

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 6
"One For The Team"

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PART THREE:

17 EXT. PINEMARCH HARBOR - EVENING

17

There's a body of water to one side of us, and a busy-ish town to the other.

NARRATOR

Pinemarch is a harbor town on the southern coast of Iorden. It is so named because it marks the point south of which no trees will grow.

The wind whips around a bit.

NARRATOR

Sussmann is a dock worker who lives near Pinemarch. He is so named because it is a common moniker in those parts, and his parents were uncreative. We join Sussmann now, as he peers out into the harbor, in the slim hopes of spotting some vessel whose crew might pay him to help unload it - it had been a slow year - and shivers against the arctic wind.

Sussmann sucks in a **chilly breath**.

Some splashing approaches.

NARRATOR

Sussmann's heart lifted for a moment as he saw a bow break the fog, and then quickly dropped when he realized it was that of a small rowboat.

(beat)

And then it lifted again, ever so slightly, as he realized he recognized this particular boat. At least he'd have the company of friends to look forward to. And maybe a fresh meal.

SUSSMANN

(shouts out to the boat)

Brenda! Rollo! Any luck today?

The rowboat clunks into the docks.

NARRATOR

But as the boat got up close, Sussmann saw not his two friends, but rather a single figure, shrouded head to toe with an ashen, threadbare cloak.

SUSSMANN

Oi! Who are you?

As a reminder: Renault speaks through magic means and FX should reflect that, per 020501.

RENAULT

I could ask you the same thing, my good fellow.

SUSSMANN

What are you doing with my friends' boat?

RENAULT

Your friends insisted on shoehorning their political agendas into a perfectly logical debate about fishing. So I grew frustrated.

SUSSMANN

Frustrated?...Where are they!?

NARRATOR

Sussmann brandished his boat hook in the figure's direction, as one might with a proper polearm. But with a flick of the figure's wrist, the tool was yanked out of its wielder's hands by some unseen force and cast into the sea.

SUSSMANN

Ach!

We hear a whoosh and a splash.

NARRATOR

It was then the figure finally lowered its hood and stepped onto the dock.

Bones clack against wet wood.

SUSSMANN

(horrificed)

What...what in Selbirin are you?

Scuffling, uneven footsteps retreat.

NARRATOR

Sussmann staggered back from the rotted mask of death which now shambled towards him.

RENAULT

I am but a humble traveler, who seeks that which treachery took from me.

SUSSMANN

Are you the jolly farmer?

RENAULT

I'm looking for a rather tall fellow, not over-clever - the strong silent type this one. He'd be traveling with an old timer in a kilt, whose complexion is not much better than mine. Have you seen them?

SUSSMANN

I've not seen them here. Begone you, and leave our town in peace!

NARRATOR

Sussmann launched himself away from Renault, and sprinted off towards town.

He **screams** as he runs away.

NARRATOR

And Renault calmly followed after him.

18 EXT. PINEMARCH TOWN SQUARE - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

18

We hear the nervous buzz of a riled-up crowd. A few torches crackle.

*

NARRATOR

As Renault rounded the corner of the stables into the center of the town, he was met by dozens of the townspeople, all of them brandishing pitchforks or boat hooks, or torches, or whatever other cudgels could be mustered in a hurry.

SUSSMANN

There he is!

The crowd roars in a mix of anger and panic.

*

RENAULT

Ah, good. You're all in one place.

SUSSMANN

Get back, Demon!

RENAULT

(ignoring him)

I'm looking for two men who were likely traveling together, one would have been very tall. Have they come this way?

SUSSMANN

Come on, lads. If we hold fast together we can drive him back.

NARRATOR

The gathered townsfolk leveled their crude weapons, in a loose imitation of a phalanx. But what they lacked in formal discipline, they made up for in resolve, as they advanced on Renault.

SUSSMANN

Get back, I say! You're not welcome here, fiend. *

RENAULT

Well that won't do at all.

NARRATOR

Renault searched his surroundings for any means with which to repel the advance, and across the way from the stables, he saw a modest chapel. Beside the chapel was a small yard filled with a few dozen headstones. Renault raised an arm in the direction of this yard.

We hear a really gross and disturbing magic pad.

NARRATOR

And the world around him seemed to shift, in a most unsettling way.

