

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 1
"A Cruel And Sullied World"

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PART TWO:

8 INT. TENT - PRE-DAWN

8

THE LAST INSECTS OF THE NIGHT ARE QUIETING DOWN.

NARRATOR

We rejoin some of our party in one of their tents near Freehold, where Nia had come to converse with Nelson and Jen.

NIA

We must speak about your dreams, Nelson. Do you remember anything?

NELSON

I told you, I never remember my dreams.

NIA

I thought this one might be different. You spoke to me in my dream.

NELSON

That's...weird.

NIA

Yes. In the past when I've had visions of the wounded young girl, I was alone. But last night you were there, as was Billy, and Yllowyyn, and Sir Brennen, which is why I've come to speak with you.

NELSON

The wounded...
(*then it comes back to him*)
Ohhhhh, right. *That's* the girl. The wounded girl. I have seen her!

JEN

Sorry, can we back up just a tiny bit?

NIA

So you do remember the dream.

NELSON

No, still no for tonight. But I think I saw that girl when the Templars made us hallucinate.

JEN

(*still trying to get an answer*)
Uh, yeah, just real quick--

NELSON

--Right, sorry. So, turns out Brennen and Nia have been having these, um, dreams. Where they see this little girl with a chest wound. And she tells them stuff that's maaaybe a prophecy.

JEN

...Kay.

NELSON

But I forgot to tell Nia. When the Templars poisoned us, I saw...well, I saw a lot of things. But one of them was this girl. She had a big bleeding hole in her chest, and she said "There are seven things you must know to save me. The sixth is: Order is a story made flesh through power."

NIA

Interesting. In last night's dream she mentioned Chaos. Order and Chaos, the ideals of the gods Galadon and Garedian.
(*some fear*)
All of this is just as I have been coming to suspect it would be.

JEN

You guys are being pretty casual about some straight-up horror movie shit.

NIA

Oddly, the wounded girl exudes calm. The same sense of safety and protection that Sir Brennen reported from *his* dream, the day you three arrived in Iorden. Do you remember that?

JEN

That was why the King let us live.

NELSON

Right! Brennen's dream reminded him of that old prophecy. The scrolls of, was it...Baradir?

NIA

Yes, very good. The Scrolls of Baradir. And since having that dream, Sir Brennen has come to believe that the three of you are going to play some vital role in an upcoming war between Order and Chaos, which in his mind I'm sure means his war to retake the throne.

JEN

Okay, but that's...you don't think that's true, do you?

NIA

I've given that question much thought, and I have much to say. But for the moment, you must understand that Sir Brennen believes it with his whole heart. And if he shared my dream last night as I suspect, he will want to speak with you immediately upon waking. He will likely insist on taking you before the Council of Elders as he had planned to do when all of this started.

JEN

That's...the council of Elves that we talked to like last week? That Regan lied to?

NIA

No, that was the High Council of the White Forest. The Council of Elders is a gathering of scholars, clergy and theologians who aim to guide proper interpretation of scripture throughout the realm.

NELSON

Oh. They should have picked more distinct names that were easier to remember.

NIA

I'll be sure to mention it when next I've a hand in shaping centuries-old institutions.

JEN

Oh my god Nia, was that a joke?

NIA

No, we are too short on time to joke. Be forewarned: If you come before the Elders, depending on what they say, Sir Brennen may either release you from his charge entirely, or else...

JEN

Or if we're important, then we're in for the duration.

NIA

What the Elders say may make you indispensable in Sir Brennen's eyes, yes.
(almost an admission)
He is too honorable for outright kidnapping, but he would not make your departure easy. So you should think carefully about what you do next.

JEN

Are you...telling us to run away?

NIA
I'd sincerely hope you wouldn't. But you ought to make an informed decision.

JEN
Thanks, Nia. Thanks for, I dunno, treating us like grownups.

NIA
You've been given responsibilities no child could bear. You're owed the respect that goes with that.

A beat. Feels like they're reflecting.

NELSON
Speaking of that, Nia...what do you think about this prophecy stuff?

JEN
Yeah. Informed decision, right? So inform us.

NIA
Yes. Well. Let me begin by saying I think it is obvious by now there is *something* extraordinary about you all.

