHANT.*

TRAFT

Warriors. Today is your day. Win or lose, live or die,
today you leave your mark on history.

OPENING CREDITS.

PART ONE:

A THUNDERCRACK SMASH CUTS TO:

2 EXT. FREEHOLD - DARKEST NIGHT

2

NARRATOR

My dearest listeners, I am both honored and saddened to tell you that we are rapidly approaching the climax of this portion of the tale--

NELSON (V.O.)

--SIX SEASONS AND A MOVIE!

NARRATOR

Quiet, mortal, you're interfering with the tone. Where was I? Ah right. Conclusion of the book. And although I have endeavored to relay the story as truthfully as possible, well--it is the undeniable nature of stories that the teller influences the tale, and in turn the tale changes the teller. If, by the end of the day, the story turns in a direction which surprises you, please forgive this wood sprite. I've done the best I can.

Speaking of awkward transitions, Bryce Riverfell was doing the best he could to prepare the fort of Freehold for the battle with Traft's Orcs. Men were rushing around, finding their places and relaying messages. Despite Bryce's training, the atmosphere held a tinge of panic. Although to be fair, it was only due to Bryce's training that this panic was held to but a tinge. Riverfell himself was the maestro of the chaos.

BRYCE

I want all our ballistas on this wall loaded with pitch. Lighters wait for Gareth's command. Then send them all the fucking fire we can. Gareth, as soon as we have a prayer of hitting Traft's engines, you light 'em and loose 'em. We got plenty of pitch but we need to thin out his catapults and rams, and we need to see through that fog. All ballistas facing North, South, and East, get the three-inch bolts ready. They're not just gonna run at the front door like a bunch of morons.

NARRATOR

The medic who was called the Professor emerged from a stairway in the wall.

BRYCE

Royne! Don't you have civilians in your charge?

PROFESSOR

They're awake. And they can fight.

BRYCE

Fight? What are you, shitting me?

PROFESSOR

The girl's a mage, Bryce. A damned good one. I think we could use her.

BRYCE

For gods' sake Royne. They can't have more than what? Sixteen, seventeen years on 'em?

PROFESSOR

Sounds near to right. And if they'd like to see eighteen we need to win this battle.

BRYCE

(doesn't like it)
Good mage, huh?

PROFESSOR

If what the men say is true, I understand now why the Templars wanted them. Which is another thought that occurs to me. No one that age is supposed to be that good at combative magic.

BRYCE

You don't trust her but you want me to put her on our lines?

PROFESSOR

Not just on the lines, on the front lines. If she isn't to be trusted...she can do us a lot less harm out front than within the walls.

BRYCE

You're talking about a child like a pawn on a game board.

PROFESSOR

Yes, Bryce. You're a gods-damned general.

NARRATOR

Bryce grimaced, but waved at his lieutenant to go ahead. As the Professor ran to fetch the children, a messenger ran up to Bryce.

MESSENGER

General Riverfell. The Half-Orc requests parlay.

3 EXT. PLAINS WEST OF FREEHOLD - A LITTLE LATER

3

NARRATOR

A few minutes later, Bryce Riverfell led a small squad of guardsmen out into the open plain beyond the keep. An icy wind blew across the open space. The few men were dwarfed by the height of the walls and the bleak expanse of the plains. Far ahead of them loomed a wall of dark, templar-conjured fog. In a beautiful display of symmetry, a squad of Orcs emerged from the fog, and the two parties approached each other to parlay.

They halted when they were twenty yards apart. Bryce's men stood in precise formation; the Orcs in a loose semicircle. Riverfell and Traft stared at each other across the divide. At a gesture from Bryce, a guardsman brought forward a tent.

4 INT. TENT ON THE PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

4

NARRATOR

Traft and Riverfell sat alone around a small fire in the newly-erected tent. Traft took a deep swig from a leather flask before offering it to Bryce. Bryce waved it away.

BRYCE

Too old for that shit, man.

TRAFT TAKES ANOTHER SWIG FOR HIMSELF.

BRYCE (cont'd)

All my men were dead sure this was a trap.

TRAFT

What'd you tell them?

BRYCE

That I appreciated their counsel, but I was the only General around.

TRAFT

They follow you, even when they don't quite believe you.

BRYCE

Civic guardsmen learn pretty early to follow orders.

TRAFT

Don't sell yourself short, General. I think it's you they follow. You could use that.

BRYCE

I gotta admit, you impressed me kid. I never expected anyone would get this many Orcs to fight all together. Don't think the Elves did either.

TRAFI

In a way, I've got the Elves to thank. Only thing the clans all agree on these days is hating the Elves.

BRYCE

Well, they're certainly no saints.

TRAFI

Bryce. It's not too late to get on the right side of this thing.

BRYCE

You kinda lost the high ground when you opened the battle with a sneak attack. Your boys almost killed three sick kids.

TRAFI

Saw a tactical chance. Can't blame me for that.

BRYCE

I can blame you for siding with the Templars.

TRAFI

I wasn't about to refuse the help.

BRYCE

They're some sick bastards and you know it. What happened to you, kid?

TRAFI

You know damn well what happened. You know damn well who did it to me. And you sit there and tell me *I* lost the high ground.

BRYCE

I'm not saying things don't need to change, but what are you gonna do, man? Burn down everything?

TRAFI

If I have to.

Bryce **SIGHS** - searching for something to grasp onto.

BRYCE

You didn't really kill all of Ironhertz's kids, did you? Tell me they're making that up.

TRAF T

They've made up a lot of lies about me. But that ain't one.

BRYCE

Gods damn, man.

TRAF T

Easterners need to understand. They need to know what it's like to never be safe in your own skin. They need to fear the way we fear.

BRYCE

But little kids? They didn't do anything.

TRAF T

Neither did ours.

BRYCE

That don't make it right for you to just do the same.

TRAF T

Maybe not. But it takes the extreme to shake people out of their wicked routines. Too comfortable otherwise.

BRYCE

You don't have to be the monster they say you are.

TRAF T

I tried when I was young. I did everything I was supposed to. The model of chivalry. The lapdog of the Elves. And they called me a monster anyway. Might as well be a monster who fights for right.

BRYCE

You know I can't let you through. Not if you're bringing gods-damned Templars. Not if you're gonna string up little kids.

TRAF T

I'm not asking you to let us through.

A beat. Might as well lay down all
the cards.

TRAF T (cont'd)

I'm asking you to join us.

BRYCE

Fuck, man. You know what I'm gonna say.

TRAF T

I do. But everyone deserves a choice. This is your last chance to get on the right side. We both know your life's ending soon either way. Mine too. Give your soul a chance.

Bryce lets it percolate a bit.

NARRATOR

Bryce Riverfelll peered into the fire. After a long consideration, he reached for the flask and took a gulp of the moonshine inside.

BRYCE

Sorry man. I got too many chickens in this coop.

TRAF T

You think you're keeping people safe? River Folk are only as safe as the Wood Folk let you be. One day the Elves'll run out of use for you. And then...the coop's not safe when the farmers are wolves.

BRYCE

Mm. Shit all runs downhill eventually. Doesn't mean we have to live in the latrine.

TRAF T

Shit runs where you dig a ditch.

BRYCE TAKES ONE MORE SWIG.

BRYCE

Some hard-ass ground you're digging in.

TRAF T

You've gotten soft in your old age, General.

BRYCE

Sword hasn't. Find me on the field and tell me how soft I've gotten.

TRAF T

Oh, I certainly will.

Now they're just two friends trash talking.

BRYCE

I used to knock you on your ass every time we sparred.

TRAF T

Course you did. When second helpings of dinner were on the line, nothing could stop you.

BRYCE

Yeah well, our rations were different. The rest of us weren't Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's personal charity project.

Traft **spits**.

