

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 6
"One For The Team"

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PART FOUR:

A27 EXT. RACETRACK - DAY

A27

A large and excited crowd chatters loudly.

NARRATOR

Now, I know it does not necessarily come easy to your kind to hold several locations in mind at once, given the corporeal limitations of your perception. But you're going to need to, for the duration of the affair to follow.

The morning sun was still low in the sky, and the grass still thick with dew, on the cliffs overlooking Old Armstrong Bay. But already the crowd trickling up from the city was abuzz with excitement.

Near the start - and end - of the race course stood a structure - a cascading slope of wooden benches, ingeniously designed to be put up and taken down as quickly as possible, due to the illicit nature of this event. The location and height of these seats made them hands-down the best available, which is why they were at this moment filled with various vagrants and vagabonds, being paid to hold seats for the wealthiest spectators. When their patrons arrive, these enterprising individuals will of course leave the benches to stand huddled with the other unwashed masses straining for a decent look at the race.

We hear "Main Title Theme from Black Harry Saves Thanksgiving," only this time it's mixed well and played as score.

Amidst this mileu were two very meek and nervous-looking country preachers, flanked conspicuously on either side by two of the best-armed, best-trained Elvish Knights you would ever set eyes on. A few rows behind and above them, keeping keen watch on this peculiar foursome, was - simply put - the highest ranking military officer in all of the so-called civilized realms.

B28 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS - SIMULTANEOUS

B28

The same crowd as before is above us and to the right, but heavily muted through thick wood. We probably hear some footfalls above us, resonating through the wood.

To our left are several conversations that more aurally present but hushed and furtive.

NARRATOR

Not far beneath their feet, in the shadows of the raised seats, worked the artisans of those trades which require additional discretion - even at an illicit horse race. Here a boy of seventeen years approached, carrying some satchels with a grace and care that was entirely unlike his usual boisterous presence.

C29 EXT. RACETRACK - PAVILION - SIMULTANEOUS

C29

We cut under a tent - same ambience as the main racetrack scene but filtered ever so slightly.

NARRATOR

Some thirty yards from the the foot of the raised seats - that is, just the race track's width away - was a covered pavilion, in which the racers are permitted to swap their mount and tack once during the race's eleven laps.

*

To the side of us, a horse snorts.

NARRATOR

Here was one woman of sixteen years, and another woman a few years her elder. Both wore hoods pulled low over their eyes, but the younger was considerably more fidgety than the elder.

(They both speak barely above a whisper.)

REGAN

Stop it.

JEN

I'm not doing anything.

REGAN

This is your job, remember? You do it every day.

JEN

I'm not allowed to be nervous at work?

REGAN

Not when Ry'y lo-Th'yyt's looking for us you're not.

D30 EXT. RACETRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE - SIMULTANEOUS

D30

We hear the main racetrack scene again, but now their are a few gulls to our far, far right.

NARRATOR

Farther away from the raised seats and towards the cliff's edge, there was a raised platform, which held a large and sturdy chest of oak and iron. It was surrounded by no fewer than a dozen heavily armed and gruff-looking men in tattered goldenrod cloaks. They also had their hoods pulled low.

Not terribly far from them was a woman of not quite thirty years, to whom the seated preachers bore a striking resemblance. She was pacing between the various vendors and merchants nearby, and unlike the girl in the pavilion or the brigands on the platform, she made no effort to hide her face. Or her nervousness.

E31 EXT. CLIFFSIDE - SIMULTANEOUS

E31

NARRATOR

From the platform with the chest, it was less than five yards to the sheer hundred-yard drop that ended on a rocky beach. *

We feel like we've fallen off the cliff - not quite in free-fall but not gently either. Fairly quickly, the sounds of the racetrack become more distant, and gulls and lapping waves become more present.

NARRATOR

About three quarters of the way up the cliffside were a slender, golden-haired Elf, and a broad, grey-haired man. There was a rope tied between them as they climbed, and another rope ran down from each of them fastened to something on the beach.

Something metal is hammered into rock.

NARRATOR

The broad man hammered a metal spike with a hook at one end into the rock, and then tugged on it to make sure it was secure. Having done so, he nodded to his comrade.

F32 INT. STABLES - SIMULTANEOUS

F32

We're in a small, musty space. Horses are all around us - snorting, pacing around their stalls, grazing on hay.

NARRATOR

I would of course be remiss not to call your attention to the stables, where riders and their retainers saw to their mounts before the race. Each species fed off the energy of the other, until both were nearly beside themselves with nerves. Poor sweet horses - frequently clever enough to read the emotions of their masters, but rarely clever enough to simply kick things until they are the masters.

