

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 9
"A Handful of Bodyguards"

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PART TWO:

5 INT. LULU'S ALEHOUSE - CONTINUOUS FROM THE END OF PART ONE

5

(Same ambiance as the end of the last episode.)

REGAN

I got enough to start us on a plan.

NARRATOR

If you'll recall, the exiled queen and her court had just learned a f--a...lot about their new surroundings. Some of it through clever deduction, and the rest through some very direct albeit unpleasant channels.

REGAN

We learned there's two gangs in this town, yeah?

YELLOWYYN

The Rosebuds and the Mulberrys, if I recall.

REGAN

They're always at each others' throats, and this town's barely holding it together. Which makes me think they're the *only* two gangs in town. 'Cause if there were more, there'd pr--

BRENNEN

--There'd probably be more peace.

REGAN

(*impressed*)
Right.

NIA

I'm sorry, you're suggesting more gangs would keep the peace?

BRENNEN

Aye, in a wretched sort of way. They would all have their own wee fiefdoms, but none would be strong enough to rule alone. You'd see skirmishes on the borders now and then, but none would try in earnest to destroy the others, because an endless stalemate is safer.

There's a beat of quiet surprise.

BRENNEN

(*realizing this as he speaks*)
It's...not...terribly different from the Great Houses of Iorden.

REGAN

(somewhere between an aside and a dig)

Finally he starts to get it.

(to the whole group)

Anyway I think those two gangs put a big old crack right down the middle of town. If we play it smart, we can wedge ourselves in there.

BILLY

Where, in the big old crack?

REGAN

Yeah I heard it while I was saying it. But we gotta think fast, before that shithead Bill gets back.

This next exchange should be off to the side and hushed.

JANEY

I don't know, Lulu. I did embarrass him in town.

LULU

For the last time, Janey - it's nothing to do with you. He was sore about how the brawl turned out and you were the closest thing he could take it out on.

JANEY

Maybe.

LULU

You know it won't get any better, right?

BILL

(from outside)

Alright you rats! Come on out so we can give you a piece of our mind!

NARRATOR

Vanderberg's men shared a look, then calmly made their way towards the door.

6 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE LULU'S ALEHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

6

We're out on the main thoroughfare, but it's closer to night now.

RANGER 3

Figures you Mulberry curs would want to ruin the only bar in town. Does Cliff know you're out here stirring up shit at Lulu's? Not sure he'd approve.

NARRATOR

The rest of the bar room's inhabitants gathered near the windows facing the street where they saw a crowd of nearly three dozen men, all with crossbows, some with torches, some with pitchforks.

BILL

I'm stirring up shit? Y'all stood by while I got shot at with Lulu's bow. And you can bet your ass Mister Weston'd want me to stop y'all taking over Lulu's .

RANGER 1

Sorry you can't see so well, always forget the brown in your eyes is actual shit. We were having a drink! You were just looking for an excuse to start something on account of some filly trouble.

BILL

If you weren't scheming to take over Lulu's, then why do you have an Elf in there?

THE CROWD **MURMURS**.

NARRATOR

Taking a quick read on the crowd that seemed suddenly riled by his presence, Yllowyyn attempted to hide beneath a table. But at an average height for an adolescent Elf, he was a good foot too tall to fit comfortably.

BILL

That's right, you worms, we know you're scheming up something with the Elves. Don't think we didn't know Vanderberg traveled out east. From what we hear, he seems to be in high spirits. Got anything to do with what y'all have been chatting about with that Elf and his posse?

VANDERBERG

As clever as you think you are, you really are just a fool.

NARRATOR

A crowd of people came down the street, Vanderberg at their head.

VANDERBERG

Neither organization has claim to Lulu's Alehouse, nor do we intend to change that.

BILL

Then explain why I nearly got my head skewered by Lulu's crossbow and three of your men were ready to back up the one who took the shot.

VANDERBERG

I don't know for sure but it's likely you were being as much of a horse's ass as you usually are, Bill.

(yelling)

That about the way of it, Lulu?

LULU

Just about. Everyone could see it was an accident. It were Janey who pulled the lever - after Bill startled her.

