

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 1
"A Cruel And Sullied World"

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PART FOUR:

20 INT. HORSE'S HEAD INN - NIGHT

20

FADE IN NIGHT SOUNDS. AND A CRYING BABY.

NARRATOR

Anna and Gayle had managed to get the infant back into their quarters at Bailey's inn without raising too many eyebrows. But caring for it was already proving a headache after a mere few hours.

GWEN

Shh, quiet. It's all right.

A DOOR OPENS.

ARLENE

Gods, I thought it would have tired itself out crying by now.

THE CRYING ONLY WORSENS.

GWEN

You try holding him.

ARLENE

("If I must")
Very well.

IT COUGHS

ARLENE

(half-hearted)
There, there.

AND IT DOES STOP CRYING.

GWEN

I think he's taken a liking to you. It's that beautiful voice of yours.

ARLENE

Bailey seems to have believed our account in any case. Though she's certainly not pleased.

GWEN

Well I know this won't do for long. I been thinking on it. Think I'd better go to Freehold.

ARLENE

And speak with Bryce Riverfell?

GWEN

I'll tell Ms. Bailey I'm asking the General for help finding the child a permanent home, which ain't even really a lie. Bet a token from Ms. Bailey'd get me an audience with him no problem.

ARLENE

And while you have his ear...

GWEN

General Riverfell met Traft the half-breed once. If ever we had a friend who knows about Orcs, it's him.

ARLENE

When must we leave?

GWEN

Well, I think I'd better go alone, don't you?

ARLENE

Alone?

GWEN

I don't think it'll do to subject the wee little thing to the road, so one of us'll need to look after him here. And you're more like to be recognized at Freehold.

ARLENE

But I don't know the first thing about caring for a child. Let alone this one.

GWEN

Ain't that much to it. If he cries, you either feed him, clean his behind, or put him to bed.

ARLENE

You can't really intend to leave me alone with it.

GWEN

I don't want to but I don't see any way around it. Do you?

ARLENE

Well just give me a moment to think, can't you? Rather than just deciding on your own and sneaking up on me with it.

GWEN

I'm sorry. I'm sorry it's so sudden, but the sooner I go the sooner he doesn't have to be our concern anymore.

ARLENE

Fine, since you've made up your mind to abandon me.
(beat)
 Forgive me, Gw--Gayle. I know you are right. Only I am
 frightened.

GWEN

I know. I am too, but we've been in far worse danger
 than this before.

ARLENE

Yes. But you've been with me for it all. I'm realizing
 now, you've not been out of my sight for more than an
 hour since we left the keep. Saying goodbye is harder
 than it should be.

NARRATOR

Gayle approached Anna, and took her hand with great
 care.

GWEN

It's all right. It'll be all right.

ARLENE

I love you.

GWEN

I love you too.

ARLENE

Our time here has been the happiest time of my life. In
 fact I think it is the only time I've ever known
 happiness. If something happened...
(only half-joking)
 If you do not return to me just as soon as you can then
 I shall never forgive you.

GWEN

(a little flirty)
 Well that won't do at all.

Gwen **kisses** Arlene, but it's short-
 lived.

NARRATOR

Gayle kissed Anna, but Anna pulled away after just a
 moment.

ARLENE

Lately I've felt as though I'm flying. Have you ever
 had a dream like that? And yet a part of me expects to
 come crashing to the ground at any moment. Gods forgive

(MORE)

ARLENE (cont'd)

me, I can't help but think this...child will be the instrument of my downfall.

GWEN

That's why I'm going to Bryce. So it doesn't have to be ours. And it's not but a few hour's ride. With the battle won, the supply trains'll be running again, and Bryce's men'll be back guarding the road. I'll be safe.

ARLENE

You'd better.

GWEN

And you too. Keep your wits about you, hear? I wouldn't be leaving if I really thought he was any danger to you, but if there's any change...just stay safe, love.

ARLENE

Yes. For you I always will. When must you leave?

GWEN

Guess it depends on the supply trains. I'll have to talk to Ms. Bailey.

ARLENE

And you'll be gone overnight?

GWEN

Depends on the supply trains too. But I imagine I could.

A slightly longer kiss now.