But I digress. Anyway, it is in this state of heightened nerves and excitement that one of the riders was approached by a dark-haired woman in peasant's clothes, with a hand on her hip and a glint in her eye.

JOCKEY

Help you, miss?

GWEN

(extremely flirty)
Aye. Believe you can.

33 EXT. RED REAVER - SIMULTANEOUS

33

We're near to - but not inside - a large creaky ship.

NARRATOR

And finally of course, there was the ocean vessel anchored somewhere nearby. Its sails were very intentionally concealed at present but I can tell you that they were blood-red. And on this ship a boy of sixteen years cradled an infant with eyes so light a shade of brown that some might call them orange. But there's not much for me to tell you about this place. At least, not right now.

*
*

B34 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

B34

All the conversations we overhear in this section should be panned.

SEX WORKER 1

(shouts to a passerby)

Hey stud. Why don't you come over here and tell me how you like it.

*
*
*
*

SEX WORKER 2

Say again dear?

(beat, then...tries to play it cool)

Oh. Ah, right, sure, sure. That's...extra though.

*
*
*
*

NARRATOR

Under the seats, it grew crowded. Far too crowded, in fact, for the boy with the satchels to do what he needed. He looked around, wracking his mind for a solution.

*

F35 EXT. BEHIND STABLES - CONTINUOUS

F35

Some footsteps sneak towards us.

JOCKEY

(impatient)

So is this happening or what?

GWEN

Hold your horses--Heh. Get it? Just need a quick freshen-up.

JOCKEY

I ain't got much time. The race is about to start.

GWEN

Just one question. Which perfume d'you like better? Rosewater...or ether?

JOCKEY

Ether? I never--

He's muffled mid sentence and very quickly trails off.

NARRATOR

As Gwen held a dampened rag over the short man's mouth, he rapidly crumpled into a useless heap. And she quickly set to disrobing and then binding him.

We hear some clothing move around.

A36 EXT. RACETRACK - CONTINUOUS

A36

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Do you see your daughter? Point her out to us.

NARRATOR

In the seats beside the race track, the two preachers remained stolidly silent, their gazes fixed straight ahead.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Excuse me.

(beat)

Your better is speaking to you.

MILDRED

Ow! Don't you pinch me!

We hear a loud and furious slap!

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

(fuming)

Mem-rhypoas!

BEN

(cautioning)

Milly!

MILDRED

She pinched me!

RY'Y

Major! Mind your temper. I see her. Twenty yards south of the winner's circle. See?

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Has she signaled to us?

RY'Y

Not yet.

NARRATOR

Major Zyka'ad unsheathed a diminutive and discreet dagger and held it close to the Reverend Mildred's side.

A very small knife is unsheathed.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Lest you forget yourself again.

NARRATOR

Mildred squeezed Ben's hand as his jaw clenched in rage.

RY'Y

Patience, Major.

NARRATOR

Yet even as Ry'y spoke thus, she was fidgeting with several of the myriad weapons on her belt.

E37 EXT. CLIFFSIDE - CONTINUOUS

E37

NARRATOR

But the first serious mishap of the day happened along the cliffside.

Brennen and Yllowyyn are climbing this whole time, so they **strain** accordingly.

YLLOWYYN

Do you think we're high enough?

BRENNEN

Ten more yards should do it.

A beat as Brennen **hoists himself up** once more.

BRENNEN

Good thing, too. We're nearly out of--Yah!

Some rock breaks loose and cascades down the cliff.

We hear rope zip through a loop for a split second and then catch and pull.

YLLOWYYN

Ach!

Yllowyyn's shoes scuff on rock.

YLLOWYYN

Are you all right?

Brennen is a little more distant than he was before.

BRENNEN

(breathing hard)

Aye. I'm all right. Damned bastard popped right off.
Hold still while I head back up.

We hear him climb under narration.

NARRATOR

What had just happened was a very common type of mishap in tandem climbing. One climber relied on a handhold that proved faulty, and fell. But, tethered as he was to his partner with a rudimentary pulley between them, he merely fell a few yards and yanked his partner upwards, rather than meeting a very messy death. Indeed, this is routine and expected - precisely what this type of climbing is prepared to handle.

Less expected, however, was the jagged rock between Yllowynn and the pulley, on which the rope had caught. And worse, Brennen and Yllowynn did not see it, even as their rope began to fray.

We hear a rope straining.

