

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book 1 - PRINCES OF IORDEN

Chapter 8
"Evil Untold"

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1 INT. GREAT COUNCIL CHAMBER - MORNING

1

BA'AT

Sir Brennen. Do you know of any person of procreative age with a claim to the High Throne?

NARRATOR

In the great hall of the Elven High Council, deep within the White Forest, every eye in the room was fixed on Sir Brennen Willemsen. The fate of Iorden relied on his next word--Would the Th'ar lo-Hyyl intervene on behalf of house Guernatal against Ardel Redmoor, or would they stand aside and allow human affairs to progress unimpeded? The law demanded a Guernatal heir.

Queen Aeron Regan, rightful heir of House Guernatal, stood beside the old general. In the tense, heavy silence that filled the hall, Regan studied the Elvish faces in the room. Her wits, forged razor-sharp by the cruel hammer of experience, searched for a hint as to how to proceed. The interminable silence stretched on, until--

REGAN

No. No, we don't know anyone like that.

OPENING CREDITS.

PART ONE:

1A INT. GREAT COUNCIL CHAMBER - MORNING

1A

NARRATOR

Regan had just turned down any possibility of Elven support for her regency, or assistance in dealing with Ardel Redmoor. Every eye in the room turned towards her. The faces of Brennen and Yllowyyn each showed surprise. The faces of the High Council were just confused, as they had expected an answer from Brennen.

RY'Y

Well then there's little more to discuss.

NARRATOR

Disappointment and desperation warred on Sir Brennen's face. His eyes searched the faces of the Elven Council, seeking some hint that they may change their mind.

BRENNEN

However we do--we could retrieve House Guernatal's Talisman of Dominion.

NARRATOR

The general looked again towards Regan, begging her to confirm.

REGAN

It's far away, but we know where it is.

RY'Y

Were you able to return that to us, it would be greatly appreciated.

BRENNEN

And what of the High Throne then?

RY'Y

Talismans symbolize status, they don't confer it. You know that. Now, Sir Brennen, I wish you honor, glory, and fortune as you avenge your liege.

YLLOWYYN

Wait. If I may, Th'ayyd, with greatest respect, surely order is best served by putting Traft down sooner rather than later. He'll only gain strength.

RY'Y

Well do I know it. Even as we speak, some younger Elves, out of ignorance, malice, or madness, crop their

(MORE)

RY'Y (cont'd)
hair short and whisper sympathies for the chaotic
causes of Orcs. Nothing else sickens me so deeply.

NARRATOR
To their shame, Yllowyyn and his family, you'll recall,
knew of just such a young Elf--in fact she was
currently minding Billy, Jen, and Nelson back at home.

RY'Y
But that is precisely why the law is so indispensable.
If we forsake it now, what kind of example would that
set?

YELLOWYYN
What if there are none left to set an example for,
Th'ayyd?

WYYN
That will do, Yllowyyn. This is no longer your concern.

YELLOWYYN
What? Of course it is.

WYYN
House Guernatal is fallen, through no fault of your
own. You're recalled from your post with commendation.

YELLOWYYN
But House Guernatal is not fallen.

WYYN
Its last living member is slain and there are no heirs.
What would you call that?

YELLOWYYN
I...

NARRATOR
Yllowyyn looked towards Queen Regan, his eyes begging
her to speak up. Regan shook her head, nearly
imperceptibly, and said nothing.

CHANCELLOR
*If that's all, then adjourned this gathering of the
High Council is.*

2 INT. YELLOWYYN'S PARENT'S PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS

2

NARRATOR
While the high council was in session, our children
from Pennsylvania remained in Yllowyyn's parent's
house, minded and "entertained" by Yllowyyn's sister,
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Yllodyk. The young Elf was playing her harp in the human style.

YLLODYK PLUCKS OUT A TERRIBLE VERSION OF "THE SINGING SISTER."

NARRATOR

Was attempting to play her harp in the human style.

YLLODYK

What do you think?

JEN

(clearly unsure)
It's...very beautiful.

YLLODYK

My friends would be so jealous to hear you say that. We all like human music better than Elvish music. So much more expressive, don't you think?

NELSON

(so fucking over it)
Uh huh.

YLLODYK

And it's so beautiful the way you all scorn sexual gratification.

BILLY

I don't know if we "scorn" it...

JEN

It's not really beautiful. People are super mean about it actually.

NELSON

Hey if your parents are all so gung-ho about sex how come there aren't a lot more Elves around?

YLLODYK

Egg-bearing Elves can ovulate or not at will.

JEN

That's kind of the greatest, actually. Jealous.

YLLODYK

I think we're plain sick of our parents telling us what's good, what's just, what's beautiful. They say we're naive. I say they're so scared of anything changing they've convinced themselves nothing can be other than it is.

YLLODYK

I mean sure there'd be sacrifices. But I can't understand what in Iorden everyone is so afraid of.

NARRATOR

At this moment, Yllodyk removed a small silk pouch from her harp case. From within the pouch, she retrieved a handful of clumpy green leaves. She placed most of these leaves into her own mouth, and then offered the rest to the group.

YLLODYK

Anyone want a hit?

BILLY

No thanks, I get tested for the football team.

NARRATOR

A small touch on the shoulder from Jen reminded Billy of the likelihood of his returning to his football team in the near future. Had anyone asked, a word from Nelson would have invited speculation as to whether any vegetation from Iorden could even be detected by Northeast Pennsylvanian drug tests--although nobody asked. Either way, Billy reconsidered.

BILLY

Yeah, okay, fuck it.

YLLODYK

They're scared of it because you're harder to control when your mind's been opened. Don't trust anyone over 300.

NARRATOR

As Billy was reaching into the silk pouch, the door swung open. Billy frantically tossed the pouch back to Yllodyk, who hid it in her harp case as Nia stalked into the room.

NIA

We're leaving. Thank our hosts and gather your things.

3 INT. YELLOWYIN'S PARENT'S KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

3

NARRATOR

A short time later, the party was packed and ready to leave. The humans waited outside while Yllowyyn remained to "discuss" with his parents.

YLOWYYN

The High Council flays its own fingers to spite its hands.

WYYN

Haven't you done enough to humiliate us today, Yllowyyn?

YLOWYYN

In Mem'lyg, 'lyg' can be translated as 'words,' 'law,' or 'reason.' And I think the Memyet have the right of it.

WYYN

Yes, you seem to have become quite fond of their kind.

YLOWYYN

There comes a point where the words of the law and the reasons of the law are at odds, and when we reach that point surely reason must prevail.

BA'AT

And who presumes to decide when we've reached that point? Who claims the wisdom to know when the laws of our ancestors must be sacrificed on the altar of expedience? You? I should hope not.

Yllowyyn steadies himself. Knows
it's a can of worms but...

YLOWYYN

These are my friends and they need help.

WYYN

It is not the duty of a Kalth'yr to make friends with their kind. Walk away from this blasted ordeal now, while you've still hope for a seat on the High Council.

YLOWYYN

I have seen Sir Brennen routinely risk his life to defend order and the law. What have the bureaucrats on the Council done to preserve order lately?

BA'AT

Far more than you seem capable of understanding.

YLOWYYN

Speak not down to me. I understand more than you think.

WYYN

And far less than you think.

YLLLOWYYN

You raised me to love the Ancestor's laws and Galadon's Order above all else. To protect them at any expense. And that's what I do now. I disappoint you? You disappoint me by not seeing that. By not trusting my intentions, or the character you instilled in me.

WYYN

It's not your intentions or character we mistrust.

BA'AT

You're too young to foresee the consequences of actions, and too childish to be grateful for things as they are.

YLLLOWYYN

I shall return to you when I have been proven correct, and embrace you with no bitterness.

WYYN

And if that day never comes?

Yllowyyn thinks for a beat.

YLLLOWYYN

I suppose I'll return in shame and hope you can embrace me with no bitterness.

BA'AT

You're a damned fool, child.

YLLLOWYYN

Then you're a damned fool's parents. Until we meet again.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn briefly put a hand on each parent's shoulder, and then turned and left, making sure to hoist his head high until he was out of sight. As he left, Ba'at lo-Yl poured himself a drink.

THE DOOR CLOSSES. EXCESSIVE CREAKING.

NARRATOR

Oh for nature's sake with the blasted doors!

4 EXT. ROAD IN THE WHITE FOREST - LATE MORNING

4

NARRATOR

Anyway, thus our party found themselves trudging down the main road out of the White Forest. All were in poor spirits, but none more so than Yllowyyn.

BILLY

Dude, Weenie, your parents are harsh, man.

NELSON

Also super racist.

YELLOWYIN

They've only tried to raise me as best they know.

BILLY

Yeah but they don't have to be such di--
(*catches himself, quieter*)
--such dicks about it.

NELSON

Maybe they do if stepping out of line is risky enough.

NARRATOR

As they reached the gates of the forest city, the group halted. Brennen turned towards his queen and spoke urgently.

BRENNEN

It's not too late to fix this, Your Grace.

REGAN

Situation hasn't changed. I made a decision.

JEN

What about the stuff we talked about?

REGAN

I took it under careful consideration.

BRENNEN

Do you not understand where you've left us? We're lost, Your Grace.

REGAN

None of it adds up. I can't figure out what the Elves want. And I don't go into business with anyone unless I know what they want.

BRENNEN

The High Throne is not a business, Your Grace.

REGAN

Please.

BRENNEN

I understand your wariness, but we've no options left.

REGAN

Brennen, have you ever dodged a sword or a bolt and you have no idea how you knew it was gonna be there? There's just a part of you deep down that knows when to duck.

BRENNEN

That wasn't a fight.

REGAN

It's *all* a fight. Every breath I've ever taken was a fight. I thought you'd understand that.

NARRATOR

Suddenly, Yllowyyn's head snapped around, looking back into the forest.

YLLOWYYN

Riders approach from within!

RY'Y

(O.S.)
Hail, Sir Brennen!

NARRATOR

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt, lord commander of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl approached our party, flanked by a number of her knights.