NARRATOR

At this, Vanderberg's head snapped towards the alehouse in surprise. Bill, taking this momentary distraction as an opportunity, reached for his crossbow.

Crossbow shoots and hits flesh.

NARRATOR

In a blur, Vanderberg drew his crossbow and shot Bill in his shooting shoulder, all before the man could level his own crossbow.

BILL

ARGHHHH!

VANDERBERG

You always had funny ideas, Bill, but thinking you could draw on me has got to be your funniest yet.

BILL

THIS ISN'T OVER. I DEMAND A DUEL.

NARRATOR

At this outburst, the amassed crowd grew still, awaiting the response, anticipating more violence.

VANDERBERG

There you go one upping yourself all over again. But if you insist then I agree. Not to worry, I'll make it quick as I can so you won't have to worry about your sorry life much further.

BILL

Then you accept?

VANDERBERG

I do.

BILL

Then I name Weston as my proxy.

WESTON

And I accept.

NARRATOR

A man detached himself from the shadow of an awning across the street from Lulu's and stepped into the torch light, smiling at Vanderberg. The crowd, having grown to include those noticing the commotion and wanting to know what was going on, grew uneasy, as these two imposing figures now stared at each other.

7 INT. LULU'S ALEHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

7

BRENNEN

I imagine that's the leader of the second gang.

NIA

Given that crossbows appear to be the weapon of choice, speed appears to be the key to a successful duel.

REGAN

And we know Vanderberg's fast, and this other guy seems more than happy to duel him. So he must be pretty fast himself.

JEN

Is that gonna be a problem for us?

REGAN

No. I think if anything I hear opportunity knocking.

YELLOWYYN

(on the other side of room)

Someone tell me when I can come out please? My feet are very badly asleep.

8 EXT. STREET OUTSIDE LULU'S ALEHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

8

VANDERBERG

Well...been a while, Weston.

WESTON

If I didn't know better, I'd think you were ducking me.

VANDERBERG

We both agreed to leave the town split. Seemed no point in breaking that deal.

WESTON

Yet here we stand.

VANDERBERG

That we do. Suppose you put this together?

WESTON

Heard maybe you were getting a little too settled, like maybe you needed a reminder of why the town's split. I'm still here, Les, and still will be after you finish another of your schemes.

VANDERBERG

Like the scheme you had about having one of your lieutenants sleeping with the only person in the town with a mind for sums?

WESTON

Doesn't sound too far off from your scheme to head out east to make a deal with the fuckin' *White Forest* before the next Elf visit. Guess we'll see if you're still around to make good on that deal when they get here in two days.

NARRATOR

Vanderberg's eyes widened in surprise.

WESTON

Oh, interesting. You really didn't know they were coming so soon, did you? Huh. Maybe you're up to something else. But I know you've got a plan. Let's cut the act and finally have it out. One last duel, that only one of us walks away from.

REGAN

Or...

NARRATOR

Regan emerged from the saloon.

REGAN

...you both end up killing each other and some loose catapult like Bill ends up in charge - fucks the whole thing. I've got information on something very VERY valuable. You can either split the value for both your gangs, or one of you will take the other out and become the only boss in town.

VANDERBERG

Hey, this wasn't the deal!

REGAN

Deal's still on, just the conditions have changed. You're no stranger to that, right Vanderberg?

VANDERBERG

I kept my end, you still--

REGAN

--Doesn't matter. Here's what's going to happen: you two, and only you two, are gonna go with my squire to make the pick up. You'll leave at dawn tomorrow, that way you'll have enough time to pick it up and get back here before the Elves arrive.

WESTON

And why should I trust this isn't some ploy you're working with Vanderberg?

REGAN

Because the best actor in Armstrungard couldn't fake that vein he's about to pop in his head.

WESTON

(chuckles)

I reckon you're right. But I ain't goin' anywhere til I know what we're picking up.

REGAN

The White fucking Lady. Genuine article.

WESTON

(laughing)

Right, you lot managed to get across the mountains on the promise of...

NARRATOR

But as Weston glanced at Vanderberg, he saw no amusement, just determination to get what he was owed. As well as the vein in his forehead, growing to double the size.

