

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD  
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 8  
"A Change of Scenery"

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## PART TWO:

10 INT. CAVES UNDER THE BLACK MOUNTAINS - DARK

10

We're in the cave where we left Mag Uidhir et al. at the end of the last episode. There's at least one torch burning.

Very importantly, the breathing of a huge creature is still present.

As before, some coins skitter to the ground.

NARRATOR

Traft, Mag Uidhir, and Arden - you'll recall - were in a bit of tight spot. Deep below the Black Mountains, they had awakened...something. It was certainly extremely large.

MAG UIDHIR

Arden. You need to stay very, very calm.

NARRATOR

And given the scaled talon it had begun to reveal, and the enormous hoard of treasure amongst which it had until very recently slumbered, Mag Uidhir had a reasonable suspicion as to what it was.

MAG UIDHIR

I believe we are in the presence of a dragon.

NARRATOR

Arden the Annihilator nodded his approval, steeled his resolve, and drew his dagger.

A dagger is unsheathed.

MAG UIDHIR

No, Arden. Just walk away. Very carefully.

NARRATOR

But Arden was already stalking his way up the wrist that was revealing itself from beneath a pile of silver trinkets.

MAG UIDHIR

Arden...

There's a big, fast rush of air!

NARRATOR

In the blink of an eye, another talon slammed into the wrist - the way a man might swat a fly but scaled up to a monstrous size.

Arden skitters back along the cabin floor.

NARRATOR

A lesser warrior than Arden would have never dodged the strike, let alone retain his footing. Unfortunately...

A gigantic appendage whips past us.

NARRATOR

...He did not notice the backswipe of the tail.

It hits Arden. Hard.

NARRATOR

This blow sent him airborne, to crash into a marble column some thirty yards away.

Off to our left - a gnarly crunch.

NARRATOR

The blow would've killed a normal man. Arden was merely knocked out cold.

TRAFT

Oh, to Selbirin with this.

We hear a three people run away.

NARRATOR

At the sight of this, Traft and his soldiers beat a hasty retreat from the cavern. Mag Uidhir, however, stayed put.

Coins and treasure continues to shuffle all around until it starts to sound like an avalanche.

We're hearing the dragon rise from prone to up on its haunches. And we feel their size every step of the way. (They're about as big as a large commercial jet.)

When they speak, their voice is tremendous, booming and huge. And also androgynous. Furthermore, it's important that the breathing sound we've heard is consistent, whether the dragon is speaking or not.

DRAGON

Who dares disturb my slumber? I shall burn your flesh from your bones, and suckle upon your marrow!

MAG UIDHIR

Great and venerable Dragon. The disturbance was an accident, and I humbly beg your forgiveness. Also for the rude behavior of the others with me.

DRAGON

Be gone from here at once!

MAG UIDHIR

What will you accept in exchange for safe passage?

DRAGON

Accept?

MAG UIDHIR

Yes, what do you want?

DRAGON

*(taken aback by the question)*

I...want to burn the flesh from your bones and suckle upon your marrow.

MAG UIDHIR

We seek something here. There must be something you would accept in return.

DRAGON

*(as menacing as possible)*

Do not trifle with me, riverling!

NARRATOR

The Dragon opened their mouth and flared the plumage around their neck.

We hear an organic - almost insectoid but of course very large - clicking sound.

NARRATOR

And inside their gaping maw, literal sparks began to fly.

MAG UIDHIR

I've known Dragons in my time, oh venerable one. They have always been supremely rational creatures.

The clicking stops.

NARRATOR

The sparks died down, and the plumage receded.

MAG UIDHIR

I'm certain there's some bargain we can strike.

DRAGON

You've...known more of my kind?

MAG UIDHIR

Aye, I've known, one at least.

DRAGON

You will tell me about them. I must insist.

11 EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DEEP NIGHT

11

NARRATOR

Not so far away as the raven flies - but quite far away as the mole burrows...

We're in the middle of a white-out blizzard.  
The winds are so intense that everyone has to shout to be heard.

Connor is screaming the whole time.

VANDERBERG

Y'ALL, WE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS WIND FOR A BIT. OR SOMEONE'S GONNA GET FROSTBITE.

NARRATOR

...Our heroes' quest to reach the western part of the continent had proven quite unpleasant. The inclement weather which, you'll recall, had made an overland route untenable, had only gotten worse. It was now making the path to the underground route treacherous as well.