TRAFT

That Bloodthirsty Old Bitch taught me some pretty neat tricks, I'll give her that at least.

BRYCE

Now that I'd like to see.

TRAFT

You'll see more than you ever wanted.

BRYCE

Half hour passage to get back to our lines?

TRAFT

Go 'head, take an hour. I know how age can slow a man down.

NARRATOR

With a small wave, Bryyce Riverfell turned and left his erstwhile comrade behind.

5 EXT. FREEHOLD RAMPARTS - AN HOUR LATER

5

NARRATOR

Atop the ramparts of Freehold, the three children looked out over the field of the impending battle. The Professor was supervising, but from a few paces away, leaving the children a final few minutes of privacy.

BILLY

Jenny, you sure about this?

JEN

I have to do something.

BILLY

Those guys out there look serious.

NELSON

You know, its funny.

BILLY

What is?

NELSON

I'm not nervous. I used to get nervous before WoW raids, even though I was an expert. Sweaty palms, heart racing, all that stuff. And here we are, real battle, in way over our heads, and I'm not nervous. Scared, but not nervous.

JEN

I'm scared too. But I'm done hiding.
(*shouts a bit to be heard*)
Where do you want me, Professor?

BILLY

Us. Where do you want us?

NARRATOR

Just then, Bryce returned to the ramparts by means of a stairwell.

BRYCE

Professor.

PROFESSOR

I take it terms were not reached?

BRYCE

You three understand this is for real? This is war, and I can't promise we'll win it. What's more, if we lose, I can promise we'll be given no quarter at all.

NELSON

If we bail and you lose, there's no where to hide anyway, is there?

BRYCE

No, don't suppose there is.

JEN

Well then where do you want us?

PROFESSOR

Do you think Traft is wont to feign to the north or south before his first wave, General?

BRYCE

I'd figure both, if he can spare the troops. He's gonna want to draw fire from our engines away from his. Jen, was it? I want you on the north wall. Professor, put more of our pike on the south wall, but give these three a personal guard. Treat 'em like fucking royalty.

PROFESSOR

Heavy armor for their guard?

JEN

No, steel's no good.

BRYCE

We can't all afford Moonsilver, honey.

JEN

No metal. Leather.

PROFESSOR

Orcs will likely be wearing pilfered steel.

JEN

I'm counting on it. If I do a strong enough spell I can't really predict how it's gonna arc.

NARRATOR

Of the four men present, only the professor had any idea what any of those words meant, and even he could barely comprehend how they could possibly relate to magic. For a moment they all just stared at Jen, before a shout interrupted their silence

GARETH

Cover!

NARRATOR

All of the Civic Guard had been drilled in how to respond to this call. The children were not. Bryce and the Professor had to haul the kids below the ramparts just before a hail of arrows fell around them.

BRYCE

So now you know what to do when someone yells 'cover.'

THE ARROW SHOWER SLOWS.

GARETH

Archers! Nock. Light. Draw. Loose!

NARRATOR

As the Orc volley finished, the Freehold soldiers stood smoothly, released their own volley of flaming arrows, and ducked right back down. And with that, the Battle of Freehold had begun.

PROFESSOR

Heavy shields! Protect the engineers. Unleash the ballistas.

GARETH

Nock! Light! Draw! Loose!

THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN BRYCE'S ARMY AND TRIFT'S CONTINUES THROUGHOUT THE SCENE.

BRYCE

When your guard gets here you're gonna move around to the north. Get from cover to cover between the volleys. Trust the shield-bearers. They're good at their jobs.

ANOTHER VOLLEY FALLS AROUND THEM.

BILLY

Time to nut up or shut up.

NARRATOR

This comment prompted a raised eyebrow from Jen.

BILLY

I meant it like a...metaphor. That's a metaphor, right?

NELSON

No it isn't.

BILLY

I mean you're gonna do great, Jenny. You have, like, serious lady nuts now.

JEN

(what are you talking about?)
No I don't.

BRYCE

What in god's name are lady nuts?

BILLY

I--everyone knows what I meant.

NELSON

Did you ever think of maybe reading--

BILLY

(flabbergasted)
--I'm working on my vocabulary, okay?

NARRATOR

I am an immortal being, I have spoken in the language of men, of Elves, of trees, of rivers, even of squirrels, who often talk of nothing but nuts. Lady nuts however...Billy never ceases to amaze me.

Right, anyway. Billy was saved his embarrassment by the arrival of the shield bearer brigade.

BRYCE

These are your boys. Listen when they say cover, and they'll keep you free of any holes you don't want.

NARRATOR

As if to demonstrate, the twelve soldiers threw their heavy oaken shields up just as another rain of arrows fell. All the shafts fell harmlessly into the thick wood.

BRYCE

Go. Now.

6 EXT. FREEHOLD NORTHERN WALL - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

6

NARRATOR

Billy, Jen, and Nelson ran to the northern wall of Freehold, accompanied by their guard detail. The rebel forces had advanced to the base of the wall itself in this quarter, and thick Templar fog had brought premature midnight to the battle. Arrows were falling, men were screaming, and countless Orcs were swarming the walls, trying to climb up and establish a foothold on the battlements. The men were holding, but the Orc numbers were great. Slowly, the Freehold garrison was giving up precious territory atop the walls.

None of the combatants paid any notice at all to the newcomers joining the battle. That is, nobody paid any notice until a bolt of blue lightning shot from a young woman's hands into an Orc, just as he was cresting the top of the wall. Another bolt of lightning, another Orc down. This bolt, as Jen had predicted, arced from the metal armor of one Orc to another of his compatriots, and again to a nearby Freehold guardsman who did not get the message--or chose to ignore it.

Jen, for her part, either did not see her ally crumple to the ground, or else forced herself to ignore it. She passed through the battle as if accompanied by an avatar of the gods. The shield bearers protected her from arrows, Billy and Nelson protected her flanks with short swords, and Jen brought electric death to the Orcs. Soon, the battle had turned. The Orc battalion turned to flee, running from the blue lightning.

7 EXT. OUTSIDE THE NORTHERN WALL - SIMULTANEOUS

7

NARRATOR

They ran straight past their squad of Templars, who had been busy conjuring the smoke. The three hooded and
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

masked figures stopped their chant and watched Jen's magic from afar. With a nod from their leader, the three turned and calmly floated away.

8 EXT. FREEHOLD NORTHERN WALL - SIMULTANEOUS

8

NARRATOR

Atop the Freehold battlements, the obvious effect of this was the lifting of the preternatural fog. Moonlight hit the soldiers in the aftermath of that skirmish.

THE CIVIC GUARD ALL CHEER.

BILLY

Hell yeah. Get the fuck out!

NELSON

They'll be back with another wave.

BILLY

Yeah and we'll kick their asses just like we kicked these guys' asses! Jen will lightning the shit out of them! Jenny, that was--Jen!

NARRATOR

Jen was slumped against the battlement wall. Her breathing was shallow and her eyes glazed.

NELSON

Is she hit?

BILLY

(to their guard)
What the FUCK? You were supposed to protect us!

NELSON

There weren't any arrows though.

BILLY

Jen. JEN!

JEN

Ah!

NARRATOR

With a start and a gasp, Jen returned to alertness

BILLY

What happened?

JEN

I don't know. All of a sudden I was, like, outside of myself. That was not fun.

9 INT. TENT IN TRRAFT'S CAMP - A LITTLE LATER

9

NARRATOR

The Templars who had retreated from the front returned swiftly to their quarters behind Traft's lines. They knelt beside a chest covered in strange and frightening runes, and, producing from their pockets keys of an eldritch design, opened the chest. It was packed with a coarse, black powder.

What follows in our tale is...well...

(a beat, then, dismayed)

...It will be no more pleasant for me to tell than for you to hear.

