

Kingdom Come Episode 1

written by

Michael McKnight Jr

Address
Phone
E-mail

FADE IN:

INT. ERIDEN'S CASTLE/THRONE ROOM - DAY (DAWN)

Fire CRACKLES as the flames begin to spread throughout the room. Bodies litter the floor. Some are wearing matching sets of armour. Others are unarmored. The unarmored bodies appear bestial, as if they are less than human.

The hero MIRIAM(30s), a tall and stocky blonde woman, tosses her helmet to the ground. Her steely eyes burn with unchecked hatred, practically shining out from her soot covered face. Her armour is cracked and scorched in several places. She plunges her greatsword into a prone enemy.

With great effort she raises her blade at the figure across from her.

MIRIAM

(Breathing heavily)

Hear me and acknowledge, devil. For the innocent you've slain, the lands you've ravaged, the ones who've sacrificed themselves in hopes of ending your terror, I, Miriam, Hero of Vane, shall slay thee.

Seated before her is ERIDEN, king of this castle. His features are soft and angelic, standing in stark contrast to the skeletal wings folded upon his back. He lounges lazily upon his throne, flanked on either side by a set of shattered statues. He is watching Miriam with an amused smile.

ERIDEN

(Slowly Clapping)

How rousing. You've certainly more a gift of speech than the last to be where you now stand. Very well Hero of Vane. I, Eriden, rightful master of the five kingdoms, acknowledge thee.

Eriden rises to his feet, drawing his longsword. His playful voice does not match the intensity of his face.

ERIDEN (CONT'D)

Come forth Hero. Show me the fruits of thine labor. What strength has the hatred I've instilled in thee wrought?

Miriam raises her sword in a salute. Closing her eyes she begins to offer up a prayer.

MIRIAM

(Softly)

Lords of Law guide me. I ask thee
of thine divine power. May my blade
shine with thou divine light.

Miriam's greatsword shines with a radiant light. She briefly allows herself a wry smile. Miriam rushes Eriden, greatsword held high.

ERIDEN

(raising his sword)

Don't disappoint me.

The two blades collide and the fight begins. Miriam appears to have the upper hand. Her swings are heavy and overpower Eriden's parries. Eriden is far more nimble, however, and is able to avoid being hit by the greatsword.

Miriam backs Eriden up against one of the cold stone walls. She swings her sword down at him. Eriden shifts into a silvery mist that moves out of the way of the blade. Miriam's sword buries itself in the castle wall, cracking and splintering the stone.

The silver mist moves behind Miriam. Eriden takes form and places a hand on Miriam's back. A pulse of green and black energy streaks out from his hand.

Miriam cries out in surprise as she collapses. The stone wall crumbles away and buries her in its rubble. Eriden kneels on the floor next to the rubble pile.

ERIDEN (CONT'D)

Well done Hero. Your skill hath
brought thee honor.

The rubble shifts as Miriam's hand reaches out and grabs Eriden's leg. She rises from the pile. Her eyes are filled with the same radiant light that shines on her sword.

Her body is listless and moves unnaturally, like a puppet on a string. She is unresponsive and lifeless. The hero Miriam is dead yet her body persists.

Eriden shakes the hand loose and rises to his feet.

ERIDEN (CONT'D)
 (addressing the heavens)
 You would you so desperately deny
 me my birthright that you would
 defile even the memory of thine own
 servant? Was her life not enough a
 sacrifice to satiate you?

Miriam's body creaks and groans as it begins to shuffle towards Eriden. It swings the sword at him but the power and life that was once there has fully left.

Eriden easily parries the swings. Shifting into a silver mist once more, he moves across the room.

ERIDEN (CONT'D)
 I apologize Hero. This was not how
 I wanted to end our duel. The
 respect you have shown your gods
 has not been returned unto thee.

Eriden raises his sword in a salute similar to the one Miriam made moments before. He mutters an inaudible prayer to himself. His sword glows a deep red as liquid drips from the tip. His skeletal wings unfurl as his eyes go dark.

With a roar, he charges forward. Miriam's body raises its sword to strike once more. The blades collide and create a deafening shockwave.

Eriden's longsword cleaves through the greatsword. With one last swing he brings the sword through Miriam's body.

The fight has ended. Eriden stands victorious.

ERIDEN (CONT'D)
 May you find rest Miriam, Hero of
 Vane.

Eriden gently lowers Miriam's body to the floor. After a solemn moment he snaps his fingers. An imp-like creature appears before him. The IMP kneels.

IMP
 My lord?

ERIDEN
 See to it this place is cleaned.
 And make sure this one,
 (Gestures to Miriam's
 body)
 Is returned to a place her people
 can find her. I'll not deny them a
 proper burial for their champion.

IMP

Very well my lord. Is there anything further you desire?

ERIDEN

Yes. Take stock of what remains of my army. And send word to any surviving generals. The gods grow relentless. They're beginning to take further action against my presence. We have much rebuilding to do before they act again.

IMP

Right away my lord.

The imp bows and exits the throne room. Eriden gazes out at the rising sun through the broken wall.

ERIDEN

Jonah, Estull, Vivienne, Carlise, and now Miriam. I swear, I shall not let the gods' shameless disposal of your lives go unpunished. For you and I alike, I shall have our revenge.

Eriden takes a seat upon his throne. The crumbling statues flanking him cast wild and sinister shadows in the light of the dawning sun.

EXT. DEMI-HUMAN SLUMS/MARKETPLACE (BRATHE) - DAY

An ELVEN MOTHER(20s) and her young SON make their way through the slum's marketplace. The mother stops at various different stalls to buy clothing as well as items of food. The son is inquisitive and tries to explore various other vendor stalls. The mother has to call for him to return to her side repeatedly.

The market place is a bustling hive of activity located not far from the city's harbor. The SOUNDS of BARTERING, SMITHING, and COOKING set a familiar rhythm for the denizens.

The stalls themselves are little more than hastily constructed wooden sheds. Everything is cramped and tight but the area retains a certain charm.

The marketplace is full of variant types of humanoids. Dwarves and halflings are the most abundant species to be seen. For the most part these are the individuals owning and operating the stalls.

Elves are less common, though not a rarity. Half-orcs are few and far between. They are either beggars or hard laborers.

There are next to no humans in this area. Any humans that do appear, however, look far more disheveled and vacant than any of the other races.

As the mother and son leave the marketplace the mother stops to drop a few coins into the hands of a BEGGAR on the side of the road. As the pair walk off, the beggar begins to follow them at a distance.

Mother and son arrive at their home, a modest construction of straw and wood surrounded by several other similarly crafted huts on the edge of the city near a large wall. Mother calls for her son to catch up to her. She looks about as if something briefly caught her attention. The pair enter the hut and shut the door.

Across the road, the beggar watches as they enter the house. Quickly scrawling something on a piece of paper, the beggar darts off.

The beggar returns to their spot near the marketplace. Almost immediately, a masked and hooded figure appears before the beggar. They deposit a small pouch of coins into the beggar's hands.

The beggar grabs the gloved hand of the hooded figure and slips them the piece of paper. The figure nods before disappearing into the crowd of people on the busy road behind them.

The street outside the mother's house is quiet and calm in comparison to the hectic marketplace. The SOUNDS of bird's CHIRPING and children PLAYING can be heard. A horse drawn cart slowly trundles down the road.

As the cart passes by the mother's house, the hooded figure is standing at the door. They carefully slide the door open before slipping inside.

INT. VISCOUNT DUSCHALL'S OFFICE - DAY

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL(50s), a heavyset human man in a well tailored vest made of fine materials, sits at a desk in the center of the room. He is absentmindedly perusing through a mountain of paperwork. Occasionally he places his seal on one of the many pages.

The room's heavy oak doors slowly creak open. The hooded figure strides forward towards the desk. A pair of armed guards escorts the figure into the room.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL
(Looking up from
paperwork)
You've finished your assignment?

HOODED FIGURE
(Tossing a pair of
bloodied rings onto the
desk)
Complete with proof of kill.

Duschall jumps as the rings hit the desk. He picks the rings up to inspect them. They bear the same crest as his seal.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL
(Visibly uncomfortable)
Yes, well ... well done. Well done indeed. And you were not seen?

HOODED FIGURE
I'm a professional. Even if I were spotted, I wouldn't be recognized.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL
Most delightful news. Now then, I suppose there is the pesky matter of payment to deal with.

Duschall takes a moment unlocking a drawer under his desk. He pulls a small chest of coins out from the drawer interior. He begins counting out coins as he puts them into a small sack.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL (CONT'D)
Dreadful affair really, that killing. Never had much of a stomach for it.

