

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 2
"What Used To Be Enough"

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PART TWO:8 EXT. CAMP NEAR FREEHOLD - DAY

8

THROUGHOUT THIS SCENE, SWORDS PERIODICALLY CRASH AGAINST SHIELDS. LISTEN THE ACTORS FOR VOCAL CUES OF WHEN THEY'RE MEANT TO BE SWINGING.

NARRATOR

With little to be done as our party awaited Brennen's decision, Billy and Nelson had taken to practicing their swordsmanship in the camp outside Freehold.

Billy and Nelson **swing swords** and **raise shields** throughout.

NELSON

Look dude.

(*swings sword*)

My parents were literally experts on this.

BILLY

Yeah, on earth.

(*swings sword*)

What if we're missing something here?

NELSON

There's no way, that every - hup! - single - hyah! - Orc is so evil that they gotta shoot kids.

BILLY

You sure you're not...

(*swings*)

...reading your own stuff into this?

NELSON

Oh like you're not?

(*swings*)

If it looks like a genocide and quacks like a genocide, you don't just wait and see what's up.

BILLY

(*swings*)

But what if we make things worse by getting in the way?

NIA APPROACHES THEM.

NIA

(*walking by*)

Gentlemen.

AND SHE KEEPS WALKING.

NELSON

(*out of breath*)

Oh hey, wait up wait up.

THE BOYS STOP FIGHTING

NIA

Yes?

NELSON

(*still out of breath*)

Got a minute?

NIA

Yes, but just. Jen is alone trying to medicate you-know-who, Galadon help her.

NELSON

We've been talking, you know 'cause of everything. And maybe you can clear this up. What do you know for an objective scientific fact is different between humans and Orcs?

NIA

You mean aside from the many reports of savagery?

NELSON

I think you could pick the right pieces of anyone's history and make them seem savage. So yeah, aside from that.

NIA

Well it is true that in antiquity, both humans and Orcs lived in a brutish state of near-constant war, amongst themselves as often as betwixt each other. But our ancestors had it in their nature to come together for a greater good - to learn a common language, to see the wisdom of the Concordats, and generally to treat with each other in a civilized manner. This was not true of the Orcs.

NELSON

Maybe the Orcs just had it worse under the Elves so it wasn't worth it roll over.

NIA

My ancestors did not "roll over," Nelson. Under the Elven peace, these realms have enjoyed three thousand years of stability, which Galadon help me I've been asked to help break.

NELSON

Aren't there like four civil wars going on right now?

NIA

Of course there's been conflict. But it's chivalrous now. No longer does a losing clan face total annihilation. And there are the countless Elven technologies and magicks from which we've benefited during the peace.

BILLY

You do still shit outside though.

NIA

This is exhausting. Where would you prefer we shit?

NELSON

What he's trying to say, I think, is that three thousand years is actually a really long time to still be, you know, fighting wars with horses and castles. Maybe the Elves are holding you back on you.

NIA

If you boys would like a history lesson, I can refer you to some excellent books, but then I ought to see to Jen.

NELSON

No offense Nia, but that doesn't really answer my question. What's different about humans and Orcs that no one could possibly argue about? Or is there anything?

NIA

Well, skin and eyes, I suppose.

NELSON

That's it?

BILLY

What's up with their skin and eyes?

NIA

Their skin is an ashen grey, and their eyes can be anywhere from the yellow of bile to the red of blood.

NELSON

Sorry. THAT'S IT?

NIA

Can not the scales of a serpent betray the potency of its venom?

NELSON

Nia, I can't believe you're...they're evil because they look different?

NIA

It could be the other way round. Some foul or vicious behavior that creates the appearance.

NELSON

Do you not hear yourself? You sound like such a hypocrite.

NIA

(insulted)

In what way have I contradicted myself?

BILLY

I think he means cause you're both, you know, black.

NIA

(doesn't understand at all)

What? What does that mean?

BILLY

Well like your skin.

NIA

My skin? What's black about it? It's a shade of brownish tan I suppose, lighter than Nelson's and darker than Sir Brennen's.

NELSON

Jesus, Nia. Where I'm from, anyone who looks like you or me, our skin is the first thing people notice.