Mercifully, at around the same time as the Battle of Freehold, there was much else happening in the realm which will prove significant to our tale. So, if you'll forgive this lapse in temporal verisimilitude, I would like to tell of these other events, before we must return to the grim, grisly inevitable.

END OF PART ONE.

PART TWO:

10 EXT. SOUTHERN SEAS - NIGHT

10

NARRATOR

Before we return to the terrible events which followed the Battle of Freehold, let us turn to another one of history's great crimes: Renault D'Esprit.

(great disdain)

You remember Renault. The self-styled "nice" necromancer.

To the south of Iorden, there exists a great sea, named the South Sea--gods-damn, but whoever named the geography of this land had absolutely no creativity. You know who has creativity? Rabbits. I bet that Mr. Fluffy Toes would have come up with an exquisite name for this sea.

Anyway, where was I? Oh right. The weather of the South Sea is cold and tempestuous. The water is perilous, with massive icebergs both above and below the surface of the water, and gale-force winds driving icy rain across the water. It was through these conditions that Renault D'Esprit was guiding a tiny rowboat, accompanied by his general Mag Uidhir. Mag Uidhir, you will recall, was the one undead warrior who seemed to side with Nia in her disagreement with Renault. I rather like Mag Uidhir--as the undead go, he's good folk.

11 EXT. ICEBERG - NIGHT

11

NARRATOR

Under a dancing aurora, the tiny craft made land on one such iceberg.

RENAULT

This is it then? The hitherto final resting place of your great warrior?

MAG UIDHIR

The ice drifts have shifted in the three millennia since the map was made, but it could not be any other place. Arden and his mighty hammer.

RENAULT

Good. I shall have his hammer, I shall have his loyalty, and then no one will dare refuse me.

MAG UIDHIR

(hiding something)

The way down is certain to be...perilous. Are ye sure ye wish to proceed, Renault?

NARRATOR

Renault took confident hold of Mag Uidhir's shoulders.

RENAULT

Mag Uidhir, I want you to listen to me. I...have a good feeling about this. And I never ignore my feelings. Right then.

NARRATOR

He headed into a crag in the ice.

MAG UIDHIR

(sarcastic disdain)

Aye, good thing that's never led ye into error before.

12 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

12

NARRATOR

Back on the Iordic mainland, Nia sat by a still but steaming pool, peering at her reflection. Her face was heavily bandaged. The remainder of our party--that is, Queen Regan, Sir Brennen, and Yllowyyn were camped near this pool, having completed their quest in the Cairn of Evil Untold.

After a deep breath, Nia pulled the cloth from her face. Beneath were dark red scars, the price of fighting against Renault's poison spray. As she stared in dismay, Regan joined her.

REGAN

Not so bad.

NIA

(low spirits)

I suppose it could have been worse.

REGAN

Nia. You a whore?

NIA

Pardon?

REGAN

A stage player? Do you depend at all on what your face looks like?

NIA

Well no, but that's not really the point.

REGAN

Nia, what do you do? What are you good at?

NIA

I'm a scholar.

REGAN

You're a scholar. I lived in Armstrungard all my life. Some of the richest scholars I ever seen had faces like an Orc's infected cock wrinkle.

NIA

I'm sure you think you're being helpful.

REGAN

Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You got a great story to tell. Those fine-ass college boys are gonna be lined up out the gates to hear how you vanquished the necromancer.

NIA

Never figured you to be keen on college boys.

REGAN

I'm not, but I was guessing you were.

NIA

Never?

REGAN

(bragging a little)
I mean, not never. They're damn near shitting their pants the whole time and they shoot their goo if you wink at 'em too hard, but it's nice to pull on someone's hair and not come up with lice.

NIA

I feel so vain for caring about a few marks on my face. But it just feels as if I've lost a part of myself I'll never have back.

REGAN

Life's a series of things you don't get back. You keep living though.

NIA

And on that encouraging note, if you wouldn't mind, I think I'd like some time to myself.

REGAN

Suit yourself. I need a bath.

NARRATOR

With her usual air of practicality, the Queen stripped nude and dove into the thermal pool. Nia, much less accustomed to such displays, averted her gaze...but not quickly enough to avoid seeing Regan's back. The flesh was riddled with scars, narrow lines crossing and re-crossing the Queen's back. There was almost more scar than flesh.

NIA

(to herself)
Galadon's mercy.

REGAN

There are easy ways and hard ways to get good with a sabre. I couldn't afford the easy ways.

NIA

I didn't...I'm sorry I made such a fuss over--

REGAN

--It's all right. I kept living.

BRENNEN'S FOOTSTEPS APPROACH BRISKLY.

BRENNEN

Nia, have you made any--
(sees Regan)
--Your Grace. Pray forgive my intrusion.

NARRATOR

Holding council meetings in the nude was not a habit of the late King Gunther, and so Brennen found himself quite unsure of how to proceed while his Queen was bathing.

REGAN

We're grown-ups Brennen.

BRENNEN

(still clearly uncomfortable)
Nia, I had, erm...if I could--

REGAN

--As you were, Sir Willemson. State your business.

The order centers Brennen.

BRENNEN

Aye, Your Grace. I had hoped to inquire as to whether Nia had made any progress in discerning meaning from that tablet we found.

NIA

As a matter fact, I have discovered something interesting.

NARRATOR

Just now, Brennen noticed Nia's face.

BRENNEN

So those wounds did scar. I am sorry you had to face that Nia.

REGAN

She's over it. What did you find on the tablet?

NARRATOR

Nia's countenance indicated she may not have been as thoroughly "over it" as her Queen had decreed. She soldiered on however, reaching through her supplies for the etching she had taken of the stone tablet.

NIA

See these four characters? They repeat far more often than any other character here. It's almost as if they demarcate sentences of the text. Now what would you need four of, that could usefully start every sentence of something?

YELLOWYYN

Cardinal directions.

YELLOWYYN WALKS OVER TO THE GROUP.

NIA

That is indeed what I suspect, Kalth'yr.

YELLOWYYN

I must once again speak in protest of this investigation.

BRENNEN

Your dissent has been duly noted, Kalth'yr.

NIA

And entered into the Royal Record. Many, many times.

YELLOWYYN

But Th'ayyd Ry'y lo-Th'yyt specifically instructed us not--

REGAN

--Not to open the chest. And we didn't. For the thousandth, thousandth time. Now can we please move on? I gotta take a piss and I'd like to do it in peace.

BRENNEN

We'll excuse ourselves so that Your Grace might, erm...

REGAN

I didn't say stop the council.

BRENNEN

Your Grace?

REGAN

(pee-sighing)

You were saying about the directions, Nia?

NARRATOR

As a wood sprite, I have seen, or heard of, hundreds of kings and queens since the dawn of time. Some of them had indeed preferred to hold council while bathing, or outdoors, or countless other foibles. But I can honestly say that what Regan had just done was an historical first.

NIA

(ew)

Yes, well, my provisional assertion about the cardinal directions of course naturally suggests this is some kind of map.

REGAN

The Knights of the Wood gave us a map so that we could find them another map?

NIA

Or some manner of navigation guide. Though its value may derive from the document itself rather than its use as a map. Perhaps it is a key to translating these forgotten scripts?

REGAN

Any idea what it's a map to?

NIA

Unfortunately I am no closer to identifying any real location connected to this map.

Brennen thinks for a beat -
pondering tactics.

BRENNEN

Kalth'yr, I think it is time we sought to break our fast, aye?

YLLOWYYN

As you wish. I saw a warren of hares grazing near here this evening. Seven or eight of them. Should be easy enough to track.

NIA

We four cannot eat *eight* hares.

YLLOWYYN

Any Elf trained in the ways of the hunt will tell you, it is the hunter's sacred and lawful duty to also cull the population of the prey. This maintains balance and order.