HOODED FIGURE
Try not to think about it much. You'll sleep better.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL
(absent mindedly)
You must understand, it simply had to be done. I was unaware that she had bore the child. And to have it be a son no less. Think of the rumors that would spread if it were known a viscount had bedded a servant. A demihuman servant no less. One of those damn knife ears at that. No no, that child being entitled to my estate would have simply been too much for the good people of Brathe to bear.

HOODED FIGURE

Not my business. Pay me and my investment in your personal problems will be concluded.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

Quite.

Duschall returns to filling the pouch with coins. He stops as he is putting another coin in the pouch. He puts the coin back into the chest and pushes the sack across the desk.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL (CONT'D)

Your payment. 100 silver coins.

HOODED FIGURE

We agreed on 200 silver.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

Did we now? I see no formal documentation of any such agreement. I feel as though 100 silver is more than enough compensation for your services. Of course if you disagree you're more than welcome to simply take the amount you see fit for yourself.

The armed guards flanking the hooded figure draw their weapons at Duschall's signal.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL (CONT'D)

Of course that option may prove more trouble than its worth. If you find yourself still unsatisfied you're more than welcome to file a formal wage violation complaint with the viscount of the district your business took place in.

(smiling smugly)

Which in this case happens to be me.

The hooded figure carefully sizes up the armed guards flanking them. They snatch the bag of coin from the table and storm out of the office.

EXT. CHURCH OF LAW - DAY

Unnaturally euphonious church bells TOLL out across the town square.

Beautiful, intricately carved wooden doors to a massive cathedral swing open and a multitude of people begin exiting the building, whatever service they were attending having now come to a close.

Standing a full head and shoulders taller than almost the entire crowd is BENJAMIN(40s), a heavily muscular and heavily tattooed human man with recently bruised knuckles. He is wearing a tight black cassock lined with white trim.

A silver pendant of a scale hangs from his neck.

Benjamin stands at the doors to the cathedral, thanking and chatting with the church goers for their attendance as they file out the doors and down the steps.

As the last of the attendees leaves the building, Benjamin picks up a broom and starts sweeping the cathedral entryway. His back is turned to the open street.

BENJAMIN

(without turning around)

If you've come for our afternoon service you're a bit late I'm afraid. You've just missed it.

Standing behind Benjamin is the hooded figure. They reach up and take off their hood and mask, revealing themselves to be ARIHANA(20s), an androgynous, non-binary elf with pale skin and long black hair. Their pale skin casts a striking contrast with Benjamin's much darker color.

ARIHANA

I was never able to sit through those long sermons anyway.

BENJAMIN

(facing Arihana)

No, I suppose you did prefer to sneak out whenever you weren't being watched.

ARIHANA

(smiling)

It was too easy not to. Everyone was usually too focused on not falling asleep to pay me any mind.

BENJAMIN

(chuckling)

Yes well, Father Dorian can be dreadfully boring at times. It's good to see you Arihana. I don't suppose you're able to stay?

ARIHANA
 (shaking their head)
 Sorry Benji. Not this time. I need
 your help.

Arihana signals to a nearby building. The elven mother and son come out from their hiding spot behind the building. Cautiously, they make their way through the square towards the church.

BENJAMIN
 War refugees?

ARIHANA
 No. They've both lived here in
 Brathe their entire lives.

BENJAMIN
 Contracts then. Who hired you?

ARIHANA
 Victor Duschall. Offered me 200
 silver to dispose of them quietly.

BENJAMIN
 The Viscount? And people accuse the
 church of stealing their tax money.
 What crimes did they commit to
 warrant the viscount's ire?

ARIHANA
 Bearing his child and being born,
 respectively. They need sanctuary.
 If Duschall finds out they're still
 alive, he'll send someone else
 after them.

Benjamin lets out a low whistle. His face grows distant and contemplative.

The elven mother and son arrive at the steps of the church. The mother looks around confused and a bit fearful.

BENJAMIN
 (addressing the elven
 mother)
 Welcome. I am Brother Benjamin. You
 have come seeking sanctuary,
 correct?

ELVEN MOTHER
 (addressing Arihana)
 Why have you brought us here?
 (MORE)

ELVEN MOTHER (CONT'D)

You said you were going to take us
someplace safe.

ARIHANA

And I have. You might not find it
ideal, but this is the safest place
in the entire city.

ELVEN MOTHER

The Church of Law? Are you mad, or
just ignorant of your history
child?

ARIHANA

My history of this place is one of
protection, particularly when there
was no one and nowhere else willing
to take me in.

ELVEN MOTHER

Then you have betrayed your own
people.

ARIHANA

The dead can't be betrayed.

BENJAMIN

(soothingly)

If I may, I understand your
hesitation. Law has had his fair
share of zealots. Many have
inflicted atrocity after atrocity
on a great number of people. There
are no words or assurances that I
can give that will erase or excuse
the past, so I won't waste your
time. But I will say this: without
our help, you will die.

ELVEN MOTHER

Then I'll die. Proud and free,
clinging to what little dignity I
have left in this world.

BENJAMIN

And your son? Will you kill him as
well? If you prefer not to wait for
your hubris to do the job, I could
provide you a knife.

The elven child moves to hide behind his mother.

ELVEN MOTHER

How dare you-?

ARIHANA

He's right. There's no way to keep Duschall from discovering your fates forever. Once he does he'll send another assassin after your heads. One that won't attempt to spare you an early death.

BENJAMIN

As I stated earlier, I understand and even sympathize with your hesitation. If the roles were reversed I doubt I'd be able to accept my help either. But I assure you that is the entirety of what I am offering you. My help. No lies, no falsehoods, just protection.

ELVEN MOTHER

At the expense of my traditions, my heritage. That's the price you'll ask of me, no? To turn my back on my culture? To be branded a pariah?

BENJAMIN

(lowering his head)

You have my humblest and deepest apologies. You are correct. Until you cast aside your pagan beliefs and accept his markings, Law cannot grant you his protection.

The elven mother opens her mouth to respond. Before she can do so, she feels her son behind her grabbing her hand. He is clearly afraid.

The elven mother looks at her child, then at Arihana, then back at Benjamin's bowed head. There is a clear conflict on her face as she wrestles with the options currently being presented to her.

ELVEN MOTHER

(sighing)

Very well. I will accept Law and his marking. But please, only me. If there is a way to receive this protection without forcing my son to be forever disconnected from his people, then I would wish for that.

Benjamin nods his head in understanding. He holds out his hand to the elven mother, who in turn places her hand in his.

Softly, Benjamin engulfs the elven mother's hand in his own.

BENJAMIN

Lords of Law guide my mortal hand.
Grant of your humble servant thine
divine protection.

The pendant hanging from Benjamin's neck begins to glow a soft silver. His hands begin to glow a similar shade of silver.

ELVEN MOTHER

(trembling slightly)

What's happening?

BENJAMIN

(gently)

There's no cause for alarm. Just as your gods once granted mighty boons to your forefathers when they first settled this land, so too does Law grant of me. It is through my devotion of him that I am allowed to channel but a trivial portion of his power. And with that power, for just the briefest of moments, I am able to work miracles in his name.

Benjamin carefully removes his hands. A glyph of a scale appears on the elven mother's hand.

The glyph glows a brilliantly bright silver, before slowly fading to a dull grey.

The glyph pulses rhythmically.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

As long as you find yourself within the grounds of the church, that glyph will protect both you and your son from any and all life threatening harm that might befall you. Save for that of divine intervention I suppose.

ELVEN MOTHER

I ... thank you human. If what you say is true then I am in your debt.

The elven mother bows slightly to Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

(bowing in return)

Once inside look for a man named Brother Isaac. He will see you to a private room and a warm meal.

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

After that we can discuss what your future here in Law's hands will hold.

The elven mother mouths a word of thanks towards Arihana. Arihana simply nods in return.

The elven mother takes her son by the hand and together the two disappear inside the church.

ARIHANA

Thank you Benji. Truthfully I was worried they would be turned away, but I could think of no other place in the city to bring them.

BENJAMIN

There was a time not so long ago where they very well might have been. But we've been much better with accepting all into Law's loving embrace as of late. There's always room for another should you decide you can stay after all.

ARIHANA

You know I can't do that.

BENJAMIN

Unfortunately. I must say, your presence has begun to be felt even here at the church. Men I never would have thought to see in these halls now arrive at all manners of the night, begging for Law's protection. All whispering of a demon in the slums wanting them dead.