NIA

Yes well it does cover most of our bodies.

NELSON

No I mean people assume stuff about us.

NIA

(laughing it off)

Well it would be fair to assume our ancestors came from warmer climes.

NELSON

Yeah but that's not what I mean. It's like, you know...

BILLY

That you're not smart and
you're lazy and you steal.

NELSON

Yeah no one asked you,
Billy.

BILLY

I'm not saying it's true! I'm just saying that's what people think. Some people.

NIA

But that's absurd.

NELSON

You don't see how that's the same as what you're saying about Orcs?

NIA

If you went around looked at all of our palms and lips, you'd see all of us share the pink of vitality and health, which the Orcs lack. All of us, that is, assuming Regan has not murdered Jen by now.

BILLY

Yeah man, I'm...actually kinda worried about that. Maybe we can talk to Nia more later? For Jen's sake?

NELSON

(frustrated)

Okay, fine, just think about one thing for me, Nia. Would the Elves be anywhere near as powerful as they are right now without Orc gems?

NIA

I don't know Nelson, but the more docile Orcish tribes work in the mines and trade their gems to the Th'ar lo-Hyyl, so that's an argument against widespread slaughter.

NELSON

What do they trade for?

Beat.

NIA

Just because I do not have every answer you seek, it does not necessarily mean you are right. Now if that is all...

NARRATOR

She nodded curtly to the boys, and then strode off.

NIA WALKS AWAY.

BILLY

Should we, uh, keep training?

NARRATOR

Nelson glared at Billy.

BILLY

What?

NELSON

Fucking Fox News over here. Hyah! Tah!

TWO SWORD HITS AGAINST A SHIELD

9 INT. TENT NEAR FREEHOLD - EVENING

9

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, by Regan's sickbed...

Regan does a **huge, overdramatic spit-take.**

JEN

Regan, goddammit, just drink the goddamn tea.

REGAN

No, I hate it!

NARRATOR

By now, perhaps you can, listener, imagine Regan's displeasure towards being nursed as a convalescent by her comrades.

JEN

What are you, five?

REGAN

Yeah, five fingers deep in your mom.

Jen gives an **exasperated groan/yell.**

NARRATOR

For those of you already well versed in the art of storytelling, you may recognize that calling it "displeasure" is what we in the business call an "understatement."

THE TENT OPENS AND NIA STEPS IN.

NIA

Good afternoon, Your Grace.

REGAN

Oh good it's the fucking temperance brigade.

NIA

(*fuck you too*)

Doing especially well I see.

NARRATOR

Regan's health had not miraculously improved in the two days since her near-encounter with immolation, but her spirits had...well, plummeted as you can plainly hear.

REGAN

You still running a cloister or can I have a gods damned drink yet?

NIA

Your Grace, the herbs will speed the healing; strong drink will hamper it. If you would heed--

REGAN

--I ain't gonna heed a thing from someone who has to fake it even when she fucks her own hand.

JEN

Regan, please listen to us.

REGAN

Listen to you? You? Let's think through that one, shall we, sunshine? If I listened to you, the Elves would know who I am. If I listened to you, we would have put ourselves straight in the hands of those motherfuckin' butchers. For all I know, if I listened to you, I'd been marching with them instead of watching. Is that it? Am I forgetting any other great places your "counsel" woulda put me?

NARRATOR

Jen looked stung, but offered no reply.

NIA

Just because her advice was not proven right, does not mean it was bad advice, or ill-given. Now may I change your bandage?

REGAN

No, it fucking hurts.

JEN

Guh! That's why you're supposed to drink the tea.

REGAN

Fuck a tea.

JEN

Will you stop being such a baby.

NARRATOR

In her frustration, Jen grabbed Regan's wrist to unwrap the bandage.

TWO QUICK HITS; A WHOOSH OF MOVEMENT; A KNIFE SPRINGS OUT.

NARRATOR

I need hardly tell you, this was a misstep. For, with a speed forged through honed instinct and practice, Regan had spun around, grabbed Jen's arm, and pulled a small, concealed dagger out from somewhere on her person. This despite the cast on her dominant arm and the bandages on the opposing hand. Regan held the polished blade between them, wincing through her pain but holding steady.