BRENNEN

That will do, Kalth'yr.

NARRATOR

Brennen watched Yllowyyn stride off into the brush. He waited until he judged the elf far out of earshot, and then waited an extra minute for safety, before turning back to Nia.

BRENNEN

(quietly)

Nia, do you have everything you need to continue your work once we have given the chest to Ry'y lo-Th'yyt?

NIA

My etching is as true to the original as it's ever going to be.

BRENNEN

Good. I at least agree with Yllowyyn that we must not *appear* to disobey the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

NIA

The Lord Commander is meeting us here, then?

REGAN

"I'll find you," she said. Gotta love the little threat snuck in there. Smooth bit of cock-waving.

BRENNEN

With respect, Your Grace, even Queens must serve someone.

NIA

I only hope the children are safe. If the smoke on the horizon is any guide, Traft encroaches farther east each day.

BRENNEN

We shall know by sundown whether we'll have help. If there's one thing the Knights of the Wood never are, it's late.

13 INT. ICE CAVE - TIME UNCLEAR

13

NARRATOR

Back in the South Sea, Renault and Mag Uidhir were deep within a frozen cavern, hidden among the ice floes. By torchlight, the two cautiously proceeded through the cave, though Renault was not so cautious as to bother shutting his mouth for a moment. Gods forbid.

RENAULT

In truth, Mag Uidhir, this is about ethics in academic--

MAG UIDHIR

--By the Holy Matron. There it is.

NARRATOR

The light of the torch fell upon an ancient stone altar. Atop this altar sat a massive warhammer--more like a slab of iron than a proper hammer, mounted on a wooden staff bound in ancient mummified leather.

MAG UIDHIR

No man could count how many of the Invaders were crushed by that fell iron. That means...

NARRATOR

The undead general cast the torchlight around the altar, until he found a wall of ice, its glassy smoothness standing out among the rough stone of the cave. Lifting the light higher, it became obvious that a figure of a man was frozen in the ice. Calling it a man may be an understatement--the figure was easily seven feet tall, as naked as the day he was born apart from his blue warpaint, and entirely encased in the wall of ice.

RENAULT

This is he?

MAG UIDHIR

None other. Arden the Annihilator. The greatest warrior who ever lived, and likely will ever live.

Mag Uidhir pauses, unsure of what to disclose.

MAG UIDHIR (cont'd)

Not the sharpest spear in the armory though.

RENAULT

Splendid. All the better to bend to my intellect.

Mag Uidhir **SIGHS**. Better to come clean.

MAG UIDHIR

Aye, that's what I ought to talk to ye about. Arden saw mages, druids, scholars...anyone clever really, as threats. And Arden did not suffer threats gladly. He killed them.

RENAULT

You're saying I should try to conceal my intellect.

MAG UIDHIR

I'm saying Arden will take one look at ye and cave yer skull in.

RENAULT

Why have you only told me this now?

MAG UIDHIR

Because I hate ye, Renault.

RENAULT

You what?

MAG UIDHIR

I hate ye from deep down in me soul. I hate everything ye are, I hate everything ye stand for, and I just plain hate yer wanker face.

RENAULT

This is...I thought we were friends.

MAG UIDHIR

That's because ye care too little about other people's feelings to bloody listen to them. Which is another thing I hate about ye. But it turns out I'm not completely without honor. So I leave ye the choice.

RENAULT

And why should I not part you from the false life I have given you right here and now?

MAG UIDHIR

Speak any of the old tongues, do ye? Arden knows not a word of the common. And what's more he hates the sound of it. "The braying of slaves" he called it. So do as ye will, ye bastard pox of a boy.

RENAULT

How dare you? I am the greatest mage - technically - alive!

MAG UIDHIR

Well I don't know about that.

RENAULT

You impudent fool. I gave you life.

MAG UIDHIR

(basically a dare)

Necromancy's not as impressive as ye think. Happened all the time in my world. Reviving the Annihilator would be impressive, I'll admit. But no one would hold it against ye if ye weren't clever enough.

RENAULT

We shall see who's clever and who isn't, Mag Uidhir, you arrogant son of a whore.

MAG UIDHIR

(chuckling to himself)

We certainly will.

RENAULT

Thus begins my greatest feat yet!

NARRATOR

Aided by magic, the torch flame suddenly flared high. In the heat, the wall of ice began to melt.

END OF PART TWO.

PART THREE:14 EXT. HILL NEAR CASTLE GUERNATAL - EVENING

14

NARRATOR

On the plains outside Castle Guernatal, Julius Mooncrest had the unfortunate task of planning both a siege and a funeral. He directed arrangements from within his command tent.

JULIUS

The engine builders will be here by the morrow?

MOONCREST KNIGHT

Yes my Lord. Shall we commence the blockade?

JULIUS

Yes, do it. But do not commence bombardment until I give the order. I will know when the time is right. Has our page delivered the declaration of war?

MOONCREST KNIGHT

He has gone, my Lord, but not yet returned.

JULIUS

Come. Let us pay our respects to the memory of my dear nephew.

15 INT. TUNNEL BELOW CASTLE GUERNATAL - NIGHT

15

NARRATOR

In the labyrinthine tunnels below Castle Guernatal, one of the more uncouth members of Redmoor's garrison - which is saying something - had detained a small child.

REDMOOR GOON

What's in the purse?

NARRATOR

The child shook his head defiantly.

REDMOOR GOON

What's in the purse, you little shite?

NARRATOR

This prompted the child to clutch the cloth purse in question even tighter.

REDMOOR GOON

Give it here.

NARRATOR

The guard yanked the purse out of the child's hand.

CHILD

That's not yours!

REDMOOR GOON

What's this, then?

NARRATOR

He opened the purse and produced a silver coin.

REDMOOR GOON

You stealing from the gentry? They'll have both your hands for that.

CHILD

I didn't steal it!

REDMOOR GOON

And they'll have your tongue for lying.

CHILD

It was...a gift!

REDMOOR GOON

A gift?

CHILD

Yeah, from...Lord Corelan.

REDMOOR GOON

Don't you know there's a tax in gifts, you idiot?

CHILD

What tax?

REDMOOR GOON

I'm keeping this and letting you off with a warning. Next time you get a gift and don't pay the tax, I'll whip you silly. Now off with you.

NARRATOR

The Child shot his captor one last dirty look before scurrying off. The guard chuckled to himself.

HE CHUCKLES TO HIMSELF.

REDMOOR GOON

(oh-so-proud)
"Tax on gifts."

NARRATOR

That's when a hand shot out of the darkness and pulled the guard away.

16 INT. ANOTHER SECTION OF THE TUNNELS - A BIT LATER

16

NARRATOR

The child was running along another section of the tunnels, when a commanding whisper stopped him in his tracks.

WHISPERER

Wait, child!

CHILD

Who's there?

WHISPERER

This is yours, is it not?

NARRATOR

A silver coin rolled along the ground to stop at the child's foot.

CHILD

Who are you? Where'd you find this?

WHISPERER

I took it from the man who took it from you. It was not his to take.

CHILD

Is this a trick?

WHISPERER

No, child. Too long have you suffered wanton injustice with no recourse. Ardel Redmoor is a wicked blight upon this keep and its people. But now justice is come, and Redmoor shall fall.

CHILD

Are you an assassin? Like the one what killed the King?

WHISPERER

Ardel Redmoor killed the King. But I am not an assassin. You can call me the Spirit of Justice.

CHILD

What like a ghost? Ghosts ain't real.

WHISPERER

The man who took your coin will trouble you no more.
That is very real. You can wait and see if you don't
believe me.

CHILD

What do you want?

WHISPERER

As I said: Justice. Tell me, child, as I do not know
this keep as well as you. We are near the pantry and
below the great hall, are we not?