ARIHANA

Was it not you who taught me to guide those receptive to change into Law's waiting arms?

BENJAMIN

Yes, but I don't remember teaching you to butcher those unreceptive. You've no right to play the judge and executioner.

ARIHANA

But the church does?

BENJAMIN

That's not-

ARIHANA

You don't understand what these bastards are doing Benji. What they're doing to the people they know can't fight back. My people. If I wasn't there acting as just the slightest deterrent-

BENJAMIN

(throwing up his hands)

I'm not having this conversation with you again. I know you think what you're doing to be righteous, but senseless slaughter is never the answer.

ARIHANA

(under their breath)

That didn't stop you, Blackheart.

BENJAMIN

(loudly)

I say this precisely for that reason. You think I haven't seen soldiers speak just as you're speaking now? You think I haven't been right where you find yourself currently? I speak with an experience not so easily disregarded by ignorance child.

There is an awkward moment of silence between the two.

Arihana stares quietly at the ground. Their lip quivers slightly as they sulk in a way not unlike a child who has been admonished by a parent.

Benjamin sighs and exhales slowly, carefully releasing the tension he is holding in his body language. His face becomes soft and gentle once more.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have shouted. You are making a difference, and I am so immensely proud of you. I just don't want to see you go down the same path I did.

ARIHANA
(quietly)
I know.

There is another beat of silence between the two.

ARIHANA (CONT'D)
I should probably go.

BENJAMIN
(nodding)
I understand. Before you do
however,
(tosses a medallion to
Arihana)
Would you mind looking into that
for me when you get a chance? All
of my old contacts came up empty.

Arihana examines the medallion. It is of simple and cheap
make. On its face is a carved image depicting the six Lords
of Law standing on either side of an empty throne.

ARIHANA
What is it?

BENJAMIN
Not sure. We only came across it
maybe a week or two ago. The royal
guard was called to investigate the
disappearance of a small farming
family. Their bodies were found
dead and washed up in the harbor,
each with one of those hanging
around their necks. Since it
depicted the Lords of Law the
guards brought it here for us to
look into, but we've never come
across imagery like this in any of
our texts.

ARIHANA
(pocketing the medallion)
I'll check with some people, see
what I can find. I need to take
care of something else first.

BENJAMIN
Professional or personal?

ARIHANA
Personal.

BENJAMIN

Well, I won't stop you then. Just do me one favor: don't die. I would like very much to be able to visit with you like this more often.

ARIHANA

(smiling)

Losing trust in your training? Don't worry about me Benji. Some crazy old priest made sure I was exceptionably hard to kill.

Arihana dons their mask and hood before effortlessly fading from sight amongst the crowded street.

INT. VISCOUNT DUSCHALL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Shadows dance about the room as the torchlight flickers. Viscount Duschall is still at his desk reading papers. The mountainous stack is all but gone. Duschall absentmindedly places his seal on one of the papers on the desk before him.

There is a KNOCK on the door to the office.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

(Without looking up)

Yes what is it?

GUARD (O.S.)

Sire, Duke Whittaker is requesting an audience.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

Very well. Tell him we will set up a meeting for the morning.

GUARD (O.S.)

He's ... here now sir. He says it is of the utmost urgency.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

(Looking up in surprise)

He's here now? Tell him I'll be there to greet him in a moment.

Duschall places his paperwork down and spends a moment preparing himself. He takes a deep breath and exits the room. The heavy oak doors slowly swing themselves closed. There is a moment of silence followed by the muffled sounds of VOICES starting a conversation.

One of the windows in the room gently slides its way open. Arihana, hooded and masked once more, slips in quietly through the open window. Once inside they quickly scan the room.

Determining the room to be clear, Arihana makes their way to the desk. They produce a set of lock picks and begin to unlock the drawer. There is a soft CLICK as the drawer is unlocked and slides open.

The sound of voices grow louder as the ones talking are approaching the door. Arihana quickly pockets the coin chest. They stand up and begin to head for the still open window.

Arihana has a moment to leave the office without being seen, but they hesitate. There is another item inside the drawer that catches their attention.

It is a ring. They pick it up and inspect it.

CLOSE ON the ring. It is engraved with the insignia of a weeping willow. Circling the base of the tree is a shattered crown.

The oak doors swing open as Viscount Duschall and DUKE WHITTAKER(40s), a slim human man with greying temples in a well tailored outfit, enter the room.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL (CONT'D)

I vow to you that I will take care
of-

Duke Whittaker looks up as and instantly sets his eyes upon Arihana. They see the duke spot them. Arihana drops the ring and runs for the window.

Whittaker reaches out a hand towards the fleeing Arihana. A small pendant around his neck glows faintly as he chants.

DUKE WHITTAKER

(Softly)

Lords of Law guide me. Bind my foe
that they might face judgement.

The shadow cast by Duke Whittaker's hand flickers and dances in the torchlight for a moment before streaking out across the floor. The shadow weaves its way through the room, connecting itself to Arihana's foot.

Arihana, halfway to the window, is unable to move.

DUKE WHITTAKER (CONT'D)

It would seem Victor, that we have
a rather unexpected visitor.

Duschall turns to run for the door.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

The guards. We must alert the guards.

Whittaker reaches out and grabs Duschall by the arm. He does not take his eyes off of Arihana.

DUKE WHITTAKER

(Calmly)

Think for a moment. An intruder arrives at your office, the very moment I arrive to speak with you, the very day the council reaches a decision? Does that not seem like too great a coincidence?

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

I suppose, but can't we still let the guards handle this while we sort that out.

DUKE WHITTAKER

And if the guards played a hand in organizing this one's arrival?

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

Well what would you suggest then?

Duke Whittaker releases his hold on Duschall's arm. He walks around until he is face to face with Arihana. Duschall follows him apprehensively.

His pendant begins to hum softly as he traces his fingers through the air. A trail of light follows his fingers. The light encircles Arihana before fading away.

DUKE WHITTAKER

(To Arihana)

I am going to ask you a series of questions. Your answers will determine whether you leave this building a corpse or not. And don't bother lying. I've cast a spell that will ensure you speak only the truth. A bit of added insurance. Now, we'll start simply. What is your name?

Arihana refuses to answer. Their body shakes as they try to force themselves to move to no avail.

DUKE WHITTAKER (CONT'D)
If you refuse to answer me, I will
be forced to consider that an
admission of guilt. I worry you
would leave such an unfortunate
mess for the guards to clean. Now,
once more, what is your name?

ARIHANA
(In Elvish)
Arihana.

DUKE WHITTAKER
Elvish? Fascinating.
(In Elvish)
Were you sent here by any members
of the council or royal family?

ARIHANA
No.

DUKE WHITTAKER
Have you been asked, paid, coerced,
or in any other way manipulated
into coming here to kill myself or
Viscount Duschall?

ARIHANA
No. I was unaware of your arrival
until you entered through the door.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL
(To Whittaker)
What is it? What is he saying?

DUKE WHITTAKER
(To Duschall)
That he isn't here to kill us.
Which means that he certainly
wasn't sent by any members of the
royalty.
(To Arihana in Common)
Why are you here?

ARIHANA
(In Common)
I was recruited by Viscount
Duschall earlier today to quietly
complete a certain task. He refused
to pay me my agreed upon price in
full, so I came here with the
intention of taking the coin I was
owed.

DUKE WHITTAKER

You say you were recruited? What for?

ARIHANA

To dispose of one of the viscount's Elven mistresses and lovechild.

VISCOUNT DUSCHALL

(Flustered)

P-preposterous. This vagrant speaks lies. I've never seen this man before in my life. Your spell must not have worked. I say we kill him here and be done with this.

DUKE WHITTAKER

(uninterested)

Victor, you may rest assured that I have very little care or concern for your personal affairs. Particularly those that concern your rather troubling choice in bed mates. However, of no intent or design of your own, you have provided us with quite the timely opportunity.

Whittaker condescendingly pats Duschall's face. He stares intensely at Arihana for a long moment. They begin to grow uneasy under the duke's gaze.

Whittaker taps his fingers on his pendant. The soft glow fades at his touch. The spell cast on Arihana is released, and they are able to move once more.

Arihana eyes Whittaker suspiciously as they carefully massage their limbs.

DUKE WHITTAKER (CONT'D)

I have a proposition for you, assassin.

EXT. CITY GATES - DAY

There is a large group of people gathered outside the gates of the city. They are casually milling about, as if waiting for something to arrive. There are collections of families as well as individuals standing off by themselves.