Off to one side of us, bones begin to rattle and creak and pop.

SUSSMANN

Oh gods help us.

The townsfolk begin to panic. *

NARRATOR

The denizens of Pinemarch looked on in horror, as the mortal remains of their kith and kin arose, from what should have been their final rest. Some had already been picked clean by the worms, while others were still recognizable. And none of the living could say which was more terrible.

The undead begin to groan and shamble towards us.

MR. RAWLS

Now just what's going on here?

RENAULT

(caught off guard)
Hmm?

The sound of Renault's spell cuts out abruptly,
as does the groaning of the undead.

NARRATOR

Standing betwixt Renault and the crowd, and flanked by
two hired guards, was the mayor of Pinemarch - one
Mister Rawls. You've met him before I believe, for he
was a frequent patron of the Horse's Head Inn, and
badly allergic to pepper.

MR. RAWLS

Well? What's all this commotion?

TOWNSPERSON 1

There's a demon come among us, m'lord!

*
*

MR. RAWLS

A demon?

TOWNSPERSON 2

Look at him! And by some dark spell, he's mustered the
bodies of the dead to march against us!

*
*
*

RENAULT

Erm...no I haven't.

We hear dozens of bones immediately clatter to
the ground.

SUSSMANN

Look at the bones, m'lord!

RENAULT

That's...there was a very small earthquake. The ground
shifted.

The crowd reacts with incredulous anger.

*

RENAULT

It's been known to happen!

SUSSMANN

Will you help us drive him away, m'lord? Summon the
Civic Guard from Freehold? Or perhaps a few priests.

MR. RAWLS

Well let's see if it need not come to that.

SUSSMANN

I...LOOK AT HIM!

MR. RAWLS

Now mind those torches, you lot. You're liable to destroy some property if you're not careful.

NARRATOR

And then Rawls turned to Renault with a cordial gesture.

MR. RAWLS

Greetings, Sir. My name's Rawls, and I'm the landlord here. What brings you to my town?

RENAULT

I'm searching for two thieves.

MR. RAWLS

Thieves? Well we can't have that, this is an honest and hardworking town. I'm sure we can help you find the villains.

SUSSMANN

M'lord, he killed two of our friends! And stole their boat to get here!

Angry shouts of agreement.

*

MR. RAWLS

Is that true?

RENAULT

I did *not* kill them. I did throw them off of the boat. In my defense, I was simply trying to engage them in a civil debate about who should and shouldn't be permitted to benefit from doing certain types of labor. And then they had to go and make it all political, which I find very rude.

MR. RAWLS

Hmmm.

NARRATOR

Rawls looked at the gathered crowd, then back at Renault, then back at the crowd, until finally...

MR. RAWLS

Have a word, lad?

NARRATOR

...He put his arm near - but very carefully not on - Renault's shoulder and beckoned him to step aside.

*

MR. RAWLS

(furtively)

I'll be honest with you. I quite like the cut of your jib.

RENAULT

My what?

Something rotten cracks off Renault's body and splashes to the ground.

RENAULT

Oh, beg pardon, that's mine.

MR. RAWLS

Not at all, my lad. I mean I like your whole...outlook.

NARRATOR

The muscles which had previously held Renault's jaw in place twitched upwards - in what Rawls could only assume was an attempted grin.

MR. RAWLS

You ask me, everyone around here's become far too political these days.

(we can hear the air quotes)

All this talk of "safe working conditions" and "fair wages." I mean, really...what in Galadon's Green Garden is a wage?

RENAULT

Yes, well, some people cannot resist injecting their agenda into everything they say and do. For instance, the two-timing harlot who--

MR. RAWLS

--Precisely, my lad! Precisely. You've said it just right. Now, suppose I was to help you find the ones you seek. Perhaps you could do me a kindness in return?

RENAULT

What did you have in mind?

MR. RAWLS

There's a sight too many agitators and instigators in my town. I'd like to encourage them to leave, if you take my meaning.

NARRATOR

What had been a half-hearted grin before soon spread to the rest of...what was left of Renault's face.

RENAULT

It would be my pleasure.

MR. RAWLS

Splendid, lad, splendid.