BRENNEN

Lord Commander.

NARRATOR

Brennen fell to one knee and lowered his head. After a moment, the other humans followed suit--Billy just a fraction later than the rest. Yllowyyn did not bow, but held a fist to his chest in salute.

YLLOWYYN

Th'ayyd. I deeply hope I did you no insult nor spoke out of turn before.

RY'Y

I hadn't noticed.

RY'Y *DISMOUNTS.*

RY'Y

Sir Brennen, I have something I would ask of you. Warrior to warrior. A quest you might say.

BRENNEN

A quest? What is it?

NELSON

That's when the party's given some objectives to complete, usually in exchange for a promised reward... But that's not important right now.

RY'Y

Indeed. I'm sure you're aware, Sir Brennen, that the Th'ar lo-Hyy1 have duties beyond simply protecting the Elven realms of Iorden and upholding the White Forest Concordat.

YELLOWYYN

(trying to impress)

They also seek out, protect, and preserve sites and relics of historical importance to the realm.

RY'Y

Just as you say. We've recently become aware of a relic of great importance, which we believe resides in an ancient burial mound not far from Freehold.

NIA

I've heard of this place. There are accounts of horrid blasphemies there, albeit of varying reliability.

RY'Y

Posterity has a way of exaggerating, but of course there is likely some danger. Either traps of those who built the mound or else bandits who've gotten there first.

BILLY

Wait but aren't you guys supposed to be like the baddest bad-asses in the world?

NARRATOR

Ry'y gave Billy a long, cold stare.

A BUZZING FLY ENTERS OUR SOUND FIELD AND PERSISTS.

JEN

It's a compliment where we're from.

RY'Y

Oh, surely. Mounted and on the fields of honorable battle, the Th'ar lo-Hyy1 are second to none. But of course our prowess would be somewhat wasted were we afoot, single-file in dark tunnels. Not by much, of course. A Knight of the Wood is still a Knight of the Wood. But we were prepared to excavate the whole tomb to minimize the risk.

NIA

That could prove a very costly endeavor.

RY'Y

Yes, we know. However, a small fighting force, used to fighting together, and with the right skills...

REGAN

And what makes you think we have the "right skills" for robbing graves? Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

Pray let us operate with some level of mutual respect. I see the arms you bear, "arms-bearer." You've had the Mooncrest fashion of sabre modified to straighten the blade.

NARRATOR

Commander Ry'y drew her own sabre now. The shimmering pearly-white blade, ornamentally carved, curved sharply off in the shape of a half-crescent.

RY'Y

In a sabre, the curved blade maximizes cutting area when swinging cross-body from horseback.

NARRATOR

To demonstrate, Ry'y suddenly swung the blade across the front of her body. A fly fell from the sky, cut cleanly in half.

RY'Y

With a straightened blade, you lose nearly every advantage that design affords. Except close-quarters mobility. Vital if you wish to, let's say, covertly retrieve some wares from a...

REGAN

Burial mound.

RY'Y

My thoughts exactly, glad to see we understand each other.

NARRATOR

Ry'y resheathed her sword as Brennen considered the Elf's offer.

BRENNEN

What sort of wares are we to retrieve, Th'ayyd?

RY'Y

We believe there is a chest, which contains a very important document. That is what you shall seek.

NELSON

No one likes a fetch quest.

YELLOWYYN

Mind your company.

RY'Y

Now this is very important. Do not attempt to open the chest yourselves.

NIA

Then how do we know what's in it?

REGAN

Then how do we know what's in it?

NARRATOR

Nia and Regan glanced at each briefly, before turning back to Ry'y for the answer.

RY'Y

If our information is correct, the chest will be impossible to mistake for anything else. As I was saying, the document we desire is very old and very fragile. Mere contact with the winds of today may damage it beyond repair. And those who built the chest may have done so in a way that destroys its contents if it is opened improperly. I cannot have you take that risk, so you must bring the chest to me unopened.

NELSON

That should be fine, unless one of us has insatiable curiosity as a tragic character flaw.

BILLY

Uh, that'd be you, dork star.

RY'Y

Unopened. Say it back to me if you would.

BRENNEN

Unopened, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

Good. We're all understood.

REGAN

I didn't hear him agree to this transaction.

RY'Y

I didn't hear him give you leave to conduct business on his account. Sir Brennen, will you do us this service?

NARRATOR

Brennen tried to balance the need to maintain his appearance of command with his too-keen awareness that the decision truly belonged to his queen. While pretending to consider, he caught a glance at Regan from the corner of his eye. Without a better idea, Regan raised her shoulders briefly, before reluctantly nodding in agreement.

BRENNEN

I would, but...how urgent is the need? I only ask because we may need some time to study the maps and... decide how our particular skills may best be tactically employed.

RY'Y

I don't expect a day or so to do any harm. But, to encourage you to timely action, allow me to present some tokens of good faith.

NARRATOR

At a gesture, three Elves came forward from the rear of the group. From their saddlebags, they unslung a number of rolls of golden cloth. They placed these reverently on the ground before Brennen, and slowly unrolled the parcels. As they did, a glow rose forth.

BRENNEN

Galadon's Great Mercy.

NARRATOR

Laying before them on the ground was a veritable armory's worth of gear. Weapons and armor shone in the sunlight. Each piece was a pearly white, yet seemingly reflected the entire rainbow of colors in the bright daylight.

NELSON

I knew we were due for an equipment upgrade.

NARRATOR

General Brennen was immediately drawn to an enormous battle axe. He stroked the shimmering blade devoutly.

BRENNEN

This blade is of Moonsilver.

RY'Y

And the handle is Whitewood.

YLLLOWYYN

These are sacred.

RY'Y

A personal gift from my own armory, Ylllowyyn. Will you take yours? I hear you're becoming quite the archer. Too long now have you hewn your shafts from peasant pulp. These are Whitewood, and fletched with the feathers of Mountain Eagles, so they'll fly further and truer. And the heads are Moonsilver, so they'll pierce deeper.

YLLLOWYYN

I do not deserve such splendid gifts, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

Y'ykaas Tyymo-ka, Hyylyet.

YLLLOWYYN

For Home and Honor, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

And for your chaplain, a consecrated Whitewood staff.

NIA

I shall treasure this for the rest of my days.

RY'Y

We have shirts of Moonsilver mail, shortswords and half-shields for your squires.

NARRATOR

Jen was pleased to note that the Elven idea of armor actually appeared to serve a protective role. Nelson, of course, was just excited to have new apparel. Billy, however...

BILLY

Does it have to be so...*Glee*-like?

NARRATOR

Once again, Ry'y stared at the boy in confusion.

JEN

He's asking about all the colors.

BRENNEN

Moonsilver is tougher than steel and lighter than leather. The sheen is just a result of the forging process.

YLLLOWYYN

Only Whitewood burns hot enough to forge Moonsilver.

REGAN

And only the Elves have Whitewood.

RY'Y

And for you, arms-bearer...

NARRATOR

Ry'y Lo-Th'yyt gestured to a particular pair of bundle. Regan opened them slowly to reveal a twin pair of mechanical crossbows. The wood was covered in an intricate array of fine carvings.

REGAN

(a bit awed)

Those are repeating crossbows.

RY'Y

Smaller versions of the ones we carry. More maneuverable in close-quarters combat. Ideal for combat in, say...

REGAN

A tomb.

NARRATOR

The Elf procured a bandolier of spare bolts, which Regan joyously strapped across her chest.

REGAN

You'd trust us with these?

RY'Y

As I said, a show of good faith. Of course there will be additional compensation on completion of this quest.

REGAN

How much?

RY'Y

Gold is not everything, arms-bearer. Sir Brennen, your help would free a great many of my riders to other tasks, and for that we'd be very grateful. I should think we could sort out your little Orc problem.

END OF PART ONE.

PART TWO:

5 INT. MOONCREST QUARTERS OUTSIDE CASTLE GUERNATAL - MORNING

5

JULIUS

What do you mean, "missing"?

ANTONIN

I mean 'absent when she was meant to be present.'
Missing. Disappeared.

JULIUS

Do you mean to tell me you have not yet consummated
your marriage?

ANTONIN

There was *no bride* to consummate it with.

NARRATOR

Antonin Mooncrest was explaining to his uncle Julius
how, after their wedding the previous night, Antonin
was unable to find his bride Arlene. Understandably,
the discussion had turned irate.

JULIUS

Forgive me, I thought you understood the importance of
consummation.

ANTONIN

Consummate yourself! Am I speaking Orcish, Uncle? She
wasn't there! She's nowhere to be found.

JULIUS

You were seen quite deep in your cups last night. Are
you sure you're remembering clearly?

ANTONIN

Yes. I broke up that preposterous fight, I sentenced
our man to be flogged, Redmoor said his would be hanged
and requested I do the same to ours, and with
displeasure I consented. That man died to keep this
peace of yours.

JULIUS

Peace of ours. It was your idea as much as mine so
don't dare start down that path.

ANTONIN

There is no more peace. I went up to the bedchamber to
find it empty. No one had seen Arlene since she started
dancing. And Ardel was the last partner she was seen
dancing with.

JULIUS

So you suspect foul play?

ANTONIN

You don't? I think he sent her away to Galadon-only-knows what awful fate, just as he did to his cousin.

JULIUS

The man's not a fool, despite what you seem to think. And only a fool would risk this alliance for petty cruelty.

ANTONIN

Then suppose he truly lost the girl. How is that better? We staked our alliance on this man, and on his sister's children by me. If he can't keep track of his sister, do you truly intend for his army to fight alongside ours?

JULIUS

Point taken, nephew. Let us go to the man, ask some sensible questions - in view of the court - and see if we don't receive sensible answers.

ANTONIN

And if we do not?

JULIUS

I suspect we will. But we can cross that river if we come to it.

THEME MUSIC.