Each person has some sort of bag or sack used for traveling.

There is a statue of four hands lifting a tome erected off to the side of the road. A sizable portion of the people gathered are either praying at the statue or casually talking within its vicinity.

Arihana is amongst the waiting crowd. They are in simple traveler's clothing. Their face is uncovered and their hair is pulled up into a neat bun. Their appearance is more feminine today.

They are carefully going over the items in their travel pack when ETHRO(20s), a bright-eyed human man in simple clothes under a chain shirt, wearing a sword on his hip, approaches them.

ETHRO

Have everything you need?

ARIHANA

(Looking up startled)

Sorry, did you say something?

ETHRO

I was just asking if you had everything you needed. If not, there's a general store just inside the wall there. Just tell the dwarf at the counter that Ethro sent you and she'll square you away with whatever you need.

ARIHANA

Okay? I take it you're Ethro?

ETHRO

(Smiling)

That's right. Ethro Redfast at your service. Finest playwright this side of Desegrimme.

ARIHANA

(Gesturing to the sword)

Funny looking quill you got there.

ETHRO

Ah this.

(Pats the sword)

This is just a bit of ... side work for now, as well as a bit of insurance. Never hurts to have if you run into any of those Law-damned insurgents on the road.

ARIHANA

Yeah, well ... good luck with that.

A pair of children run past playing loudly. They try to climb the statue. Their parents call after them to chastise them for a lack of reverence.

ETHRO

(Gesturing to the statue)
Planning to pay your respects
before hitting the road?

ARIHANA

Not exactly one for religion.

ETHRO

Fascinating. Do you mind if I use that for a future play? It'll be about a Lawless, mysterious elf standing at a crossroads. Where is she heading? To rekindle a flame with an old lover maybe? Or perhaps to learn forbidden magic lost to time? Only those watching in my seats would find out.

ARIHANA

People really pay to see shit like that?

ETHRO

Well ... they haven't yet. But they will. Soon. I'm still work shopping different ideas around town, but there are some promising avenues out there. And if I perfect this idea of a wandering adventurer I'll have people lining up and down the street begging for a chance to see my work.

ARIHANA

(Lightly chuckling)
Well once that happens be sure to save a seat for me. Maybe I'll get lost and end up at one of your shows.

Ethro's face lights up as Arihana laughs. He is preparing to continue talking when a commanding voice rings out, interrupting him.

LADY JOSEFINE(20s), a brown skin human woman with medium length curly hair, stands at the base of the prayer statue.

Around her, a small band of men, each with a sword and chain shirt similar to Ethro's, stand at attention.

JOSEFINE

I don't remember paying you to stand around conversing. The caravan will arrive soon. Make sure you're travel ready before it does. We may be asked to assist their sentries when they arrive.

ETHRO

(Sighing)

Alas, it would seem the time for business has arrived.

(To Arihana)

Perhaps, if Law favors me, I'll have another chance to speak with the lady before trip's end?

ARIHANA

(Smiling)

If Law favors me then perhaps not.

ETHRO

(Returning the smile)

And here I thought you said you weren't religious.

Ethro waves and runs off to fall into formation with Josefine and the rest of her armed escort.

The caravan arrives shortly thereafter. It is a procession comprised of multiple carts and wagons, each flanked by a soldier on horseback. The wagons all bear the insignia of the kingdom.

The insignia is of a weeping willow encircled by a golden crown. The crown is fully intact.

The soldiers check the crowd for any weapons or contraband before allowing them into the carts. Lady Josefine shows the guards a piece of parchment. She and her band are allowed onboard without being checked further.

Once onboard one of the carts, Arihana slips a dagger they hid in their bag onto their person, continuing to keep it hidden. They glance solemnly at the city gates before pulling up a hood and lowering their head.

Once the entire crowd milling about is inspected and onboard securely, the caravan lurches forward and starts moving down the road.

The wide open landscape, dotted with farmers and the occasional poor villager, stretches out as far as the eye can see.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

The sounds of the forest's more harmless, nocturnal residents ring out through the night. Oddly bright little fireflies lazily move through the air. Their glow bathes the forest with an enchanted ambiance. The trees gently sway in the wind.

The caravan is parked and set up as a camp for the night. The travelers with their own bedrolls sleep on the roadside while those without share the space of the carts. The more rugged or adventurous travelers have made their beds amongst the forest floor.

The soldiers escorting the caravan have set up a small campsite of their own a few paces up the road. They are still within sight of the caravan but are not resting among the travelers.

The soldiers take turns keeping watch and sleeping. The one's awake on watch pass the time with drinks, gambling, and soft merriment in one another's company.

Josefine's company are dispersed throughout the soldier's camp.

Carefully tucked between two trees in their own bedroll a small ways away from the caravan is Arihana. They are sleeping fitfully.

The SOUND of the soldier's campfire CRACKLING grows louder and louder. Their tossing and turning begins to grow more violent.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. ELVEN VILLAGE - NIGHT

Fire ROARS as the huts and small houses in the village are consumed by the growing inferno. The SCREAMS of elves go up through the night as families and friends are separated from one another in a confused panic.

Butchered bodies of elves are scattered about the village ground. Some bodies appear to have been gnawed on.

Running wild through the village are various different races of monsters.

The half-snake, half-man Yuan-ti slither after the villagers, sinking their fangs into still screaming victims. The upright, bipedal hyena-like Gnolls run from hut to hut, setting each one on fire. Large, lumbering, green skinned orcs laugh and jeer as they compete to see which of them can throw the struggling elf bodies the furthest.

A teenage ELVEN GIRL leads a SMALL CHILD through the wreckage of the village. They reach the craggy wall of a cliff side.

She mouths something that is inaudible and positions the child against the cliff wall. She stretches out her hand and closes her eyes in concentration.

A massive bull's head comes into frame behind her. A minotaur, eyes sharp and focused, raises a sword that can only be described as a hulking mass of iron in the air above her head.

The elven girl smiles sadly and clasps her hands together. There is a flash of dull light that covers the crying child. The minotaur brings the sword down towards the elven girl.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Arihana rips out of their bedroll in a panic, twin daggers in hand. They are drenched in sweat and breathing heavily. Their bedroll has been shredded to pieces.

A NOISE deeper into the forest catches Arihana's attention. Briefly, they look up the road towards the soldier's encampment. The SOUNDS of their drunken MERRIMENT and heavy SNORES can faintly be heard even at this distance.

Arihana sets off into the woods on their own. Their movement is deliberate, hidden, and gives off very little sound that could reveal their location. They stop at a vantage point behind a tree to observe the source of the sound.

There is a small band of bandits, about five in total, checking their equipment and quietly conversing. Arihana is unable to make out what they are saying from where they are hidden, but the raiders gesture in the direction of the caravan multiple times.

Arihana is deeply focused on the bandits, trying their best to make out the details of their conversation, when a hand touches their shoulder.

Arihana jumps at the hand's touch, drawing their daggers up in a defensive stance. Their eyes look wild and somewhat unhinged in the moonlight.

Ethro stands before them, hands raised casually in a playful sign of surrender.

ETHRO
(laughing nervously)
Woah there. Didn't mean to startle you.

Arihana pulls Ethro behind the tree they are using as cover.

ARIHANA
(Hissing)
Quiet fool! What are you doing here?

ETHRO
Me? I was just on watch and found myself growing awfully drowsy. I decided to go for a quick walk in order to rouse my spirits. What about you yourself? Had I not recognized you I would've mistaken you for some mad beast.

ARIHANA
(gesturing to the bandits)
Keeping an eye on them there.

ETHRO
(Peeking around the tree)
On ... who, exactly?

An arrow THUDS into the tree between the heads of Ethro and Arihana. The bandits noticed the sound of voices and have surrounded the pair in a flanking pattern.

Ethro draws his blade and steps protectively in front of Arihana.

ETHRO (CONT'D)
Go! Quickly! Alert the soldiers and bring them back here to me. I'll distract them long enough for you to get away.

ARIHANA
(Eyeing the bandits circling them)
It doesn't exactly look like running here is an option.

The fight is dirty, gritty, everything but clean.

Arihana is fast and nimble, their daggers parrying strike after strike, but they are unable to get a good hit in on the bandits through their leather armor.

Ethro on the other hand, is slower with more predictable strokes. His strikes don't often land, but when they do they land with enough bite to force the attacking bandit to fall back and regroup for a bit.

The fighting drags on. Neither side is able to get an upper hand on the other.