JEN
(*you flatter*)
Psh. Naah.

NIA
Whether I think you have ought to do with The Scrolls of Baradir is complicated. In no small part because my beliefs regarding the Scrolls themselves are complicated. They were very important in my house as a child. My parents are priests in the Order of the Plow, you see.

JEN
Joined the family trade, huh?

NIA
Not quite. The Order of the Plow is a ministry devoted to the concerns of farmers and other country folk. And the Scrolls of Baradir purport to be written by a fisherman who was visited by Galadon in his sleep. You can see why this idea of Galadon speaking to a humble fisherman would be appealing among the rural lowborn.

NELSON
Visited? Like in a dream.

NIA

That is where beliefs diverge. You see writing in the time of Baradir tended to be very poetic. The ancients were more concerned with the personal emotional truth of events than with the objective, material truth. So what does Baradir mean when he speaks of his visits from Galadon? Perhaps he is speaking in metaphor, and only meant to say he felt the presence of Galadon in a very personal way. The Council of Elders prefers this interpretation.

NELSON

How come?

NIA

Because the alternative is that he visited the Selbiric plane in his dreams and communicated directly with Galadon.

JEN

And they don't like that idea?

NIA

Selbiric Dreaming is a known and accepted miracle. But the canonical scriptures say this only happens to the worthiest of the worthy, to those who have devoted their entire lives to the rule of Order and the glory of Galadon. And the Council of Elders holds that this means, well, them.

JEN

So god's word has to come through them. Convenient.

NIA

I'd be lying if I said politics weren't involved. But...the Scriptures are dense texts full of archaic language and many meanings. I do not think they can be fully understood without many years of study. If I did not fully believe that, I never would have joined the Order of the Quill.

NELSON

Okay, but, so, there's a *chance* one or many of us may be Selbiric Dreaming?

NIA

Perhaps. There is also a third possibility. *Some* readings of Baradir seem to lend credence to what is called the theory of Divine Avatars.

JEN

Oh! You *did* mention this before. I was pretty out of it on that wagon ride to the White Forest but I remember

(MORE)

JEN (cont'd)

that cause Nelson was shitting on *Legend of Korra* and I thought he was wrong.

NELSON

You're really gonna front like it lives up to *Last Airbender*?

JEN

It gets really good in the later episodes!

NIA

May we stay on topic please? Much to say before the sun rises.

JEN

Sorry.

NELSON

Sorry.

NIA

The theory of Divine Avatars holds that the gods Galadon and Garedian have the power, if they so choose, to leave Selbrin and inhabit the physical body of a mortal in Iorden. They must join with the body at birth, and must remain with it until death. Some versions hold that while inhabiting an Avatar, the gods lose all their powers. Others say that it strengthens them, they become super-human. These beliefs were all common in antiquity.

JEN

What does the Council of Elders think of that one?

NIA

It is heresy. Blasphemy. It defies the First Theological Axiom of the the Second Concordat: The gods are of Selbirin alone. Scholars sometimes discuss it hypothetically, as the metaphysical implications would be fascinating. But to preach it in earnest is to forfeit one's tongue.

JEN

Goddamn.

NIA

Yes, perhaps. I never took the idea seriously before. But the things I have seen during our time together... the parallels between the dreams and the scrolls is uncanny, and Brennen knew nothing of the scrolls when his dreams began. But I finally started to think in earnest about Avatars after meeting that beggar in Armstrungard. The night we stayed in the monastery, I dreamt of the girl. She told me "the blind man has seen the face of God." And the very next day a blind man I never met before tells me he saw Garedian *herself* carry

(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)

out the murder of Prince Uther. Granted there is nothing to rule out that the man was just mad and our meeting pure coincidence, but once I allowed myself to consider the Theory of Avatars...

JEN

Other things just started coming into focus?

NIA

Yes. Well said. Many things that have long been mysterious. Especially regarding the death of Prince Uther, but that is a *much* longer story.

JEN

Okay so bracket that. What could this mean for us?

NIA

Well, you did arrive here seemingly out of nowhere with memories of a fantastical world that is nothing like this one.

NELSON

Wait wait wait wait. You're not actually suggesting that we're...Avatars of your gods. Are you?