(Turns to the crowd)

All right you lot, listen up! We're going to have a town meeting at dawn. Everyone to attend.

There are grumbles of confusion. *

MR. RAWLS

We're going to tell our visitor whatever we might have seen or heard about people passing through here, so he can find who he's after.

The grumbles turn to anger. *

SUSSMANN

But he's a murderer!

The crowd shouts their agreement. *

MR. RAWLS

Now, now. You'll have a chance in the meeting to air all your grievances and have them heard.

SUSSMANN

Who knows what else he'll do before morning?!

MR. RAWLS

Well we haven't lost our ability to resolve disputes like civilized adults have we? I've always prided myself on this town being exceptionally civil under my watch, and I don't plan to change that now. I see no reason not to hear the shambling, malevolent abomination out.

TOWNSPERSON 1 *

Really? You see no reason? *

MR. RAWLS

(to Renault, re: shambling, malevolent)

Erm, no offense.

RENAULT

Oh not at all. I've very thick skin.

Something else gross sloughs off Renault's body.

RENAULT

...In a manner of speaking.

Then, from off right...

FISHERWOMAN

(shivering but fuming)
STOP THAT MONSTER!

The crowd gasps their surprise. *

SUSSMANN

Brenda? Rollo! You're alive!

BOATSMAN

(also shivering)
No thanks to him! We'd be drowned and frozen by now if
a bit of driftwood hadn't passed us by.

SUSSMANN

I've heard enough. To Selbirin with the Mayor! Let's
get him out of our town, lads!

The crowd yells a crude battle cry. *

MR. RAWLS

Ah...this is getting out of hand.

RENAULT

Allow me.

We hear a blast of vile, sickly magic.

TOWNSPERSON 1

Ah! Ah! AAHHHHHHHHHHH!

Flesh sizzles and burns.

NARRATOR

The townsfolk saw one of their comrades disintegrate in
front of them, as a gob of putrid fluid from Renault's
staff caught him squarely in the chest.

Beat.

The crowd screams in panic. *

NARRATOR

And that was enough to disperse the crowd.

Footsteps scatter away.

RENAULT

See? They're not so tough when you get down to it.

NARRATOR

And now it was Rawls' turn to fake a smile, as his color drained and his brow perspired.

19 EXT. AN ARMSTRUNGARD INN - BALCONY - VERY LATE NIGHT

19

We hear a few crickets chirp. There might be a few city sounds but they are sporadic and boisterous. The very few people who are still awake are impressively drunk.

A French window-type door opens.

NARRATOR

Jen stepped out onto a small balcony outside the edifice where most of her comrades slept.

JEN

Oh, I'm sorry.

NARRATOR

She was surprised to see Gwen and Arlene, wrapped in each others arms and gazing out onto the city.

JEN

(her voice catches a little - she's been crying)
I didn't mean to...yeah. Sorry.

GWEN

No, it's all right. We were leaving.

We hear the embrace release.

GWEN

...You been crying?

JEN

(tries to make light of it)
Ohh, yeah, ya know. When everything's nice and you're having a good time and you just start crying for no good reason.
(The crying has fully caught up with her by now)
Like ya do.

Gwen and Arlene are at a loss for how to respond.

ARLENE

Why don't we leave you some privacy?

GWEN

Aye, let's. Just, um...we don't hardly know you, but...

ARLENE

(unsure - a huge leap of vulnerability)
I used to cry like that. I still do sometimes. I can't say I fully know why. But it's much less scary now that I...have someone I can be honest with.

NARRATOR

Arlene, still holding Gwen's hand, gave it a gentle squeeze.

ARLENE

I...hope you have that as well. It's...very important I think.

Arlene and Gwen's footsteps recede, and they close the door behind them.

We sit on just the city sounds for a good...

...long...

...while.

DISSOLVE TO:

20 INT. BEDROOM

20

We hear the last embers of a fireplace dying out.

NARRATOR

It was quite some time before Jen willed herself back in from that balcony and into the cot she was sharing with Billy.

Bedsheets rustle.

JEN

(whispers)
Hey, Billy?

BILLY

(half-asleep)
Wassup?

A long, tentative silence.

BILLY

Babe?

Jen hesitates. And then...