6 EXT. GLACIAL PLAINS - LATE MORNING

6

NARRATOR

If one is illicitly stowed away on the back of a vegetable cart, hidden beneath a burlap sack, the ride may be very disorienting. As such, two particular stowaways were aware of nothing more than the bumping of the cart and the occasional sounds of the road.

POINT MAN

(muffled, through sack)

Halt! Hail, Bryce Riverfell, Esteemed Commander of Freehold.

BRYCE

(muffled, through sack)

Morning, boys! Who's hungry?

NARRATOR

With some dread, the stowaways heard these voices approach, yet could do nothing but cower in wait to be discovered.

SACK OPENS, AMBIENT NOISES GETS MUCH LOUDER

BRYCE

What in Galadon's good grace...?

7 SAME - A BIT LATER

7

NARRATOR

And so Arlene and Gwen--for those were the stowaways of course--found themselves huddled around a fire across from Bryce Riverfell, Esteemed Commander of the Civic Guard garrison in Freehold.

BRYCE

Well?

NARRATOR

Arlene and Gwen looked towards each other, but otherwise sat in silence. either unwilling to speak, or else just plain unsure of what to say.

BRYCE

I'm giving you a chance to explain yourselves.

GWEN

Pray, forgive us m'lord. We didn't steal nothin'. We're just two simple farm girls who were hiding from bandits.

BRYCE

This is so much easier if you don't lie. Clarence?

NARRATOR

A particularly big man tossed a sheathed dagger to Bryce Riverfell. The dagger, once belonging to Rickard Redmoor, had been confiscated from Arlene upon the discovery of her person inside the vegetable sack.

BRYCE

This blade's got the crest of House Redmoor on it. Also I can see the damn wedding dress sticking out from your robe.

NARRATOR

Arlene's face reddened.

BRYCE

So the only mystery is what in Selbirin you're doing out here, Maid Redmoor. Or is it Lady Mooncrest by now?

ARLENE

Lord Mooncrest and I said our vows, my Lord.

BRYCE

General, my Lady. And congratulations, I guess?

GWEN

Wait, if you're not a Lord then m'lady outranks you. She can order you to let us go, can't you m'lady?

BRYCE

Ayup. Unless Lord Mooncrest wants you back, and I can't imagine he wouldn't seeing as he married ya. In which case his order would supersede yours.

GWEN

What if she gives her order first?

NARRATOR

Bryce shook his head sternly.

GWEN

(whispers)
We have gold. And Jewels.

BRYCE

Which I believe the jurist and the hangman would call "evidence."

NARRATOR

Silence returned as the crestfallen women huddled closer together. Bryce considered the two for a moment.

BRYCE

I know people who literally woulda died for the tiniest sliver of a chance at a noble life. And here you are, born into that good life, and trying your damndest to throw it away. I don't get it.

NARRATOR

At this, Arlene rose, and removed her heavy overcloak. Her delicate white wedding gown ruffled in the wind.

ARLENE

It's a beautiful gown, is it not?

BRYCE

Very, my lady.

ARLENE

In fact, I can't imagine anything more perfect in which to become someone's bride. But it's rubbish for literally anything else. One cannot go riding in silk, or sing in a corset. All it's good for is looking beautiful for someone else. I don't pretend to know what it's like to be poor. Silk is certainly more pleasant than hemp. But wear it all your life, and it starts to feel like a noose all the same.

BRYCE

Take the dress off, please.

GWEN

General, no, I beg, if you must, I will--

BRYCE

--No I'm not...gods, in a tent.

8 SAME - A FEW MINUTES LATER

8

NARRATOR

Bryce Riverfell afforded Arlene all the proper privacy, as well as a spare shirt. The tunic was, of course, far too large for the lady, but as traveling garb goes, it was far less absurd than the wedding gown had been. The lady returned to Gwen and Bryce at the fire, and handed the silken dress to the general.

He stared at the fabric for many minutes, then finally tossed the entire thing onto the fire. The silk ignited quickly.

BRYCE

Maybe I never saw you two.

ARLENE

General?

BRYCE

Or maybe I did. We'll be stopping at an inn tonight. I'll decide when I get there.

ARLENE

There's so much more I could tell you, General, if you'll hear me out.

NARRATOR

Gwen rubbed her lady's arm comfortingly.

BRYCE

I'm sure. You know, I've been risking my life for forty years, hoping I could get some land, get a little something for myself. Maybe leave something behind in this world besides a pile of bones. If I'm gonna commit that dream to the fire like so much lace, I'd at least like some time to think about it.

9 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - EARLY EVENING

9

NARRATOR

On the road near Freehold, Queen Regan and her entourage stopped for refreshment - and to plan - at a roadside inn.

REGAN

Nia, since you're the closest I've got to a scribe, put on the record that I don't like this tomb raid we're headed for.

NELSON

Pixel-boobs or gritty reboot?

BRENNEN

There's very little else we can do, Your Grace. With respect, your decision at the council meeting made certain of that.

REGAN

I understand that, which is why we're doing it. But I don't like it. For the record.

BAILEY

Welcome, dearies.

NARRATOR

The children froze in panic at the sight of the inkeeper--a woman whose appearance was remarkably similar to both the Madam Bailey who had sold them armor so long ago...and to the Madam Bailey whose brothel was the site of Jen's tete-a-tete with Sergeant McShane.

REGAN

Don't worry, different sister. I checked. C'mon.

NARRATOR

The party sat at a table in the darkest corner of the inn, to hide their intentions. Brennen unrolled a tattered map, provided by Ry'y upon their departure.

BRENNEN

Here it is. Just over seven miles south.

NIA

The Cairn of Evil Untold.

NELSON

Let me see.

NARRATOR

As Nelson leaned over the table to peer at the map, Jen shook her head in confusion at the name.

JEN

What's it really called?

NIA

(Was I unclear?)
The Cairn of Evil Untold.

BILLY

No but really. No one would actually call a place that.

NELSON

No, guys, it actually says that on the map.

BILLY

Seriously?

JEN

Lemme see.

JEN SCOOTs OVER IN HER SEAT.

JEN

Wow it really does say that on the map.

BILLY

Tourism board really shit the bed on that one.

JEN

Why would anyone ever go there? Why would they put it on the map?

NELSON

There's definitely undead there.

NIA

So say some tales. The possibility of undeath is discussed theoretically among some, with no respect of the sacred. But I highly doubt it's ever been achieved.

NELSON

No, if they bothered to actually call it the Cairn of Evil Untold, there is one hundred percent definitely a high-level necromancer there with an army of undead minions.

BRENNEN

All the same, it's where we must go to retrieve the chest for the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

JEN

I think I would like to not do that. Just, like, none of that.

NELSON

That would usually be right up my alley, but it's called the Cairn of freaking Evil Untold.

BILLY

If it's too nerdy for Magic: The Geekening over here, I'm out too.

NIA

Just the other day, you thought "Templars of Discord" was a good name for a troupe of bards. This is surely not as bad as that.

NELSON

No, this sounds firmly in the dark fantasy slash horror genre. I'll pass. Nia, you should think about staying back too.

NIA

What? Why?

NELSON

I don't know how to tell you this, but folks like us do not fare well in horror stories.

NIA

I can't afford not to go. If there is any unholy magic in the Cairn, I'm best equipped to cast it out.

NELSON

Just don't split off from the group to "cover more ground," okay?

JEN

And don't get undressed in front of any mirrors.

NIA

What? Why would I--

NELSON

--Oh, and if there's any doors you can't open try saying different words for "friend."

BRENNEN

I'm not keen to break our fellowship in such times.

NIA

Nor I.

(considers, resigns)

Yet it must be admitted they are likely safer here.

BRENNEN

Safer is different than safe.

BILLY

I vote you guys go get the chest, and we'll stay here and--

NELSON

--Gather information. We're totally equipped to do that.

BILLY

I was gonna say drink beer until we forget we've each killed a man, but yeah we can talk to some dudes.

BRENNEN

I dislike this plan, Your Grace.

REGAN

(to the kids)

I think we'd all prefer if you came along. What'll it take?

BILLY

You saying that map is a joke and it's not actually called the goddamn Cairn of fucking Evil Untold.

REGAN

What's the matter? Scared?

JEN

Again, yes. "Cairn of Evil Untold." Says it on the map.

REGAN

We can drag 'em there by force but why waste the energy?

YELLOWYYN

Agreed. Take no offense, but it's not as if their fighting prowess is indispensable to our success.

NIA

Parting ways leaves me ill at ease as well. But they've been through a lot. Perhaps a night of harmless revelry would do their spirits good.

BRENNEN

Agh.

A beat of resigned realization.

BRENNEN

So be it. Your Grace, a silver to purchase supper for the road?

NARRATOR

He stood, but turned to the children.

BRENNEN

Remain aware of your surroundings at all times. You still need your wits about you. We'll return in two dawn's time.

NARRATOR

The children all solemnly nodded their agreement at the old general. At this, Regan retrieved a small purse from her pack, and handed it to Jen. A nearly-imperceptible glow could be seen from the top, before it disappeared into Jen's handbag.

YELLOWYYN

Sir Brennen is right. Awareness. At all times.

NIA

Do I have your word?

NARRATOR

Some hours later...

KIDS

(pre-lap, V.O.)
One, two...

10 INT. SAME - A FEW HOURS LATER

10

KIDS

Three!

NARRATOR

The children had given their solemn word, and then as soon as the rest of the party was gone, proceeded to spend an unbelievable number coins on ale. Presently, they were taking full wooden cups of ale, stabbing the

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

bottom with a dagger, and drinking the ale through this dagger-hole. I cannot fathom why, the cups had perfectly serviceable openings at the top already. Humans sometimes, I tell you.

THREE CUPS SLAM DOWN ON THE TABLE.

BILLY

Whoo! Shit man they make better beer here than I thought.

NELSON

Of course they do. This is handmade artisanal beer, recipe's probably a family heirloom. You're used to Natty Ice.

BILLY

Do another?

NELSON

[Enormous burp]

BILLY

Nice.

NELSON

Think I'm good for now.

JEN

Yeah, God I'm not even drunk I'm just full. I can feel it sloshing around in my stomach.