ARLENE

Then make sure you leave time to say goodbye properly.

NARRATOR

And then a smile overtook Gayle's slightly reddening cheeks.

GWEN WALKS TO THE DOOR, OPENS IT...

NARRATOR

And she did not break her lover's gaze until she was out the door.

...THEN CLOSES IT BEHIND HER.

21 INT. ICE CAVE - TIME UNCLEAR

21

NARRATOR

There is one more incident I must tell you about, before we return to the predicament of Queen Aeron Regan and her retainers. And this one is set in a glacial cave off the southern coast of Iorden.

ICE DRIPS AND A TORCH BURNS.

RENAULT

There, he is nearly unfrozen, Mag Uidhir. Now what do you have to say?

NARRATOR

You'll recall that the necromancer Renault and the undead warrior Mag Uidhir were in the not-so-final resting place of Arden, a legendary hero of antiquity. Or at least of his corpse, which until very recently was frozen into a block of ice.

MAG UIDHIR

Well you know the reanimation is the part that requires true skill.

RENAULT

You doubt me still?!

MAG UIDHIR

Oh never, I'm just very interested to see how this turns out.

NARRATOR

Renault stood over the thawed remains of the enormous man, and bowed his head, concentrating deeply.

AN EERIE MAGICAL SOUND FADES IN - THE SOUNDS OF WRETCHED LIFE. MIX SKITTERING INSECTS WITH ATONAL THE SHINING-ESQUE CHORUSES, ALL OVER A SPOOKY PAD.

RENAULT

(incantation)

From meat we're born and to meat return, a cask of flesh our fun'ral urn. Ere our heart stops in its seat, and cease the drum of our life's beat.

MAG UIDHIR

How long'll it take ye tae beat yer meat over there? I'm decomposing as we speak.

RENAULT

Shut the fuck up, Mag Uidhir!
(back to chanting)
 Like tulip in a field of grass, like bird like bee like
 snake like ass. As unto--

MAG UIDHIR

--Oh aye, like ass indeed.

RENAULT

Mag Uidhir, I swear to every god there is...
(continues)
 As unto man the gods gave breath...

NARRATOR

Listen, this dreadful thing had a few dozen verses to it. Loathe as I am to speak in Renault's defense, he was attempting a very difficult spell. But I see no need to subject you to the whole sodding thing, so we'll skip to the end.

RENAULT

By my will and might and practiced hand, I bid you wake on my command!

MAG UIDHIR

You've a practiced hand alright, ye fucking wanker.

RENAULT

Mag Uidhir SHUT THE FUCK UP!

NARRATOR

Despite Mag Uidhir's goading of Renault, neither could pretend not to perceive the dread stillness that had settled around them.

THE MAGIC PAD SHOULD BE AS LOUD AS IT'S GONNA GET NOW.

NARRATOR

By now the force of these magics felt fit to tear asunder the ice and living rock.

THE MAGIC PAD DROPS OUT VERY SUDDENLY, WITH JUST A KISS OF REVERB.

BEAT OF QUIET.

NARRATOR

And then...

Arden **gasps** and **grunts** gutturally, catching his breath.

NARRATOR

Arden's eyes shot open as his every enormous muscle twitched to life.

RENAULT

Ha! There, I have done it, Mag Uidhir!
 (to Arden)
 Stand, my friend. We've much to discuss.

JOINTS POP AND SINEWS CREAK TO LIFE.

NARRATOR

Arden the Annihilator stood to his full height, his corded, sinewy, form looming over the cavern; he was a fortress unto himself. His pitch-black hair fell to his shoulders in wild untamed locks, and his eyes burned like oil fires cutting through a blizzard. One was the blue of a summer sea, and the other...the other was the orange of a lit coal.

First he looked Renault thoroughly up and down. Then he looked to Mag Uidhir and nodded something like a greeting. Mag Uidhir bowed his head low. Then Arden's fearsome gaze fell upon his hammer, where it rest upon the altar.

RENAULT

Now our first order of business will be to avenge my recent defeat, nay, betrayal.

HEAVY PLODDING FOOTSTEPS - ARDEN'S - WALK ACROSS THE CAVE.

RENAULT

There is a harlot of a sorceress, who did everything she could to make me believe she loved me.