17 INT. CASTLE GUERNATAL - MAGIC HOUR

17

NARRATOR

Early the next morning, as Ardel Redmoor marched
towards his breakfast with a retinue of his personal
guard, he was frustrated to find himself unable to
cease conversation with the Castle's ancient Head
Priest.

HEAD PRIEST

There have been ill omens, my Lord.

ARDEL

(humoring the old coot)
Omens?

HEAD PRIEST

Troubling signs amongst my more gifted acolytes.

ARDEL

This is what could not possibly wait until after
breakfast?

HEAD PRIEST

As you once said, my Lord, the servile classes are
prone to superstition and panic. You would not want to
be on the wrong end of those base instincts.

ARDEL

And why would I find myself there?

HEAD PRIEST

Well, my Lord, if one did not know better, or was
hasty, one could interpret the omens as...ah, hm...
speaking ill of your regency.

ARDEL

(out of patience)
Are you implying something, your eminence?

HEAD PRIEST

But of course not, my Lord.

ARDEL

I don't give a damn what the rabble thinks of my regency. They did not appoint me Lord Regent, the gentry did.

NARRATOR

Redmoor's guards began the laborious process of opening the doors to the Great Hall.

ARDEL

And the gentry have steel, should it come to that.

HEAD PRIEST

Oh dear.

ARDEL

And if the gods take issue with how I conduct my affairs, they can sodding well tell me themselves.

NARRATOR

When Ardel turned to enter the hall, he saw a bloody dagger, held by a severed hand, and suspended in mid-air. This certainly caught his attention. Close inspection would reveal the grisly token to be suspended by a thin bit of twine, but this did not lessen the initial shock.

HEAD PRIEST

[Sustained cry of terror, morphing into a sigh of relief] Ah. Well, that certainly got the bowels moving.

18 INT. ROOM IN THE HORSE'S HEAD INN - MORNING

18

NARRATOR

At the rooster's call, Arlene and Gwen awoke in each other's arms, between a scratchy straw bed and a threadbare quilt at the Horse's Head Inn. It was the most content that either woman could ever recall having been.

ARLENE

Good morning.

GWEN

Certainly is.

GWEN GIGGLES HAPPILY.

ARLENE

What is it?

GWEN

I was scared I'd wake up and it'd all be a dream.

ARLENE

Good fortune is better revealed in than questioned.

NARRATOR

As if to reassure her, Arlene placed a soft but lengthy kiss on Gwen's lips.

ARLENE

Convinced, my love?

GWEN

(mischievous)
Not yet.

*HANDS RUSTLE UNDER THE COVERS. ARLENE HALF-GIGGLES,
HALF SHUDDERS .*

ARLENE

What about the morning's work?

GWEN

It can wait. I've finally found a chore I like doing.

ARLENE LAUGHS AGAIN; IT TURNS INTO A STIFLED MOAN.

19 EXT. STREAM NEAR THE HORSE'S HEAD - MORNING

19

NARRATOR

It was thus that Gwen could not quite contain a somewhat ribald grin as she set about the chores for which Madame Bailey was actually paying her.

She knelt beside a gentle stream with linens and a clump of soap, and set to scrubbing. A rabbit approached the stream, keeping a cautious distance from Gwen and eyeing her with great suspicion.

GWEN

(cooing)
Hullo there.

NARRATOR

Deeming Gwen not an imminent threat, the rabbit drank from the stream.

GWEN

And what are you doing out this time of morning? Thought you was more for the night...You know, we're probably not all that different. Always looking over our shoulder for hawks or snakes or some other nasty thing. My hawks and snakes are man-shaped but it comes out the same.

NARRATOR

Its thirst sated, the rabbit tentatively hopped towards Gwen, and smelled her.

GWEN

No I don't have any food for you. Sweet thing...And don't go around begging. It's unbecoming of you. It's a proud creature what faces everything you've faced.

NARRATOR

The rabbit permitted Gwen to pet it, and permitted itself to relax.

GWEN

Course there's advantages to all that danger.

NARRATOR

Gwen looked around as is about to divulge a dark secret, but her cheeky smile belied that she was merely amusing herself.

GWEN

I bet you fuck just as often as you can. Me too.

NARRATOR

The rabbit's ears snapped up, its every muscle tense.

GWEN

What?

NARRATOR

The rabbit darted off like an arrow, sprinting away with all its might.

GWEN

Hmph. I would meet Iorden's only prude of a rabbit.

NARRATOR

That was when Gwen finally turned her attention back to the water.

GWEN

Gods!

NARRATOR

The white linens were pink as the water ran red with blood. Gwen leapt back from the water to see her hands were blood-soaked too. Fighting back waves of panic and disgust, she crouched low, and crept, cautiously, up the nearby hill to get a better look upstream.

20 EXT. FURTHER UPSTREAM - CONTINUOUS

20

NARRATOR

As she crested the hill, she froze. The panic was gone from Gwen's eyes, replaced by wholly rational fear. Beside the river lay a body, submerged to the waist, spewing blood, and draped in a filthy, one-piece garment.

GWEN

(whispers)

No one knows you were here, Gwen. You can go back to the inn and forget all about this.

NARRATOR

She searched her soul, hoping she would feel convinced.

GWEN

Gods dammit.

NARRATOR

Gwen approached the body, and looked around to make sure no one could see her. With a heave, she flipped the body face-up, and gasped at what she saw. Its skin was grey - not from rot but a vibrant, recently living grey. She was ornamented with colorful paint - a female Orc. When Gwen pushed back her hair in disbelief, she realized that some of the grey had gotten on her hands.

GWEN

Gah!

NARRATOR

She plunged her hand into the stream, and was relieved to see the grey wash off. Then she realized how little sense that made.

GWEN

(befuddled)
Wait...

NARRATOR

She splashed some water onto the Orc and scrubbed. The grey washed off, revealing human fleshtones beneath.

GWEN
What in Selibirin...?

FEMALE ORC
(barely gets it out)
Please.

GWEN
Gods!

NARRATOR
Gwen dove back with fright.

FEMALE ORC
Please...Save...

GWEN
(scrambling)
You're...tired. Why don't you take a little rest and then everything will be all right.

FEMALE ORC
No...Save...

GWEN
Just close your eyes and drift off to sleep.

FEMALE ORC
Save--

GWEN
--I can't save you, all right? You're hurt too bad.

FEMALE ORC
No! Save...Child.

NARRATOR
The Orc let out her last breath and fell still. That was when Gwen finally noticed the cloth bundle wrapped up tightly beside the Orc. The nausea of realization hit her hard. She crawled to the bundle and slowly unwrapped it, knowing perfectly well what she would find.

AN INFANT COUGHS, AND THEN CRIES.

NARRATOR (cont'd)
Which brings us back full circle to that which can no longer be avoided. So, next, I'm afraid, I must recount to you the gruesome conclusion to the first Book of our tale.

END OF PART THREE.

PART FOUR:

21 EXT. FREEHOLD BATTLEMENTS - DARK BEFORE THE DAWN

21

NARRATOR

In the blackness before the dawn, the fortress of Freehold was beset on three sides by Traft's host.

The battle was bloody and terrible, but Jen remained a formidable fighting force. Billy and Nelson were redoubtable in their own rights; the boys helped keep attackers clear from Jen as her lightning spells did their grisly work.

GARETH

They're scaling the north wall!

NARRATOR

Jen's entourage of shield-bearers and friends re-formed around her.

BILLY

Ready?

JEN

(panting)
Let's do it.

NARRATOR

They ran off, and arrived at the north wall, again just in time for Jen to break a brutal stalemate. But this was all taking a toll on the poor girl.

THE SOUNDS OF COMBAT SLOW DOWN AND FADE INTO OBLIVION.