BILLY

Oh you can, huh?

NARRATOR

A mischievous grin split across Billy's face. He turned deliberately towards Jen, raising his arms towards her. A smile broke her face too.

JEN

Oh don't you dare.

BILLY

I don't believe you.

JEN

(ad lib., e.g.)
No no no no no...

JEN

(giggling)

This is your last chance. You're gonna be in so much trouble if--

NARRATOR

Heedless of the girl's warnings, Billy grabbed her by the waist, and tossed her up in the air. Both laughed uproariously as Billy caught her, and then repeated the toss a number of times. I can't imagine why--like I said, humans.

JEN

(through laughter)

Oh God stop I'm gonna hurl.

NARRATOR

As Billy set Jen onto the ground, the two looked into each others eyes, and it was as if the rest of the inn had disappeared to them.

NELSON

(schoolyard taunt)

Ooooooooooh.

BILLY

Shut it, dork-hole.

JEN

I love you.

BILLY

Yeah, I know, I'm pretty awesome.

JEN

No, really.

NARRATOR

She kissed him, with almost a hint of regret in her eyes.

JEN

I love you.

BILLY

I love you too.

JEN

I missed...fun. Do you guys remember fun?

BILLY

How could we have fun when someone's always up our asses with a sword?

NELSON

Plus, murder - not super fun.

NARRATOR

A look of determination crossed across Jen's slightly-inebriated face.

JEN

So? Let's see what we can do about getting home.

BILLY

You mean to Pennsylvania?

JEN

Yeah, to Pennsylvania. Brennen and them clearly don't wanna help, maybe someone else can give us a clue.

BILLY

Yeah, okay. Let me have one more beer, and then we'll--

JEN

--Let's start now. I don't wanna waste our chance. Nelson, you in?

NELSON

Yeah, it's about time.

BILLY

Really dude? I always figured you'd just wanna stay here.

NELSON

Me too. But turns out it's just got all the same bullshit I dealt with in Pennsylvania. Worst part is, I realized that stuff is in all those books I loved. All my heroes are racists and everything sucks. Let's get outta here.

BILLY

Fair enough.

(loudly, to the room)

Hey yo! Has anyone here ever been to Pennsylvania?

NARRATOR

Every head in the bar turned to stare at Billy. Had someone dropped a pin, the sound of its fall would have echoed. Slowly, and only after some time had passed, conversation resumed.

NELSON

I think we need a slightly better plan than that.

BILLY

Got a better idea?

JEN

See those guys playing cards over there?

BILLY

Who, the dweeby looking ones?

JEN

Yeah. Nelson, recognize that thing on their coats?

NELSON

That was the crest from the college of Armstrungard.
Wow, good eyes, Jen.

JEN

They're college boys. Stuck in bumblefuck nowhere, a little drunk, probably horny, and desperate to prove how much better they are than everyone here. Just like...Billy?...

BILLY

UPenn douchebags during Christmas break.

JEN

There you go. And we're gonna mess with them the same way. Only instead of getting them to buy us beer, they're gonna give us information.

NELSON

From what we've gathered so far, how we got here is still some pretty esoteric stuff. Nia didn't know anything either.

JEN

I'm not saying I don't trust Nia, but her and Brennen and all those guys have a vested interest in keeping us here. Prophecy and stuff. People in here don't.

BILLY

Okay, we can run that play.

JEN

Just don't hit anybody. Unless I say. Nelson, sound good? Information can't hurt.

NELSON

(G.I. Joe voice)
Knowing is half the battle.

Silence.

NELSON

(let down)

No one? Bueller? Bueller? *Really?* Nothing on that either?

BILLY

I know that flick. Something about eating breakfast right?

NELSON

I quit.

BILLY

Let's do this shit!

NARRATOR

In his excitement, Billy threw his chair to the ground and stormed off to the bar to obtain more beer.

JEN

He got pretty close on that one.

NELSON

Admittedly. Same director.

JEN

You ever worry that we've been away just long enough to forget how much NEPA sucks too?

NELSON

You ever live out a cherished fantasy, only to realize that it wasn't your own, and was made up by someone trying to keep you down? 'Cause that's where I'm at.

JEN

Are we talking about porn right now?

NELSON

God, I miss the internet.

JEN

C'mon, Nelson Let's go home.

END OF PART TWO.

PART THREE:

11 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - NIGHT

11

NARRATOR

In a roadside inn near Freehold, three young men sat around a table, entertaining themselves with ale and cards. On each of their robes was the crest of the College of Armstrungard. So engrossed were they in their own company that they did not notice the girl approach their table. She sat down without invitation.

JEN

Hi.

NARRATOR

One of the young men appeared angered by the interruption of their game, but the other two set down their cards to look over their new guest with a good deal of interest.

JEN

Wanna play a game with me and my friends?

TRAVELER 1

Do your friends all look like you?

JEN

They have great personalities.

NELSON

Yo.

BILLY

Sup. This my seat?

NARRATOR

The Armstrungard boys seemed disappointed at the arrival of Billy and Nelson, and somewhat taken aback by their willingness to sit without invitation.

JEN

What's the matter? Don't wanna make new friends?

TRAVELER 3

We got all the friends we need, honey. Shouldn't you be in bed?

TRAVELER 2

It's a crime she isn't.

TRAVELER 3

Ugh. I can't take you anywhere.

TRAVELER 1

What are we wagering, love?

JEN

Oh, this isn't a betting game. This is a drinking game. Your cups all full?

TRAVELER 1

You're gonna drink with us?

JEN

I am.

TRAVELER 3

Drink what? Milk?

NARRATOR

Jen gave the boy a smile, and then plucked the flagon of ale out of his hand. Without a moment's hesitation, she put it to her own lips and drank. After a rather impressively short amount of time, she slapped the empty flagon down onto the table.

NELSON

I assure you, homegirl can drink.

BILLY

I seen it, man. She's been drinking since she was like ten.

TRAVELER 1

I don't know if you've ever been to the College of Armstrungard, love. We drink enough to affront the gods.

JEN

Well, what's the point of drinking if you don't get to do a little something less than holy?

NARRATOR

The one boy, who was upset at the interruption of his game, rolled his eyes. The other two, however, seemed once more to be interested in their new friend.

TRAVELER 1

What's the game?

JEN

It's a classification game. Should be easy for you college boys. When it's my turn, I draw a card, and

(MORE)

JEN (cont'd)
hold it up to my head, so that everyone else can see it
and I can't.

NARRATOR
Jen drew a card from the top of the deck, and without
looking, held it to her forehead. The card showed the
pictogram of a Queen.

JEN
Now I give a category. You give me things in that
category based on my card. If I have a 2, you give the
worst thing in that category. If I have an ace, you
give the best. Then I guess my card. If I'm right, you
all drink.

TRAVELER 2
If you're wrong?

JEN
I take a number of drinks equal to the difference
between the numerical values of the card I had and the
card I guessed. Got it?

BILLY
No.

JEN
So I might say, "diseases you could get," and based on
the card I'm holding you might say...

NELSON
A taste bud disorder that makes spinach taste like
pizza bites.

BILLY
I can gain or lose weight by thinking about it hard
enough.

TRAVELER 1
Doctor help! There's this lusty barmaid stuck on my
lap!

TRAVELERS 1 & 2
[Lewd Guffaws]

JEN
This sounds like a King to me.

NARRATOR
Jen removed the card from her own head, and looked at
the front.

JEN

Wow you guys have high standards. What would an ace have been?

TRAVELER 2

You in my lap.

NARRATOR

At this, Billy's muscles tensed as if he were preparing for a fight. Below the level of the table, Jen put a hand to his knee to restrain him from striking his new friend unconscious.

JEN

I was off by one, so I take one drink. [Gulps] Who's next?

12 INT. MOONCREST COMMAND TENT - NIGHT

12

NARRATOR

Outside of Guernatal Castle, Antonin Mooncrest was dining in private with his father. Marcus Mooncrest, you'll recall, suffered from a tragic affliction of the mind. He appeared to take a great deal of enjoyment from his bowl of stew. Antonin, ever the dutiful son, wiped the gravy dripping from his father's chin with a silk cloth.

ANTONIN

Father, I need you to listen to me for a moment.

NARRATOR

The father looked up from his supper. His eyes sat on his son, but never fully focused their attention on him.

ANTONIN

Uncle Julius is...he has the cunning needed to rule. Know that your duchy is safe and your people will prosper under him.

NARRATOR

At the compliment to his brother, Marcus' face split into a proud smile.

ANTONIN

And I have learned much from him. But I have also learned much from you.

Antonin pauses a beat to reflect,
choose his words.

ANTONIN

Compassion most of all. Sadly, sometimes a good ruler and a compassionate man cannot act in the same way. And I fear I know what I will always choose.

NARRATOR

The door flap of the tent was pulled aside, and the aforementioned Uncle Julius entered the tent.

JULIUS

Are you ready nephew?

ANTONIN

(to Julius)
Just a moment.

NARRATOR

Antonin leaned close to his father to plant a kiss on his forehead. As he leaned in, he whispered.

ANTONIN

(to Marcus)
I can only be the man I am. I hope it's a man you're proud of.

ANTONIN

After you, Uncle.

NARRATOR

Julius exited the tent. Antonin lingered just long enough to pick up a chainmail glove off of the table and hide it under his tunic before following his uncle.

13 INT. MAIN HALL OF CASTLE GUERNATAL - A BIT LATER

13

NARRATOR

In the great hall of Castle Guernatal, Ardel Redmoor was holding court over the evening meal. Around the table sat many of the principal players in his coup, including the threatened court philosopher and the bribed treasurer, as well as the usual collection of minor lords and sycophants.

The High Priest was nearly finished giving a pre-meal benediction, entirely oblivious to the fact that most had nearly completed their supper already.