JEN
 ...It can wait.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

21 INT. PHILADELPHIA BROWNSTONE - 2003 - DAY

21

WE'RE IN THE LIVING ROOM OF A FAIRLY NICE
 PHILADELPHIA HOME.

ON ONE SIDE OF THE ROOM, A DVD OF A SEVENTIES
 EXPLOITATION FILM PLAYS: WE HEAR A FUNKY
 SOUNDTRACK, AND BAD CANNED SFX OF GUNFIRE AND A
 CAR CHASE.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM, WE HEAR SOMEONE
 TAKING NOTES ON A SHEET OF PAPER.

YOUNG NELSON
 Mom?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE
(waiting for something specific)
 Just onnnne minute, sweetheart.

WE HEAR A REMOTE CLICK AND AND THE DVD STOPS.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE
 Mmm. Almost. Yes, love, what is it?

YOUNG NELSON
(not what he came in for but genuinely interested)
 What are you watching?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE
 It's an old movie that I like to show my students on
 the last day of class.

YOUNG NELSON
 What's it called?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE
(a little wry)
 It's called *Black Harry Saves Thanksgiving*.

YOUNG NELSON
 Is it good?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

It's...complicated. And interesting. Not for you yet.

YOUNG NELSON

Oh.

A beat lost in thought.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Nelson? What did you want to ask me?

YOUNG NELSON

Do I still have to go to Grandma's next week?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Yes, sweetheart. Just while your Pop and I are busy with Finals. It's not so bad is it? Grandma's a much better cook than either of us. And you can bring your...Boy Game and your...what was it? Pocket Monsters?

YOUNG NELSON

She makes me come in before dark.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Yes, well...Grandma's house, Grandma's rules.

YOUNG NELSON

She thinks I'm gonna do fireworks. I'm not gonna do fireworks! I just wanna look at them. And catch fireflies. What's even the point of living in the middle of nowhere if you can't catch fireflies?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

You can go outside during the day.

YOUNG NELSON

But Mom! It's not fair!

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

It's the rules, Nelson.

YOUNG NELSON

We have pictures in the living room from when Pop got arrested!

SHARON LETS OUT A **GOOD-NATURED LAUGH** AT THIS. AT HER OWN EXPENSE AND PLEASED WITH HER CHILD.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

(still chucking)

Let it never be in doubt that you are our son.

(nurturing more than scolding)

Come here, Nelson Malcom Contee.

WE HEAR NELSON WRAPPED UP IN A HUG.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

I love you with my whole heart. Now, to answer your question...First, protesting a racist law and

disrespecting your grandmother are very different

things. And I think you know that. Second...hmm...

(searching for how to explain)

Grandma grew up in a different time and place.

(Half to self)

...that, admittedly, in some ways, isn't that different than ours...

YOUNG NELSON

Mom...you're mumbling.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Sorry, dear.

(under her breath again)

The perils of parenting a young black boy without giving him a complex...

YOUNG NELSON

Huh?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

It's...tough to explain. You know how your dad and I have taught you about not talking to strangers.

*

YOUNG NELSON

(confused)

Yeah...

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

Well...your grandma's concern about you being out after dark is a little bit like that.

YOUNG NELSON

Oh, so she doesn't want me to be taken by a stranger?

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

(fumbling)

Well, sort of, except that's not really my point.

(considers)

The simplest way to explain is that grandma, growing up, had to be very, very, extra careful all the time.

YOUNG NELSON

Because of strangers?

PROF SHARON CONTEE

(jolted by irony)

...Well, yes. In her old age, although she still needs to be careful, things aren't as scary for her as they used to be...sometimes - but it doesn't feel any different for her.

(beat, trying to get to the point)

...I'll just say that sometimes the things we learned to keep us safe stop being helpful, well, as helpful, once circumstances sorta change.

(exhausted)

Does that make sense?

YOUNG NELSON

Not really.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

(of course it doesn't)

Well, like I said, we'll talk more once you're back. Until then, be a good boy for grandma, hm? She's had a long life and deserves some peace and quiet. And she loves you very much. As do we.

WE HEAR ANOTHER HUG.

YOUNG NELSON

(muffled in his Mom's arms)

Wait.

YOUNG NELSON

(layered)

You're not supposed to be here.

NELSON

(layered)

You're not supposed to be here.