B38 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS

B38

All around is a swirling cacophony of lewd propositions - whispered, but like...not THAT whispered.

*
*
*

BILLY

(not subtle)

All right, here we go. World's oldest profession.
Beautiful day for it.

(beat)

Not a cop. Am for sure definitely not a cop. If I was a cop I'd have to tell you.

NARRATOR

Everyone around the boy turned and stared.

All the conversations stop.

*

NARRATOR

They considered him carefully...

A moment passes.

NARRATOR

...And then departed to ply their trade elsewhere.

BILLY BREATHES A **SIGH OF RELIEF.**

NARRATOR

Very, VERY, carefully, the boy set his satchels down and opened them.

*
*

F39 INT. STABLES

F39

Two footsteps on hay rapidly come to a stop.

NARRATOR

Those in the stable turned to see the rider who had just entered. This rider was dressed just like the one who recently left the stable, but was of a wider and decidedly more womanly stature. Her entire face but for the eyes was concealed beneath a cloth mask - a common enough precaution against the dust of a horse race. But the riders stared at her regardless, and she froze in their collective gaze.

ARLENE

(muffled through cloth, and VERY nervous)
Good morning. Oh, yes, sorry.

Some cloth shifts.

ARLENE

(no longer muffled but still very nervous)
...Last...minute...substitution?

A long and quiet moment - not unlike that between Billy and the sex workers - passes.

NARRATOR

And then the other riders - as if remembering it was none of their business anyway - shrugged and returned to their tasks.

A40 EXT. RACETRACK

A40

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

She's still not hailed us.

RY'Y

I know.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Is it possible she means to mislead us?

RY'Y

Of course it is. If she's not hailed us before the riders are called, we shall remind her of the stakes.

NARRATOR

A very worried look passed between Mildred and Ben.

E41 EXT. CLIFFSIDE

E41

A rope continues to creak and strain. Below us are slow and deliberate climbing sounds.

BRENNEN

In some ways, it's easier the second time. One is more tired, but one knows the route.

YLLLOWYYN

You'd better hurry. They'll be calling the riders soon.

NARRATOR

Despite the difference in whether and how they chose to acknowledge it out loud, both climbers were keenly aware of what was at stake. If they were to fail at their assigned task, several of their comrades - including their leader - would surely die.

*

BRENNEN

A few easy ones here...

Climbing sounds speed up for a short while...

NARRATOR

And in the Elf's restlessness while he waited for his partner to climb back to his level, his eyes began to wander. They found an Elven frigate patrolling the bay - don't worry, the Red Reaver was well-concealed in a hidden cove. But as Yllowwyn's keen eyes focused on the warship - so much like the toys he played with and dreamt about as a child...

This hangs for just a moment.

As it does, the climbing sounds come to a stop.

BRENNEN

One more big jump.
(*beat, then, to get his attention...*)
Yllowwyn!

YLLLOWYYN

(*remembers himself*)
Yes? I'm ready!

BRENNEN

All right.

The rope creaks again...

BRENNEN

Here we--

--The rope SNAPS!

NARRATOR

The rope between them snapped! It was only thanks to truly super-human reflexes and grace that Yllowyyn was able to leap down to a rock below and grab the now tattered rope before it fell.

*

YLLOWYYN

(wind knocked out)

Oof! I've got you, Sir Brennen.

BRENNEN

(reining in panic)

I've no holds within reach.

NARRATOR

He tried for one anyway...

BRENNEN STRAINS.

BRENNEN

Gah!

NARRATOR

...And almost lost his very tenuous hold on the rope.

Some more rocks careen down below us.

BRENNEN

(still reining in panic but not as well now)

You'll need to pull me up a wee bit.

YLLOWYYN

Just hold on!

YLLOWYYN SUCKS IN A BIG BREATH.

We drop into a very introspective sound-space for Yllowyyn. Ambience quiets and muffles and score becomes distorted.

NARRATOR

And as Yllowyyn took a steadying breath to summon his strength, his eyes flicked once more to the Elven warship. As you're already quite aware, if he was to fail at his assigned task, several of his comrades - including their leader - would surely die. I'm sure

(MORE)

*

NARRATOR (cont'd)

you've had thoughts before, which you wished would
leave you be but simply refused to?

*

RY'Y

(Flashback)

*It's not too late, Yllowyyn! It's never too late to
return to your true home!*

*

*

*

*

*

NARRATOR

I should note, in passing, that the distance to this
frigate was just about swimmable for a healthy young
Elf.

*

*

We sit on this beat.

Waiting.

And waiting.