One of the bandits swings too wide at Arihana, opening himself up for an attack. Arihana does not waste the opportunity. In an impressive display of speed and reflexes, they drive a killing blow into the bandit.

The sound of the dying bandit catches the attention of the others, giving Ethro an opportunity to land a strike with the full weight of his swing behind it. The sword doesn't manage to take the head of the bandit off entirely, but it is more than enough to drop him.

The rhythm of the fight has changed. Arihana and Ethro have gained the upper hand.

Falling in step with one another, the pair begin to weave their attacks together. While one is striking out at the bandits, the other is defending from any incoming attacks. They continue to circle around one another, building momentum for their strikes, until the remaining bandits are struck down as well.

With the bandits dead, Ethro drops his sword and sits down. He is unused to this level of physical activity and is breathing heavily. He laughs shakily as he breathes deeply.

ETHRO

Well, I suppose it was a good thing
you didn't listen to me. I would've
been killed several times over if
not for you.

Arihana is standing over the fallen bodies of the bandits. Their blood covered hands shake uncontrollably. They close their eyes as the SOUNDS of the SCREAMS from their nightmare earlier drown out all other noise.

With a deep breath, they steady themselves and open their eyes. The sounds of the forest, and Ethro's voice, return to them once again. They stow their daggers into their belt with a bit of a flourish.

ARIHANA
 (Extending a hand to
 Ethro)
 Like I said, running wasn't an
 option.

Ethro smiles and takes the hand. Arihana helps him up to his feet and returns his sword to him.

ETHRO
 (Gesturing to the bodies
 of the bandits)
 What should we do about these?

BANDIT LEADER (O.S.)
 Leave 'em to the wolves.

Ethro and Arihana whip around in surprise. Approaching them from behind are a group of 8-10 more bandits. The largest and most heavily scarred member steps forward. He is clearly the BANDIT LEADER.

BANDIT LEADER (CONT'D)
 It's the same courtesy we'll be
 offering to you when we're done.

ETHRO
 (Taking a defensive
 stance)
 I don't suppose running is an
 option now?

ARIHANA
 (Drawing daggers)
 I'm finding myself a bit more open
 to it at the moment.

A small bolt of fire streaks across the sky. It flies past Ethro and Arihana and strikes the bandit leader squarely in the face. He drops to the ground, writhing in pain. His face is smoldering from the fire.

Coming from the opposite direction is Lady Josefine and her personal armed escort. There are traces of magic gathered around her outstretched hand. It is clear that she has cast a spell that shot out the bolt of fire.

With a single command, Josefine sends her men charging forward.

The energy of this fight is very different from the last. If Ethro and Arihana were engaged in drawn out brawl, Josefine's troops are engaged in a one sided training exercise.

It is very clear that the precision and overwhelming success of the soldiers is due to Josefine's effective leadership.

Her command keeps her fighters tightly coordinated, with very little wasted effort between them.

They make quick work of the remaining bandits who never had a chance to recover from their leader being burned at the start. There are no casualties among Josefine's soldiers, only minor injuries.

The soldiers begin gathering the bodies of the bandits together into a pile and covering them with some dried brush of the forest floor.

Josefine approaches Ethro and Arihana. Her voice is disapproving, but not harsh.

JOSEFINE

(To Ethro)

You didn't call for assistance?
That was foolhardy.

ETHRO

Well we certainly would have had those ruffians been polite enough to afford us the chance to return to camp.

JOSEFINE

Return to- Where is the alarm horn?

ETHRO

At the camp. I had to be able to return to sound the alarm.

JOSEFINE

You- Why did you leave it at the camp if you, one of the lookouts, was wandering about out here away from all the other lookouts?

ETHRO

Well it certainly wouldn't have done any good for me to have it if the other fellows had been the ones under attack. How would they have alerted the rest of you to their location if they needed help?

JOSEFINE

The other lookouts all stayed at the camp! If we hadn't spotted one of the enemy scouts taking position you-

(taking a moment to calm herself)

(MORE)

JOSEFINE (CONT'D)

Ethro, until we arrive back behind the walls of Brathe, you, and every other member of this company, are under my employ. That means that not just your life, but each of their lives as well, are my responsibility. I can't always be running after you to help you out of a bind. So please, for my sake, try not to bring any further complications to our objectives. For now, you can go help the others with the cleanup.

ETHRO

(smiling)

Loud and clear ma'am.

(to Arihana)

We'll have to catch up with one another some time later. Once again, your help was truly and deeply appreciated.

With a bow and a flourish, Ethro goes to help the other soldiers pile up the bodies.

JOSEFINE

(watching Ethro walk off)

He means well, I know, but I swear it feels as if his head is filled with nothing but flowery nonsense.

(to Arihana)

Are you injured?

ARIHANA

Nothing serious. A few cuts and bruises.

JOSEFINE

Then you have managed to walk away from an attack far better than most. Come with me.

Josefine leads Arihana back towards the caravan's makeshift camp. The camp is partially awake with people wandering about trying to see what the commotion is. The caravan guards are at attention and keeping the travelers safely gathered together.

ARIHANA

(addressing Josefine)

I didn't realize you were a priest.

JOSEFINE

(bemused)

I'm not. At least, not as far as I'm aware.

ARIHANA

But the spell, the fire you sent from your hand, is that not a gift from Law?

JOSEFINE

Ah. No my arcane ability does not come from Law, but rather years of rigorous study and training.

ARIHANA

Isn't that rather pointless when you can just pray and be granted magic as well?

JOSEFINE

I'll agree its certainly faster to receive spells that way. But the power you can wield through prayer is limited, finite. The only limit on one's power through study is one's own capacity to learn and retain what they've learned.

Once the pair near the tree line where the forest meets the road, Josefine stops and turns to Arihana.

JOSEFINE (CONT'D)

There's a small brook a few paces up the road. I would suggest cleaning up before regrouping with the others. Do you require someone to escort you?

ARIHANA

(shaking their head)

I'll be more than fine on my own.

JOSEFINE

Understood. I won't ask you where you learned to fight well enough to fend off multiple attackers, or how you managed to smuggle those blades onto the caravan to begin with. That's no concern of mine. That said, you fought shoulder to shoulder with one of my own, managing to keep each other alive. For that, you have my thanks.

With a polite bow, Josephine turns away and walks into the caravan camp. Her presence is immediately felt. She falls into a leadership position effortlessly, calming the worries and concerns of the travelers and guards alike.

Arihana takes a quiet moment to watch Josefine work with the crowd. A faint glow and crackle of fire comes from the direction of the ambush site, followed shortly by the unmistakable scent of burning flesh.

With one last look at their bloodied hands, Arihana steels themselves before walking in the direction of the brook.

EXT. MAIN ROAD (SLOLAND) - DAY

The caravan slowly pulls up the road towards a small, quiet town. A few people, mostly the families, begin to unload their belongings and depart from the caravan. There are a few shared goodbyes between the ones departing and the ones remaining with the caravan, but most of the ones departing simply begin making their way into town once they collect their items.

Arihana is amongst the travelers parting ways with the caravan. Ethro hands them their travel pack and helps them off of the cart. He makes a showy, yet endearing display of saying goodbye.

Arihana ignores the goodbye initially before sighing and returning a small wave of their own. The small gesture is enough for Ethro who takes it with vibrant enthusiasm.

The town of Sloland is a quaint little community situated within the rolling plains of Vane's countryside. Unlike Brathe there is no wall, and certainly not enough room for different districts based on race and class, but the people appear far happier here.

While the overwhelming majority of residents of the town are human, there are a fair handful of Demi-humans walking about as well. While some older townsfolk watch and mumble as the Demi-humans pass, it is clear their treatment in this town is far better than in the larger city of Brathe.

Patrolling through the town there are a few soldiers. They are few and far between, and they are outfitted in rather well-worn pieces of armor that still appear well maintained despite the wear and tear. Even though they are clearly on a patrol, the soldiers occasionally stop to chat with or help some local residents of the town.

Arihana travels down the street, taking in the gentle ambiance.

Without realizing it a slight smile comes over their face. The town has a charm that appears familiar to them.

After a brief period of walking, they head into the largest building in the center of the town. It is the town's inn.

INT. SLOLAND INN - CONTINUOUS

The inn is constructed with a feel similar to the town. The interior is warm and inviting. The inn is set up with a diner and bar area operating as the first floor, with rooms to rent on the floor above it.

Even though it is midday, the diner area is about halfway full of workers and families alike. There is a positive buzz in the air as conversations flow as freely as the drinks.