NIA

One thing the literature agrees on is that if the gods were to take human form they would still know they were gods. So no, I don't think so. There is, however, talk in the Scrolls of a Champion.

A ROOSTER CROWS.

NIA

(hasty)
And that will have to wait it seems.

NELSON

What? Come on! You can't leave us hanging on that.

NIA

Brennen will be in soon, and then you'll have some thinking to do. But before you choose your course, I'd say this in favor of your staying. Regarding the mysteries we've discussed, including your arrival in Iorden and perhaps even how you might return to your home, the Elders certainly have access to research that I do not. I promise no answers, but neither can I think of a better alternative. Now think on what I've said.

NARRATOR

She turned to leave them.

THE TENT FLAP OPENS.

NARRATOR

But then paused once more.

NIA

I'd not make liars of you. But I would ask that you not *volunteer* the details of this conversation to Sir Brennen.

JEN

Wait, hang on.

NIA

Yes?

JEN

(cautious beat)
Regan left to chase the Elves in the middle of the night.

NELSON

Ruh-roh. There it is.

NIA

She did what?

JEN

I can't decide whether to tell Brennen.

NIA

(Wit's end)
This is who would be Queen. Galadon save us all.
(regaining composure)
Sir Brennen must be told, but let me handle it. Take the chance to talk amongst yourselves.

NARRATOR

And then she departed, leaving Jen and Nelson alone with a great many thoughts.

9 INT. YET ANOTHER TENT - SIMULTANEOUS

9

NARRATOR

Unbeknownst to Nia though, Brennen had awoken before the horn's call. But having found Nia out of bed, he chose to begin his day speaking with Yllowyyn.

BRENNEN

Her Majesty must declare herself. Now that Traft is routed, there are houses that will take up arms against Redmoor. Maybe enough to defeat him. But only if Queen
(MORE)

BRENNEN (cont'd)

Regan flies Guernatal banners. Perhaps she'll be more willing, now that see's seen the Th'ar lo-Hyyl are true to their word.

YELLOWYYN

Though if she makes her claim now, after having earlier denied knowing Guernatal's heir, I worry they may hold the, ah, ruse against her.

BRENNEN

She was thinking tactically. Hardly damning for a Queen, rather the opposite.

YELLOWYYN

I pray the High Council of the White Forest sees it that way. I must admit I worry sometimes Sir Brennen. Is she ready to wear Gunther's crown?

BRENNEN

More ready than that sniveling shit Ardel Redmoor!

YELLOWYYN

Well of course, I only--

BRENNEN

--And she is Gunther's granddaughter.

YELLOWYYN

(not unkind but...)
Bastard granddaughter.

BRENNEN

I know for a fact he planned to legitimize her. Before he was usurped and murdered!

YELLOWYYN

Yes, I'm not--

BRENNEN

--And I'll not listen to you disparage Gunther's dying wish.

YELLOWYYN

Let's remain calm, Sir Brennen.

BRENNEN

Do you think you know better than the High King what's best for the realms of men?

YELLOWYYN

Let you not forget, Sir, what I've given for this Queen! I challenged the High Council and spurned my parents, out of faith that her cause would one day be

(MORE)

YELLOWYYN (cont'd)

proven just. But if I am wrong, then my life in politics is over before it has started, and I've done insult to my kin for naught. Is that all forgotten?

BRENNEN

No. No, 'tis not Kalth'yr. You've been as true to your post as could ever be asked. Forgive me, I've been troubled of late.

YELLOWYYN

I'll never ask your apology for being fierce in defense of your liege. Loyalty is perhaps the finest trait of men. I only ask you to believe that I speak as an ally. As far as I'm concerned, Aeron Regan's claim on the throne is not in question. But in my capacity as an advisor, I must respectfully express my...reservations concerning her readiness.

BRENNEN

I cannot lie, Kalth'yr. I do wish she had more time to learn how to rule. And I wish Gunther was around to teach her. But never does the beggar set the banquet menu.

YELLOWYYN

Well, you've never been a beggar, Sir Brennen. At least not for wisdom and strength. And she's not without a few regal qualities. If anyone can cultivate them, it is you.

BRENNEN

You're gracious, Kalth'yr.