REGAN

*(sarcastic)*

GOOD THING THERE'S A BUNCH OF INNS NEARBY, THEN.

VANDERBERG

THERE'S AN OLD HERMIT OVER THAT RIDGE, GOT A CABIN.  
HE'LL LET US WARM UP FOR A FEW.

12 INT. JETHRO'S CABIN - NEARLY CONTINUOUS

12

We're inside a cabin. Just outside the blizzard  
rages, and the walls creak from the wind. But  
inside is the quiet of the grave.

There's a VERY URGENT series of knocks on the  
door.

VANDERBERG

*(barely audible through door)*

Jethro! Jethro, you old coot, you in there?

NARRATOR

You may recall this particular cabin. But if you do,  
then your memories of it will not be especially warm.

Beat.

VANDERBERG

*(barely audible)*

We gotta come in!

Another beat.

VANDERBERG

*(barely audible)*

Sorry 'bout this!

Van Der Berg kicks the door in. The blizzard  
outside comes with it.

Eight sets of footsteps hurry inside, one of  
them carrying the crying Connor.

VANDERBERG **STRAINS** AGAINST THE DOOR.

VANDERBERG

Help me shut this thing!

BRENNEN

Right.

BRENNEN AND VANDERBERG BOTH **PUSH** TOGETHER.

The door closes - mostly. It still slams open and shut a little.

VANDERBERG

Now hold it down while I nail it shut.

Van Der Berg works quickly to drive four nails through the door.

FINALLY the storm is locked outside.

Things have calmed down, except for Connor.

VANDERBERG

Will someone please shut him up?

Arlene's lullaby plays through Jen's iPhone

Connor settles down.

VANDERBERG

Wonder where old Jethro is. I have a hard time believing he finally bought the farm after all these years. On the other hand, I guess I don't.

(Beat)

Well in any case, I got us here and did the door. Someone else can get the hearth going.

YLOWYYN

I will.

We hear Yllowyyn walk to one side of the room, and strike steel against flint.

BRENNEN

Should we prepare to stay the night?

YLOWYYN **BLOWS LIGHTLY** TO FUEL A FIRE.

VANDERBERG

Not sure. Gonna have to shoot from the hip a little.

Under the next few lines, we'll hear Yllowyyn futzing with some kindling.

REGAN

(never heard the phrase)

Shoot from the hip?

VANDERBERG

Wing it. Play it by ear. You never seen the way a bowslinger shoots, out west?

NARRATOR

Regan shook her head "no."

The fire begins to catch and crackle. It will steadily grow under the next several lines.

VANDERBERG

The best ones don't have to raise their crossbows to eye level to hit their marks. They just...

*(mimes it)*

Thhhp! ...Shoot from the hip.

REGAN

Are you one of the best ones?

VANDERBERG

I'm all right.

REGAN

Interesting.

NARRATOR

Regan did her best not to grimace as she flexed the muscles of her wounded arm. It hung in its sling, just above hip level.

We hear Yllowyyn make his way around the cabin, lighting wall lamps as he goes.

VANDERBERG

To answer your question, if the storm lets up at all tonight, I strongly suggest we hoof it then. It's less than a mile to the cave entrance we're using. Otherwise, we leave by first light, blizzard or no. Wait any longer, the cave's liable to snow over. Then we're well and truly screwed.

NARRATOR

By, now Yllowyyn had lit enough lamps to render the party's current lodgings visible.

BILLY

*(startled and genuinely disturbed)*

Yo what the fuck is up with that painting?

VANDERBERG

Yeah, he's had that for a while. Old codger has some strange tastes you ask me. But then what do I know about fine art?

BILLY

I'm gonna...turn it around or something. Those eyes are bugging me out.



Billy walks over and takes the painting off the wall.

BILLY

Hey yo there's like a...little cubby back here. Behind the painting. Just a...totally normal, not at all sketchy hole in the wall behind the creep-ass painting.

VANDERBERG

Anything in it?

BILLY

Uhh...looks like some kind of book.

NELSON

A book?

NIA

A book?

Nelson and Nia walk over.

VANDERBERG

No supplies, huh? All right, somebody gather up all the blankets lying around. And I know the old man had a larder in here somewhere, maybe hidden. So help me look for it.