HEAD PRIEST

And so this generous bounty, bestowed upon us by the grace of Galadon, and by the courage Lord Redmoor has shown in maintaining order, is accepted most graciously by us humble servants, in the hope that it will be

(MORE)

HEAD PRIEST (cont'd)
sustained, and that the elderly among us will pass it through the bowels in a painless and timely manner. So be it, by god.

ALL
(*Distant, hardly listening*)
So be it, by god.

NARRATOR
The great doors of the hall swung open.

ANTONIN
So be it, by god.

NARRATOR
Antonin Mooncrest was followed closely by his uncle. Their appearance created somewhat of a shock around the court. The pair of Mooncrests strode purposefully to stand before Ardel.

ARDEL
Lords Mooncrest. Come to join us for supper?

JULIUS
Afraid we have slightly more dire matters to discuss.

ANTONIN
How goes the search for my wife? I find myself worrying greatly over her.

A loaded question and Ardel knows it. He parries.

ARDEL
I appreciate your concern, Lord Antonin. We are of course doing everything in our power to find her, as I'm certain are you. I will not rest until *my sister* is returned safely.

JULIUS
Yes, of course. Honor and our houses would require no less from each other. Perhaps we could arrange a council early on the morrow to compare our findings thus far, lest one miss something the other might see.

NARRATOR
Ardel glanced around the room, as if seeking an excuse. None came to mind.

ARDEL
Yes, that will do fine, my Lord.

ANTONIN

Why not convene the council now?

ARDEL

My Lord?

JULIUS

Nephew, it's only reasonable to allow some time to--

ANTONIN

--This is my wife and your sister we're talking about.
Why waste even a moment?

ARDEL

But of course time is required to--

ANTONIN

--To devise a passable lie?

NARRATOR

A shocked murmur filled the hall.

JULIUS

Nephew! Forgive his manners, my Lords, he is deeply
concerned about his wife.

ANTONIN

There is no information forthcoming, as Lord Redmoor
has no desire for his sister to be found. He knows damn
well what happened to her.

NARRATOR

As he spoke, Antonin stepped closer and closer to
Ardel, until by the last the two men were nose-to-nose.
Julius was aghast, but could do nothing.

ARDEL

There are very troubling insinuations behind your
words, Lord Mooncrest. Such implications could get you
in trouble.

ANTONIN

I did not come here to *imply* anything, I came here to
formally accuse you, Lord Redmoor, in full view of the
court.

ARDEL

Accuse me? Of what?

ANTONIN

You spoke slanders and published libels about the late
Gunther Guernatal, had him assassinated, and usurped
his throne - the highest seat in all of Iorden. In your
(MORE)

ANTONIN (cont'd)

youth, you intentionally got your cousin and sister drunk out of their minds and convinced him to rape her. When they divulged this gruesome fact to others, you had your cousin killed, and I'm sure you've done some unspeakable evil to your sister, my wife, to keep her quiet as well.

NARRATOR

Antonin looked around to the stunned faces of the court to make sure that all could hear him well.

ANTONIN

For all these crimes, and for an overall turpitude of character which does me insult on general principle, I demand satisfaction.

ARDEL

Mark me, boy, and mark me well. Do not dare--

NARRATOR

--With a solid THWACK, the chainmail glove flew through the air and slapped Ardel across the face. For good measure, Antonin Mooncrest wound up and gave Ardel a second slap.

ANTONIN

Satisfaction, my Lord, will I have it?

NARRATOR

You will forgive this wood sprite for taking some amount of joy from the blood which streamed from a gash on Ardel's cheek.

ANTONIN

Or must I add cowardice to the already-staggering catalogue of your vices?

ARDEL

Oh you shall have it.

ANTONIN

Superb. You have the choice of time and weapon. I will await your word in my headquarters.

14 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - LATE NIGHT

14

NARRATOR

Back in the tavern near Freehold, all involved were fairly inebriated. One of our new Armstrungard friends held a four of hearts to his forehead.

BILLY

Advanced Placement fart appreciation, but the teacher's kinda hot.

ALL

[Laughs]

TRAVELER 3

Remedial transmutation. Ba'a lo-Ky'yr is lecturing but Olaf Softhearth is grading.

TRAVELER 2

Souuuuuunds liiiiiike....four!

ALL

[Cheers]

TRAVELER 2

Ha! Bottoms up, you sorry sods.

NARRATOR

After the group took their appropriate libations, the deck was passed to Nelson. The boy drew an ace of spades to his forehead. Jen caught the boy's eye and gave a quick nod. Nelson considered his category for a moment, before continuing.

NELSON

Libraries.

JEN

The one in New York with the lions.

BILLY

Oh yeah I remember that one. From the movie with the groundhog.

TRAVELER 1

Ba'a lo-Ky'yr's personal collection.

TRAVELER 2

Psh. In the human realms, maybe. Nothing next to the archives in the Temple of Homes Forgotten.

TRAVELER 3

He's right. Children of men aren't even allowed in there.

NELSON

Sounding like an ace.

BILLY

Of spades, dude. Fucking Motörhead.

NELSON

Metal. As. Fuck.

NARRATOR

At this, the two boys from Pennsylvania made a strange occult symbol with their hands, and shook their heads violently up and down. I can only presume they were very briefly possessed...although it seemed to pass soon enough.

BILLY

I want food. Anyone else want food?

JEN

Oh my God yes right now.

TRAVELER 3

Kitchen's been closed nearly an hour.

BILLY

Don't worry I'll find us something.

NARRATOR

Billy stood up with a good deal of purpose--and considerably less stability--and walked off in a random direction.

TRAVELER 1

Quite chivalrous, that one.

TRAVELER 3

Built like an ox.

JEN

That he is.

TRAVELER 2

Not overly clever, though.

NARRATOR

Jen grimaced at the insult, but managed to convert it quickly enough into a smile. After a second of willpower, the smile turned alluring.

JEN

Do you guys think you're clever?

TRAVELER 2

I have moments of inspiration.

JEN

And what inspires men like you?

TRAVELER 2

Girls like you.

JEN

Like *me*? I inspire you? What do I inspire you to do?

TRAVELER 2

Why don't you come over here and find out?

NELSON

I'm not sure how Billy would feel about that.

TRAVELER 1

Lose the idiot.

NARRATOR

Again, the smile strayed towards a grimace before reining back in.

JEN

To be fair, I haven't seen any of you being as clever as you say you are. What do you say Nelson? What test of wits would prove them worthy of the maiden's favors?

TRAVELER 3

She's no maiden.

JEN

(super flirty)
Now, now, mind your manners.

TRAVELER 3

Ugh. Crass.

NELSON

Do any of you have any idea what's in those secret archives you were talking about?

JEN

Very good, Nelson. I think that's an excellent test of wits indeed.

TRAVELER 1

Bjorn here claims to have read one. But only when he's good and tanked.

TRAVELER 3

I made no such claims. I said I glanced at a page.

NELSON

Well what did that page say?

TRAVELER 3

I don't think that's mine to disclose.

TRAVELER 1

Aw, tell her you fucking braggart.

TRAVELER 3

I don't want to.

TRAVELER 2

(sotto voce)

Gods damn me, Bjorn, if you aren't the most selfish son of a whore I've ever met. This is why we can't ever have anything nice!

JEN

Aww, it's okay.

NARRATOR

Jen dipped her finger into the foam of her beer, and then licked her finger clean.

JEN

You don't need to be shy.

NARRATOR

This gesture seemed to have an effect on the first traveler, but none at all on Bjorn. Apparently, it had an unintended consequence on Nelson as well.

NELSON

May I be excused from the table?

TRAVELER 1

Agh. You're howling at the wrong hound with Bjorn here. Selfish twat.

TRAVELER 3

Sticks and stones, Martin.

TRAVELER 1

Aye, sticks and stones indeed.

TRAVELER 3

Say, where's that farm boy-looking friend of yours?

NARRATOR

Sudden realization crossed Jen's face, and she immediately removed her finger from her mouth. She looked towards the hallway which Billy had wandered through.

15 INT. ROOM IN THE INN - CONTINUOUS

15

NARRATOR

Down said hallway, Billy had just found an open door. Being slightly inebriated, Billy chose to simply enter and announce himself.

BILLY

Hello?

NARRATOR

The room appeared empty. Billy walked in and looked around to be certain. He saw the typical collections of personal effects that one might leave in an inn bedroom. Also, he found a small barrel labeled "Salt Beef". The lid of the barrel was open, which Billy took as an invitation.

BILLY

Tits.

NARRATOR

In many great tales, there is a point where, by a stroke of pure luck, the hero of the story happens to uncover a nefarious plot, just before calamity would have otherwise befallen them. The hero thus averts the calamity and saves the day. Billy was no such hero. Instead, he stuffed a handful of salted beef into his mouth, and as much more as he could hold into various pockets and fists. His search accomplished, he strode out of the room and back towards the main room of the inn.

Had he been even slightly more diligent, or slightly less drunk, he may have noticed, on the bed in the room with the salt beef, were a pile of twenty-sided dice, similar in design to the ones Nelson wore around his neck. Also, he might have noticed a pile of night-black robes, similar in design to those worn by the Templars of Discord.

END OF PART THREE.

PART FOUR:

16 EXT. MARSHY COUNTRYSIDE - DUSK

16

*A GAGGLE OF GEESE FLIES OVERHEAD.**THRUM AND WHIR OF A REPEATING CROSSBOW. A BOLT WHISTLES SLIGHTLY WIDE OF A GOOSE. THE GEESE FLY OFF FASTER.*

REGAN

Shit.

NARRATOR

I'm told that when two humans first take each other as lovers, it is not uncommon for them to spend the first night of their love affair not sleeping at all but instead becoming as intimately familiar as possible with each other's corporeal forms.

Aerona Regan, the erstwhile thief and future Queen, despite being intimately familiar with the corporeal forms of many an acquaintance, had never truly known love in her adult life. This is not to lay that all at her feet; if you've followed our tale thus far you know very well why that is. But so it was.