YELLOWYYN

The Human Realms shall have a good Queen one day. And you shall have your vengeance.

THE TENT OPENS.

NIA

Sir Brennen, there you--ah. Kalth'yr. Good morning. Am I intruding?

BRENNEN

Not at all. I sought you out earlier but you were not abed. I take it you had the dream as well?

NIA

I did, and there is much to discuss there, but--

BRENNEN

--Now we truly must bring the young ones before the Council of Elders.

YLLLOWYYN

I still fear Sir Brennen may be giving too much credence to writings which have already been deemed false.

BRENNEN

I believe Galadon is just, Kalth'yr. And for those three to arrive and the dreams to follow, just as the monarchy is in greater peril than it has been in a dozen lifetimes...Come to my aid here, Nia.

NIA

I...think you are onto something, truly. It merits much discussion. But I'm afraid there is a more urgent matter.

BRENNEN

What is it?

NIA

It is, ah, perhaps best discussed in private, Sir Brennen.

A slightly uncomfortable beat.

BRENNEN

Are you certain the Kalth'yr's skills and knowledge would not be helpful?

NARRATOR

A brief look passed between Nia and Brennen.

NIA

I'm sure there will be much to discuss with him come supper. But for now...

YLLLOWYYN

If...that is the will of the court.

BRENNEN

Kalth'yr, I'm certain General Riverfell could use a hand rebuilding his ramparts. Perhaps you could offer your services for the day.

Yllowyyn pauses. That one stings.

YLLLOWYYN

You would like me to work as a carpenter?

BRENNEN

He's been a most gracious host. And with your skills as a climber you are uniquely suited to the work.

YELLOWYYN

Yes it seems I am. Very well then.

YELLOWYYN EXITS THE TENT.

We let the tension sit in the air
for a while.

NARRATOR

Nia hesitated to speak for some time, knowing what she did about an Elf's senses.

BRENNEN

He's out of earshot by now.

NIA

(get ready for the shit blizzard)
Her Majesty our Queen seems to have departed.

BRENNEN

Departed where?

NIA

West, tracking the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

BRENNEN

SHE WH--
(catches himself, whispers)
She what?

NIA

This was several hours ago as far as I can tell.

BRENNEN

Why didn't you tell me sooner?

NIA

I only just found out. Jen was the only one she told.

BRENNEN

Well why didn't Jen tell me sooner?

NIA

Seems she was torn between guarding Regan's safety and respecting her stated wishes. A noble struggle if ever there was one.

BRENNEN

The Th'ar lo-Hyyl care not about intentions. They will suffer no defiance, which is how they'll see Regan's trespass.

(MORE)

BRENNEN (cont'd)

(beat)

None of you understand, and I blame myself. Perhaps I was too permissive with that tablet you found in the cairn.

NIA

The map, you mean? It could be an invaluable font of information if I could just decipher it.

BRENNEN

That's just what I mean. I accepted that risk because I truly believed there was no way the Elves would know. And even then with unease. But trespassing where the Knights are like to be? These are not some petty watchmen to be bribed. They are the army of order in this world and they are ironclad in their purpose.

NIA

(thinking aloud)

Order is a story made flesh through power.

BRENNEN

What?

NIA

Nelson did have the sixth vision as suspected. Neither here nor there at present. Is Regan good enough to avoid the Elves' detection?

BRENNEN

Depends. On what they're doing, on how close she gets.

NARRATOR

Brennen allowed himself a moment to think. And Nia saw his face change. The vexed consternation of man thinking fell to the grim certainty of man deciding.

BRENNEN

I must go. As far as the Th'ar lo-Hyyl know, I still hold rank over Regan. If she's found, I gave the order to scout to the west. They may let her live if she was following my command.

NARRATOR

Nia did not fail to grasp what Brennen was implying for himself. It showed on her face.

NIA

You needn't throw your life away, Sir Brennen. She is a woman grown, and she cast her own lot.

BRENNEN

And I cast mine with hers. Forty one years ago, I pledged my life to House Guernatal. Every day since has been borrowed from Galadon.

NARRATOR

Brennen stood to leave.