REGAN

That gonna be a problem? If this guy turns out not to be dead?

VANDERBERG

I'll leave behind some money, don't worry.  
(then, reading Regan's subtext...)  
And if it came to it, no. Jethro might give you the willies but he was very old.

NIA

This looks hand-bound.

The book creaks open.

NIA

And hand-written. And this is a peculiar style of leather. Can't say I've ever seen its like before.

JEN

Looks like it's a diary or something. Do you know what these charts and symbols mean?

NARRATOR

Seeing at last what Jen was pointing to, Nia hastily closed the book.

The book slams shut.

NIA

We should not be here. This Jethro may have been old, but he was dangerous. Or at least he kept very dangerous company.

VANDERBERG

What do you mean, dangerous?

NIA

There is Templar magic in this book.

VANDERBERG

You mean those spooky geezers with the hoods?

NIA

The same.

VANDERBERG

Like I said. As soon as the snows let up we're gone.

NIA

*(quietly)*

Nelson, you should hang onto this book. But take care who finds out you have it.

NARRATOR

Having said her piece, Nia nodded politely to the Pennsylvanians, and then left them in their corner of the cabin.

Nia walks away.

NIA

*(drawing attention, as she walks across the cabin)*

Now let's see. If I were in a chaos cult, where would I hide my foodstuffs?

BILLY

*("that was weird.")*

Man, what did you and Nia talk about on the boat?

JEN

I mean...it's not really our business. Unless it is.

NELSON

Right. Um, okay. I guess we've got some time. Where to start?

*(Thinks for a sec)*

So you know those dreams everyone's been having?

Ambience fades out.

NARRATOR

Over the next several minutes, Nelson did his best to summarize his conversation with Nia and her mother to his compatriots. When he had finished, and looked up from his shoes to the faces of his interlocutors, he saw them both at a loss.

Ambience returns, much as it was before. But notably, the winds outside are a little calmer. They will gradually quiet even more throughout the rest of this scene.

JEN

...A god. Like, a God god? Like do they mean God the way we mean God?

NARRATOR

Nelson shrugged his shoulders sheepishly.

BILLY

Do you have any powers?

NELSON

I dunno, I guess I'm supposed to, but...Remember when we were on that dude's farm? Nia was teaching us magic. And I tried to do it, I really did. But I got nowhere. And Jen got it right away. So I just...figured I wasn't good at magic.

JEN

Might be worth trying again, you know, in light of the...maybe you're a god stuff.

NELSON

You know how they say everyone thinks they're the hero of their own story? And you hear that, and you think "Yeah, totally. Except not me because I actually am the hero?"

JEN AND BILLY **BOTH CHUCKLE.**

NELSON

I read so many books where it's like, the nobody is secretly the chosen one or whatever. I think that was the only thing that got me through ninth grade. Thinking like, one day I'm destined to be special. And now we're on some like, no shit for real for real fantasy shit, and...that day on the farm, I remember thinking: I'm not special. Nothing about me's special.

JEN

Okay but even if you can't do magic, you don't have to do magic to be special.

NELSON

Okay, then how am I special?

JEN

Everyone's special.

NELSON

If everyone's special, then no one's special.

BILLY

Gotcha there.

JEN

Nelson you had two experienced priests seriously considering that you might be a reincarnated god. That sounds pretty goddamn special to me.  
(*re: "goddamn," at least a little cheeky*)  
No offense.

NELSON

Like I feel like deep down this might be true. But it also sounds fucking bonkers, right? So...am I just lying to myself because I really want it to be true?

JEN

Do you...really want it to be true?

NELSON

Yeah!  
(*beat*)  
I mean...not really? I don't know.  
(*Thinks a little more*)  
I wanna be powerful. Who doesn't? I wanna protect people! And myself and stuff. But when someone tells you you might be a god, but also you're too out of touch with your godlike self to have any powers, it's like...what the hell am I supposed to do with that information?

BILLY

(*genuinely trying to be helpful*)  
Uh...get in touch? With your godlike self?

NELSON

I mean is there any version of the story where a kid finds out he's God that ends well for that kid?

A long pause.

NARRATOR

Jen looked over to Billy, who gave as surreptitious a shrug as he could managed. Then she looked back to Nelson.

JEN

Maybe this is a...new type of story?