However, Regan did treat new weaponry the way most people treated a new lover. At dusk, she did not quite have that hang of the sighting mechanisms on her new crossbows. By dawn, she could fell a goose at a hundred yards. Lack of sleep was a price she was happy to pay, in order to not carry anything into battle with which she did not know at least as well as she knew herself.

17 SAME - MORNING

17

FADE OUT NIGHT SOUNDS AND FADE IN MORNING SOUNDS

NARRATOR

Brennen awoke to grease crackling over a fire.

REGAN

Breakfast? If we're doing this thing, let's get there soon. Before I remember how stupid it is.

18 EXT. CAIRN OF EVIL UNTOLD - LATE MORNING

18

NARRATOR

After breakfast, the party set off down a path through increasingly swampy countryside. Eventually, they
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

reached a hill emerging from the swamp. In this hill was a stone door, covered in moss. In front of the door was a very precisely-organized stack of human skulls.

Nia raised her new elven staff towards the door, and muttered something briefly. The tip of the staff lit up in a blue glow. Under this illumination, runes were clearly visible carved through the moss and into the stone door. As she read, a crow emerged from the swamp to land atop the door.

CROW CAWS.

NIA

This is writing from the old times, but it seems to have been carved recently.

YELLOWYYN

I thought the old tongues of men were nearly all lost.

NIA

They are. This is the only dialect of which we still have knowledge, albeit still limited. There is one tablet which was partially translated into Old Elvish. It's in Ba'a lo-Ky'yr's personal library in fact.

BRENNEN

So you can read this inscription?

NIA

I remember very little. Most of it from my earliest days at the college.

NIA

I can make out words for 'torment' and 'realm of'...

THE CROW CAWS AGAIN.

NIA

(some awe)
...Friends. As Nelson said. By Galadon, I do not know how that boy knows all that he does.

BRENNEN

I don't understand.

NIA

This word means 'friend.' *Vaynd.*

ANOTHER CAW.

NIA

Funny, I'd nearly forgotten that word. Reminds me of...

NARRATOR

She stood tall, and spoke the word louder.

NIA

Vaynd.

NARRATOR

In a flutter of feathers, the crow suddenly swooped off of the door frame, and landed on a particular skull within the pile. Lacking a better idea, and with some trepidation, Nia reached for that skull. The rest of the party drew all their weapons, and trained them at the doorway.

Nia pulled on that skull. It attached to a rather rusty chain. As the cleric pulled, the stone doorway grated open. The noises that the door made--

THE STONE DOOR GRINDS OPEN. STALE AIR WHOOSHES OUT IN AN UNCANNILY HUMAN-SOUNDING MOAN.

--Well, they were the noises one might have expected from a location named "The Cairn of Evil Untold".

When nothing immediately leapt out at them, Nia raised her glowing staff to light the darkness, and entered the cairn. Brennen and Yllowyyn followed. Regan removed a small scythe-and-chain from her pack and secured the rusty chain in the open position before bringing up the rear.

19 INT. CAIRN OF EVIL UNTOLD - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

19

NARRATOR

As they entered the cairn, the party lit torches. The firelight revealed that the passage they tread was lined with eerie statues, human-shaped figures kneeling in prayer. However, none of these statues was in possession of a head, and each statue was bowed down to a small round stone. The passageway ended in a steep spiral staircase, disappearing downwards into the gloom. Without much of a choice, the party descended.

20 INT. CAIRN INNER SANCTUM - TIME UNCLEAR

20

NARRATOR

At the bottom of the stairwell, the group found themselves in an enormous hall--so large that the combined torchlight could not reach the walls. The hall appeared to contain a number of long, narrow stone tables--and many more of the eerie headless statues.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

As they surveyed the surroundings, their eyes suddenly caught a movement from one of the statues. In an instant, a crossbow bolt and an arrow were flying side-by-side towards the movement. A snake fell dead from the statue. As it fell, it knocked into the round stone of the statue. The stone rolled, or rather wobbled, along the floor to rest against the toe of Sir Brennen's boot.

Brennen picked up the stone and blew off the dust. Once it was so cleaned, the eye sockets and a grinning jaw were apparent.

NIA

Oh, Galadon's mercy.

NARRATOR

The group approached the statue to confirm their sickening realization that it was in fact a human corpse. The body was decapitated, burned, dessicated, and also impaled by three identical swords through the gut.

They all looked back the way they had come, realizing how many other corpses they had passed.

BRENNEN

Who do you think these men were?

REGAN

Whoever they were, somebody really fucking hated them.

NIA

What little is known about this place says it was the site of unspeakable crimes.

YELLOWYNN

Were these the victims or the punished perpetrators?

NIA

They're victims now.

BRENNEN

Let's find what we came for. I'd not stay here any longer than needed.

NARRATOR

Walking along the hall, the party soon reached a stone dais. Atop this dais sat a stone altar. Atop this altar sat an unmistakably ancient chest.

YELLOWYYN

This looks to be what we seek.

NIA

This too has the old script written on it. But I can't recall the meanings of any of these words.

NARRATOR

As Nia inspected the ancient chest, the more militarily-inclined of the party took a defensive stance. Brennen walked around to the far side of the altar, where he found a large table, more ornate than the rest of the hall.

At this table sat twelve more bodies. These had kept their skulls. Based on the agony twisted plainly on their faces, however, one might have deduced that this was more a curse than a mercy.

NIA

Wait a minute.

NARRATOR

Brennen saw the seat at the head of the table conspicuously empty.

NIA

The chest has already been opened.

BRENNEN

Then close it and let us leave.

NIA

If it's already open there's no harm in seeing what's in it.

YELLOWYYN

We were given very clear instructions.

NIA

Not to open it. And we haven't. It's already open.

REGAN

It could still be trapped, I've seen it before.

NIA

How long I've yearned for the chance to conduct research in an actual site of antiquity.

YELLOWYYN

We're not here for research.

REGAN

Let's get it outside and then I'll open it with you.
Deal?

YLLLOWYYN

Quiet!

NARRATOR

At first the sound of footsteps coming from the stairway was faint, only detectable by Yllowwyn's keen Elvish ears. Yet the sound grew louder, and grew closer, and closer. They all trained their weapons on the stairwell.

For a brief moment, Brennen looked down at the skull on the ground at his feet. Suddenly, the skull's eyes popped open to stare up at the knight, and the rictus grin of death somehow widened.

BRENNEN

[Cry of angry alarm.] {Oooooooh. No Ahhhh. Ahhh. Back of the throat. Sorry, couldn't resist.}

NARRATOR

As Brennen stomped down on the skull, the sounds of creaking and moaning suddenly came from all around them. Defiant of all natural and physical law, the "statues" slowly rose and turned towards the altar.

REGAN

Oh now what in the fuck is this shit?

NARRATOR

With a sudden hiss, an army of snakes emerged from the walls. In eerie unison, they slithered towards the skulls, and pushed them back towards the necks of their erstwhile owners.

NIA

Galadon save us. The rumors...Undead!

NARRATOR

An army of undead stood before them. Yllowwyn placed an experimental arrow through the skull of one of them. The skull shattered, and the corpse fell to the ground, unmoving. Without a word, another stepped forward to take its place.

For a tense moment, stillness filled the hall until, in eerie unison, each corpse reached to its own belly, and drew out one of the swords impaling it. The army began to advance.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Suddenly, battle raged in the hall. Bolts and arrows flew, and Brennen's throwing axes flashed in the dim light. And yet the undead continued to press forward. For each one that fell, another took its place. The battle looked increasingly hopeless, until Nia raised her Elven staff. The blue light at the tip intensified, as Nia gestured it towards the corpses.

NIA

Back!

UNDEAD

[Hissing and growling]

NIA

Get back, you fell abominations. In Galadon's name.

NARRATOR

The light of Nia's staff halted the corpses in their tracks. As she swung her staff towards them, they retreated a step.

VOICE

Can it be? Have you finally returned?

NARRATOR

The voice emerged from somewhere behind the party. Brennen and Regan spun to face the new threat, but Nia's focus remained on holding back the undead army.

VOICE

They will not harm you. Unless I tell them to. Why don't you turn and face me, Nia?

NIA

How do you know my name?

VOICE

How could I forget it, *vaynd*?

NIA

Renault?

NARRATOR

Nia slowly lowered her staff. True to the words of the voice, the army did not advance any further. Nia slowly turned around. As she did, torches lining the hall suddenly sprang to light, illuminating the macabre scene. A man stood before them. Or rather, the remains of a man stood before them. Nia's hands trembled.

NIA

My god, Renault. What have you done to yourself?

RENAULT

I have conquered death.

NIA

You've corrupted everything, and yourself most of all.

YELLOWYYN

You know this...thing?

NIA

We studied at Armstrungard together. A very long time ago, it seems.

RENAULT

Look on my works! Can there be any doubt of my genius now? And I have done it all for you, Nia.

REGAN

...Why don't we give you two a minute, and we'll just get this chest out of your way...

NARRATOR

Nia's hand shot to Regan's arm, grasping it tight and preventing the Queen from moving.

NIA

Don't you dare leave me alone down here.

REGAN

He's your friend.

NIA

He was. Galadon only knows what he is now.

RENAULT

I am the greatest mage - technically - alive, and your intellect, Nia, is the only suitable match for mine. Were it not cased in so flawless a body, then I would not be tortured by my desire. But there you stand, and I am but a man.

BRENNEN

Desire this, you unholy beast.

NARRATOR

Brennen did what he does best when introduced to a foe: he launched an axe at it. As the pearly blade spun towards Renault, one of the seated corpses at the table suddenly lurched to life. With supernatural speed, an undead arm shot into the air and grabbed the spinning axe handle. Just as quickly, it flung the weapon back from where it came. Brennen needed to block the blade away with another axe to prevent it from impaling him.

RENAULT

Thank you, Cabhan. I'd counsel against lame attempts at violence, you old fool. Should I perish, the spell I've placed on my army will compel them to follow their last orders in life, and defend this tomb against any intruders.

YELLOWYYN

He might be bluffing.

REGAN

Yeah I think so.

