

THE ONCE AND FUTURE NERD
Book II - MYTH MADE FLESH

Chapter 7
"What's Close To You"

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Goldenrod Revisions - Ad libs chosen in edit
7/4/2021

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PART FOUR:

24 INT. A CABIN OF THE RED REAVER - LATE NIGHT

24

The sounds of the ship surround us.

NIA

So. What was this dream you had?

NELSON

Well, first of all I remembered it. So, that's weird. I don't know the last time I remembered a dream.

NIA

I see.

NELSON

And so there was the little girl and the monster, right? And the girl said her enemy was near, and we haven't been asking the right questions, and we're out of time, and not to let my power be corrupted. And then the monster grabbed my hand and I woke up.

NIA

(she doesn't see)
I see.

NELSON

But then later the baby grabbed my hand in real life and it was...the same.

NIA

The same?

NELSON

I don't know how to describe it. I just knew it was the same, even though it wasn't.

NIA

I think I know what you mean. Sometimes in dreams, I'll find myself in a room that looks nothing like my parents' cottage. And yet it *feels* like my parents' cottage, so much that I'm certain that's where I am. Is it like that?

NELSON

Yeah, kinda! Except in reverse. In the dream I didn't know what I was feeling when the monster grabbed me. But as soon as the baby did it too, then I recognized the feeling.

NIA
Was it frightening? Or painful?

NELSON
No, that's what was weird. It was...kinda chill.

NIA
Chill?

NELSON
Like I finally understood something I was supposed to, but couldn't before. Except, I don't remember what it was I understood.

NIA
Ah, yes. A true scholar's most frustrating recurring dream.

NELSON
And then he wanted me to look at this book.

NIA
In the dream?

NELSON
No. I.R.L. Uh, in real life.

NARRATOR
Nia took the book in her hands - the very one she had specifically directed Jen and Nelson towards. *On The Totemic Traditions of Primitive Iorden*, as you may recall.

NIA
(a little unnerved)
You're...sure it was this one he chose?

NELSON
Totally. What do you think it means?

Silence.

NELSON
Nia. You were telling us about Avatars once, and then shit popped off and we never finished the conversation. Does this have something to do with that? What did you mean when you said I might be more than human?

NIA
Well as I said, the theory of Divine Avatars is considered heretical if espoused in earnest. As such, reliable sources on the matter are sparse. Even the very book you handed me - there were times I would have
(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)
traded an arm to spend one night reading it, had the offer been made.

NELSON
(*dispirited*)
You're gonna tell me you need to read the whole thing before you can say more.

NIA
I very badly want to read it. But fortunately - or not, depending on how you look at it - we have a more expedient option.

25 SAME - A FEW MINUTES LATER

25

MILDRED
I'd rather not spend our last minutes together getting into another of your debates. Can't we just pass the time in peace?

NIA
I think you were right.

MILDRED
...About what?

NIA
Nelson? Show her.

NELSON
Here you go, missus ah...

MILDRED
Mildred's fine, dear. What's this? *On The Totemic Traditions of Primitive Iorden?*

NIA
It's a very old book. I haven't read it, but it is known to be the best surviving source on the Theory of Divine Avatars.

MILDRED
Demigods, you mean.

NIA
Yes. I've come to believe they were real. The Order of the Plow had that right all along.

MILDRED
I see. What changed your mind?

NIA

(Eating crow)
My travels. Since leaving the college.

MILDRED

(just a whiff of told-you-so)
Hm. Did they now?

NIA

We need to borrow from your knowledge of the subject.

MILDRED

Borrow away.

NIA

Every time Avatars are supposed to have walked among us, they battled each other. Yes?

MILDRED

Aye, of course. Galadon rallies the forces of Order, and his enemy rallies the forces of Chaos, and the two hosts do battle.

NIA

How recently is that believed to have happened?

MILDRED

Ohhh, not for a long time. Long before anyone living was born.

NIA

And how would we have known?

MILDRED

They'd tell us of course. Announce themselves, claim their dominion. How else to rally their forces?

NIA

Well, perhaps by convincing their forces that they were acting of their own accord.

MILDRED

What are you driving at?

NIA

This may sound mad. But suppose an Avatar of Garedian had walked Iorden during our lifetimes.

MILDRED

No, that's...surely we'd have known.

NELSON

(cant help himself)
Don't call her Shirley.
(beat)
Sorry, wrong crowd for that one.

NIA

The murder of Prince Uther Guernatal has been unsolved for nearly seventeen years. Which suggests a tremendously - almost supernaturally - skilled assassin. And can you remember any single event in your lifetime which further advanced the cause of chaos? Have you not felt as if Iorden has been slowly unraveling ever since?