WESTON

...Well shit. Suppose that's worth a trip.

VANDERBERG

(through clenched teeth)

Fine. We'll both go.

REGAN

Right then, we'll see you tomorrow. Oh and by the way, Lulu's is still neutral ground, but if you start trouble, you'll have to answer to me or one of my knights.

NARRATOR

At this, Brennen and Yllowyyn stepped out of the bar and took positions behind Regan.

REGAN

Also, if any fighting between your two gangs happens while their dads are out of town, we'll get word to the drop and the deal is off. Oh, and Vanderberg - lose the babysitters, yeah? Me and my crew have got every reason to stick around now.

NARRATOR

The gangsters into whose care Vanderberg had entrusted our party looked to their superior for guidance. After a brief deliberation, he tersely cocked his head in the opposite direction from the inn, and his underlings stepped away.

REGAN

Alright! You all should run on home to get plenty of sleep, some of you need to be up bright and early.

NARRATOR

The crowd began dispersing, confused by the lackluster and sudden conclusion of the night's events. Weston and Vanderberg lingered a short while longer than most, eyeing each other, before they both turned away and made their way back to their respective sides of town.

9 INT. LULU'S ALEHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

9

NARRATOR

Regan, Brennan, and Yllowyyn re-entered the barroom.

BRENNEN

That seemed to go well, Your Grace.

YLLOWYYN

Yes, a well-baited trap if I may say.

REGAN

I'm not counting on anything just yet, but it's a start. Billy, I just put your ass down as collateral. You're sure you're up for what we talked about?

BILLY

(maybe a little overconfident)
Don't worry, I got this. Besides, our crew doesn't have a bigger pain in the ass than me.

REGAN

Right. Annnnd speaking of...
(rushing to the bathroom)
Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck.

10 INT. LULU'S ALEHOUSE - CELLAR - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

10

NARRATOR

As the High Queen of the Human Realms of Iorden rushed off to the latrine once more, a man sat alone in the cellar, crouched amongst casks of ale and whiskey.

Footsteps head down the stairs.

THE HEEL

That you, Lulu?

NELSON

My name's Nelson. Lulu gave me your food to bring you.

THE HEEL

You can leave it at the bottom of the stairs.

The footsteps come to rest.

NELSON

Hey man, are...are you okay?

THE HEEL

Am I okay?

NELSON

Yeah. This place seems kind of, uh...hostile.

NARRATOR

Cautiously, the large man stepped out from his hiding spot, and got a good look at the rather diminutive figure standing at the base of the cellar stairs with a tray of bread and beans.

THE HEEL

(still suspicious)
I know how to handle myself.

NELSON

Yeah. Still though. You know. What's your name?

THE HEEL

Look, I don't know what your angle is but I prefer to be left alone.

NELSON

There's no angle. Just...as my dad would say, you're family. Feel me?

THE HEEL

If you're one of those who thinks just because I do Carl's show for money that maybe I'll do *anything* for money, let me tell you right now--

NELSON

--Oh, no no no, gross dude.

(Beat - better clarify!)

I mean not gross in like a homophobic way, gross in like a fetishizing way, and in a "I'm sixteen" way. That's not...yeah, no.

THE HEEL

Tell me why you're still here or else please leave me alone.

NELSON

Because my friends need your help even if they don't know it yet. And because I know what it's like to be a spec of pepper in a sea of salt.

THE HEEL

(not convinced)

That so?

NELSON

Where I come from, my skin color is the one everyone seems to be having a problem with.

THE HEEL

This is paint. Washes off.

NELSON

Right. But does it, though?

THE HEEL

Where do you come from?

NELSON

Really far away, dude. There's this huge empire called the U.S.A. It enslaved my ancestors, up until my grandparents' grandparents. Nowadays...they tell us to get over it, but I think they're the ones not over it.

THE HEEL

They got Elves in Yuessay?

NELSON

(chuckling - never thought of it like that)

Huh. That's a really good question. ...We've got something close enough.

(beat)

What's your name?

THE HEEL

Folks 'round here call me Henry.