A HEAVY SLAB OF IRON IS DRAGGED ACROSS STONE: ARDEN PICKING UP HIS HAMMER.

RENAULT

And I, fool that I was, gave her my heart. But then she and three others came to the keep where I had found shelter. And stole from me a great treasure from ages past.

RENAULT'S FOOTSTEPS RETURN TO CENTER, RIGHT NEAR RENAULT.

RENAULT

Ah, good. I see you've fetched your weap--

--ARDEN'S HAMMER WHOOSHES THROUGH THE AIR AND SLAMS INTO RENAULT'S CHEST - BREAKING BONES AND SQUISHING FLESH.

Renault gives a **cry** which turns into a **wheeze**.

THERE'S A HISS OF ESCAPING AIR AMIDST THE BURBLING BLOOD.

MAG UIDHIR

(struggling through raucous laughter)
Ha! Arden! *Ní fhaca mé le fada thú.*

RENAULT

(with a collapsing lung)
Ah, Mag Uidhir, could you remove my fifth and sixth rib from my right lung please?

MAG UIDHIR TAKES HIS SWEET-ASS TIME STANDING AND WALKING TO RENAULT. VERY SLOW FOOTSTEPS WITH CHUCKLES UNDERNEATH

MAG UIDHIR

So how's your "greatest feat yet" working out for you so far?

TWO SQUISHES AND RUSHES OF AIR AS MAG UIDHIR PULLS OUT THE TWO RIBS.

RENAULT

(air returning)
Thank you Mag Uidir.
(to Arden)
Now, as for you, I gave you life, and you will--

--THE HAMMER WHOOSHES AND CRUNCHES AGAIN.

Renault gives a **formless scream**.

SOMETHING BONY BOUNCES AWAY ACROSS THE ICE.

NARRATOR

With this second blow, Arden had knocked Renault's jaw clear across the cave.

We can tell Renault is trying to shout a **stream of profanity**, but he can't actually form any words of course.

ARDEN

Mmph.

MAG UIDHIR

Well, then. The mighty Arden has spoken.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir gestured to Arden, and the two made for egress of the cave. In quite high spirits if truth be told.

TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS WALK AWAY, BUT ONE SET STOPS.

NARRATOR

But Mag Uidhir stopped once more before leaving.

MAG UIDHIR

I suppose I owe ye a word of thanks, what for reuniting me with the Annihilator and all. Fare thee well, Renault D'Esprit. If never we cross paths again, it'll be ages too soon. But ye weren't entirely useless.

NOW MAG UIDHIR LEAVES.

Renault **groans** once more.

NARRATOR

(exasperated)

And Renault blasted D'Esprit, never one to let the heinous mutilation of his flesh stop him from being an arse...

BONES CLACK TOGETHER AS RENAULT SCOTS ACROSS THE GROUND

NARRATOR

...Clawed his way after them.

22 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - DAY

22

NARRATOR

It had been more than a day since Regan's return, and though her condition had not worsened it had also not noticeably improved. The fallen queen had not stirred from where she was lain.

Jen was nearing the end of her watch when...

Regan **groans**.

JEN

Regan?

She **groans** again.

JEN
You with us?

REGAN
(still very groggy)
Ohhhhhh my gods fuck everything.

JEN
Well bowl me over. Morning sunshine.

REGAN
...the fuck am I?

JEN
Back near Freehold, thanks to Brennen. You were out for a while, I was worried you were in a coma. Damn, I guess you mighta been.

NARRATOR
That was when the tent opened to reveal the one who would relieve Jen of her scheduled watch.

TENT FLAP OPENS.

JEN
Heya. She's up!

YELLOWYYN
Welcome news indeed. When she's feeling b--

REGAN
--Son of a bitch!

CUPS AND TRAYS CLATTER VIOLENTLY TO THE GROUND FOLLOWED SHORTLY BY THE THUMP OF REGAN'S BODY.

She **groans** with frustrated pain.

NARRATOR
Regan launched herself in Yllowyyn's direction but her legs betrayed her immediately.

JEN
Woah, easy cowgirl!

REGAN
Did you know, motherfucker?

YELLOWYYN
Know what?