YLLOWYYN **GROANS** AND **GRUNTS** AND **STRAINS** AND THEN...

YLLOWYYN

Hyah!

Score and ambience slam back in.

BRENNEN

I've got it!

YLLOWYYN

Good! Just one more!

BRENNEN **HEAVES** ONE LAST TIME AND THEN **LAUGHS** WITH RELIEF.

YLLOWYYN

Hold still I'll tie you back on.

We hear rope fastening.

NARRATOR

As the Elf re-tethered himself to his climbing partner,
that partner gave him a warm and hearty clap on the
back.

Brennen practically pounds on Yllowyyn's back.

BRENNEN

Well done, Yllowyyn. Well done. I thought I'd seen my
last sunrise for sure.

YLLOWYYN

Let's try not to repeat that, shall we?

BRENNEN

Come, let's finish what we started.

YELLOWYIN

There's less rope now, so we'll need to stay closer
tog--

--In the distance, over by the racetrack, we hear a HUNTING HORN.

BRENNEN
Come on.

NARRATOR
And thus did they return to their assigned task with a renewed sense of urgency.

B42 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS

B42

We hear the same horn from our new sonic vantage point.

NARRATOR
Under the bleachers, Billy removed several cloth sacks from his satchels. They were sticky with some kind of grease. He scanned the wooden beams that held up the seats, and then headed straight for one of the thickest. He affixed one sack to its center.

*

F43 INT. STABLES

F43

The same horn again.

CRIER
Riders to your gates! All riders to your gates!

About a dozen horses begin trotting away from us.

GWEN
Be safe, love.

ARLENE
And you, my treasure. I'll see you on the ship.

GWEN
You'd damn well better.

They **kiss** very quickly.

One last horse trots away.

A44 EXT. RACETRACK

A44

One last time we hear the horn. We maybe even catch a faint echo of the **Crier** on the wind.

RY'Y

(out of patience)
That's it. Stand them up.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

She's hailing us, Th'ayyd.

RY'Y

Hm. Indeed she is.

NARRATOR

Ry'y lo-Th'yyt returned a distant wave across the track.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

What's she doing?

RY'Y

Shielding her eyes it seems. Perhaps she can't see them. Hmm.

A moment while Ry'y considers. ("Is this a trick?")

RY'Y

(reluctantly)
So be it. Stand them up.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

You heard her. On your feet.
(beat)
Stand I said.

We hear some intentionally slow shuffling around.

RY'Y

She's waved again. She sees.

C45 INT. RACETRACK - PAVILION

C45

REGAN

You got 'em?

JEN
Yeah I saw. You good?

REGAN
Got 'em.

JEN
God, Nia looks just like her Mom. Dad's eyes though.

REGAN
I count six Elves besides Ry'y. Two with Nia's parents
and four nearby.

JEN
Yeah, same.

Beat.

REGAN
(a reminder)
Nice weather we're having today, ain't it? Unseasonably
clear.

JEN
Right.

Jen's magic pad fades in...

E46 EXT. CLIFFSIDE

E46

On the cliffside, we hear hammering.

NARRATOR
And as a gentle fog began crawling in from the sea, up
the cliffside, Yllowyn was fastening a rather large
support pole into the rock. *

BRENNEN
You'll have to climb over towards me so I can reach. We
can't get far apart enough on this rope.

YlLOWYYN
Blast it all.

Hammering quickens for a moment, and then
stops.

YlLOWYYN **PULLS HARD ON SOMETHING.**

YlLOWYYN
This one's secure. I'm heading your way.

BRENNEN

Look. The fog.

YELLOWYYN

Jen. We haven't much time.

B47 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS

B47

NARRATOR

Under the seats, Billy had already attached each of eight cloth sacks to the eight largest beams. Next he removed a glass bottle from a satchel. Eight lengths of cord ran from this bottle to as many sacks. He placed the bottle on the ground, with his foot nearby. And waited.

*
*

F48 EXT. RACETRACK - STARTING GATE

F48

We're on the back of a trotting horse,
surrounded by a dozen other trotting horses.

As we pass some threshold, the large buzzing
crowd erupts into a roar.

NARRATOR

As Arlene saw and heard the size of the crowd
surrounding the racetrack, her eyes widened. Though her
face was already covered, she fidgeted with her mask,
trying to pull it even higher.

A49 EXT. RACETRACK

A49

The Elves now have to **shout** over the roaring
crowd.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

She's still not moving. What is she waiting for?

RY'Y

Keep your eyes open, Major. I mistrust this.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

Should I send one of the sergeants over?