In one corner of the room, there is a minstrel playing a JAUNTY TUNE. Some children dance around while their parents laugh and clap in time with the music.

Seated at the center table is a large, muscular man in full armor. His raucous LAUGHTER fills the room, but none of the other patrons seem to mind. In fact, many of them are seated with him at the table conversing and laughing as well.

A well-endowed woman in a red dress is seated at the table next to the man in armor. She leans against the man and whispers something in his ear, pressing herself against him as she does so. The man LAUGHS loudly once again and orders another round of drinks for everyone at his table.

Arihana enters the inn in the midst of the celebration that accompanied the new round of drinks. They are a bit surprised at the level of noise and instinctively begin reaching for a hidden dagger. They take a moment to calm their nerves before taking a seat at the inn's bar.

Arihana has hardly even had a moment to sit down when a grinning halfling man pops up from behind the bar. There is a bit of wine staining on his teeth. This is the INNKEEP. His words are fast paced and a bit slurred.

INNKEEP

Well you're a new face. Welcome to me humble home here in Sloland. What can I do you for stranger?

ARIHANA

You say this inn is yours?

INNKEEP

That's right that's right. I'm the sole owner and proprietor of this fine establishment. As well as the barkeep, cook, maid, security, handyman, whatever else you need really. If there's something to be done, I'm the one doing the doing.

ARIHANA

Right ... well I would like to rent a room.

INNKEEP

Right right. No problems there. And how long do you think you'll be needing that room for missy?

Another bout of raucous LAUGHTER fills the inn, interrupting Arihana before they can speak.

INNKEEP (CONT'D)

Oh right, since you're here at such a special time, you can get two rounds of drinks free of charge. So, what's your poison?

ARIHANA

Just an ale is fine.

The words are no sooner out of Arihana's mouth before the halfling is sliding a foaming mug of ale across the countertop towards them.

INNKEEP

An ale amiright? Can always tell what me guests are gonna order. Me dear old Ma used to call it a gift I was destined to thrive from. Me Pa on the other hand, called it sorcery and threw me out. Imagine, if I was some large and in charge magic man, why would I be wasting my time going around guessing people's drink orders?

(laughing)

Ah well. Turns out he ran off with some crazy old wizard somewhere and me Ma got hitched with his brother. All's fair that ends at some point eh?

ARIHANA
(visibly confused)
I- wha- you said you had a room
available?

INNKEEP
Did I? Well that's right we got
rooms and rooms and rooms. It's ten
silver a night if you're
interested. Meals included but
drinks are pay-per-mug.

Arihana slides ten silver pieces across the countertop. The innkeep playfully bites one of the coins as if checking to see if it's real. He walks off for a moment, returning with a meal prepared for Arihana, before busying himself behind the bar.

Arihana eats slowly, savoring the food. It is implied that they have not had a simple home cooked meal in quite a while. They watch the lively center table while they eat.

The conversation and laughter has turned to drunken singing. A few of the diners are fast asleep with their heads on the table next to their beer mugs. The armored man is SINGING the loudest, despite not knowing the words, to the tune the minstrel is playing. He appears to be in a drunken state of bliss.

The woman in the red dress sensually feeds the man in armor some of the fruit scattered about the table. Despite the drunkenness of the surrounding patrons, and the abundance of alcohol on the table, she has not taken a single sip.

She leans over the man to feed him another piece of fruit and they fall out of their seats to the ground, her landing on top of him. The woman laughs slightly, brushing the hair out of her face, while checking on the armored man. He laughs drunkenly for a moment. He lets his gaze wander towards the woman's ample cleavage before blushing a bit and averting his gaze.

The woman notices this. She smiles and whispers something in the man's ear. He grins goofily as they stand up and exit out of the tavern together.

Arihana watches out the corner of their eye as the pair leaves.

ARIHANA
(to the innkeep)
Who was that?

INNKEEP

Oh you mean Knight-Commander Jankyn? Yeah he comes in here every so often after a long night of patrols. He's a real hoot that one. Once you get a little liquor in him that is.

(Laughs)

ARIHANA

Knight-Commander, huh? I thought he was branded a heretic of the church and exiled off into the wilds.

INNKEEP

Oh that's just some old city rumor spreading that is. Nothing to do up there but chat shite about good folk. Bunch of gossipy bastards.

(Catching himself)

Oh but not you missy. You got a right proper air about you. Bet you ain't never spread a nasty rumor about someone before in your life.

ARIHANA

Can't really say that I have. So if that's just a rumor, what's he really doing down here?

INNKEEP

(leaning forward)

Well, just between you and me, one night when he was good and drunk, ol' Jan let it slip that he had a bit of a falling out with the Council of Vane up in Brathe after the war ended. See, he figured that there were gonna be some unrest with Desegrimme over the land they lost in the all the fighting. The council refused to expend any resources to protect some smaller villages and towns that would be prime targets for those insurgents, so the good Commander rounded up a few of his men and set up outposts to protect us less important folk out here in the sticks.

ARIHANA

You aren't at all worried about him having a well-trained battalion residing in your town?

(MORE)

ARIHANA (CONT'D)

What will you do if he decides they want to start taking things you all aren't ready to give?

INNKEEP

(shrugs)

Well he hasn't demanded anything of us so far. Even refuses to take things for free, insists he'll earn a living like everyone else. I doubt any of those wayward marauders would show us the same respect without him here keeping them at bay.

ARIHANA

Sounds like a real blessing for you then.

INNKEEP

Oh yeah, he's a good bloke.

ARIHANA

And the woman who was with him? She a war hero too?

INNKEEP

(laughing)

Can you imagine? I doubt there's a blacksmith alive who could craft a breastplate she could squeeze into.

(Realizing Arihana isn't laughing with him)

Uh- no, no. She's no soldier I ever heard of. Don't really know much about her. Just waltzed into town one day about a week ago. Don't spend her time with no one else but the Commander. I reckon he's caught her fancy.

ARIHANA

Looked more like he was the one fancying.

INNKEEP

Well I'm sure it would look that way to someone less versed in the matter of the heart, but to us seasoned professionals it's clear who's chasing who. You know, that reminds me of this one time I caught me dear old Pa stuck about halfway into-

ARIHANA

(forcing a smile)

Sorry, I'm a bit more tired from the road than I thought I was. Would you mind showing me to my room?

INNKEEP

Oh yeah, yeah. That's no problem at all. I'll show you there right away. You know, me old Ma would always tell me it's not good to keep-

The innkeep's voice drones on as he leaps over the bar and leads Arihana through the dining area and towards the staircase at the back of the room. Arihana just smiles politely as he talks.

As they reach the staircase, Arihana notices that the minstrel is missing from the room. The music he was playing earlier is still playing from where he was seated. None of the other patrons of the bar seem to notice this. The children are still dancing and the parents are still clapping in time to the music.

Arihana is the only person present aware of this phenomenon.

EXT. MAIN ROAD - NIGHT

The night in Sloland is just as peaceful as the day. Most of the families have turned in for the night. A few of the workers and soldiers who patrolled during the day can be HEARD drinking and enjoying one another's company from the inn's interior.

Occasionally, a drunk towns person stumbles about the empty road. The soldiers on duty, the ones actively patrolling at night, go out of their way to make sure these drunks are stable and able to reach their homes safely.

Even in the darkness and uncertainty of night, there is a warmth and familiarity in the air. The town is a picturesque definition of a gentle coziness.

One of the soldiers on patrol makes his rounds up the road. For a moment, a sudden shift in the shadows catches his eye. When he turns to investigate further however, he sees nothing there.

Arihana dashes from house to house. They are once again dressed in a dark hood and mask. They make no sound as they move, leaving an eerie absence in the wake of each step.

Arihana continues to make their way down the road in this fashion, avoiding any and all lines of sight. They are counting the houses under their breath until they arrive at a small one partially tucked away on a side road. The light of a candle can be seen flickering through the front window.

Arihana carefully slides up one of the back windows and slips into the house.

INT. JANKYN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The window opens up into a spartan bedroom. There is very little in this room outside a bed, a clothes chest, and a stand displaying a suit of armor. A sword is propped up against the side of the bed.

There is no sound as Arihana's feet touch the wooden floor. They quickly look about the room. What they are looking for is not here. They quietly make their way to the door at the far end of the room.

Slowly, they open the door into the next room. This appears to be a common area, office, and dining room all wrapped into one. This room leads to an open archway that appears to lead to a kitchen. It is also the room with the front door in it.