REGAN

Come down here and talk to me if you're not a yellow piece of shit.

The long sentence makes her **cough**.
This should continue sporadically
throughout the scene.

YELLOWYYN

Now wait just a moment. You're the one with questions to answer.

REGAN DRAGS HERSELF ACROSS THE FLOOR, GRUNTING WITH EVERY MOVE.

JEN

Ooooookay let's calm down before we get hurt.

REGAN

Yeah someone's gonna get hurt. Answer my question you splinter-pole fuck! Did you know?

YELLOWYYN

I don't what it is you've--

JEN

--Okay clearly she's delirious. Just leave for now.

YELLOWYYN

And leave you alone with her?

JEN

Send Billy.

YELLOWYYN

I think Sir Brennen would be--

JEN

--Billy, okay? Just trust me.

REGAN

Fuck you! Stay right the fuck here and answer me.

YELLOWYYN LEAVES.

NARRATOR

Ylloyyyn exercised his better judgment and departed. This only led Regan to intensify her admittedly futile pursuit.

REGAN

Get back here you chickenshit son of a bitch.

She **strains** with the effort of pulling herself across the floor.

JEN
Okay, stop? Why don't we stop.

REGAN
Get offa me.

JEN
Why don't we go lay back down before--OW! Ow, who the fuck actually bites someone?

REGAN
I said lemme go.

Her **coughing fit** intensifies.

JEN
Yeah, not until your trachea heals. C'mon.
(*lifting*)
Up she goes.

Between the **coughs and wheezes**,
Regan **grunts** from the strain of standing.

TWO SETS OF SLOW, SHAMBLING, DRAGGING FOOTSTEPS.

JEN
(*still strained*)
You know it's a good thing you didn't break my skin. They haven't invented tetanus shots yet, I coulda died from infection.

REGAN
You tryna say my mouth is dirty?

JEN
You? Gosh, never.

REGAN
Bite my cunt.

Both **strain** one more time.

NARRATOR
With great effort, Jen and Regan managed to get the latter's less than fully functional body back into her cot.

JEN
So, you wanna tell me what--

REGAN

--Look at me, Jen. Children.

JEN

Children?

REGAN

Children, and unarmed women. Least a hundred of 'em, maybe two.

NARRATOR

As Jen watched Regan speak, she saw something that she had never before seen on the rogue's face.

REGAN

Some of the kids were still at their moms' tit. Some of the women were too old to walk.

JEN

You can rest you know, we don't have to talk about this now.

REGAN

Yeah we do.

JEN

You're looking pretty sick.

REGAN

You're looking scared, and I need you focused.

JEN

Yeah. I'm scared of what could make you feel sick.

REGAN

Well have a seat girlie, you're in for a ride.

A CHAIR CREAKS AS JEN SITS DOWN.

JEN

(steels herself)

Okay. A couple hundred women and children.

REGAN

It was a fucking massacre. The Knights of the Wood marched them half to death, and shot them all to shit when they started to drop. Then they burned the bodies.

JEN

That was the fire. Jesus Christ.

REGAN

You keep saying that. That a god where you're from?

JEN

Maybe. Debatable.

REGAN

Hope she's a good one, cause clearly ours are for shit.

JEN

I'm still just trying to process what you...Okay, a massacre. Why?

REGAN

Search me. Leaving no one behind who'd want revenge for the battle maybe?

JEN

And they just shot them where they stood?

REGAN

They marched them for days. No food, no water. Then this one kid, couldn'ta had a single crotch hair yet, he just collapsed, and they opened his throat right there. His mom freaks out, runs at the Lord Commander, and then they started shooting. Didn't stop until no one was moving.

JEN

That's fucking sadistic.

REGAN

No. I almost wish it was. If Ry'y lo-Th'yyt had been cackling like a maniac or flicking herself off or some crazy evil shit like that...at least I woulda known it was unusual, you know? But she just look bored. Like a farmer wringing a chicken's neck for the thousandth time.

THE TENT FLAP OPENS VERY QUICKLY.

BILLY

(out of breath)

Jen you okay? What's going on? Oh, dude. She's up.

JEN

Is anyone else coming?

ANOTHER SET OF FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.

BILLY

I think Nelson's following me.