TEMPLAR (V.O.)

YOU ARE LOSING YOURSELF, CHILD.

NARRATOR

Jen looked around, frightened, searching for the source of horrible voice.

TEMPLAR (V.O.)

YOU LACK THE SKILL NOW, BUT WE CAN TEACH YOU. COME TO US, STORMBRINGER.

JEN

Who's...what's...

BILLY (O.S.)

Jen. Jen!

THE CLAMOR OF WAR COMES WHOOSHING BACK.

NARRATOR

Billy's call snapped Jen back into coherence.

BILLY

You need some rest.

JEN

I'll rest later.

BILLY

Be smart. You gotta know when to take some bench time.

GARETH (O.S.)

WEST WALL. ALL AVAILABLE MEN TO THE WEST WALL. HIGH
COMMANDER'S ORDERS.

BILLY

It's okay to sit this one out, Jenny.

NELSON

This sounds like a pretty big wave.

JEN

That's why I need to be there. Shield-bearers, on me!

22 EXT. FREEHOLD WESTERN WALL - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

22

NARRATOR

On the Western wall, Bryce Riverfell looked out at
enemy torches beyond counting.

BRYCE

Gods dammit, they can't have many more waves after
that. Tell the men to--

NARRATOR

--Bryce paused when he saw the torches of Traft's horde
rapidly splitting apart to give way to something else.

BRYCE

What in Selbirin...?

*SIX ELEPHANTS TRUMPET ANGRILY AS THEY CHARGE THROUGH
THE LINES.*

BRYCE (cont'd)

Traft has war elephants! Get those ballistas loaded!

FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.

JEN

Holy shit, are those elephants?

BRYCE

Or else I'm the High King of Iorden.

NELSON

Wow, really going the full Minas Tirith here.

JEN

Yllowyyn told us the elephants were wiped out when they built the tower.

BRYCE

It appears the Elves are fallible, then. If the ballistas can't take them down, I need you stop them.

JEN

You mean...

BRYCE

Stop them. Before they get to the gates. Can you do it?

JEN

Can't you aim for the legs or something?

BRYCE

Even if we hit them, you think that would be any better for the poor things? You can do it quicker and cleaner.

JEN

Crap. I need some time to focus. I'll need to get a lot of current moving. More than I ever have.

BRYCE

How can we help?

JEN

Cover my ass get me some water.

BILLY

Y'all heard the lady. Water!

JEN

Billy, talk to me.

BILLY

About what?

JEN

Just whatever. Just need to hear your voice. It brought me back when I was getting...lost or whatever.

NARRATOR

Jen closed her eyes and concentrated. The world around her hummed in its special way.

BILLY

Uh, okay. Did I ever tell you about the game against North Scranton?

NELSON

Like a million times.

BILLY

Shut up Nelson.

JEN

Baby, I love you and I'm proud of you but honestly I drown out most of your football stories at this point. I'm sorry.

BILLY

Ouch.

JEN

Need something I haven't heard before.

BRYCE

Not to rush a delicate moment, ladies and gents, but, uh...

BILLY

Okay, okay. Nelson if you give me crap about this I will pull your arms off, shove them up your asshole, and give myself a high five down your throat.

Billy takes a beat to psych himself up.

BILLY (cont'd)

I love you so much, Jen.

JEN

I love you too.

NARRATOR

Her long, blond hair was standing straight on end.

BILLY

I love you, and you impress the shit out of me. It is scary how smart you are. And that's how I know you're gonna get us through this.

NARRATOR

Traft's war elephants drew closer.

BILLY

You figure everything out so quick. You're gonna pull this spell off and we're gonna win.

NARRATOR

That was when Nelson noticed something. He squinted through his spectacles to see better.

BILLY

We're gonna win, and you're gonna be the hero, and you deserve it.

NARRATOR

Finally, as they were only yards away, Nelson got a clear look at the elephants.

NELSON

JEN, WAIT THAT'S--

NARRATOR

--Jen sent a tremendous lightning bolt at the elephants, which Nelson saw too late were covered in hundreds of small clay pots.

A MASSIVE EXPLOSION SHAKES THE GROUND.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Jen's spell ignited the thunderdust, which sent a hurricane gale of fire and air towards the gates of Freehold. The sturdy doors were blown to splinters, slicing the men in the courtyard into a hideous pink mist.

Atop the wall, soldiers were knocked to their feet, unable to hear and barely able to stand straight. Through rigorous force of will, and even more rigorous training, General Riverfell maintained just enough presence of mind.

BRYCE

(strained)

MOVE. EVERYBODY MOVE. IT'S COMING DOWN.

NARRATOR

Those standing grabbed those who couldn't, and all made haste away from the walls. The thick stone edifice trembled, then quaked, then fell to the ground.

23 EXT. TRAFT'S CAMP - SIMULTANEOUS

23

NARRATOR

Traft's army cheered with wild abandon as they saw Freehold's west wall collapse.

TRAFT

Now is the moment you've waited too long for. Avenge your fallen loved ones. Show the Easterners what fear means. All columns, full assault. CHARGE!

24 EXT. FREEHOLD - MOMENTS LATER

24

NARRATOR

Out in front of the crumbled walls, the Freehold garrison was not ready for Traft's charge, but it is to Bryce's great credit that they were in the neighborhood of readiness.

BRYCE

Anyone who can hold a fucking pike, get your ass to the front. Hold the line! Anybody deserts now is gonna wish an Orc killed him. Professor?

PROFESSOR

I'm here, Bryce.

BRYCE

(whispers)
Let the mage and her friends leave.

NARRATOR

The professor looked out at the seemingly unstoppable horde, now only two hundred yards away.

PROFESSOR

It's been a pleasure, Bryce. At least we took plenty of them to Selbirin with us.

FOOTSTEPS RUN IN.

BILLY

(panting)
We're here.

BRYCE

(sotto voce)

I think you all should make a tactical retreat.

JEN

We said we'd see this through.

BRYCE

(whispers, emphatic)

When they get through the realm's gonna need you. Don't waste your damn lives.

A beat.

BRYCE (cont'd)

If you don't haul ass right now it's gonna be too late.

BILLY

Jen, maybe he's got a point.

JEN

Billy, I've spent my whole life feeling like I wasn't strong enough. I won't do that anymore.

NELSON

I don't wanna die, Jen.

JEN

(holding back tears)
Go if you have to.

BILLY

Jenny, come on.

NARRATOR

Billy grabbed Jen, trying to pull her away.

JEN

(crying)
No, get off me.

BILLY

I'm not leaving you here to die!

25 EXT. FIELD OUTSIDE FREEHOLD - SIMULTANEOUS

25

BATTLE CRIES THROUGHOUT.

NARRATOR

The Orcs thundered towards Freehold. Smith the smith even led a small column of his own.

SMITH
FOR MARY!

NARRATOR
Their footfalls were like thunder. They were but fifty yards away now.

SMITH
FOR CAROL!

NARRATOR
And then, a lone crossbow bolt fell through the sky and skewered Smith through the neck. Before anyone noticed, three more bolts fell. And then it was raining death.

A BATTLE HORN BLOWS.

26 INTERCUT - VARIOUS NEAR FREEHOLD

26

NARRATOR
Cresting a hill on the Orcs' north flank came five hundred Knights of the Wood, their gilded armor gleaming in the freshly risen sun. Their repeating crossbows pattered out a symphony of the rebels' doom.

THE HORN BLOWS AGAIN.

NARRATOR (cont'd)
Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, Lord Commander of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl, led the terrible swift charge, but Brennen and Yllowyyn rode right beside her.

When the trumpet blasts reached Riverfell's lines, the old General simply closed his eyes in silent prayer, while his men cheered.