There is a large wooden desk set up across from the front door, on the opposite wall underneath this room's window. There is an assortment of papers, charts and maps, all marked with crosses and circles at various places, spread about the desktop. A lone candle, the flame nearing the end of its life, struggles to illuminate the desk.

Face down on the desk, hand clutching a small, shattered glass vial, is Knight Commander Jankyn. His body is still and unmoving. He is very clearly dead.

ARIHANA

(moving to inspect the
body)

Looks like someone got to you
before I could Knight Commander.

Arihana lifts the commander's head up. His eyes are bloodshot and swollen. The veins in his neck and under his jaw are heavily engorged to the point of pulling the skin on his face taught, giving his face a haunted look. The skin around the veins is an unsettling deep purple.

There are small cuts and bruising on the throat.

Arihana gingerly opens the knight commander's mouth. His tongue is swollen and black. His teeth appear to have suffered some sort of corrosion.

The fading light of the candle reflects off a piece of broken glass, catching Arihana's eye. They open Jankyn's hand to investigate the vial. His fingers are covered in dried blood.

They lift the broken vial up to the light to inspect it. There is a small remainder of a deep crimson colored liquid. It is heavy and coagulated and does not flow freely.

Arihana brings the vial up to their face and smells the liquid.

ARIHANA (CONT'D)

Blood?

Gingerly, they take what remains of the candle and tilt the commander's head back. There is a pool of blood gathered in his mouth right above where the swollen veins on his neck begin.

There is a sudden KNOCK at the door.

SOLDIER #1 (O.S.)

Sorry to disturb you captain, but we found something we think you should come see. It appears to be some sort of arcane symbols drawn in a few of the fields outside of town.

The sound of the knock and the voice surprise Arihana. Their hold on the captain's body loosens. He falls to the floor with a loud THUD.

ARIHANA

(hissing)

Law-damned heavy son of a-

SOLDIER #1 (O.S.)

Captain? Captain is everything alright in there sir? If this is a bad time we can-

Arihana begins searching the desk frantically. Clearly they are unable to find a specific item they seem to be searching for. They roll up the maps and charts and stuff them into a pouch the commander left near his desk.

They begin to knock on and inspect different parts of the desk itself.

All the while the voice outside grows more concerned and eventually more join him outside the door. The soldiers are beginning to realize something is going on.

The knight commander's head lists to the side and the blood trapped in his throat begins to slowly ooze out onto the floor. His other hand opens up and a palm sized item clatters onto the floor.

Arihana knocks on another place on the desk and a secret compartment pops out. It is filled with a few more documents as well as a smooth black opal. A semi-circle is engraved on the surface of the stone. They stuff all the items into the pouch.

There is a loud THUD as the soldiers begin beating down the door from the outside.

Arihana swings out the window above the desk. They climb up onto the desk and are about to jump out the window when they stop to take one more glance around the room.

The palm sized item on the floor next to the commander's hand catches Arihana's eye. They hop down from the desk and go to inspect it.

It is a medallion of simple and cheap make. On its face is a carved image depicting the six Lords of Law standing on either side of an empty throne.

The front door is forced open by the soldier's relentless attacks. It almost unhinges from the force of the impact. A handful of soldiers rush into the room.

Each soldier entering the room see the same thing at the same time: their beloved captain, dead on the ground, his head resting in a pool of blood, and a masked figure crouching over his fallen body.

ARIHANA
(seeing the soldiers
enter)
Well shit.

SOLDIER #3
(crying)
Captain!

SOLDIER #2
(pointing at Arihana)
Don't let him escape.

SOLDIER #1
(to the other soldiers)
Circle around back and cut him off.

The guards begin drawing swords and readying crossbows.

Arihana quickly grabs both the medallion and the pouch, vaults over the desk, and flees out through the window.

EXT. MAIN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The SOUNDS of guards SHOUTING and dogs BARKING fill the air. The soldiers in the town are organizing their efforts and coming together to maximize their search. As curious townsfolk start exiting their homes to investigate the noises, the soldiers are there to calm their worries and usher them back inside.

The sleeping town of Sloland has been violently awoken.

Arihana is trying their best to remain unseen. Unlike the sprawling city of Brathe they are used to, there are very few hidden routes and alleyways in this small town that don't immediately lead to an open area that would make them easy to spot.

With little routes of escape available, and guards closing in from every direction, Arihana begins climbing up the side of the houses they are hiding between. It isn't an easy task, and their mad upward scramble leaves evidence of their climb on the street below, but their only thought is of their immediate escape.

Once on the roof of the house, Arihana notices a small stable a little ways outside the town. Effortlessly, they make their way across the rooftops towards it. The sounds of their pursuers fades in the distance as they make their way there.

INT. STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Arihana slips into the stables through an upper story window. They drop softly onto the landing below.

The SOUND of VOICES on the ground floor cause Arihana to instinctively hide. They catch their breath as they listen to voices below.

Carefully, they peek over the edge of the landing to observe what is happening.

On the ground floor is the WOMAN in the red dress, somehow just as immaculate as they were earlier despite being surrounded by hay and mud. She is holding a lantern.

Across from her is the MINSTREL(30s) from the inn. He is a rather shaggy looking human man.

His skin has a soft red undertone to it. He does not cast a shadow despite clearly being in the light of the lantern.

He has a sword drawn.

The minstrel is flush with anger and his blade shakes slightly with rage. The woman is calm and collected. At most, she appears to be slightly annoyed, as if this is nothing more than a small inconvenience for her.

MINSTREL

Did you truly think that I wouldn't find you? That your deeds would forever go unpunished?

WOMAN IN RED

(sighing)

As I've stated numerous times now, I'm afraid I don't know who you are strange man.

MINSTREL

Don't lie to me witch. Look into my eyes. Look upon these eyes that hold nothing but hatred for you.

The minstrel waves his hand in front of his face, leaving a trail of magic in the air. The magic lingers on his eyes, obscuring them for a moment before dispersing. As the magic fades, his once brown eyes are now a vibrant golden yellow with black slits for pupils.

WOMAN IN RED

(a look of realization comes over her face)

Suri? Suri is that you?

MINSTREL

(baring his fanged teeth)

Do not call me that! Don't you dare use that name again!

WOMAN IN RED

Why, my sweet Suri. It's been so long. Look at you. Look how much you've grown. You've changed so much since last I had you with me.

The woman reaches out her free hand. She closes the gap between her and the minstrel in an instant and places her hand on his face. From her perspective, this gesture appears loving or perhaps at least nurturing. The reaction and look on the minstrel's face as she touches him paints a far different story.

The minstrel slaps her hand away and moves back, giving himself room to raise his sword at the woman.

MINSTREL

Yeah, sixteen years will do that to a person. Though not to you, it would seem. Tell me, is it magic or just the very nature of a monster that allows you to keep your accursed charm?

WOMAN IN RED

(smiling)

My my. Have our years apart dampened your memory of what your flattery does to me? Lay down your sword. Let me have you, here and now. It will be just like we were before.

The woman tries to step forward again but this time the minstrel is prepared for her. He moves back in time with her step and whips his blade up to her neck. He stops it before it strikes her, but it still manages to cut her ever so slightly.

The small trickle of blood that runs from the woman's neck onto the blade of the sword sizzles and burns as it touches the steel.

MINSTREL

We were nothing before. You were a predatory witch who would do whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted, with no regard for anyone else. But things are different now. I'm not that same helpless child anymore.

WOMAN IN RED

(pouting)

Yes well you're certainly less fun now. So tell me, if not to rekindle our once fiery passions, why are you preventing my departure.

MINSTREL

I've thought of nothing more than what I would do this day, the day I finally found you on the wrong end of my blade. How I would leave you dismembered, torn asunder.

(MORE)

MINSTREL (CONT'D)

How I would make you beg for death
as I left what remained of you for
the birds. How I-

WOMAN IN RED

If your plan is to bore me to death
you're more than succeeding. Alas,
today of all days, I'm afraid I
have very little time to play these
games with you my little Suri.

The woman speaks a word in an archaic language. The minstrel is pushed away from her by an unseen force, his blade passing harmlessly away from her neck. He tries to rush forward in a rage and is rebuffed before he is able to reach her.

With just a word, the woman has cast a spell that has erected an invisible wall between the two of them.

She turns her back on the minstrel, who is foaming with rage as he desperately tries to force his way through the wall to no avail. The woman meticulously clears some hay and debris out of an empty stall.

WOMAN IN RED (CONT'D)

We truly must do this again my
love. It's been far too long since
last we lay together, and knowing
your thoughts still dwell on me
after all this time has stirred
something deep within me.