JEN

(*trying not to move*)
Regan...

REGAN

(*that really hurt to do*)
You don't ever put a finger you wanna keep on me in anger.

JEN

(*caaaaaaalm down*)
That's my bad. Let's just--

NIA

--Put that weapon away, you FOOL!

NARRATOR

This, coming from Nia, shocked both Jen and Regan out of their stalemate.

REGAN

(*really fucking testy*)
Come again?

NIA

Speaking freely here, *Your Grace*, for someone who swears disdain for all manner of pomp and pretense you are perhaps the most prideful person I've ever met. You dare call me vain for fretting about scars, yet you refuse to acknowledge your own! And I don't mean the ones on your body. You'd rather wound your friends than admit you are wounded.

REGAN

I don't have friends and this is the fuck why, cause--

NIA

--Refusing to acknowledge friends is not the same as not having them. That young woman you've seen fit to bare steel at? Despite your abuses and insults, I've seen her confide in you, counsel you in good faith, fight by your side, and keep herself up at night navigating the confoundingly precarious politics of holding your confidence while still minding your well-being. *That* is a friend.

NARRATOR

Regan did not yet let up, but her eyes flicked over to Nia more than she might have allowed at her most composed.

NIA

And somehow, she is the best friend you have. If you cannot see that, then I struggle to imagine your reign lasting more than a few weeks. So please, in the name of whatever it is you respect...put the blade away.

NARRATOR

For a moment all was quiet. Regan's breathing slowed, and her eyes stilled, and then she flipped her knife back to its unseen pocket and at last released her grip on Jen.

REGAN

Happy?

NIA

Not nearly.

REGAN

Well, I guess that's too--

NIA

--I believe an apology is in order.

REGAN

Are you shitting me?

NIA

I am certainly not.

REGAN

What are you, my fucking school marm?

NIA

There's a saying my parents were fond of. "Galadon rules alone. All other kings hold court." So let's examine the standing of your court, shall we? Your best tracker and archer has run off, probably after overhearing you swear to dismember him. You have exactly one knight, whom you've backed into an impossible corner. You've nearly stabbed your closest confidant and best mage and healer. And you've royally pissed off your second best mage and healer. You are not on the path to prosperity, victory, or effective governance. And I promise you, by merely uttering the words "I'm sorry," you will not spontaneously burst into flames.

REGAN

I'm shouldn'ta drawn on you, Jen.

JEN

(*it's not fine*)

It's fine.

REGAN

I'm sorry, okay?

JEN

(*she's not over it*)

I'm over it.

REGAN

What do you want from me?

NIA

If someone threatened you with a knife, would you accept mere words by way of apology?

REGAN

What, then? Lick her ass?

NIA

I think you should surrender your weapons.

JEN

(*scoffing*)

Yeah right.

REGAN

Yeah right is right. No fucking way.

NIA

It would be a show of good faith to all of us.

REGAN

Nia I swear I don't have patience for this shit.

NIA

Well I do. And I am not in pain.

A silent stare-down ensues.

Until...

REGAN

Agh! Fuck you and your religious fucking conviction.
Fine. Find me some brandy, and I'll give you all my ranged weapons.

NIA

And combustibles. And blades over six inches.

REGAN

Nine inches, and you leave me the bottle.

NIA

No. You can have one sip every two hours.

REGAN

Five sips every six hours, and I decide what a sip is.
In return you get...every weapon that's currently
outside of my body.

NIA

Very well. If only because I shudder to legislate
the...particulars of that last condition.

REGAN

Better hop to it.

NIA

Come along, Jen. We shall return once Her Majesty has
decided to comport herself in a more becoming manner.

NARRATOR

Nia gave the smallest curtsy that etiquette would
permit a clerical acolyte to give a Queen, then left.

ONE SET OF FOOTSTEPS EXITS...

NARRATOR

Jen made no such gesture. In fact, as soon as she was
certain the Queen's eyes were closed, Jen made a rather
different sort of gesture in Regan's direction, before
also walking out.

...FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER.