PROFESSOR
Galadon's mercy. The Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

NARRATOR
Decimated by the crossbow barrage, the Orcish lines were in complete disarray. When Ry'y's riders closed to within a hundred yards, they slung their crossbows on their saddles and drew their sabres.

RY'Y
Y'ykaas Tyymo-ka.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE WOOD ERUPT IN A BATTLE-CRY.

YLLOWYYN
Y'ykaas Tyymo-ka!

BRENNEN

For Guernatal!

NARRATOR

The children did not yet understand the celebration of the men around them.

JEN

What happened?

PROFESSOR

Our salvation happened. Look!

NARRATOR

The Knights of the Wood leveled their sabres at their foes. That is when the rout became a slaughter. Traft's demoralized lines shattered like crystal on stone. Many Orcs dropped their weapons and turned to flee, but these were ridden down and slain just like the others.

Yllowyyn's bow did terrible work from horseback. Brennen dismounted amidst the fray; despite the Knight's age, he and his axe lived up to their fearsome reputation.

The rebel General Traft surveyed the battle-field, hoping desperately for some sign that the fight was not in vain. Though it broke his heart, his tactical insight told him plainly that all was lost, that to stay and fight meant only his futile death. He grabbed an abandoned horse and fled.

But Ry'y lo-Th'yyt saw him, and gave chase. She let loose with her crossbow. Traft looked back over his shoulder just in time to duck out of the way. Ry'y loosed again and again, but Traft was a nimble rider, and she could not close the distance to him. When the last bolt in Ry'y's magazine zipped past Traft's head, she reined in her mount.

As she watched the half-Orc escape, she looked... disturbingly satisfied with herself. Though no one was there to notice it.

She trotted back to her victorious troops and raised her sabre in celebration.

RY'Y

TH'AR NY'YKY!

*THE KNIGHTS OF THE WOOD CHEER.*27 EXT. FREEHOLD - CONTINUOUS

27

NARRATOR

Back at Riverfell's lines, the celebrations were interrupted by a Scout's alarm.

SCOUT

Rider approaching!

NARRATOR

A hundred pikes snapped to the ready. The children looked in the direction of the Scout's gaze, but smiled at what they saw.

JEN

They're with us!

NARRATOR

Regan and Nia rode in together, and stopped when they saw Billy, Jen, and Nelson.

NIA

Oh, thank Galadon you're alive.

REGAN

Front lines? Gods, I thought I taught you better than that.

BRYCE

I had a lot of men who weren't so lucky. You two are...?

BILLY

Our friends.

NELSON

Our chaplain and...arms-bearer.

NIA

You must be General Riverfell. I'm Nia, an acolyte of the Holy Brotherhood. I meant no insult to your honored dead, I was only relieved these see these three. I would of course perform last rites for any of your men if you so desire.

BRYCE

I appreciate that, Nia. We'll talk once we've gathered the dead and wounded. But tonight we celebrate.

JEN

What are you guys doing here?

REGAN

Brennen sent us. In case that charge didn't go as planned and we needed to get you three outta town.

RY'Y

Fortunately, it did go as planned.

NARRATOR

Ry'y approached, flanked by Brennen and Yllowyyn. Bryce, and all of his men, dropped to their knees.

BRYCE

Lord Commander.

RY'Y

General. As you were.

BRYCE

We sure are glad to see you. General Brennen, you as well. You saved my ass.

YELLOWYYN

It's Sir Willemsen now.

BRYCE

That so? You saved my ass, Sir.

NELSON

That was freaking awesome. Some straight Riders of Rohan shit. Someone has to tell me the whole story. I wanna start writing some of this stuff down.

NIA

A very worthy pursuit, Nelson. I would be glad to help.

NELSON

Uh, I am literate.

RY'Y

General Riverfell, your men performed commendably against nigh insurmountable odds.

BILLY

(mutters)

Took you long enough to show up though.

NELSON

(are you stupid?)

Dude!

RY'Y

Squire William, I would remind you that we are Knights of the Wood. And Knights of the Wood are never late or early. We always arrive precisely when we mean to.

NARRATOR

Regan remained silent, but took careful note of the edge in the Elf's voice.

BILLY

Yeah but you didn't arrive when we needed to you. That's what 'late' means--AH!

NARRATOR

General Riverfell locked Billy in a very efficient grapple to ensure his silence.

BRYCE

He's had a long day, Lord Commander. I'm not ashamed to say these three were indispensable to the battle.

RY'Y

Is that so?

BILLY

Especially Jen.

NELSON

Mostly Jen.

RY'Y

Perhaps the path of the squire suits you after all. It would warm my heart to see a female called 'knight' in the realms of men.

JEN

Thank you, Th'ayyd.

BRYCE

We'll be feasting tonight, Lord Commander. Will you join us?

RY'Y

Afraid not General. We must push our advantage of course.

YELLOWYYN

There's hardly an Orc left breathing.

RY'Y

On this battlefield. There's likely to be others traveling nearby. You might be tempted to call them squires or "support staff," but in truth it's just

(MORE)

RY'Y (cont'd)
 whoever was loafing around the hive and decided they
 wanted to spill man-blood.

YLLOWYYN
 In that case, Th'ayyd, it would be my greatest honor to
 join you on your hunt.

RY'Y
 Stay, Yllowwyn, and rejoice with the Memyet you have
 sworn to serve.

NARRATOR
 Regan's hawkish eyes never left Th'ayyd Ry'y lo-
 Th'yyt's face.

BRENNEN
 With your permission, Th'ayyd, the Kalth'yr and I would
 sleep easier knowing the threat has been quelled once
 and for all.

NARRATOR
 A tinge of annoyance crossed Ry'y's visage. This was
 not lost on Regan.

RY'Y
(losing patience)
 Have faith, Sir Brennen. If the Th'ar lo-Hyyl say a
 threat shall be dealt with, it shall be dealt with.

BRENNEN
(defeated)
 Of course, Th'ayyd.

REGAN
(probing)
 Can a few extra hands really hurt?

RY'Y
 Are you a tactician, arms-bearer? We depend on
discipline. Your *master* and his retainers are...
 competent warriors. But my Knights and I have trained
 and ridden together for near to half a century. If a
 single link in the chain were to weaken at a crucial
 moment, then yes, extra hands can hurt.

NARRATOR
 Regan settled back into her saddle, with new, private
 knowledge, but certainly not satisfaction.

RY'Y
 I wish you all an enjoyable feast, and bid you good
 evening.

RY'Y CLICKS TO HER HORSE AND TROTS OFF.

BRYCE

Who else needs a drink?

28 INT. DINING HALL OF FREEHOLD - AFTERNOON

28

NARRATOR

A short while later, in the now-bustling dining hall at Freehold, Bryce Riverfell raised a cup to his men. They saluted him as best they knew how.

WHOLE GARRISON

BRYYYYYYYYYYYYYYCE.

NARRATOR

His men applauded wildly as Bryce emptied his cup in one gulp. When he gestured to our children, prompting them to bow, the cheers grew even more rapturous.

29 MONTAGE: DINING HALL - TIMELAPSE DAY TO NIGHT

29

NARRATOR

And so the victory feast began. Fowl and sausage and bread and rice poured from the kitchen. Ale and mead and wine ran like water. Soldiers sung songs of great heroes past. Jen and Billy embraced, first with innocent joy, and then with...not-so-innocent joy. Jokes were told, some more decorous than others.

REGAN

So then the jester goes, "that's just what the princess said!"

NIA

Oh, my.

BRENNEN

[Retches]

NARRATOR

Nelson took in all the revelry around him and, having borrowed one of Nia's quills, set to writing down as much as he could. This pleased Nia greatly. By nightfall, everyone in the hall was well-fed, and well-drunk, and grinning like a fool. And oh, my Prince, how I wish I could end our tale there. With our heroes safe and happy among friends. But if you've listened so far, you know such stories are never so simple.