NELSON

But is that what you call yourself?

THE HEEL

No, but people round here can pronounce it. So it's easier.

NELSON

Well tell me your name then, gimme a shot.

A beat.

THE HEEL

O'an Ritsl.

NELSON

That's dope. Tzan Reetsil you said?

O'AN

Not quite. But I do appreciate the effort.

NELSON

I'll keep trying.

O'AN

Are your friends like you?

NELSON

Eh...not exactly. Two of them are from where I'm from but none of them have my same ancestors. But...they're really trying to be on the right side of things.

O'AN

Even the Elf?

NELSON

Yeah, actually. He didn't used to be, but he shot another Elf over it. A General.

O'AN

No shit. How come?

NELSON

The leader of our crew - the short one, with the knives. She...saw something. Murders. A lot of murders actually.

O'AN

I bet I can guess who it was got murdered.

NELSON

(uncomfortable giving this news)
Yeah. Yeah, bet you can. I'm...sorry. But it changed her. It changed a lot of them honestly. And now they all wanna get back at the Elves.

O'AN

(Considers a beat)
Why do you think they need my help?

NELSON

Because you've for sure noticed things about this town that those nice white ladies upstairs haven't.

O'AN

Can you tell me what they're planning?

NELSON

It's probably easier if you come upstairs and hear it yourself? The last step of the plan gets over on the Rangers and the White Forest.

O'AN

Ha! Okay, you got me - I've gotta hear this at least.

11 INT. LULU'S ALEHOUSE - NIGHT

11

REGAN

So are you all just shitting yourselves constantly?

LULU

(What a weird question)
No...

NARRATOR

Admittedly, the Queen wasn't starting her planning with the most pressing of details.

JEN

I think you might have like a food sensitivity or something? Or maybe you're not eating enough fiber.

REGAN

Why do you even have this stuff? What lunatic decided to eat it?

Nelson emerges from the cellar with O'an.

NELSON

Hey y'all. You know Tzan?

LULU

'Course

NARRATOR

He returned their greetings with a very polite but not excessively friendly nod.

NELSON

I think he should help us with our plan.

REGAN

I think you're probably right. That's good thinking, Nelson. Tzan was it?

O'AN

O'an.

REGAN

O'an. How's it hanging? I'm Regan, Aeron Regan. The, ah...the fuckin'...

BRENNEN

Champion of the Civilized Peoples and High Queen of the Human Realms of Iorden.

REGAN

That's it.

O'AN

(wry)
Civilized, huh?

He gives that just a second to hang in the air...

JANEY

(sniffly but recovering)
And I haven't properly introduced myself to any of y'all. Janey. Howdy.

REGAN

Nice to meet you, Janey.

O'AN

(threading a needle - polite but not familiar)
Ma'am.

JANEY

You put on a good show in the square before. I almost had fun for ten minutes, watching Bill get embarrassed like that.

O'AN
Just doing what I'm paid for.

JANEY
Regan, was it? That was...well, you got a lot of guts.
I can't thank you enough for stopping them coming in
here. Can I put your next drink on my tab?

REGAN
I'd like that.
(a probing silence)
But...I've gotta ask for something more important. I
need to know all I can about this town.

JANEY
Oh yeah? Why's that?

REGAN
(some swagger to this)
So I can get rich.

LULU, JANEY, AND O'AN ALL SHARE A **CHUCKLE**.

LULU
Guts indeed. But that'll only get you so far 'round
here.

REGAN
So why don't you tell me what else I'm missing? C'mon
I'll introduce you to my crew.

They head over to the Party's table.

*Note: This "cloak" exchange can happen while they walk
and should be played as a throwaway, but it should
definitely be intelligible to the audience.*

JANEY
I love this, uh...what do you call this?

REGAN
My cloak?

JANEY
May I?
(beat)
Auch, you can't find craftsmanship like this out here.

They arrive at the table.

Regan clocks...something, but leaves it be
for now.

REGAN

Right...So this is my crew.

NARRATOR

Look, as you may have realized by now, this story has quite a few heroes, and you already know their names. So I'll spare you the ritual of saying them all aloud. Suffice it to say, once introductions were made, planning began in earnest.