10 EXT. WHITE FOREST - DEAD OF NIGHT

10

A HORSE TROTS UP TO US AND SOMEONE DISMOUNTS

NARRATOR

Though he had ridden hard to return to the White Forest
as quickly as possible, Yllowyyn now found himself in
want of the will to open his parents' door. But when he
looked back over his shoulder, in the direction of
Freehold, he remembered the bridges burned there.

REGAN

(replay)

Yllowynn's been lying to our faces all this time while his buddies murder children. If it was up to me I'd cut his cock off and feed it to him...

NARRATOR

That's metaphorical bridges, not literal. Indeed, if Yllowynn had gone around Freehold committing arson I'm not sure there would be much room for redemption in his particular story. Anyways. With queasy guts and reddening cheeks, the young Elf put his hand on the door, steeling himself for what awaited him inside.

Yllowynn **sighs**.

11 INT. YLLOWYYN'S PARENTS' FOYER - CONTINUOUS

11

HUGE DOOR CREAKS OPEN, TRIGGERING A SERVICE BELL.

NARRATOR

With yet another blasted creak, the massive door swung open. As it did, the once still home came to life as servants sprung from their beds to care for the unexpected guest.

SOUNDS OF PEOPLE MOVING AROUND

YLLOWYYN

Please let my parents know I've arrived.

NARRATOR

Yllowynn handed his pack to a passing servant, watching as she walked towards the living quarters.

BA'AT

Yllowynn?

NARRATOR

Yllowynn looked up to see his father Ba'at Lo-Yl coming down the stairs.

YLLOWYYN

Greetings, my Sire. You must forgive me for...arriving at so late an hour.

NARRATOR

Yllowynn knelt to greet his father in the traditional manner.

BA'AT

Oh, child, stand. There is no need for that.

NARRATOR

Ba'at grabbed his son's arm to help him up.

YLOWYYN

But...after how...

BA'AT

All of that is in the past now, dear child.
(beat)

Although House Guernatal is without a successor, it is clear Sir Brennen remains a great asset in the realms of men. You were wise beyond your years to see that.

YLOWYYN

Ah, yes, well about Sir Brennen--

WYYN

(panned; to an unseen servant)

--And you should have known to retrieve me right away!

NARRATOR

Just then Yllowynn's mother, Wyyn Lo-Dyk, emerged from the hall towards the living quarters, berating a servant. At the sight of her child, Wyyn's mood appeared to change.

WYYN

Yllowynn! Our warrior has returned. The battle at Freehold has been the talk of the wood these past few days.

YLOWYYN

Sire! My deepest apologies for disturbing you so late in the night.

WYYN

Oh nonsense my dear child. You've represented our name and family well. There is no need to apologize for being here.

YLOWYYN

But...thank you. I was so worried after our last discussion that you would not have me back.

BA'AT

Let us go sit and you can recount the battle to us.

NARRATOR

Yllowynn finally allowed himself to relax in his parents' home and in doing so found that he was quite tired from the strain of the ride. He followed his father towards the parlor with his mother close behind.

12 INT. YLLOWYYN'S PARENTS' PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

12

CHAIRS ARE PULLED OUT AT A TABLE.

WYYN

Would you like anything to eat, Yllowynn?

YLLOWYYN

No, thank you, I'd just as soon--

WYYN

--I'll ring for Ruby.

WYYN RINGS A HAND-BELL.

BA'AT

Now as to the battle. We've been dying to hear.

YLLOWYYN

Ah, yes. Well the story in fact begins when Lord Commander Ry'y lo-Th'ytt sought Sir Brennen out as he left the Wood. As it happens, she--

--THE BELL RINGS AGAIN, MORE URGENTLY.

WYYN

Ruby?

(aside, to Yllowynn)

That blasted girl grows lazier each day.

YLLOWYYN

It's quite alright, sire, I could scarcely eat a thing.

WYYN

Nonsense. We pay enough to feed and house her. RUBY!

WYYN RINGS HER BELL FRANTICALLY FOR SEVERAL BEATS. THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN.

WYYN

There you are. Have you gone deaf, girl? Bring meat and wine for Yllowynn.

NARRATOR

The mortified-looking human servant girl bowed her head low, and scampered out of the room as frantically as she had entered.