NARRATOR

Regan lifted both of her crossbows, each one now reloaded to six deadly bolts. She aimed them both at Renault's chest.

REGAN

What do you say, stinky? I got twelve friends here think you're full of shit.

RENAULT

Oh, yes, please throw the chance tokens with me and see what happens.

NARRATOR

Renault did not flinch. He barely so much as blinked his eyes, and his expression remained just as calm as ever.

REGAN

Shit.

She lowers her weapons.

REGAN

Either he's for real or else rigor mortis makes for a great fucking poker face.

RENAULT

So, Nia, do you admit your love for me now?

NIA

...What?

RENAULT

Do you admit your love for me?

NIA

My god, Renault, you cannot possibly be serious.

RENAULT

I can see by your eyes how impressed you are by my arcane mastery.

NIA

I'm not impressed, I'm frightened and repulsed. Necromancy, Renault?

RENAULT

Repulsed by your earlier error in passing me over? Frightened by the lustful feelings you're finally forced to acknowledge?

REGAN

How's this for research in the field, Nia?

NIA

Oh, get stuffed.

REGAN

I'll pass this time, thanks. Besides, he seems only have eyes, well...maggotty eye holes, for you.

NIA

Are you implying?...I will not defile myself.

YELLOWYYN

No need to defile yourself. Perhaps by means of manual stimulation--

NIA

--Oh, for Galadon's sake.

RENAULT

No mere erotic release could sate my love.

REGAN

Let's just figure out what'll get this guy to back off and then get the fuck out of here. Men aren't complicated, Nia, we just have to--

RENAULT

--Not *all* men are the simple creatures you make us out to be. Thinking only with their members. I desire on a deeper level; my lust is that of the soul.

NIA

You've forsaken your soul, Renault.

RENAULT

Have I? Then whence does my love for you still burn?

NIA

Do you not realize what you've done here?

RENAULT

Of course I do. I told you it could be done by a skilled enough mage. Lesser men are only frightened of it because they are too weak to control it. Let me show you how sweet sin can be.

NIA

Necromancers pervert the order of Galadon and the most sacrosanct traditions of men for their own personal gain.

RENAULT

Not *all* necromancers--oh wait, yes, that one is definitionally true. But no matter! For it was long before I mastered death that I committed the sin which drove my love away. I was young, naive, and blissfully besotted. And I committed the sin which is vilest of all by the reckoning of women, despite their words otherwise. I. Was. Too. Nice!

REGAN

Ohhhhhhhh boy. He's one of those. Yeah, we're gonna be here a while.

END OF PART FOUR.

PART FIVE:

21 INT. CAIRN INNER SANCTUM - TIME UNCLEAR

21

NARRATOR

Nia, Yllowyyn, Brennen, and Regan, found themselves in a dank tomb known as the Cairn of Evil Untold, buried deep under a swamp, surrounded by an army of zombies and snakes, being lectured on the finer aspects of romance by an decaying, foetid lich king.

RENAULT

Nia spurned my love because I was *nice*. But I shall be vindicated. I know you loved me once.

NIA

Slightly infatuated maybe, but that was before--

RENAULT

--Ha! You admit it! You loved me, and were scared of your desire, so you ran to men for whom you lacked any deep feelings. Will you come with me now? Or must I destroy your companions?

REGAN

This one's a real charmer, Nia. You let *him* get away?

RENAULT

Silence, you ill-washed strumpet!

REGAN

(mocking)

Buy me a drink before you start with the dirty talk.

NARRATOR

Renault ignored the rogue, and turned his gaze intently on Nia.

RENAULT

Do you admit your love for me, Nia?

NIA

No.

RENAULT

What else must I do?

NIA

It doesn't work that way, Renault.

RENAULT

It works however I want it to work! I am the master of death, the greatest mage alive. If you will not recognize my magnificence, then you shall die.

NARRATOR

Suddenly, the army of undead was advancing on the party once again. Renault pointed a staff directly at the party. Moving quickly, Regan grabbed something out of her pack and threw it at the ground at her feet.

Smoke erupted all around the party. Hidden by the haze, the party ducked for cover behind some pillars. The undead, who are generally not known for their tactical wit, continued shambling towards the spot where the group was last seen.

However, when Yllowyyn loosed an arrow from behind his pillar, Renault immediately turned and shot a puff of green smoke out of his staff in the direction of the arrow.

REGAN

(sotto voce)

Nia, we need you to take care of those things. We'll keep lover boy busy.

NARRATOR

Regan signaled to Brennen and Yllowyyn.

BRENNEN

Go back to Selbirin!

NARRATOR

Suddenly, the air around Renault was filled with a barrage of arrows, bolts, and axes. Renault had no choice but to duck for cover, and in that moment Nia stood and aimed her staff at the army of undead. She closed her eyes tightly, and suddenly a beam of blinding blue light shot from her staff. Wherever it hit a corpse, there was a scream, and then there was nothing but dust. She dispatched a row of corpses in this manner, before Regan pulled the cleric back into cover. Barely a breath later, a green plume of smoke from Renault passed through the space where Nia had just stood.

From their cover behind the pillars, the party could see eleven of the twelve seated corpses rise and draw weapons. Renault turned to the twelfth, seated corpse in annoyance.

RENAULT

What are you waiting for Mag Uidhir?

MAG UIDHIR

I don't believe there's sufficient justification for violence here. You're clearly the aggressor against a much more vulnerable--

RENAULT

--Shut the fuck up, Mag Uidhir!

NARRATOR

Nia took this opportunity to disintegrate another row of undead before taking cover once more. The battle began again in earnest, with the four living souls fighting the undead army and dodging the attacks from Renault. As they fought, they spoke, hoping against hope to distract, dissuade, or otherwise ameliorate the onslaught.

COMMENCE CONTINUED BATTLE SOUNDS UNTIL INDICATED OTHERWISE.

YELLOWYIN

Perhaps my Memlyg is poorer than I supposed. But did he say his problem was being too nice?

REGAN

'Nice' here meaning "do what I want or I'll kill you."

NARRATOR

Missiles of metal and magic flew between the words.

RENAULT

I am only thus now, since I saw where "nice" got me.

BRENNEN

Kindness performed in expectation of a reward...
Hyah!..Isn't truly kindness.

NARRATOR

Brennen's axe swung toward Renault, but was intercepted by the skull one of his minions. The lich king paid as much attention to Brennen's blade as he did to his words--that is, none at all.

RENAULT

Was Frederik Iohanssen ever as nice I was, Nia. Or was it just his member that impressed you?

NIA

Frederik...Oh by Galadon, Renault. You've given more thought to that boy than I ever did. It was a freshman's tryst!

REGAN

That's the second time you brought up someone else's member. You sound a bit fixated on cocks.

NARRATOR

One of the undead chieftains rushed at Regan, forcing her to stop talking and draw her sabres. The two fenced ferociously.

RENAULT

Nia, have you ever been with a mage who actually knows how to treat a lady? I could show you pleasures you dare not dream of. Granted, the putrefaction of my blood precludes tumescence, but I shall lay you down on ancient silks and shower rose petals on your lover's mound.

NIA

[Half-gags, half shudders]

RENAULT

They'll be dead, of course, for everything I touch now turns to a withered husk of its former self. But it's the thought that counts!

REGAN

Oh gods, Nia. How are you still standing despite your hungrily quivering loins? Hyah!

RENAULT

Don't dare mock me, woman. For it is by the word of your kind that I have fashioned myself thusly. You all say "why can't I meet a nice man?" And yet here stands a nice man who has never so much as seen a single unclothed breast. You admit that you fancied me once, do you not?

NIA

Yes, fine.

RENAULT

And there were many signs I was too foolish to see. I waited too long, and was banished to the inescapable realm of friends. But I recognize my error now. And I can wait as long as I must, conquering death as I have.

NIA

Waiting won't fix this, Renault.

RENAULT

Then what will?

NIA

Letting us leave would be a pace in the right direction.

RENAULT

Not until you've heard me out. I was loathe to offend your perfection with my awkward juvenile overtures. It's only because I think so highly of you that I waited so long. Doesn't that count for something?

NIA

It's not that you waited too long Renault. It's that you proved the kind of man less frightened to profane all that's holy than to say "hullo Nia. May I buy you an ale?" This blasphemous horror you've fashioned yourself into is far less excusable than any awkward overtures.

RENAULT

Is that all?

NIA

And now you're trying to kill us!

RENAULT

May I, then?

NIA

May you what?

RENAULT

Buy you an ale?

NIA

No you may not!

RENAULT

Hark, my friends. How the seductress speaks one way and behaves the other.

NIA

No that's--have you no idea what I value? What I believe in?

RENAULT

And if you fancied me, why did you never extend an overture my way. Why must the burden of approach fall on the man?

REGAN

Oh fuck your burden!

NARRATOR

Regan's swords danced, dispatching corpse after corpse. And yet, her mortal arms began to tire. The corpses did not. Nia sent a quick blast of light past Regan, to buy her a moment's respite. A glance around the room, however, showed Nia that all of her friends were similarly tiring. Yllowyyn had spent his arrows and was fighting with his hunting knives, and Brennen's armor was dented in a number of new places.

NIA

Gods damn you, Renault.

NARRATOR

Desperately, Nia turned her attention towards Renault. Her staff blasted a path directly to the Lich King's feet. He sent cloud after cloud of green smoke at her, but each one she deflected with a flare of blue light from the Whitewood staff.

NIA

(quiet, but strained)
By the power of Galadon, Lord of all lords and keeper of the most Holy Order...

NARRATOR

Nia now advanced with her eyes closed. The green smoke hit the blue light. Some specks of green splashed past the light and hit Nia's face. They sizzled and burned where they hit.

NIA

(fighting slight pain)
...I drive away this unholy perversion so that Order may reign...

NARRATOR

The green smoke intensified, a solid beam of green hitting Nia's beam of blue.

NIA

(coughing, tearing up)
...As dark flees the light of day and coldness flees the sunrise...

NARRATOR

Nia bled openly from her nose and the many burns on her face.