NARRATOR

She held his gaze for a long moment, and then, seeing that he was not comforted, placed a consoling hand on top of his. Billy took the cue, and gave Nelson a few rough but amiable pats on the shoulder.

We hear Billy pat Nelson's leather armor.

NARRATOR

This moment of empathy, however, was promptly interrupted.

REGAN **SNAPS HER FINGERS INSISTENTLY.**

REGAN

The chest.

NARRATOR

Regan was gesturing towards - as you might have guessed - a formidable chest in the center of Jethro's cabin.

NIA

That's the first place I looked.

REGAN

Move the chest and pick up the rug. I'd bet a tit there's a trap door under there.

Two sets of footsteps approach the center of the room.

NARRATOR

Brennen and Yllowyyn immediately sought to comply with this order.

VANDERBERG

Wait, stop.

They do.

VANDERBERG

Listen. You hear that?

Everyone's quiet.

The audience may notice that the winds outside  
have died away to nothing.

BILLY

I don't hear anything.

VANDERBERG

Exactly. Blizzard let up. Gettin's good so we better  
get.

BRENNEN

What about the supplies?

VANDERBERG

We've got blankets, firewood, and dried oats. The rest  
we can scavenge. But if that pass snows over, we're  
here 'til spring.

NARRATOR

And so, quickly gathering their accouterments and  
steeling themselves anew for the cold outside, our  
party departed Jethro's cabin - leaving behind the oil  
painting in the corner. And the door to the cellar.

We might hear just the slightest hint of an  
eerie synth pad here.

13 EXT. ENTRANCE TO THE MOUNTAIN TUNNELS

13

We're outside. We hear some winds but they're  
pretty gentle.

Eight sets of footsteps trudge towards us  
through the snow.

Once they reach us...

VANDERBERG

There's the entrance, right where I left her. Everyone  
ready? Once we're go in, it's a three-day hike to the  
other side. Maybe two, if we really haul ass.

NARRATOR

Looking to his charges and seeing no objections...

VANDERBERG

Giddy up.

They all start walking again, receding into a tunnel of stone and wood.

Just before they exit our sound field though...

NELSON

Billy, listen to me very carefully, okay? Don't. Touch. Anything. No matter how cool it looks.

14 INT. CAVES UNDER THE BLACK MOUNTAINS - DARK

14

DRAGON

Where did you meet one of my kin? Tell me.

MAG UIDHIR

Oh, it was a long time ago. I was born around three thousand years ago, if my math serves.

DRAGON

River Folk do not live that long. Not even the Wood Folk live that long. Would you deceive me?

The dragon starts clicking again.

MAG UIDHIR

Never, venerable one. It sounds unlikely but I swear it on the Matron. My body was preserved long past when I should have been dead, and then reanimated by loathsome magics.

DRAGON

I see.

The clicking stops.

DRAGON

This one of my tribe that you knew - tell me about them. What did they call themselves? What business did you have with them?

MAG UIDHIR

I'm afraid I can't remember what he was called. Or... she? Forgive my stupidity, most ancient one, I don't think I knew.

DRAGON

This distinction is not meaningful to my kind. Continue your story.

That really grabs Mag Uidhir's attention.

MAG UIDHIR  
It's not?

DRAGON  
No.

He has much he wants to ask and no idea  
where to start.

MAG UIDHIR  
I...If I may, oh venerable--

DRAGON  
--Do not make yourself tiresome to me, riverling.  
Continue, I said.

MAG UIDHIR  
I...of course. We approached...this Venerable Being  
because we sought...their help in our fight. The Elves  
are not scared of much, but you may know that your kind  
terrifies them.

DRAGON  
A justified fear. The Tree Folk were considered a  
delicacy in many quarters.

MAG UIDHIR  
We begged their aid, explained our plight, the justice  
of our position. I felt like they listened, really took  
what we said to heart. That was how I learned that your  
kind are so rational. But they said they would need  
time to think. And before they decided, we were  
captured.

DRAGON  
Do you resent them this pause for contemplation?

MAG UIDHIR  
I would not dare.

DRAGON  
If you believe me rational, then you must believe lies  
anger me more than any truth.

MAG UIDHIR  
Then yes. I did. But before long it was the least of my  
woes.