QUICK, SCURRYING FOOTSTEPS, AND THE DOOR CLOSES.

WYYN

I do declare, the help these days.

BA'AT

Shall I have her whipped?

WYYN

If she did not understand the first two times I doubt a third would make the difference.

NARRATOR

Amidst this exchange, Yllowynn searched his parents' faces for a hint of compassion towards the pathetic creature they had just berated. He could not rightly say he saw any.

YLLOWYYN

Why not trade her with another house?

BA'AT

And risk her behavior there reflecting how we run our house? I think not.

WYYN

I think we must remind her of the comfort in which her family is permitted to remain.

NARRATOR

At the mention of the human girl's family, Yllowynn could not stop a look of worry from creeping over his face.

WYYN

Anyway, Yllowynn, you were say--what's the matter dear?

BA'AT

Was it the battle? I forget your experience has been limited to skirmishes before. There's no shame in being troubled, you know. But you must remember that the feeling will pass in time, and that your actions were right and just.

YLLOWYYN

It is not the battle, exactly.

BA'AT

Well then what? You are free to speak your mind under this roof.

YLLOWYYN

I am afraid it would not be my own mind I would be speaking, just a wild story brought back from...a Memyet soldier.

WYYN

Oh?

YLLOWYYN

I sincerely doubt the tall tale, and yet I find myself unable to forget it completely. It involves the killing of a great many Orcish prisoners by the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

NARRATOR

The briefest of looks passed between Yllowynn's parents.

BA'AT

Ry'y lo-Th'yvt is not known for recklessness or wanton cruelty. If she exercised her power of summary execution, which is of course her right, I'm certain she did so with good reason.

YLLOWYYN

Yes, of course. It's only...to hear this soldier's gossip, many of these Orcs were, well, they appeared as children. And their mothers seemed to care for them as Memyet do.

A long, lingering beat.

BA'AT

I see.

WYYN

What a peculiar story.

YLLOWYYN

Like I said, truly a tall tale if I've ever heard one. For of course, Orcs care no more for their relations than they do for their hated foes. Isn't that right?

WYYN

Yes of course. I'd pay no mind to this wild gossip. The undisciplined rabble of Memyet fighters are known to tell any manner of tale in the wake of battle. I trust this wasn't one of Sir Brennen's men who said this? He seems too noble to allow such talk within his camp.

YLLOWYYN

No...man of Sir Brennen's said this.

BA'AT

Good. Brennen may be our last best hope to restore order to the realms of men. It would be a shame if he suffered such fools in his ranks.

WYYN

Do you know how many Memyet have heard this fanciful nonsense?

YOLLOWYYN

Very few. I'd not have heard it myself save for our gifts of perception.

BA'AT

That is well. Memyet are susceptible to gossip.

YOLLOWYYN

I must wonder why anyone would lie about such a ghoulish thing?

WYYN

Who can say?

BA'AT

Knowing the type as I do, I'm sure this soldier sought to use this lie to advance in some perverse way his own selfish ambitions.

YOLLOWYYN

Well I suppose I can believe that. Though it is a relief to hear it said out loud. Forgive me for troubling you.

BA'AT

Not at all, child. What must parents do for a child nearly grown, besides help him find the path if he's gone astray?

YOLLOWYYN

The Urrkyet really are most different from the Memyet, aren't they? In a way that renders sympathy misplaced?

WYYN

It is the difference between a lap dog and a rabid wolf.

YOLLOWYYN

Yes. I do wonder sometimes whether it's quite fair to compare the Memyet to dogs.

BA'AT

(*jovial, not cruel*)
Maybe not to the dogs.

WYYN

(*amused*)
Oh hush, you.

BA'AT

Joking, joking.

YLLOWYYN

I only mean that, having spent much time among them now, I have seen the Memyet display a tremendous complexity of thought and breadth of passion. Far more than I'd been led to think possible.

WYYN

Yes, well, it can't be denied that some of them have left a meaningful mark on history here or there. There will always be the odd few who transcend the limitations of their race. Perhaps Sir Brennen is one such.

YLLOWYYN

But then, by that same logic, mightn't we expect the rare exceptional Orc to be noble enough to love its child? And feel the pain of losing its kin?