RY'Y

Yes.

NARRATOR

Major Zyka'ad caught the eye of one of her cohort and
motioned him towards the Winner's Circle.

D50 EXT. RACETRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE

D50

NARRATOR

And over by the Winner's Circle, Nia noticed the Elf walking towards her with purpose. She looked towards the gruff men near the chest. She tried to take deep breaths, which nevertheless caught in her quivering jaw and came out shallow and strained.

E51 EXT. CLIFFSIDE

E51 *

We hear rushed hammering.

YELLOWYYN

How many nails is that?

BRENNEN

Three more to go.

And then in the distance, a horn blows again.

BRENNEN

Galadon help us.

The speed of the hammering intensifies.

52 EXT. RACETRACK - STARTING GATE

52

We almost feel the breath of snorting horses in our ears.

CRIER

Riders to your marks!

The horn blows again.

CRIER

Riders get ready!

The horn blows louder and in a different tone.

Almost a split second even before the horn, the horses explode into mad gallops!

The crowd erupts into its loudest cheers yet.

B53 EXT. RACETRACK - UNDER BLEACHERS

B53

NARRATOR

At the sound of the third horn, Billy brought his heel down hard on the bottle.

Glass shatters.

NARRATOR

He watched intently as a puddle leaked onto the ground.

Nothing for a moment.

NARRATOR

And then the puddle began to smoke. And finally, to his obvious relief, the ends of all the cords ignited.

We hear eight fuses light in quick succession and being crawling away from us.

NARRATOR

As soon as they did, he took off at a sprint.

Billy runs away.

D54 EXT. RACETRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE

D54

NARRATOR

And as Billy ran, Nia set off walking towards the chest and its stewards.

Footsteps. A rush of blood in our ears.

NARRATOR

Her heart was beating just as fast or faster than the sprinting young man's.

The footsteps come to a halt.

Horses gallop past us.

NARRATOR

Just as the horses blew by the Winner's Circle, a very frightened Nia got close enough to the chest to attract
(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

the attention of one of the gangsters guarding it. A particularly short one, as it happened.

GANGSTER

(not very helpful)

Help you?

A switchblade springs open.

NIA

(tries to hold it together)

Galadon's mercy be upon you.

NARRATOR

And as tears moistened her eyes, she quickly leaned in to kiss this short brigand on the cheek.

GANGSTER

Hey, who the fuck are you, la--

--Crossbow bolts fly in from multiple directions at once and just shish-kebab this dude.

NIA LETS OUT AN **ANGUISHED CRY**.

Some of the crowd notices and begins to scream as well.

NARRATOR

As the fallen knave's shocked comrades looked around for the assailants, one of them squared on Nia and drew his sword.

A sword is unsheathed, and immediately another crossbow is fired.

NARRATOR

But this one was immediately shot by the Sergeant that Major Zyka'ad had sent over. Now seeing at least one of their foes, the band of rogues turned to the Elf Knight, some with bows.

A hail of crossbow bolts flies in and strikes fleshy targets all around us.

NARRATOR

But Ry'y's many retainers made short work of these.

The crowd is panicking now.

NARRATOR

Of course, once the bolts were set in flight - which the Elves could have always chosen not to do - it was inevitable that they would strike some bystanders in the crowd.

NIA IS SCREAMING OUT A PRETTY **CONSTANT STREAM OF IMPOTENT PROTESTATIONS**.

NARRATOR

It is in this tumult, that the Elf nearest the Winner's Circle finally got a look at the brigand doomed by a kiss.

ELF SERGEANT

(shouting)
It's not her! It's a trick!

55 EXT. RACETRACK

55

RY'Y

Major! Kill them!

All SFX and ambience ramp down to SLOW MOTION.

NARRATOR

Now several things happened all at once here.

Hoofbeats thunder.

NARRATOR

One: The horses rounded the last turn into the completion of their first lap.

Two blades are unsheathed.

NARRATOR

Two: The Elves nearest the two preachers drew and raised blades over them.

A repeating crossbow cocks and readies.

NARRATOR

Three: The Elf nearest Nia squared on her and raised his crossbow.

An arrow buries in flesh, followed closely by a throwing axe.

NARRATOR

But four: This Elf's life was ended as Brennen and Yllowyyn emerged from the cliffside and fog and entered the fray. Then five: a half dozen hidden Elves took aim at the two new combatants, and should have had them dead-to-rights, if not for Six. And this is the critical one.

A brief tense pause...

Eight explosions ring out, shattering wood to splinters.

SFX and ambience slams back to real time, as people and horses scream.