NELSON

(even more out of breath)
What's the matter? Oh, sweet, good to see you up. How you feeling?

REGAN

Shut the tent and sit down.

JEN

Regan told me something you both should hear.

NARRATOR

Regan repeated her tale once more. I'm skipping it, not because I think you should be spared the brutality, mind you, but because it'll never be said in Iorden that I lacked a good sense of pacing.

BILLY

Holy shit. Are...you sure?

NARRATOR

Regan shot Billy a look that could have melted moonsilver.

BILLY

Okay, okay, fine. But why though?

REGAN

I don't know. I always knew Elves were pieces of shit under all the jewels but I never knew it was like this.

NELSON

Oh.
(beat, then, pained...)
Ohhhhhh, Nelson you dumbass. How did I miss that? No one is Always Chaotic Evil. Regan, the jewels in Iorden are mined in the Black Mountains, right?

REGAN

Most of them, yeah.

NELSON

The same place the Orcs are from. And the Elves have a buttload of jewels.

REGAN

And they use them. To keep all the little lords and ladies eating from their hands.

NELSON

That's why they're killing them. It's a resource grab. Telling everybody they're savages just makes them easy to kill.

(MORE)

NELSON (cont'd)

(sarcastic jab at himself)

You know, like the exact same pattern that's happened a million times over that I didn't fucking see.

JEN

Be fair to yourself, Nelson. We didn't see it either. Just because it happened in *Lord of the Rings* or something--

NELSON

--I'm not talking about *Lord of the Rings*! I'm talking about Africa. America. Nazi Germany. The Middle East. Everything my parents ever taught me about - whoosh! Right over my head. I never met an Orc, and I just believed everything their enemies said about them.

BILLY

But we *did* meet Orcs, dude. They were the ones marching up on us with an army of death metal wizards.

NELSON

What would you do if you were them?

BILLY

I'm just saying it's not like you had no reason to think they're...savages or whatever.

NELSON

I mean imagine if you knew the Elves were slaughtering your children, wouldn't you be mad enough to...

...And here's the big one...

NELSON

Oh, God. Oh God Oh God oh Jesus everloving Christ.

JEN

(impatient)

What?

NELSON

We helped the Elves do it. Those women and children they killed were the families of the army we fought. We killed a lot of them.

Nelson is breaking his own heart as he speaks.

NELSON

I was so excited to just be the hero for once, I didn't stop and think. I didn't even ask, "who's telling the

(MORE)

NELSON (cont'd)
stories?" For all we know, Orcs are just...people who look different.

REGAN
I don't know about that. But I know what a grieving mother looks like. And that's what I saw.

NELSON
Screw me, dude. Screw all of us but screw me first. My parents...
(*probably crying a bit now*)
My parents even tried to warn me in my dream.

REGAN
You done flogging yourself yet? 'Cause whatever you should or shouldnt'a figured out, you ain't no fucking splinter pole and you didn't pull those triggers. So how's about we kill that smug motherfucker just walked out of here, tie his little nuts up in a golden ribbon and send them right back to his rich bitch parents?

JEN
Wo-hoah, Yllowyyn? No. No way.

REGAN
You wanna get serious with these splints or not?

JEN
Okay, first you are in no shape to kill anyone right now. And second...I'm pretty sure Yllowyyn didn't know about this.

BILLY
Yeah, Weenie's a dick but he's never been a monster.

NELSON
I know he wasn't there, and I'm not saying he's a monster. But are you *sure* he had no clue about any of this? I mean you heard the way his parents talk about humans, imagine what they think of Orcs.

JEN
Yeah, we need to talk to him. But can we at least try to keep the peace until he's had a chance to explain himself?

NELSON
Wait peace for who? For those dead kids?

JEN
For us, Nelson. For the four friends we have in this entire world to not be trying to kill each other. How's that?

NELSON

I can't believe you're putting our comfort over actually making a difference.

BILLY

Comfort? Are you fucking serious bro?

NELSON

Yeah, and I'd know. I spent all of high school trying to lay low and fit in because it was more comfortable than telling people to act right. But fuck that. Some shit cannot stand. C'mon Jen, What happened to the person who killed a child molester?

