

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD  
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 4  
"I've Been Working On The Whale-Road"

**Part One** by Rhiannon Angell and  
Christian T. Kelley-Madera

**Part Two** by Anya Gibian, Zach Glass,  
Shannon Harris and Christian T. Kelley-Madera

**Part Three** by Anya Gibian,  
Christian T. Kelley-Madera and Gregory M. Schulz

**Part Four** by Shannon Harris,  
Christian T. Kelley-Madera and Gregory M. Schulz

Created and Executive-Produced  
by  
Zach Glass &  
Christian T. Kelley-Madera

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PINK Production Draft for 9-16-17  
+ YELLOW Production Revisions + GREEN day-of/edit fixes

iordic.princes@gmail.com  
onceandfuturenerd.com

## PART TWO:

6 INT. OTTO'S QUARTERS - DAY

6

NARRATOR

We resume our tale in the quarters of one Captain Otto Olafsson, whose ship you'll recall had recently been overrun by a large band of raiders. At this moment, the quarters had been commandeered by the leader of the outlaws so that she could have a private conversation with Regan.

REN

So if I give you passage to Armstrungard, what are you prepared to give me?

REGAN

You mean aside from the gold we already gave Olafsson?

REN

His gold is my gold now and will be no matter what. So that's no offer.

NARRATOR

Also present for this negotiation were Jen, and the pirate called Alf Fire-Beard. At the moment, the two seconds were locked in a staring contest. A rather absurd-looking staring contest, as Alf towered over Jen by closer than not to a full two feet. But the young woman mustered all the apparent ferocity she could under the circumstances.

\*

ALF

I'd like to know what you think you're looking at there, little missy.

JEN

Oh, nothing much.

REGAN

Look I'll be honest with you.

REN

Ha!

ALF

Ha!

JEN

Hey! Where she's from a thief trades on her word more than gold. Thought you'd know that.

REGAN

Thank you Jen. I was saying we don't have much coin beyond what we already paid for passage. Can scrounge up maybe another...fifteen pieces but that's it. But. But.

NARRATOR

Regan gesticulated emphatically as though to convey the gravity of what would come next.

REGAN

You strike me as people who'd benefit from friends in high places.

REN

I'm listening.

*This next bit is maybe played like an aside.*

REGAN

Jen?

JEN

What?

REGAN

Tell her.

JEN

Tell her what?

REGAN

For fuck's...do the name and titles thing!

JEN

...You sure?

\*

REGAN

Just. Fucking--

JEN

*(puffs up)*

--You're addressing Aeron Margaret Regan, last scion of the Great House Guernatal, champion of the civilized peoples and rightful High Queen of the Human Realms of Iorden.

*Beat.*

*Alf and Ren burst into hysterics.*

ALF

*(through shaking laughter)*  
That's what you come to offer us?

REN

*(fighting fits of giggles)*  
Gal, there is no more House Guernatal, I never gave a shit about "civilized" peoples, and if your bum ever touches the High Throne then my paramour's face is Galadon's mead bench.

REGAN

*(taking it)*  
When I found out I thought the same exact thing. But turns his late majesty Gunther was diddling my grandma.

REN

Yeah, you and half the orphans in Armstrungard.

REGAN

But he was gonna make it all legitimate and shit until Ardel Redmoor had him killed.

ALF

Oh yah sure he was.

REGAN

I know how it sounds.

REN

I wonder how the Elves and the Great Houses would react to this claim of yours.

REGAN

I...haven't exactly declared to them yet.

REN

Ohhh but of course.

REGAN

Wasn't the right time last time I saw them.

REN

You were scared you mean.

REGAN

I mean I wasn't a fucking idiot under the circumstances. But now I *am* pushing the claim.

REN

Why?

REGAN

That's my business. Point is I'm building an army. And one day not too long from now, gonna need a navy too. How's 'Admiral Ren' strike you? Maybe 'Captain Alf'?

*Ren sighs.*

REN

Alf, the ledger.

NARRATOR

From a satchel at his side, Alf produced a hefty, hand-bound tome, and dropped it on Olafsson's desk.

*Thud.*

NARRATOR

And, knowing what was about to be asked of him, he pilfered Olafsson's quill and hastily set to scribbling some figures.

*Under dialogue, a quill scratches parchment until specified otherwise.*

REN

My pa always said to me, he said, "Ren, to survive this line of work you need to be a good sailor, a good fighter, a good negotiator...and a great bullshitter." And thief queen, you've got a special knack for bullshit to bring a tall tale like that in front of the greatest bullshitter to ever sail the seas. If it was up to me, I'd be inclined to do you a favor.