MILDRED

...Aye, perhaps, but...that doesn't mean it was a God what did it.

NIA

The seven of us have been having dreams, which I have come to believe are Selbircic in nature. You know I would not take that position lightly. In one of them, I was told "the blind man has seen the face of God." And the very next day, a blind beggar told me he'd watched Garedian kill the Prince.

NARRATOR

Nia saw a wave of unease pass over her mother's face.

NIA

What is it?

MILDRED

There's talk in the Scrolls of what happens when Avatars are killed. They always mention a blinding light.

NELSON

And there was a blinding light right before we came here.

NIA

I see.

They take a beat.

NARRATOR

All present let this new information sink in for a moment.

MILDRED

...But wait. That's just it. Avatars have been killed plenty of times before. And the stories don't say Iorden plunged into chaos. Or order for that matter. Their spirits return to Selbirin, where they regain their godly powers, which include inhabiting another Avatar if they wish. And the cycle just begins anew.

NIA

Hmm. Interesting.

Nelson is apprehensive, and it grows throughout the rest of the scene. He's following the logic where it goes...but he doesn't want it to go there.

NELSON

"My killer has died as well, but has not yet joined me." That's what Brennen heard in his first dream, right?

NIA

Correct.

NELSON

So what if Garedian killed Galadon's Avatar, but found some way to stop the spirit from going back to Selbirin?

MILDRED

Where would they go?

NELSON

What about to another dimension, or plane of existence or something.

NIA

Selbirin and Iorden are the only known planes of existence. There is no recorded evidence of any others.

NELSON

Nia, where I came from - do you think that's Selbirin or Iorden?

NIA

I...don't know.

NELSON

What if it's a whole other plane? And Garedian figured out how to send Galadon there?

NIA

I suppose it's not impossible. But we're so far out on this limb now, that--

NELSON

--You thought I might be more than human somehow, right? But we ruled out Avatars because Avatars know they're Avatars.

MILDRED

That much the scrolls make clear.

NELSON

What if they were so far from Selbirin that they lost track? Like they lost touch with the part of themselves that was a God. And it wasn't until they got back closer to Selbirin that they started to remember.

MILDRED

What do you mean "started to remember"?

NELSON

Brennen started having dreams when we showed up at the castle. You started having dreams that night at Bailey's. We all had the same dream when we were together at Freehold. And now...I started remembering my dreams when I was babysitting. Which means the baby must be...

MILDRED

Sorry. Are you trying to say that you and that babe are Avatars of the gods?

NELSON

Believe me, I don't want it to be true. I'm just... saying what makes sense.

NARRATOR

Nia could see the distant, glassy look in Nelson's eyes, and recognized it for the terror that it was.

NIA

(comforting best she can)
Nelson. It's true that this hypothesis could explain some of the stranger phenomena of your time here. But that doesn't mean it is the only, or even the most likely explanation.

NELSON

Yeah, but...doesn't something about it feel right?

A beat.

NIA
(struggling to argue)
 Well, I--

--Jen walks in.

JEN
 Hey. Sorry - am I interrupting something? I need to borrow Nia a minute, but it can wait.

NIA
(to Nelson)
 I'm happy to stay a while. There's more to talk about.

NELSON
 No, I uh...think I gotta digest a little.

JEN
 ...Everything okay?

NIA
 Where are we off to?

JEN
 Regan's exact words: "You know how people say they humbly request your presence when they really mean get your ass in here right the fuck now? Well I *actually* humbly request your presence."

NARRATOR
 Nia looked to her mother, and an unspoken moment of kinship passed between the women.

NIA
 Hm. I'll try not to keel over in shock.

26 INT. MEDICAL DECK - A FEW MINUTES LATER

26

The door opens. Jen and Nia enter.

REGAN
 Hey.

NIA
 Your Grace.

JEN
 Yo.

REGAN
(Like she's trying new words out)
 I'm...sorry. You were right. About basically everything.

NARRATOR

Jen and Nia looked at each other, and then back at Regan, almost uncertain of how to proceed.

JEN

(surprised but sincere)
Thanks.

NIA

That really does mean a lot coming from you. But is there any chance you could be more specific?

REGAN

I made a call that wasn't mine to make, because I thought I knew better. And it was the wrong call. It was stupid, and it makes me a hypocrite. Nia, I'm sorry I gave you shit about saving your parents. I'm glad they're safe. I thought I was protecting the group but really I was covering my ass.