NIA

(intense pain now)
...so does chaos retreat from the cleansing tide of Order!

(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)
(and screams with the effort)
GET. BACK.

NARRATOR
Nia's beam of light suddenly exploded, illuminating the entire room. As Nia and Renault were each thrown off their feet by the impact, every undead minion in the room disintegrated under the blue light.

NOW BATTLE SOUNDS STOP

NARRATOR
Renault's staff rolled from his stunned fingers and Regan dove to snatch it away. He made little effort to stop her.

RENAULT
My dear Nia. I always knew your prowess alone could match mine.

NIA
And if it couldn't? Would you have burned me with poison until I submitted to your desires? Would you have let your army slay my friends?

RENAULT
Can I truly be that repulsive, that you would rather be burned, rather watch your friends die, than love me?

NIA
Yes. Yes, apparently you can. If this is how you react to my rejection now, how could I ever feel safe with you?

RENAULT
I wasn't always like this. All I ever wanted was love, and I have always been denied it.

NIA
No, you wanted adoration. If you wanted love, you should have cultivated it within yourself, instead of filling yourself with hate.

RENAULT
What else was I supposed to feel every time Xavier would regale me with tales of his latest conquest? Why did women swoon over him and scorn me? How could those frivolous harlots be so stupid?

NARRATOR
Now, Nia stood.

NIA

And why is your ire directed at them and not Xavier?
Did he ever tell you how he ended up in the infirmary
with that broken bottle in his back?

RENAULT

Hightstown Jane attacked him with it. The girl was out
of her mind, everyone knew that.

NIA

Everyone didn't work in the infirmary. Everyone didn't
talk to Jane before she withdrew from the college. Or
hear her tell how Xavier had his way with her, heedless
of her wishes.

RENAULT

Her word against his, and Jane already proved herself
mendacious.

NIA

And what was Jane known to lie about?

RENAULT

She would frequently attract the attention of some
suitor, agree to meet him somewhere, and then never
herself arrive. Only to claim the next day not to have
agreed to meet him.

NIA

And why do you think she would lie about that?

RENAULT

Women lie.

NIA

Has it never occurred to you to wonder why?

RENAULT

How else would they manipulate men?

NIA

They're scared, you unfeeling clod.

RENAULT

Unfeeling? Have I not wept for your disdain, feared
your rejection?

NIA

You know nothing of fear. Did you meet the prostitute
who was bugged bloody by customer who didn't think he
got his money's worth. The miller's wife who confessed
to a passing fancy for her brother-in-law and was
struck so hard she lost the use of an eye? The miller

(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)

and his brother remained on excellent terms, by the way. Countless girls beaten or cut when they refused the advances of a City Guardsman. Girls taken ill while birthing the children of their uncles or brothers or fathers. And no one willing to lift a finger to help them. I remember all of these things, despite my best efforts. Believe me, I wish I could have forgotten, ignored, observed with a scientist's dispassion. For many years I tried to do just that. But the message is clear. Women will be hurt, and order will fail them when they need it most.

RENAULT

I don't see what any of this has to do with you and me.

NIA

And that's why you're a fool.

A beat. She wants that to sting.

NIA

My friends and I will be leaving now.

REGAN

Is that chest trapped, stinky?

MAG UIDHIR

You should take it. This one called 'Nia' has wisdom and strength and compassion. She should study it. The new people deserve to know.

YLLLOWYYN

Know what?

RENAULT

Go. Now.

BRENNEN

Let's not dawdle.

NARRATOR

Needing no second instruction, Ylllowyyn and Brennen each grabbed a side of the chest and ran towards the stairs, followed closely by Regan. Renault and Nia's eyes remained locked for a moment longer.

RENAULT

When I was still a freshman, Nia, I derived formulae and potions which vexed even our most venerable professors. Would that I had derived yours.

NIA

I don't have a formula, Renault. I'm a gods-damned person.

NARRATOR

With that, Nia turned and ran after her friends. Renault watched her run with hopeless fury, and the pillars of the chamber began to shake ominously.

MAG UIDHIR

I did say as much to you years ago.

RENAULT

Oh, eat a dick, Mag Uidhir.

MAG UIDHIR

So you've resolved not to learn anything from this, then?

RENAULT

AHHHHH!

NARRATOR

At the Lich King's yell, a stone fell from the ceiling, and then another, and another.

STONES CREAK AND GROAN AND THEN A FEW FALL.

22 INT. CAIRN STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

22

STONES FALL RAPIDLY ALL AROUND.

REGAN

Oh that piece of shit.

NARRATOR

Our heroes ran as fast as they could, the cairn crumbling all around them.

BRENNEN

Make haste!

NIA

Galadon help us.

23 EXT. CAIRN OF EVIL UNTOLD - CONTINUOUS

23

NARRATOR

Regan and Nia slipped through the outer door of the cairn and into the swamp, followed closely by Yllowyyn,
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Brennen, and the ancient chest. Not a second after the passed through the door, the entryway collapsed.

The entire structure rumbled and shook, and the entire hillside fell into the surrounding bog.

24 EXT. MARSHY COUNTRYSIDE - A FEW HOURS LATER

24

NARRATOR

That evening, the party sat at a campfire not far from the site which once held the cairn of untold evil. Nia sat by the opened chest. She had withdrawn an ancient stone tablet, covered in carvings, and was busily rubbing charcoal against a piece of parchment over the tablet, to copy the script. The wounds on Nia's face from the earlier fight continued to weep.

REGAN

(Panned)
Brennen, is that wine boiling yet?

NARRATOR

Regan approached the cleric with a steaming mug of wine and an old rag. She bent to clean Nia's wounds.

REGAN

This is gonna sting.

NIA

I know.

NARRATOR

Nia did not cry out as Regan dabbed the boiling wine against her wounds. Nor did she stop her work on the tablet.

REGAN

So can you make anything of that?

NIA

Any references we might have are surely so obscure that a full translation could take a lifetime. It's certainly worth preserving though.

REGAN

You think the kids are okay?

NIA

Galadon will look after them.

REGAN

That's what I'm worried about.

NIA
You know you should--oh, nevermind. Not now.

REGAN
That was pretty, uh...that was something back there.
I'm kinda impressed.

NIA
Well, thank you.

REGAN
You were only wrong about one thing.

NIA
And I'm sure you're about to tell me what that was.

REGAN
All those women you treated, who died and got beaten
and shit, that wasn't a failure of order. That is the
order. Keeping us down is the point.

25 EXT. FLOODED BOG - SIMULTANEOUS

25

NARRATOR
Not so far from the campfire, at that very moment, the
swamp bubbled. From among the bubbles, a charred and
desiccated arm sprang forth. It reached along until it
found a tree root sturdy enough to grasp a hold of. The
arm grabbed the root and pulled. Slowly, a body emerged
from the muck. First the arm, then the shoulder and
torso, and finally, the head of Renault D'Esprit.

26 INT. HORSES'S HEAD INN - NIGHT

26

NARRATOR
Which concludes--oh my. With all that excitement I'd
forgotten to tell you what became of the children. It's
very exciting in its own right and absolutely crucial
to the progression of our tale.

You will recall that they were drinking in a tavern
near Freehold with some new acquaintances, from whom
they hoped to extract information. Late in the evening,
Billy emerged from the back of the inn, his arms full
of salted beef.

BILLY
I. Am awesome.

NELSON
On-site procurement. Nice. Where'd you find this?

BILLY

Some room.

JEN

Billy.

BILLY

(to the travelers)

Oh, shit, wasn't your guyses was it?

TRAVELER 1

No.

JEN

You can't just steal people's food.

BILLY

Door was open, so was the container. That means it's up for grabs. Party rules.

JEN

At least hide it, okay? The owner may have different ideas.

BILLY

Hey, I went on a bold quest of discovery for you. I'm the Christopher Columbus of drunk food.

NELSON

You're not the Christopher Columbus of drunk food. You invaded someone else's space and swiped their shit.

JEN

Can I talk to you in private?

NELSON

On second thought, okay yeah, you are the Christopher Columbus of drunk food.

BILLY

Fiiiine.

NARRATOR

Billy and Jen stumbled away from the table and towards the back of the inn, leaving Nelson with the three Armstrungard students.

TRAVELER 1

Dammit, Bjorn. First chance I have at some arse in six months, and you just can't stop being a self-centered shit.

TRAVELER 2

To be fair, she was clearly more interested in me.

TRAVELER 1

Oh like Selbirin she was.

NELSON

I gotta pee.

NARRATOR

Nelson stood from his seat. Or rather, he tried to. As he stood, he stumbled unsteadily. Only by leaning his arms heavily on the table did he keep himself upright.

NELSON

Woah.

TRAVELER 2

(derisive)

You all right there, friend?

NELSON

I don't feel so good all of a sudden.

NARRATOR

Sweat shone on Nelson's brow, unusual in the cool air of the tavern. He wobbled unsteadily at the table.

TRAVELER 1

Your friends can drink but you can't.

NELSON

[Dry heaves, painful]

TRAVELER 2

Oh you must be fucking joking.

TRAVELER 3

That's not the ale, you idiots. It wouldn't hit him that fast. I think he's been poisoned. Help me with him.

NARRATOR

Suddenly Nelson fell heavily to the table, unconscious.

TRAVELER 1

Who in Selbirin would poison--

NARRATOR

--The front doors of the tavern slammed open of their own accord. Every eye in the room looked to see who entered.

TRAVELER 3

Gods have mercy.

VOICE

Galadon save us!

NARRATOR

Three Templars of Discord stood in the doorway. Panic erupted in the inn, with patrons running in every direction in an attempt to escape. Billy and Jen stumbled back into the main room, leaning on each other heavily in order to stay upright. Sweat beaded down both of their faces. At the sight of the Templars, they froze.

TEMPLAR

*NOW YOU SHALL SEE THE TRUE FACE OF GOD AND WEEP. THE
STORMBRINGER IS NIGH.*

END OF EPISODE.