NARRATOR

The cloth sacks left by Billy expelled air and heat so rapidly that they ripped the beams under the seats to shreds. *

Wood creaks and groans very badly.

NARRATOR

The raised seats could no longer hold the weight of their occupants. Within seconds, they gave way entirely.

The seats collapse!

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, the sound of this rapid demolition caught the attention of the Elves near the Winner's Circle...

A bow is shot twice and an axe is thrown.

NARRATOR

...Giving Brennen and Yllowyyn the chance to kill three of their opponents and then dive to cover behind the sturdy prize chest.

After the chaos of the wreck settles, there is a long moment of bruised and confused people coughing and moaning.

NARRATOR

And back over by the seats - just as Major Zyka'ad and her peer were returning to their senses - from out of the the fog and smoke, came flying a human-shaped blur, nimble as it was furious.

A knife plunges into a neck, and an artery
sprays onto the dusty ground.

REGAN

(an exertive grunt more than uttered words)
Mother FUCKER.

MILDRED **SCREAMS**.

As she screams, the crowd around us begins to
react. A bunch of bruised and banged up people
begin shuffling and shambling away.

MAJOR ZYKA'AD

She's he--

--MAJOR ZYKA'AD IS **CHOKED**.

There's a moment of scuffling as she
sputters and struggles. Then...

Three quick stabs.

REGAN

(whispered through gritted teeth)
Shut the fuck up.

MILDRED

(crying)
Ben, Ben, Ben, I can't see
you!

BEN

Milly? Milly!

MILDRED

Are you all right? Where are you?

NARRATOR

An Elf lined up a shot at Regan, but Regan was ready
for it.

A crossbow shoots, and a bolt hits a body.
Someone groans and falls.

NARRATOR

And then Regan stalked off hastily, on the hunt.

Someone scooches up next to us.

JEN

Hey.

MILDRED

Ah!

BEN

Who's there?

JEN

(kind but firm)

We're with Nia, we're here to help. But you gotta stay quiet and listen to us, okay?

MILDRED STARTS TO **CATCH HER BREATH...**

Several yards away, we hear Regan stab another Elf to death.

MILDRED HEARS TOO AND HER **BREATH QUICKENS** FOR A BEAT, BEFORE SHE **CALMS HERSELF DOWN AGAIN.**

...And then a crossbow fires off to the side and a bolt WHIPS past our head.

MILDRED **MUFFLES** HER OWN **EXCLAMATION OF DISMAY.**

Jen blasts some lightning in the direction the bolt came from. We hear someone over there fall.

BEN

Galadon above, who are you?

A horse gallops up to us, winnies and bucks, but eventually comes to a stop.

JEN

That's your ride. Let's get you going.

REGAN

Behind!

Regan shoots her crossbow and we hear it hit another Elf.

REGAN

Got 'em.

(To Mildred and Ben)

C'mon, gotta go, gotta go.

JEN

Arlene, you ready?

ARLENE

Yes. But get them up quickly, the horse is nervous even now.

JEN

I'm gonna give you a boost but you gotta swing the other leg over real quick, okay?

A crossbow bolt zips right past us.

JEN

Shit!

The horse whinnies and bucks.

REGAN

(to herself)

That'll be Ry'y lo-Th'yyt.

(out loud)

Move, move, move!

Another bolt buzzes us.

BEN

It won't hold still!

Regan returns fire with her crossbow.

REGAN

It can tell you're scared, you gotta calm down.

MILDRED

(not trying to calm down)

Oh well why didn't you say so?

Regan shoots again, just before another bolt whizzes by us. But this one sticks in flesh off to our right.

A horse cries out in pain and alarm.

REGAN

Gods dammit.

Regan shoots again.

ARLENE

Was that your other horse?

REGAN

We'll find another and catch up, you gotta go.

ARLENE

But wh--

JEN

--Go!

There's a tiny taser zap. Arlene's horse blows away at a gallop.

Another bolt flies past us in the horse's direction, but we continue hearing the horse run away uninterrupted.

One more bolt nearly wings us.

REGAN

Behind the horse!

As Jen and Regan run, Regan shoots once more.

The reach other other horse, who is panting and snorting and in obvious pain.

REGAN

Shit, right in the leg. Sorry, bud. Wrong place wrong time.

A knife opens a neck as the horse collapses to the ground.

REGAN

(whispers)
Stay down.

Another bolt smacks into the horse right behind us.

Regan shoots back, and then begins the reload cycle.

Both continue to talk quietly but excitedly.