30 INT./EXT. TENT IN FREEHOLD COURTYARD - NIGHT 30

NARRATOR

For that night, as our heroes slept, some of them dreamt.

31 DREAM SEQUENCE: WHITE BANQUET HALL - TIME UNCLEAR 31

NARRATOR

Brennen, Nia, Yllowyyn, and Billy found themselves together, in an endless banquet hall of blinding white.

BILLY

The fuck is this shit?

BRENNEN

We're dreaming.

NIA

Sir Brennen and I have had strange dreams of late, but never together like this. Kalth'yr, have you dreamed as well?

YLLOWYYN

Certainly not like this.

NIA

And you, Billy.

BILLY

Nah, this is some Nelson shit.

NELSON

Hey guys.

NARRATOR

They turned to see Nelson, seated at the head of the banquet table.

BILLY

Uhhhh. Whassup Nelson?

NELSON

I think you guys are supposed to sit.

NARRATOR

Nelson gestured towards some chairs, and his companions obliged.

NIA

Have you had dreams like this as well, Nelson?

NELSON

I told you, I don't remember my dreams. But this place feels weirdly familiar.

NARRATOR

That was when the red and gold birds, which Brennen first dreamed of so many weeks ago, on the night before he met our heroes, appeared. Strangely, they flocked around Nelson.

NELSON

Uh.

NIA

I've been having a thought for some time, which until now has been too far-fetched to speak out loud...But Nelson, I think there is some possibility that a part of you, however small, may be...more than human.

NELSON

I don't...

YOUNG GIRL

I am with you, Nelson.

NARRATOR

Then emerged the Young Girl, from all of Brennen and Nia's recent dreams, complete with the bloody hole in her chest.

BILLY

Whaaaaaat the fuuuuuck?

NARRATOR

She came to rest at Nelson's shoulder, and whispered in his ear.

NELSON

She says--

NIA

--There are seven things you must know to save me?

BRENNEN

--There are seven things you must know to save me?

NELSON

(weird.)

Yeah. The seventh thing is: Chaos takes many forms, but Death rides a horse.

32 INT./EXT. TENT IN FREEHOLD COURTYARD - NIGHT

32

NARRATOR

In the tent in Freehold's courtyard where the party was sleeping, Jen stirred restlessly and woke. She was spared the strange dream, but sleep also eluded her. Rubbing the grogginess out of her eyes, she saw all of her companions asleep, except for one missing bedroll: Regan's.

33 EXT. FIELD OUTSIDE FREEHOLD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

33

NARRATOR

In the fields outside Freehold, Regan knelt by a grey muddy puddle, checking its consistency with her finger. Although Jen's leather shoes made barely a doe's whisper on the cold, wet ground, Regan heard her approach from twenty yards away.

REGAN

Couldn't sleep?

JEN

Where you going?

NARRATOR

The Thief Queen stood and faced Jen.

REGAN

The Elves don't want us with them now because of "tactics and discipline." But it was fine for us to ride a charge with them?

JEN

I mean, she was lying, but like, whatever. They don't want us with them.

REGAN

When someone lies to your face, it's not just an insult. It's a threat. They know something and and they're making sure you don't.
(*knows how crazy this sounds*)
I gotta know what the Elves don't want us to know.

JEN

So what, you're gonna follow them? It's a whole army, with like super senses or whatever.

REGAN

I haven't lived this long by staying uninformed. Twenty times out of twenty-one it's a damn fool decision. But that one time it saves your ass is worth it. And I have

(MORE)

REGAN (cont'd)
 a feeling that soon the Elves are gonna be paying me a lot more mind than I'd prefer, whether I want it or not.

JEN
 You want some blankets?

REGAN
 Nah. Can't really stop if I'm gonna catch up on foot.

JEN
 It's cold out.

REGAN
 Good.

NARRATOR
 Regan scooped up a generous handful of mud and applied it liberally under her arms and between her legs.

REGAN
 I can't afford to sweat.

JEN
 You know you're actually crazy, right?

REGAN
 Stay tough, stay smart, trust yourself.

JEN
 Where should I tell everyone to meet you?

REGAN
 I'll find you.

NARRATOR
 Regan winked at the girl, and stalked off.

JEN MANAGES A DISBELIEVING CHUCKLE.

34 MONTAGE: REGAN TRACKS

34

NARRATOR
 Tracking a single person or animal requires great skill, training, and perception. Tracking a large cavalry division requires only eyes and common sense. Tracking five hundred Knights of the Wood against their explicit wishes requires eyes, common sense, and a certain desperate tenacity only known to those who have spent much of their lives with very little to lose.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Thus, Aeron Regan had a fairly easy time picking up the trail of the Th'ar lo-Hy'yl from the battlefield at Freehold and into the surrounding pines. Two days into her search, she found a hastily abandoned campsite, where the hundreds of hoofprints were joined by dozens of footprints.

She climbed a hill, from which she could see the procession of footsteps, and staggered from exhaustion. She had not slept in quite some time now, and judged she couldn't be far from the Black Mountains at this point. She was not wrong. She pushed through her exhaustion, knowing she could not afford to give any ground.

It was yet another day before she found the shortcut through an overgrown brook and got out ahead of the footprints she was tracking. Knowing she could not fight back sleep for much longer, she climbed a tall, dense tree, surrounded herself with the thickest branches, tied herself into her bedroll, and let slumber carry her off.

35 EXT. FROSTY PINE BARRENS - MORNING

35

FADE IN MORNING SOUNDS.

RY'Y

Styyma!

NARRATOR

Regan jerked awake at the sound of Ry'y's voice and nearly fell from her perch. Judging herself still concealed, she moved aside some branches and cautiously peered into the clearing below her.

Ry'y and her heavily armed and armored Knights surrounded a ragged, barely-clothed procession: Orcs, judging by their grey skin and alien piercings, but these Orcs were women and children. Some even infants. Regan reflected on the fact that she had never once heard a story about an infant Orc.

Ry'y called a halt. Her Knights stopped, and took long swigs from their canteens, while their captives watched thirstily. Some of the infants cried.

One of the boy Orcs, who did not look to have any more than ten years, staggered where he stood, dizzy with thirst, and fell to his knees. An older female nearby cried out in alarm.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt nodded towards the boy, and two of her Knights dismounted and calmly strode towards him.

ORC MOTHER

(in Orcish, not translated)
Nai, nai! Mildness, bidde. Mildness.

NARRATOR

For all that Aerona Regan had seen and endured, her eyes still went wide with shock as the Elves coldly restrained the boy and opened his throat. There was a terrible second of desperate silence in the crowd.

ORC MOTHER

NAAAAAAIIII!!!

NARRATOR

With the grief and fury that only a mother can know, the woman charged at Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, and was cut down in her tracks by no less than three repeating crossbows. It was then the crowd went mad, some with panic and some with rage. One willful boy managed to strike an Elf with his fist, which was all the provocation the Elves needed to unleash a brutal wrath.

Crossbow bolts flew in every direction, refusing to discriminate between the frightened and the mad. Some tried to fight in vain. Mostly, mothers tried to shield their children, but this was also in vain.

Regan watched the whole bloody scene play out beneath her.

WE HEAR MOTHERS SCREAM AND CHILDREN CRY, THE SOUND DIMINISHING AS MORE AND MORE DIE.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

A quiet, impotent rage simmered behind her eyes as she cursed herself for a thousand thousand things she failed to realize before now.

ONE FINAL INFANT REMAINS CRYING, UNTIL A SINGLE BOLT SILENCES IT.

A sickly, silent beat.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Thus concludes the first book of our tale.

CREDITS WITH NO MUSIC.

END OF BOOK ONE.