REGAN

Who's it up to then? Captain?

REN

Alf, what's the ledger say about doing the thief queen a favor?

*Alf stops writing.*

ALF

Well, if you reckon with the ships we won't be able to...visit on our way, and the foodstuffs we won't be able to fence before they rot, it's a deceptively costly endeavor.

JEN

Wait, lemme see that.

*The book slides across the desk.*

REN

I've learned many times over - don't question Alf on figures. Man's some kind of wizard.

JEN

Rationing coefficient, rate of attrition in barrels per hour per hour...where'd you learn this?

ALF

Uncle was a fishmonger, taught me the basics. Picked up that trick for working with an unknown number from a Mooncrest deserter. Rest I taught myself.

JEN

This is incredible. He's mastered algebra and he's halfway to calculus.

REGAN

All right, all right, keep it in your pants.

ALF

Don't know all that's in Olafsson's hold yet, but I'd reckon we turn a very slim profit.

REGAN

That plus the gold we gave him, plus the extra gold we're gonna give you...that's still not a bad day.

REN

But when you split it among the crew, it'll fetch them one fun night at port and little else. On the other hand, if we were to ransom that Elf or that high-born girl--

JEN

--No way. They're off limits.

NARRATOR

Ren the Ruthless cocked an eyebrow at Jen.

REGAN

You got the numbers, sure. But we can make that kidnapping cost you a fuck of a lot.

NARRATOR

In a practiced motion, Regan brushed back her cloak, revealing the small armory that she kept on her person at all times.

REGAN

Try me if you don't believe me.

ALF

Well now there's no need to get ornery.

REN

I'm not saying I'd do that, tough girl. I'm just explaining the position you leave me in. A ransom like that...why it's damn near enough for somebody to buy their way out of this life. My crew knows it. If I let the chance go, and all I give them in return is some cock and bull story about a bastard queen...how's that likely to turn out Alfie?

ALF

Well, if not for the impeccable moral fiber of our crew, and their steadfast respect for authority... that's the type of thing that'd start a mutiny against a lesser captain.

REN

So you see my problem. A Captain's not a queen. When her subjects go hungry because she's a fool, she actually has to answer for it.

JEN

It's a long-term investment. Alf, you get it, right? Compound interest?

ALF

To hear you yourself tell it, that investment depends on an army of - what, nine? - most of them not fighters, winning a war against all the Great Houses and maybe the Elves.

REN

I really would like to help you, Thief Queen. Give me *something* I can promise my crew today that won't insult their intelligence.

*Beat.*

REGAN

...Gimme ten minutes.

7 INT. MERCHANT VESSEL (BELOW DECK) - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

7

NARRATOR

And so Regan returned below deck to the side of her very ill Knight, to discuss an idea she'd had.

BRENNEN

*(weary from illness)*

Your Grace, you cannot trade the Guernatal Talisman of Dominion for passage aboard an outlaw ship.

REGAN

I can't see any other way that gets us all safely to port.

\*  
\*

BRENNEN

But, without it, how will we ever hope to--

REGAN

--What? Claim I'm legitimate in front of the Elves? That ship has sailed my friend.

BRENNEN

*(heartbroken)*

But...it is ancient and priceless. I beg of you.

REGAN

Look, I know who this belonged to. I know it means a lot to you. But you want me to be Queen. Gunther wanted me to be Queen. If we can't give up something shiny to keep my people safe, then what are we even doing?

*A beat, then...*

8 INT. OTTO'S QUARTERS - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

8

NARRATOR

Back in Olafsson's quarters...

*A cloth covering is pulled away.*

REN

*(or ad lib alt.)*

Well fuck me. Now you're talking sense.

NARRATOR

As the talisman caught a stray beam of morning sun through a porthole, its jewels cast a dazzling dance of rainbow light across the otherwise drab cabin.

ALF

How in Selbirin did you nab that?

REGAN

I told you. It's mine by birthright.

REN

Sure it is.



REGAN

Well it's more mine than it is Ardel fucking Redmoor's. Anyway it's too hot to fence in Armstrungard. But you'll find somebody in the Sugarcane Isles who'll melt it down no problem.

REN

Daresay we will.

REGAN

So is that a deal?

REN

In exchange for this treasure, safe passage to Armstrungard for you and your whole crew. We can't make port but we'll get you close enough to row and throw in a boat no charge.