WYYN

They would love for folks to think that.

BA'AT

Yllowynn, have you ever heard of the blueback spider?

YLLOWYYN

I'm not sure I have.

BA'AT

What the blueback spider loves to eat above all else is the common robin. Now you, being schooled in the hunt, might wonder how a beast which crawls on its belly through the muck might prey upon one which flies on the wing through the blessed air.

YLLOWYYN

Does it weave a web?

BA'AT

That would have to be quite the web to stop a robin mid-flight. No, my child. When the mother robin is out feeding herself, it crawls into the nest.

YLLOWYYN

And eats the eggs.

BA'AT

No, for it cannot digest the shell. It lays on top of them, and this is where its name is telling. On its back is a pattern which, from a distance, resembles the eggs of the robin. By the time the mother is close enough to notice the ruse, she is close enough for the spider to strike. And thus is her natural mothering instinct used against her by a vicious predator.

YLLOWYYN

Ah. Quite devious.

WYYN

And it is thus with the Urrkyet. It has always been their goal to convince the Memyet of the lie that they are more like them than not. And in that they must never succeed.

YLLOWYYN

They intend to...eat the humans?

BA'AT

Well I don't think they'd rule it out. But that's not what we mean. The Th'ar lo-Hyyl enforce the peace of the Concordats, yes?

YLLOWYYN

Of course. And they are the mightiest fighting force in Iorden.

WYYN

Yes, quite.

BA'AT

If all the armies of all the Memyet allied together, which they have ever done in recorded history, they would still be hard-pressed to challenge the Th'ar lo-Hyyl. Likewise, this Traft devil just got more of the Urrkyet tribes to fight together than ever seen before. And they were routed by the Th'ar lo-Hyyl.

WYYN

(*fawning mother*)

Thanks in no small part to you, my child.

BA'AT

But if the Memyet were ever fooled into seeing the Urrkyet as their allies, and Galadon forbid they all fought together...

WYYN

One Knight of the Wood is worth thirty of any other warrior in the realm. But they might be outnumbered fifty, sixty, even a hundred to one.

BA'AT

And then all of this, everything you have come to cherish and depend on, would be in jeopardy.

YLLOWYYN

I see.

WYYN

And that is why you must return to *your* Memyet just as soon as possible.

YLOWYYN

I must what?

BA'AT

You must return at once and stop the spread of this potentially ruinous lie.

YLOWYYN

But I've only just arrived home.

WYYN

Well this will *always* be your home dear. Now set to it.

YLOWYYN

I thought after the strain of battle and the ride here I might rest for--.

--KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

BA'AT

Enter.

BIG DOOR CREAK.

NARRATOR

(loooooong sigh)

You know, I'm not even going to comment on the doors anymore. I'll just let the absurdity speak for itself. Anyway, the serving girl Ruby entered once more bearing a tray of food far too large for her to comfortably carry.

WYYN

Ah, yes. Yllowynn will be taking that on the road, would you wrap it up?

THE DOOR CLOSES AGAIN.

YLOWYYN

My sires, I fear that in light of recent turmoil I may no longer have the complete trust of the Memyet.

BA'AT

Well you had better go and get it back quickly.

WYYN

And under the circumstances I think we must be kept informed of your faring as often as possible.

YLLOWYYN

How shall I do that?

BA'AT

We'll think of something. Now if there's anything you need from your chambers for your journey, you should go and fetch it.

NARRATOR

Yllowynn's parents stood, as though to politely imply that Yllowynn should do the same.

TWO CHAIRS ARE PUSHED OUT.

YLLOWYYN

Yes, I...yes.

NARRATOR

Lacking any other option within the bounds of propriety, Yllowynn took their cue.

YLLOWYYN PUSHES OUT HIS CHAIR. HIS FOOTSTEPS RECEDE AWAY AND A DOOR CLOSES BEHIND HIM.

His parents wait a beat.

WYYN

I'll send for D'ay-vaad. He can be counted on.

BA'AT

Yes that's for the best.

(sigh)

It would appear Ryy lo Th'yyt is getting careless. I must call for a council meeting tomorrow.

END OF PART TWO.