NIA

I appreciate that very much.

REGAN

Jen. I'm really sorry you got hurt. I'm just...not used to anyone having my back I guess. I'm grateful for what you did. But I want you to promise never to risk yourself for me again. Okay?

JEN

What? No. I'm not gonna promise that.

REGAN

But...that's what I want.

JEN

What about what I want? I've got your back. So, get used to it.

REGAN

Jen, I can't...do it again.

JEN

Do what again?

REGAN

You're the good one. Just like Catie. I can't outlive the good one again. I think it'll kill me this time.

JEN

(soothing)
Oh, no, no, no, no, no...

Jen sits on Regan's cot.

JEN

You were both the good one. Kids aren't supposed to die. Ever. Whatever you think you did that made you bad, I'm sure you were just...doing your best to keep your sister alive. And besides, I'm grown. I'm as fucked up as anyone.

REGAN

(chuckles, still maybe a little patronizing)
You're not fucked up.

JEN

(stage whisper - faux shame)
One time...me and Billy ordered Dominoes, right? And they brought us an extra cheesy bread by mistake. Oh, um, cheesy bread is exactly what it sounds like, but with just an obscene amount of garlic butter. And we didn't realize until like ten minutes after the delivery guy left. We coulda called him back, but I didn't, because if we waited for him to come back, then we wouldn't have time to hook up before my mom got home. So that's bad enough. But then I forgot about the cheesy bread. Just left it on the counter. Billy went home, I went to bed. I woke up, like midnight, really hungry. And I walked downstairs and just housed that cheesy bread. The whole thing. It had been sitting out for like five hours. *Who does that?*

REGAN

Nia? I want it on record that I think she'd be out of her fucking head to risk herself for me. But....I guess I can't really stop her, so...we okay?

JEN

Don't fucking do that again, okay?
(sighs)
Can I give you a hug?

REGAN

Uhh, I guess, yeah. Watch the arm.

We hear Jen wrap Regan up in a hug.

JEN

I'm really glad you're okay.

Beat.

REGAN

...Y'okay that's enough.

Jen lets her go.

REGAN

Nia? We good?

NIA

I accept your apology. I still feel angry, if I'm being honest. But soon enough, I think I won't.

REGAN

Fair enough. So. Collateral. Go and tell Ren she can have Maggie and Catie.

JEN

(a big deal)
Your swords?

NIA

Are you sure about that?

REGAN

I sure as shit can't use 'em right now. Tell her they're master-crafted, and they never made a cut that didn't kill. Which reminds me - Jen, your little library trip?

JEN

Yeahhh I guess that was kinda selfish too. See? I *am* fucked up, I told you.

REGAN

It was selfish. And stupid. In your defense you've learned from the best. But you three mighta saved all our asses by nabbing that statue. Now listen very carefully. When we meet up with these smugglers, our story is we got a friend over there who's holding onto our money. You don't let *any* of them find out you're holding onto that thing until we're safely over. And even then be very, very careful. You get me? People get killed on highways and left in a ditch for far far *far* less.

JEN

Yeah, right, cool. No pressure.

NIA

It's nearly daylight. We should make our final arrangements.

NARRATOR

And with that, Nia and Jen nodded to their Queen and friend, and departed her company.

DIP TO SILENCE.

27 EXT. RED REAVER - ABOVE DECK - MORNING

27

Shockingly, we are above deck and it is morning.

SAILOR

(from up in a crow's nest)
Land ho, Mum, land ho!

REN

You four that are getting off - We're not dropping anchor for long, so you'll want to be bidding your farewells now.

(The Nia/Parents conversation and the Arlene/Gwen conversation are happening on opposite sides of the deck.)

NIA

Mum. Dad.
(starts to cry)
I'm going to miss you so much.

MILDRED

(crying too)
My sweet girl...when do you think you'll be back?

NIA

(knows it's a fantasy)
Just as soon as I can.

BEN

You stay safe, now, you hear me?

NIA

(quoting scripture)
Over mine own spirit, I shall keep ceaseless vigil...
(a dodge)
And you as well. If you should run into any trouble, seek out Lady--the maid Anna, as it were. She is quite skilled at winning over a crowd.

MILDRED

Right. I imagine we'll stay close, seeing as we know each other.

NIA

And if I may ask one more thing of you...I know that what I've said about the Orcish peoples is hard to believe. But...please do try. It's known that many of
(MORE)

NIA (cont'd)

them work the farms out on the isles. Just look for their humanity wherever you can find it. I can't expect you to take the same risks as I, but I hope one day you can understand.