PROF. SHARON CONTEE

(bewildered)

Where did you come from, sweetheart? Are you...Oh my God, you're hurt.

YOUNG GIRL

(intense magical reverb)

My enemy, Nelson, is nearer than you can possibly imagine. And the danger is great. You contain tremendous power, but you must not let it be corrupted. I have given you the clues you need Nelson, but you have not asked the right questions. And now we are running short on time. The enemy will corrupt you.

We hear the breathing of some terrible beast approach us from behind.

NARRATOR

When he felt the hot breath on the back of his neck, Nelson turned around. Though he already knew what he would see.

There's a horrible and other-worldly SCREECH!

NARRATOR

The Nightmare Demon let out a piercing cry. Frozen with fear, Nelson could only raise his hands in front of his face. And he felt the creature wrap its clawed and scaly hand around one of his fingers.

YOUNG GIRL

The enemy seeks to corrupt you. You must refuse to lower thyself. DO NOT LOWER THYSELF!

22 INT. A ROOM IN AN INN - PRE-DAWN

22

NELSON

Ah!

NARRATOR

Nelson bolted upright in the room where he slept, soaked in cold sweat.

NELSON **BREATHES HEAVILY**. WE STAY WITH HIM AS HIS BREATH GRADUALLY SLOWS.

23 INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

23

Light footsteps down a hallway.

A knock on a door.

REGAN

Yeah?

24 INT. REGAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

24

A door opens.

NARRATOR

Nelson entered the room which Regan had commandeered, to see her very much awake, with a small arsenal spread out on the floor in front of her.

Regan preps weapons for this entire scene unless otherwise noted - we hear swords sharpened, crossbows loaded, flipknives set, vials corked, etc.

REGAN

Can't sleep?

NELSON

I don't like my job in the plan.

REGAN

Okay.

(beat)

I guess the polite response is "I'm sorry you feel that way and I appreciate you doing your part anyhow."

NELSON

Why can't Billy watch the baby?

REGAN

Can you lift those satchels over there?

NELSON

(excited, pleasantly surprised)

Oh. Yeah, probably!

Some footsteps.

NARRATOR

Nelson walked over as if to demonstrate.

REGAN

Now careful! If you start to pick 'em up, and you can't, and you drop 'em too hard, they'll be mopping us off the walls for weeks.

NELSON

(a little cowed)

...Well...there's gotta be something else I can do!

REGAN

You good at rock climbing? Horseback riding? Can you out-shoot an Elf? Got any magical powers you haven't told us about? You wanna get a jockey to try and fuck you?

NELSON

I know things. Stories! I figured out who you were before Brennen told us - before you even knew.

She finally stops with the weapons.

REGAN

Believe me, I remember. And I'm gonna need your smarts later, I'm sure of it. But tomorrow, I--the *team* needs you to wait on a boat with a baby. Okay?

NELSON

And be a hostage.

REGAN

It's the safest place to be on this job.

NELSON

What? How?

REGAN

The rest of us are gonna get shot at. Ren's got no reason to touch you unless we don't hold up our end. And the only way we don't hold up our end on this one is if we're all dead. So worst case scenario, you're still last man standing.

NELSON

This is my fight too, you know? Nia's my friend. And I don't like the Knights of the Wood any more than you.

REGAN

I know that. But on *this one*, this is how you do your part. So...pretty fucking please. Do the rest of us a solid. All right?

NARRATOR

Though Regan looked Nelson in the eyes as she said this, she did not wait for a response before returning to her grim work.

The weapons prep resumes.

25 HALLWAY

25

Footsteps again.

NARRATOR

And so, sensing the impasse, Nelson made his way to where Nia slept.

Footsteps stop.

NARRATOR

But he was intercepted on the threshold by Brennen.

BRENNEN

I'd let her sleep, lad. She's a hard day ahead of her.
(*Aside, maybe more than he should say aloud*)
Perhaps harder than she knows.

NELSON

Yeah. Fine.

26 BACK WHERE WE STARTED

26

A door shuts behind us.

NARRATOR

And as Nelson returned to his room and looked out his window, he abandoned all hope of returning to sleep. For the sun was already beginning to redden the horizon. And today was the day of the race.

END OF PART THREE.