REGAN

Okay. So everyone here's either a Mulberry or a Rosebud.

LULU

'Cept for me.

JANEY

And me.

O'AN

And me. And Carl, now I think of it.

LULU

Can I get anyone anything else to--

REGAN

--Another rancher's stew. I'll open a tab.

LULU

Suit yourself...

JANEY

I reckon there's a fair number of folks who aren't one gang or the other. But all the Rangers are anyway.

O'AN

Which is to say - everyone who takes money to kill.

REGAN

So that's the racket. And who do they take money from?

JANEY

Anyone who needs to hire an army. Usually Elves.

REGAN

Why would an Elf need crossbows for hire? What about the Knights of the Wood?

LULU

As it sounds like you know too well, it's quite a trip from the White Forest. And turns out the Th'ar lo-Hyy'l ain't at the beck and call of every middling Elf who gets a farm charter.

REGAN

Interesting.

O'AN

So the Buds and the Blossoms fight over the contracts. But never too hard. They gotta make this shithole seem orderly and dependable, else they're worried their masters will take their coin elsewhere.

JANEY

And word is there's a real fancy pants Elf coming through in a couple days' time with a big juicy contract.

NARRATOR

One would have had to know Regan well and be watching her closely to notice her muscles tense in this moment. But tense they did.

REGAN

What do we know about this Elf? Suppose just...for example that a friend of yours was...whatever the opposite of welcome is in the White Forest.

O'AN

I think the opposite of welcome in the White Forest is Orc. But go on about your "friend."

REGAN

Would you tell that friend to lay low while this Elf was in town?

O'AN

If that's what your friend's worried about, then they're in luck.

REGAN

Oh yeah?

JANEY

This particular Elf has kind of made a name for himself telling anyone who'll listen that the White Forest is too big for its britches.

LULU

Yeah, written a few things what's ruffled feathers. The phrase "tiptoeing up to the line of treason" was thrown around.

REGAN

We might just need to meet with this guy.

O'AN

Yeah, well...you'll have to do that meeting on your own.

JANEY

Him coming is why Weston and Vanderberg are so on edge, and so keen to get their hands on that statue of yours. And it's also probably the only reason those two scuffles stopped before they burned half of Main Street.

REGAN

Right. Now Vanderberg and Weston - suppose, just for a second, they were out of the picture. What's that do to the situation?

NARRATOR

A look of genuine apprehension passed between the Queen's newfound local contacts.

JANEY

You got guts, but please don't be stupid.

O'AN

As much as I'd like to see 'em both dead, they're fast. Really fast. A thousand young bowslingers each have tried to challenge 'em, and not one in those two thousand is gonna get to grow old.

REGAN

But what if we got 'em out of the picture without fighting 'em?

O'AN

How you fixing to do that?

REGAN

Let's just say the drop-off they're going to tomorrow is gonna keep 'em away longer than they're expecting. What's that buy us?

O'AN

They cast long shadows, those two. It wouldn't be enough to get them out of the way. You'd have to turn all their men against them, which is gonna be no small feat.

REGAN

But suppose we managed to do that. Then what?

O'AN

Well...I reckon one of two things. Either another leader presents themselves, and the town rallies around them, or else no one does, and the town burns to the ground, Elves be damned.

JANEY

There's no one in either gang right now who can match Vanderberg or Weston.

LULU

And I can't afford to have this town burn. So if you really are fixing to get rid of those two, you'd better find a fitting replacement and fast.

REGAN

What if I was the replacement?

O'AN **SNORTS.**

LULU

No offense, dear. They'll never trust an outsider.

REGAN

What about an outsider with more money than this town's ever seen?

JANEY

(puts it together)

You were never gonna give Vanderberg or Weston that statue, were you? You're gonna fence it yourself, while they're gone. Hmm. Guts and brains.

REGAN

Would that work?

O'AN

It might. If there's one thing Rangers worship more than their bosses it's silver.

REGAN

So we need to figure how to turn the Rangers against their bosses.

Beat.

LULU

I'll put up a pot of coffee.

END OF PART TWO.