JEN

I'm all for kicking righteous ass, okay? But we can't kick anything if we're dead, and right now we're 3 kids and an ICU patient against the entire world.

REGAN

Hey I'll kick your fu--
(*hacking coughing fit*)
Kick your fucking ass if you--

She keeps **coughing** under the next few lines of dialogue, never quite finishing the sentence.

JEN

My point exactly. And yeah, I did stab that guy. I've done a lot of shit since I got here. *Including* electrocuting Orcs six at a time. We're saying the same thing, Nelson - we should have used our brains a second before going to war. That's all I'm suggesting now.

A beat. She's not wrong.

I don't think starting with Yllowyyn is the right move. I think maybe we start with--

--TENT FLAP OPENS.

NIA

Is she all right?

NARRATOR

Nia entered just then. Mortals do have this uncanny ability to enter a room just as they're becoming subjects of conversation.

NIA

I came as fast as I could. Yllowyyn said she was having some kind of fit.

JEN
Seems herself now. Think waking up was just kind of a jolt.

NIA
To be sure. May I feel your head?

REGAN
You can feel my--

JEN
--Regan.

REGAN
(a sigh, resigned)
Fine. If you must.

JEN
She's helping you.

NIA
(just a bit insulted)
No fever. That's good.

REGAN
I didn't mean nothing Nia, just not used to being fawned over.

NIA
Well then you've an incentive to rest up so you can heal soon. But in the meantime I'm afraid you'll be unable to administer your own medical care, so here we are. I'd like to change the dressing on your burn. Do you have any pain there?

REGAN
Fuck yes I do.

NIA
That actually bodes well. It means the flesh is healing and not rotting.

REGAN
Lovely. Hey now that you mention it, why am I not impressively drunk right now?

JEN
Cause you're barely getting enough air in your lungs as it is.

NIA

Indeed. If you were to, say, accidentally overindulge, it could be very dangerous. I've picked some willow bark for you to--

REGAN

--Oh bite me. Fucking tree bark, you want me to eat tree bark?

NIA

No, it can be made into a tea. May I have your hand?

REGAN

I dunno, you any good in the sack?

NIA

Yes, very clever.

JEN

Come on. You wanna keep it don't you?

NARRATOR

Resigned, Regan held out her hand to Nia as if to say "get on with it."

NEED A SOUND HERE THAT SUGGESTS A CLOTH BANDAGE BEING UNWRAPPED. CONTINUES UNTIL SPECIFIED.

REGAN

Somebody look me in the eyes and tell me that tea will not taste like you strained piss water through a farmhand's small-clothes.

BANDAGE WRAPPING PAUSES.

A beat.

REGAN

Yeah exactly.

NIA

It *will* numb the pain. Somewhat.

UNWRAPPING RESUMES.

REGAN

Listen I've broken bones before but not without a good stiff drink. If I gotta stick this out with nothing but some shitty tea I'm gonna open my own wrists.

JEN

Oh yeah, with whose hand, drama queen?

REGAN

Your mother's if she'll pull it out of me for thirty seconds. Now where's the whiskey?

JEN

(Touché)
Walked into that one.

NIA FINISHES UNWRAPPING.

NIA

Now then, let's have a look at--oh Gods.

NARRATOR

At the sight of Regan's palm, Nia went white, bordering on green.

REGAN

What, bad?

JEN

Shit, is it infected?

NIA

(queasy)
No, I'm sorry. The scar just startled me.

REGAN

We talked about scars before, Professor. I'll live.

NIA

Just the shape of it took me aback. What did you say you burned it on?

REGAN

Felt like a rock.

NIA

I'm sure it was. Must be just one of those cruel coincidences, I'm sorry to say.

REGAN

Why, what've I got? A big old cock and balls burned into my hand?

NIA

Jen, Nelson. Would you take a look please?

TWO SETS OF FOOTSTEPS APPROACH.

NIA

Have I gone mad at long last or does that look like...

JEN

(might hurl)
Holy shit.

NELSON GAGS.

NARRATOR

They looked, and there, red and raw and clear as day in
Regan's living flesh was the grisly visage of a skull.
(beat)
By its size, an infant's.

NIA

(with horror)
What exactly were the circumstances of this fire?

END OF CHAPTER.