BRENNEN

If she returns alone then you must convince her to declare. Make Jen help, if they're such close friends. And if she needs someone to lead her army, you could fare worse than Bryce Riverfell.

NARRATOR

Nia dropped her head, crestfallen, as Brennen departed.

HOOFBEATS GALLOP INTO THE DISTANCE.

BRENNEN

Hyah!

NARRATOR

Brennen rode his mount hard, all that day and into the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

10 EXT. PINE BARRENS - NIGHT

10

DAY TRANSITIONS INTO NIGHT.

NARRATOR

The dense forest slowed him, as did his frequent stops to put his ear to the ground for signs of the Th'ar lo-Hyyl. But in the end he was glad he did so.

A DISTANT MUFFLED RUMBLE OF HOOF BEATS, PANNED MIDDLE RIGHT.

BRENNEN'S HORSE TROTS OFF TO THE LEFT.

NARRATOR

The requisite detour, however, took him far out of his way. And by the time the night was at its deepest, Brennen had to admit to himself that he was well and fully lost.

NIGHT SOUNDS GIVE WAY TO EARLY MORNING

NARRATOR

Thus it was with a drop of relief, but a torrent of dread, that Brennen spied the pillar of smoke to his north, just after sunrise.

BRENNEN

Galadon help me. Git up ye mangy nag. Hyah!

BRENNEN STRIKES HIS HORSE HARD, SPURRING INTO A FRANTIC GALLOP THAT ZOOMS OFF, FADING INTO THE CENTER.

11 EXT. BURNING CLEARING - DAY

11

A RAGING INFERNO BLAZES ALL AROUND US.

We REPLAY bits of the end of Part One.

REGAN

C'mon Maggie, upper body strength.

FLESH SIZZLES ON THE HOT ROCK.

REGAN

Aaaaaaaaaaagh!

REGAN COUGHS AND CHOKES AND GASPS FOR AIR . HER HEAD HITS THE GROUND LIMP.

FIRE ENCROACHES NEARER FOR A TOO-LONG BEAT.

BRENNEN

(panned, very distant)

REGAN?

HOOFBEATS JUST BECOME AUDIBLE.

BRENNEN

(a little bit closer)

REGAN?

Mixer: for the rest of this scene, the audience POV will be locked to Regan's unconscious body, which remains dead center. Brennen's voice will be locked to his horse, so he should be placed with the hooves for position and distance. He'll be circling Regan's location, and we want to build tension by making it unclear if he will find her.

BRENNEN'S HORSE TROTS PAST THE OUTSKIRTS OF CENTER...

BRENNEN

REGAN ARE YOU HERE?

...BUT THEN KEEPS GOING. MUST HAVE NOT SEEN HER.

BRENNEN

(fading)

Regan, answer if you hear me.

A TREE CRASHES DOWN AND SPOOKS THE HELL OUT OF BRENNEN'S HORSE.

BRENNEN

(still distant)

Whoa! Whoa!

THE HORSE WHINNIES AND BUCKS UNTIL HE GETS IT UNDER CONTROL.

BRENNEN

(getting nearer)

Is anyone out here?

THE HORSE TROTS NEARER, AND THEN TURNS AWAY.

BRENNEN

(receding again)

REGAN?

THE HORSE SEEMS LIKE IT'S TROTGING AWAY FOR GOOD. AND THEN...

BRENNEN

Regan!

THE HORSE GALLOPS TOWARDS US. BRENNEN DISMOUNTS WHILE IT'S STILL MOVING AND SPRINTS THE REST OF THE WAY. WE HEAR HIM DROP TO ONE KNEE.

NARRATOR

Brennen knelt beside his Queen, doing his best to assess the situation.

ANOTHER TREE COMES DOWN, TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT. THE HORSE WHINNIES AGAIN.

NARRATOR

But it was soon apparent there wasn't a moment to spare.

WE HEAR REGAN'S BODY SCOOPED UP AND PLOPPED ON THE HORSE.

NARRATOR

He hoisted Regan onto the back of his mount.

HE MOUNTS UP AND GALLOPS OFF.

NARRATOR

And fled as fast as the beast dared run.

THE FIRE RAGES ON A FEW BEATS LONGER, AS GIANT TREES CRASH ALL AROUND US.

END OF PART TWO.