REGAN

She's gotta reload. When she does, I'm gonna bait her into shooting. You watch where the bolt comes from and you let loose in that direction, got it?

JEN

Yeah.

REGAN

Give her everything you've got.

We hear a gathering of Jen's magic pad.

NARRATOR

As Jen concentrated deeply, she stole a peek over the back of the unfortunate horse. Or at least she tried to.

She's grabbed and pulled.

REGAN
Giddown, stupid.

JEN
I can't see anything.

REGAN
Neither can she, which explains us still breathing. But that won't last long. You just get ready to blast, then we run for another horse.

JEN
Wait, aren't there people over there?

REGAN
She doesn't care, and right now neither can you. This is her or us, anyone else is just luck. And luck ain't anybody's fault. Right? ...Right?

JEN
(*unsure*)
Right.

NARRATOR
And though Regan was not attuned to these things, I can tell you about the little bit of stored potential that Jen let dissipate into the ground at that moment.

REGAN
Okay, ready?

NARRATOR
Regan unclasped her hood, and draped it over one of her blades. She lifted it up over the horse.

This time we hear the crossbow fire. The bolt flies in and strikes metal, knocking Regan's sword away to clatter across the ground.

REGAN
Now!

A blast of electricity crackles towards Ry'y. We hear a body crash to the ground and roll, maybe ten yards away.

There's a moment of quiet. Jen and Regan are both kinda stunned. Then...

REGAN
Move.

NARRATOR

Jen took off running. And after a moment of uncertainty and almost consternation, Regan did the same.

They both take off at a sprint.

56 EXT. RACETRACK - WINNER'S CIRCLE

56

In the distance a horse gallops but it is nearing us VERY rapidly.

BRENNEN

Hyah!

Brennen throws an axe. It finds its mark.

BRENNEN

I think that's the last of them.

YLLLOWYYN

Help me with the ropes.

NARRATOR

Their foes dispatched, Brennen and Yllowyyn fastened several ropes to the now unguarded chest.

We hear some ropes being tied.

YLLLOWYYN

Here they come.

The horse is really close now.

NARRATOR

Yllowyyn stood at the ready, with a hook in his hand.

The horse blows by us.

NARRATOR

And as Arlene's mount blazed past, it was again thanks to his reflexes that Yllowyyn managed to hook a rope onto the harness that Arlene had affixed to it.

As the horse recedes, we hear the chest begin to drag along the ground.

NARRATOR

And thus the horse towed the chest behind it as it raced towards the cliff's edge.

We're dead on top of the hoofbeats now.

NARRATOR

Now this next part is a great credit to Arlene as a rider. Though Jen's fog undeniably helped, it is still not many equestrians who could intentionally drive their mount straight off a cliff.

ARLENE

Hyah!

We hear some gravel thrown as hooves leave the ground...

57 EXT. CLIFFSIDE

57

For a moment, we hear nothing but some wind rushing by us, as we're in free-fall. And then...

NARRATOR

And after a heart-stopping split-second of being airborne...

...A half-ton of muscle falls into a taut rope net.

NARRATOR

...the beast and its passengers fell into a very sturdy fishing net.

The horse screams in terror.

MILDRED, BEN, AND ARLENE **ALL SCREAM ALONG WITH IT IF WE'RE BEING HONEST.**

But on either side of us, two pulleys wheel gently.

NARRATOR

And as the net descended, so did it pull up on two ropes, strung over a wheel on each of the poles Brennen and Yllowyyn had affixed to the rock face. And so did each rope pull up on a very heavy bundle of sandbags down on the beach. So heavy in fact, that after a brief moment of terrible speed, the net's descent to the beach slowed to be quite pleasant and peaceful.

THE PEOPLE STOP SCREAMING.

The horse is still losing its shit though.

NARRATOR

The horse was, naturally, still kicking like mad -
might've helped you if you'd done that sooner, friend -
but with its legs dangling through the bottom of the
net, it could do no harm with all its might.

58 EXT. WINNER'S CIRCLE

58

We cut back up to the top of the cliff.

NIA

(recovering from her earlier screams and sobs)
Is everyone all right?

MILDRED

(shouting up from below)
Nia? Is that you love?

BEN

(shouting up from below)
Oh, thank Galadon!

YELLOWYYN

Is anyone hurt?

ARLENE

(shouting up from below)
I don't think so.

YELLOWYYN

Nia, you have to jump. The net will soon be too far
away.

MILDRED

(shouting up from below)
Who in Galadon's Name are these people?!

BRENNEN

Where are the others?