*Ren spits.*

NARRATOR

Ren spit in her hand and presented it to Regan.

REGAN

What about the other part? Do I have a navy yet, Admiral?

REN

Ha! Don't push your luck, and don't ever spurn my open hand.

REGAN

Fine.

*Regan spits too. Hand strikes hand.*

REGAN

Deal.

9 INT. JETHRO'S CELLAR

9

JETHRO

*(sharp whispers like the Templars' chanting)*  
 Ssselokar Ssselokir Naaamokar Naamokir. Ssselokar  
 Ssselokir Naamokar Naamokir.

*Jethro continues under the narration.*

NARRATOR

Jethro, the woodsman who had captured the half-Orc Traft, was reciting an arcane and forbidden spell out of his skinbound grimoire. Torchlight danced manically across the walls of the cellar as the old man's voice pronounced the incantation. In the corner, the creature Caleb whimpered.

*A dog whines.*

NARRATOR

The corpses of Jethro's previous guests were still, the dead eyes seeming to stare directly into Traft's soul. Traft lay still, bound to the table, waiting for something to happen. He waited...and waited, and waited.

TRAFT

Uh...Am I supposed to be feeling something here?

JETHRO

Hush now. Concentrate. Ssselokar Sselokir. Saalamir Naladir

NARRATOR

Jethro resumed his chanting. Five minutes passed, and then ten. After fifteen minutes had passed without a single sign of anything happening, Traft's patience snapped.

TRAFT

All right, that's it! You convinced me to cooperate. Gods help me, I guess I am still a fool for Dagmar. But we've been up all gods-damned night and you haven't told me anything more about what you're trying to do.

JETHRO

Boy I told you I ain't got time for your--

TRAFT

--But you got time to say gibberish for gods only know how long?

JETHRO

Boy! You will not disrespect my magicks. They are ancient and very hard learned.

TRAFT

Maybe so. But tonight they ain't done shit. And now I'm tired. So you start talking, or I'm done. You're gonna have to cut me up for your porridge after all.

JETHRO

All right all right cool yourself off now. What you wanna know so bad?

TRAF T

You keep saying I'm gonna see Dagmar. I'm gathering you don't mean in a poetic sense, where all the good little boys and girls meet in Selbirin after death and eat pies and sing hymms to Galadon.

JETHRO

Nay, nay, I don't mean like that. If I'm right about what I've been working on, you could touch her, smell her, as though she's standing right yonder.

TRAF T

You know you sound outta your head, right? Shit maybe you don't know that. *Why* do you think we can meet her again?

JETHRO

I first met Dagmar, ohhh must be near to twenty years now. I served House Greenhorn then. But I never rose no higher than a petty knight. And I was well past fighting age. But they kept me around, guess they thought it was courteous. They sent me with Dagmar when she came to Guernatal's court. We spoke often, we became...close. We spoke about life, about philosophy. I found that Dagmar and I shared a number of...values.

NARRATOR

You may recall, dear listener, that Dagmar had shared very similar conversations with Traft. You can be sure that Traft recalled it all too well.

\*

JETHRO

Then I began having Dreams. In 'em, Garedian gave me instructions. Told me to go to this location or that. I met others at those locations. Templars, you called them. They taught me things, great powers. Gave me their vestments and idols. I rose in their ranks. And then one night, the Dream sent me to an inn, outside of Brimshire. Dagmar was there. It was her, but not just her. Something in her I'd never seen before. And she bore this very staff I hold today. Lots of other Templars had come too.

*(Beat. This is a big deal.)*

We captured the crown Prince Uther. Took him out in the middle of the woods. The conversation Dagmar had with him...I'll never forget it.

*Replay 010101:**UTHER**Not your most imaginative work.**DAGMAR**You haven't seen the most interesting part yet.**UTHER**See you soon, dear.**DAGMAR**Will you?**JETHRO**They were talking to each other, but it was like they weren't...them. And then she stabbed this very staff, through the Prince's heart.**TRAFT**Wait wait wait. You're telling me that Dagmar herself killed Uther Guernatal? The biggest assassination in centuries, and it was done by his own stepmother?*

\*

*JETHRO**I'm saying she did more than kill him.**TRAFT**And she kept it from...well, me and everyone else in the damn world?! All while sharing the King's bed? Why would she do that?**JETHRO**That's what I'm trying to tell you if you'll shut your yap. She told us lower our hoods and close our eyes tight. I did. But when Uther breathed his last I could see like a bright sunny day, even through all that. And when I opened my eyes again, the Prince's body was gone without a trace.*

\*

*TRAFT**So what's that mean?*

JETHRO

For a long time I didn't know. Spent years trying to understand. Only one thing I did know. Whoever was coming to me in my Dreams - she and Dagmar were one in the same. By then I had dreamed every night for three, four years. True dreams too - the dream tells me to go somewhere, sure enough someone's waiting for me. And I tell you, that night, it was Dagmar's body, her voice, but sure as the sun sets, it was Garedian done the killing.