DRAGON  
There is a parable my kind tell. There was once one of  
us who was very wise. The wisest, some say. They made  
no decision which did not have unassailable logic  
behind it. One day, they were sat atop a mountain. They  
(MORE)



DRAGON (cont'd)

spied two goats, one each on opposite sides of the mountain's base. It was an equal distance to either goat. Neither goat looked more plump or more healthy than the other. There was no logical reason to choose one goat over the other. And that is how the wisest among us starved to death.

MAG UIDHIR

(laughs)

I'll admit - I knew your kind were wise, but not that they were funny.

DRAGON

That parable is not considered a joke, and I did not intend it to amuse you. I intended it as...an apology that is not fully mine to give. It is true my kind thinks carefully on our decisions, and that is nothing to apologize for. But the lives of your kind can seem so fleeting compared to ours, sometimes we forget how much they nevertheless contain. This...is an error.

MAG UIDHIR

You are most gracious, oh venerable one. Now, to your point, about the lives of my kind, I should like to begin negotiations, if it please you.

DRAGON

What do you seek in here.

MAG UIDHIR

Well, safe passage, to begin with.

DRAGON

I assumed you did not desire unsafe passage. What else?

MAG UIDHIR

We came to these caves seeking a weapon from my time - an enchanted shield. But now...it seems I have found a vastly more powerful weapon.

Beat.

DRAGON

If I understand your hope, then you should abandon it. I am oath-bound to never again take the life of a sentient creature.

MAG UIDHIR

Even to save the lives of other such creatures?

DRAGON

It is not my place to decide which lives are more worthy. And it is not your place to question my oaths.

MAG UIDHIR

Of course. Forgive my presumption. What would you accept for safe passage, and for your leave to search for the abandoned shield?

DRAGON

I shall grant you both things, if you can defeat me. In a game of riddles.

MAG UIDHIR

Riddles?

DRAGON

Long has it been since my wits were challenged. I relish the opportunity.

MAG UIDHIR

And if I lose - I suppose you'll find a way to square all the flesh burning and marrow suckling with your oath somehow?

DRAGON

*(forgot what they said)*  
Flesh burning and--ah yes. 'Twas an empty threat, I confess. But you shall not leave this chamber until you have bested me. And since there is little in here for you to eat or drink, I suggest you give it your all.

MAG UIDHIR

I understand. May I first rouse the one you swatted away before. It bodes ill to sleep like that after an injury.

DRAGON

Very well.

MAG UIDHIR

*(projecting across the chamber)*  
Arden? Arden, can you hear me? Best to wake up now.

ARDEN **GROANS** FROM ACROSS THE ROOM.

MAG UIDHIR

There's a good lad. Now I want you to listen to me, and stay very calm--

ARDEN

--VANQUISH THE DRAGON!

Footsteps sprint towards us.

NARRATOR

The Dragon took one look at the large, armed man dashing towards them.

We hear an almost cartoonish ping, and another CRASH!

NARRATOR

And flicked him away with a single digit of its talon, whereupon he crashed into a pile of treasure and fell still once again.

ARDEN **GROANS AGAIN**, THIS TIME IN OBVIOUS PAIN.

MAG UIDHIR

Arden. There's a parlay happening.

ARDEN

Parlay boring!

MAG UIDHIR

Yes, I know. So terribly boring. Why don't you go and find the general and his friends? Wait with them until I send for you.

ARDEN

I shall bide my time.

MAG UIDHIR

Please do that.

We hear Arden roll slowly out of the pile, and then trudge out of the chamber. Once he's gone...

MAG UIDHIR

Pray forgive the manners on that one. The Matron works through many instruments. Some are...not as sharp as others.

DRAGON

Mm. So then. Riddles.

MAG UIDHIR

Aye, as agreed. Who begins?

DRAGON

You are the guest.

NARRATOR

Mag Uidhir smirked.

MAG UIDHIR

What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon--

DRAGON

--A man.

MAG UIDHIR

I...didn't even finish the--

DRAGON

It walks on three legs in the evening. It's a metaphor for the life cycle of your kind.

MAG UIDHIR

How did you--

DRAGON

--EVERYONE KNOWS THAT RIDDLE! That's the one riddle that everyone knows!

MAG UIDHIR

Blast it. Feels like only yesterday I heard it for the first time. Nearly blew my skull open. I suppose it's been propagated widely in the thirty centuries since.

DRAGON

Then, riverling, it is my turn. You must grant me a... pause for contemplation.

END OF PART TWO.