(Switch to the other side of the soundfield, per note above.)

ARLENE

We think he should be called Connor.

BRENNEN

A name from the old times, then.

GWEN

Had a brother called Connor. Everyone was so happy when I went off to work at His Majesty's keep. I was too, 'course. Meant my brothers and sisters could eat. But...I was still leaving. Connor was the only one who cried for me. Heard a fever took him a few years back. Poor thing.

NARRATOR

Arlene placed a comforting hand on Gwen's shoulder.

NELSON

Connor it is.

GWEN

Now you remember what you promised, yeah?

NELSON

We'll take good care of him. Pinky swear.

ARLENE

And take this. It seems to help when he starts crying.

NARRATOR

Arlene handed Brennen the music box, which she had acquired in Maeve Bailey's establishment - what felt like a lifetime ago.

ARLENE

And if that fails, I captured a lullaby on the device Jen showed us. At least, I tried to.

BRENNEN

Thank you, my Lady. I would like you both to have these.

NARRATOR

With as much grace and decorum as his surroundings would allow, Brennen knelt before the two women, and presented them with four of his throwing axes.

ARLENE

(uhh what?)

Thank you, Sir Brennen. How...sweet.

BRENNEN

It's not exactly what they're made for, but if you find any ropes need cutting or trees need felling, they'll see you through.

(beat)

Also, if anyone gives you trouble, whack them with the blunt end. If they keep giving you trouble, then whack them with the sharp end until they stop.

ARLENE

(nervous)

Of course.

GWEN

Well here's hoping it needn't come to that. If I may, Sir Brennen...growing up where I did, you tend to see the worst side of knights. You start to think that all those songs about virtue and heroes are just songs. But you're the real thing, Brennen. Everything a knight's supposed to be.

NARRATOR

Brennen looked down at the deck of the ship, but the red rising to his cheeks was unmistakable.

GWEN

And if any of these other sellswords and rapists who call themselves knights dare look down on you for your birth, you tell those pissants--

ARLENE

--They may be of noble blood but you're of noble soul.

GWEN

Damn right. Hey! Maybe the great bard Anna can put you in one of her songs some day. All the Sugarcane Isles'll know of your great deeds.

NARRATOR

Now it was Anna's - nee Arlene's - turn to blush.

ARLENE

Oh I don't think I could actually write a song of my own. Brennen, do please thank Her Majesty for her

(MORE)

ARLENE (cont'd)

tremendous hospitality these last few weeks. We truly owe her our lives. I only wish we had more to offer by way of gratitude. The Queen is strong, wise, and just. May her days be long.

BRENNEN

Thank you, my Lady. I'm sure your kind words are--

GWEN

--Oh fuck me!

ARLENE

Gwen! --I mean--Gayle!

GWEN

Sorry! Sorry, I just can't believe I forgot about this. All this time.

NARRATOR

Gayle - nee Gwen - pulled her hand out of a small purse on her belt to reveal a luminescent golden vial. If you've forgotten that Gwen found the vial on the floor of the Horse's Head Inn after Jen left it behind during a Templar ambush, well...you'd be forgiven. Seeing as how Gwen herself had only just remembered.

GWEN

Woulda been useful before now, Gwen, you dunce.

ARLENE

Pardon me, but that's my paramour you're talking about and I'll not hear you disparage her so. Yes?

Arlene kisses Gwen.

NARRATOR

At this, Brennen's jaw went slack.

BRENNEN

Your...she's...what?

ARLENE

Kal--I mean, Yllowyyn?

Yllowyyn walks over.

YLLOWYYN

My lady?

ARLENE

Do you know what this is?

YELLOWYYN

Elf medicine? Let me see.

(reads for half a beat)

It says this treats fever, and pain related to inflammation. If only I'd had this when my arm wound had gone bad.

GWEN

Aye, sorry.

YELLOWYYN

No matter, it's still well-timed. I'll bring this to Her Majesty at once, thank you. And fare well to both of you. I wish you the best.

28 EXT. ON THE WATER - A FEW MINUTES LATER

28

A small rowboat touches down on the waves, and begins to paddle.

NARRATOR

As Alf rowed Arlene, Gwen, Mildred, and Ben towards the tropical island before them, the newly formed foursome looked for a moment at their new home-to-be. Then they turned their attention back to the Red Reaver, and their kith and kin waving farewell. They returned the waves, and held this gaze for a long while. And then, when the brigantine was no longer visible on the horizon, did the four finally turn to look at each other.

FADE OUT.

END OF CHAPTER.