NARRATOR

This should have struck Traft as the ramblings of an unwell old man. To be fair, it was literally the ramblings of an unwell old man. But he thought back on his life, on his time shared with Dagmar, and something of the old man's story struck a chord.

TRAFT

*(half buying it)*

If that's true...why'd Garedian kill Uther?

JETHRO

The time you knew her, was she not fond of saying "Galadon is gone from this world?"

TRAFT

Well, yeah. I guess I always figured she meant...  
*(making a connection)*  
...in a poetic sense.

JETHRO

Nay, nay, I don't think she did. I think that for a time, Galadon was Uther the same way that Garedian was Dagmar. And then she found a way to send Galadon to another place. That he couldn't easily come back from.

TRAFT

Wait. *That's* where you wanna send me? Someplace I can't come back from?

JETHRO

But I think you can come back. That's what I been working on all this time.

TRAFT

Working on, and failing.

JETHRO

But the others didn't believe like you do.

TRAFT

Now hang on. I take it you reckon this traveling is done by means of magic.

JETHRO

Aye, that I do.

TRAFT

So assuming they were to believe like you say, it stands to reason that someone better trained in magic than I am would have a better chance of being able to come back.

JETHRO

Suppose so. But the snows'll be back afore long. No one in their right mind gonna be through this pass any time soon.

TRAFT

Just so happens your old friends the Templars - they're looking for me. None too pleased how my last battle went. They probably weren't too far off my trail when you found me. If I went out and drew just a little attention to myself, I'm sure you could catch you a Templar or two. How'd that serve?

NARRATOR

A twisted grin crept over Jethro's face.

\*

10 INT. MERCHANT VESSEL (CARGO DECK) - SIMULTANEOUS

10

*Above us, we hear crates and barrels carted around along with general cheering and carousing.*

NARRATOR

As the crew of the Red Reaver transferred their newly-won loot from Otto Olafsson's ship over to Ren's, Arlene and Gwen stole down to the hold.

*We hear the baby lifted gently. He fusses in his sleep.*

GWEN

Shhh....shh....no need to wake. Well wasn't that a comfy bed for you! Who'd've thought a sack of flour and some straw could make a suitable cradle?

ARLENE

He certainly slept soundly enough, all through the commotion up on deck. Oh, Gwen.

SHE **SIGHS.**

ARLENE

When you left your family to go serve the nobility, did you ever imagine being in a place like this?

THEY BOTH **CHUCKLE**.

GWEN

Can't say I did. But then, I never imagined I'd meet the love of my life either. Galadon's plans are hidden from us all.

ARLENE

Yes. Some days more so than others. This is no place for the young one. What are we to do here?

\*  
\*

GWEN

The same thing we've been doing all along. The best we can under the circumstances.

11 INT. FREEHOLD GREAT HALL - NIGHT

11

*Sounds of laughter and merriment under the Narrator's lines below.*

NARRATOR

We now return to the camp of Bryce Riverfell, where the General is finishing supper with his inner circle. I would be remiss not to remind you that Regan and her makeshift court had him to thank for their escape from Freehold.

\*

GARETH

To General Riverfell!

*Amidst general cheers, we definitely pick out a swelling off...*

GUESTS

Bryyyyyyyyyyce!

*Glasses clink.*

BRYCE

Now settle down, I've a few words to say if you don't mind.

*The raucous atmosphere continues.*

GARETH

*(good-natured)*

Hey shut up you drunken idiots, your General's trying to speak!

*The crowd calms down, just a little bit.*

BRYCE

Thank you, Gareth. We all know - some too well, as we've watched our sworn blood brothers fall by our side, some kin and some closer than kin; for some, our fathers, mothers, brothers before us - we know that the life of a soldier is often hard and brief. Whether by choice or necessity, for valor or to feed our families, we put ourselves on the line and hope that, in the end, our work is just and does some good in the world.