ARLENE

(shouting up from below)
Their poor horse was--

--SHE'S INTERRUPTED BY NIA **SCREAMING** AS SHE JUMPS OFF THE
CLIFF.

Beat.

ARLENE

(shouting up from below)
 Their poor horse was shot. They had to look for another.

BRENNEN

Dammit.
(A moment of deliberation)
 So be it. Yllowyyn - You go down with them. Send the net back up, be sure to cut some of the bags like Jen said so it'll still descend for us. Get the chest on the sled and push it out of sight. Then come back up if you can.

YLLOWYYN

I will.

BRENNEN

(quickly)
 And I never fully thanked you before.

YLLOWYYN

(jogging backwards)
 I expect repayment, so you'd better stay alive.

NARRATOR

And with that, the Elf took a perfect athlete's dive off the cliff, and into the net.

The pulley descends for several beats and then finally stops. At the same time, we hear a horse approaching.

NARRATOR

And it wasn't long after that Brennen heard the sound of another horse approaching. He readied his axe, but soon recognized Regan and Jen.

The horse comes to a stop beside us.

JEN

Did the net work?

BRENNEN

Perfectly.

JEN GIVES A **RELIEVED SIGH/GIGGLE**.

We hear exactly one person dismount the horse.

REGAN

Yllowyyn?

BRENNEN

I sent him down with the others to help keep the chest out of sight. Thought you should know he saved my life while we were climbing.

REGAN

Good. Good.

BRENNEN

The net should be coming back up any minute.

Beat.

NARRATOR

And as Brennen, Regan, and Jen waited for their conveyance to return, some of the fog around the cliff's edge began to disperse. And then the carnage that surrounded the winner's circle became clear.

Bodies lay shot through, trampled, and bloodied all around. None wore fine clothes. Many looked as ragged and threadbare as Regan was when you met her. And quite a few were younger even than Jen.

Jen closed her eyes and took steadying breaths. Brennen bowed his proud head in a silent prayer. But Regan... Regan stared at the faces of the dead, her eyes burning and her jaw twitching.

The pulley starts to wheel.

QUICK TRANSITION TO:

59 INT. RED REAVER - BELOW DECK - A LITTLE WHILE AGO

59

We're below deck on the wooden pirate vessel we hinted at before. Above us, crew members are going about their work but that's pretty faint from where we are.

NARRATOR

Now, I regret to inform you that in this moment everything went very badly astray. And I promise we shall return to that bit of misfortune just as soon as there is more to be said about it.

*

But first, I must return you to the boat anchored off the bay. There, Nelson was looking after a child when no one else could or would.

The infant starts crying.

NELSON

Aw, come on. Don't tell me you need a change.

NELSON **SNIFFS**.

NELSON

Hoo. Lucky break. What do you need then? *

NARRATOR

So when that child began crying, Nelson made a very simple gesture of kindness - a playful, waggled finger in front of its face, to distract from whatever was causing the disturbance. *

NELSON

Uhh...heeeere, baby baby. *

The baby coos and giggles. *

NARRATOR

And this babe-in-arms made a very simple gesture in return - one quite common for its ilk. He wrapped his tiny hand around Nelson's finger.

The score here is mysterious, contemplative...

NARRATOR

And Nelson could not help but recall the last night's dream, and of a similar gesture, by a very dissimilar creature. *

...and then it's revelatory?

NARRATOR

His brow furrowed, and a look of recollection crossed his face.

Replay:

YOUNG GIRL

(with some dreamy reverb)
My enemy, Nelson, is nearer than you can possibly imagine.

NARRATOR

But this did not look like any enemy. The babe was, as you know, sweet. And vulnerable above all else.

The baby coos again.

NARRATOR

Nelson shook his head as though trying to jumble loose an errant thought. But soon his face was even more

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

grave than it had been before. For some thoughts are not so easily dislodged.

NELSON

Ookay. Sometimes a dream's just a dream, right?

NARRATOR

And then the babe began gesturing towards the small escritoire in the corner of the cabin. Where Nelson had stored the books from Armstrongard's library.

NELSON

You...wanna look at books?

Nelson walks over to the desk.

NARRATOR

Nelson took out the books that he and his friends had acquired.

NELSON

The one with the pictures maybe? That might be good for you.

The baby cries.

NARRATOR

And then the infant began to reach for one book in particular.

NELSON

On The Totemic Traditions of Primitive Iorden?

The baby coos and giggles with joy, as the score reaches a climax.

NELSON

Uhhh dude, what *are* you?

END OF CHAPTER.