*The crowd is silent now.*

*Bryce's words hang in the air as his earnest mood catches on.*

BRYCE

My point is that we carry a heavy burden. And you, and all your fallen friends, have carried that weight admirably and honorably. And with the completion of repairs to the outer hold, a *full two weeks ahead of the impossible fucking schedule we were given...*

*It's a blatant applause line and the crowd goes for it with aplomb.*

...All the realms can sleep a bit easier tonight. So on this evening, I wanted to raise a glass and a ruckus to brotherhood, to thank you for your service and your partnership. To assure you that it's the greatest honor of my life to serve among you! Here's to you!

*Glasses clink. There are cheers.*

GUESTS

*(ad lib.)*  
Hooray! Hear, hear! Bryyyyyyyyyyce

BRYCE

Now if you'll all excuse me, I've some other business to attend to.  
*(said with a wink)*  
Back east.

*This is met with whistles and ribald cheers*

FREEHOLD SOLDIER

Give Bailey a kiss for all of us, General!

BRYCE

Watch it now, Sergeant. Gods be with you all. Sleep well!



*Beneath growing sounds of merriment...*

BRYCE

*(aside)*

Professor, a word before I leave.

12 INT. BRYCE'S STUDY - NIGHT

12

NARRATOR

And so did the most erudite of Bryce Riverfell's Captains follow the General to his private study.

PROFESSOR

General. I can tell something's on your mind.

BRYCE

Ha. Nothing gets past you, buddy. I've got a good crew I've built over the years. You, Clarence, Gareth, Max, Steffan, Nils. Each one of you's a great fighter in your own way. It's a luxury to know this infantry'd be in good hands if ever I wasn't around.

PROFESSOR

I appreciate the compliment, though I'm not sure I like where this is headed.

BRYCE

It's not headed anywhere, yet. I just...well, you've got a way with words. I'd like you to start preparing everyone for the possibility of a change in leadership.

PROFESSOR

You're not ill, are you, Bryce?

BRYCE

Ha, ha, maybe. But not like that. No, tell you the truth I'm thinking it's time to retire.

PROFESSOR

Retire? You can't be serious.

BRYCE

This is a tough job, Professor. I won't lie to you. And I've...just seen *too much*. It's an important thing we do here, fighting to protect those who can't fight for themselves. A noble cause, I've gotta believe that. Whosoever leads that effort, needs to do it with all their heart. And that ain't me anymore. So I'm getting out while I still can.

PROFESSOR

*(at a loss)*

I...I suppose there's no talking you out of it. What'll you do with all your spare time.

BRYCE

Take it day-by-day, for once in my life.

PROFESSOR

Your men will--

*--In the distance, an Elven horn.*

NARRATOR

Both men instantly recognized the distinctive sound of that very particular horn.

PROFESSOR

The Knights of the Wood. Back here again?

BRYCE

*(very dry)*

Well there go my plans for the evening.

NARRATOR

The Professor quickly caught a flash of something in Bryce's eyes, just before he bent to a locked cabinet beneath his desk.

*Keys are jingled. A lock clicks open.*

NARRATOR

Bryce retrieved a bottle of brown liquid from under his desk, along with a single drinking glass.

*Two glass objects hit the desk.*

PROFESSOR

Not in a sharing mood?

BRYCE

Well it looks like you've gotta work tonight, Professor.

*Bryce pulls out a cork and pours himself a tall drink.*

PROFESSOR

Were you...expecting the Elves, Bryce?

BRYCE

Sooner or later, I was. Was hoping it'd be later.

*The bottle is picked up.*

NARRATOR

Then Bryce bent down again, and replaced the bottle in his locking cabinet.

*Keys jingle, and the lock clicks shut.*

BRYCE

Maeve is gonna be pissed. I told her to wait up for me.

PROFESSOR

I'm sure she'll forgive you.

BRYCE

She always has. Will you make my excuses for me? In person if you can manage it.

\*  
\*

NARRATOR

Something about the earnestness in Bryce's request caught the Professor off guard.

\*  
\*  
\*

PROFESSOR

If you say so, Bryce.

\*  
\*

*Knock on the door.*

BRYCE

Come.

GUARD #1

Lord Ry'y lo-Th'yyt here to speak with you. Says it's urgent.

BRYCE

'Course it is. I'm coming.  
(almost hesitant?)  
Bottoms up as they say.

**BRYCE GULPS DOWN HIS DRINK.**

NARRATOR

Bryce drained his glass, before leaving his study to answer Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's summons.

**END OF PART TWO.**