MINSTREL

Damn you witch! Take down this wall
and face me! I will not let you
escape judgement a second time.

The woman moves aside the last bit of hay to reveal an intricate arcane circle drawn in the soft dirt. She chants a few words in the same archaic language as before and the circle glows with a bright light.

WOMAN IN RED

(smiling)

Unfortunately I'm a bit preoccupied
at the moment, so I can't afford to
play with you now. If you truly
want me so desperately, you'll have
to come for me yet again. Don't
disappoint me and die like Sarak
did. I'll be waiting for you, my
lost amber.

As soon as the woman finishes her last sentence, the minstrel's entire body goes slack. His eyes gloss over with a far away look and his protests stop. He is still standing upright, but he is no longer present in his own mind.

The woman, still smiling, tosses her lantern onto a pile of hay and straw. It immediately catches fire. She blows a kiss to the immobile body of the minstrel and steps onto the glowing arcane circle.

The entire room lights up with a blinding flash of white light. When the light subsides, the woman is gone from the room. The arcane circle is no longer glowing.

The fire begins to spread rapidly. The dry straw and hay spread the fire throughout the entire room until the flames are licking up the wooden walls as well. The few horses remaining in their stalls are panicking wildly.

Arihana lands on the ground floor. Setting to work immediately, they manage to open the barn door and release all the horses from their pens. The horses flee in such a panic that Arihana is hardly able to move out of their way to avoid being trampled.

Even with the door open, the stables are filling with a thick cloud of smoke. Arihana, after making a sweep to make sure no one or nothing else was there, goes to the minstrel.

ARIHANA

(coughing)

You have to get out of here. This whole barn is going up.

They pull at the minstrel's arm, trying to urge them to follow, but the minstrel does not respond.

ARIHANA (CONT'D)

She's gone. There's no further point in you remaining here. You have to leave.

The minstrel has no response. Arihana checks the minstrel's eyes and tests for a reaction. There are no sign of acknowledgment. Arihana sighs and does their best to grab a hold of the minstrel's body.

It's hard work, the minstrel has a larger and surprisingly muscular build in comparison to Arihana, but eventually they are able to drag the both of them outside the burning barn.

With a sigh, they collapse to the ground, greedily taking in the fresh air. The sound of SHUFFLING boots catches their attention.

An entire squad of townsguard has surrounded Arihana outside the stables. They have their swords drawn and crossbows raised. There is a gathering of townsfolk behind them staring in bewilderment and shock at the fully ablaze stables.

SOLDIER #1

No sudden moves. As much as I would love to fill your wretched body with bolts right this second, you are to be taken and tried in the Court of the Six Faces.

ARIHANA

(sighing)

Killed by you or tried by Law? Not much of a choice there.

Arihana extends their hands and lays face down on the ground in a sign of surrender. The guards quickly manacle them and lead them off towards the town. The minstrel, still vacant, is also manacled and brought along.

INT. PRISONER TRANSPORT CARRIAGE - DAY - MOVING

The vibrant green of the rolling countryside is nearly entirely obscured by the uncomfortable, metal interior of the carriage. Only through a small, barred window situated on the carriage's door can the passing landscape be seen.

Arihana, hands bound behind their back, is quietly gazing out of the window. Seated across from them is the minstrel. He is currently asleep, his hands are also bound behind his back.

Both the minstrel and Arihana are bound to one another by a manacled chain attached to their legs.

The minstrel begins to stir as he slowly awakes. It is clear he is unaware of his surroundings. He briefly panics and starts to struggle against his bindings.

ARIHANA

You're not going to break them if that's what you're hoping.

The mistrel looks up and notices Arihana for the first time. Their hood and mask have been removed and their elven features are prominently on display. Their face is also a bit bruised.

MINSTREL

(groaning)

Would you believe me if I told you
this wasn't my first time waking
opposite some strange elf criminal?

ARIHANA

Good for you. Saves me the effort
of catching you up on what happened
after the fire.

MINSTREL

Fire? There was a fire?

ARIHANA

Yeah. Great big fucking blaze that
burnt down that whole stable and
gave my position away to the entire
town. Barely managed to get you
clear before every soldier
stationed there showed up.

MINSTREL

Well, not to sound ungrateful, but
let that be a lesson to you moving
forward.

ARIHANA

A lesson? Apologies if I wasn't
clear a moment ago, but it's only
because of me that you're sitting
there unburnt and breathing easily
right now.

MINSTREL

And look at where it got you.

ARIHANA

You're saying I would've been
better off leaving you in the fire?
Leaving you to die?

MINSTREL

That's one way to look at it.
Listen mate, this life is the only
one we get right? There's no point
risking your life sticking your
neck out for anyone else. Not like
there's gonna be some sort of
reward waiting for you at the end
of it all. Do what you gotta do for
yourself and don't worry about
anyone else.

(MORE)

MINSTREL (CONT'D)

They would rarely return to you
that same kindness if the roles
were flipped.

ARIHANA

I'll be sure to keep that in mind
if I ever find you trapped in a
fire again.

There is a moment of silence between the two. Arihana returns
to gazing out the small carriage window. The minstrel begins
fidgeting in his seat.

MINSTREL

So, fancy telling me why we're
stuck in this mobile cell?

ARIHANA

Sloiland soldiers seem to think I
killed their Knight Commander. Seem
to also think you burned down their
stables. Suppose your crime wasn't
also worth them getting in a few
hits when no-one was watching.

MINSTREL

(Laughing)

What kind of shite luck had you
near enough a dead knight commander
for you to be charged with killing
him?

ARIHANA

Bad turn of events. Was given a job
to take his life. Someone beat me
to it. I ended up with the heat.

MINSTREL

You a murder for hire? Well sounds
like you were set up there mate.
Guess we got that in common. Take
my advice, try to drop it and move
on. Threw away most my life chasing
down the one who left me high and
dry. Trust me it's no way to live.

ARIHANA

The one who set you up, it was the
woman who lit you on fire?

MINSTREL

Tried to light me on fire. Very
important distinction. But yes,
she'd be the one.

(MORE)

MINSTREL (CONT'D)

Imagine my surprise when I finally managed to track her down only to find her in that backwater ass town.

ARIHANA

Why do you think she was there?

MINSTREL

Who knows. Esme Dreighton does what she wants. No use in trying to predict her scheming.

ARIHANA

Dreighton? You mean the Witch of Alverron?

MINSTREL

The one and only.

ARIHANA

Wasn't she was executed along with the rest of her mercenary band years ago?

MINSTREL

And yet there she was. Bit strange innit?

ARIHANA

Maybe. Not really my problem.

MINSTREL

Now there's a proper attitude mate. No use sticking your nose in someone else's shite.

ARIHANA

Right.

The minstrel removes his hands from behind his back. The manacles are hanging loosely from one of his hands. He extends the hand towards Arihana.

KASSORIN

The name's KASSORIN by the way. Realized I never got around to introducing myself.

Arihana removes their hands from behind their back as well. The manacles that once bound them are similarly hanging loosely from one hand.

They briefly and uncomfortably take Kassorin's in an awkward shake.

ARIHANA

Arihana.

KASSORIN

Arihana huh? Anyone ever call you
Ari?

ARIHANA

No one still drawing breath.

The two sit in silence for a while. The only sound is the
RATTLING of the carriage as it rolls down the road.

Arihana is looking out of the window again. Something catches
their attention. They shift from a lounging position to
sitting upright and alert.

KASSORIN

Something wrong?

ARIHANA

Not sure. For a moment I thought I
saw-

There are several heavy THUDS as arrows slam into the wood
paneling on the outer walls of the carriage. The sound of
soldiers rushing to attention can be heard through the
window.

The voice of whoever is giving orders is cut abruptly short
as another volley of arrows strike the carriage. A different
voice speaks up to begin giving orders.

The horses pulling the cart whinny in fear before taking off
down the road. The sound of the soldiers preparing a
counteroffensive fade away as the cart increases speed.

Another loud whinny goes up from the horses as the carriage
hit a large rock in the road and is tipped onto its side. The
cart manages to unhook itself from the horses as it flips and
the two of them continue thundering down the road.

Arihana hits their head against the metal wall as the
carriage flips and is stunned temporarily, leaving them
disoriented and unresponsive.

Kassorin, having avoided the walls during the flip, moves to
the carriage door. He places his hand on the door and
concentrates for a bit. The carriage interior begins to glow
faintly with blue magical light.

A floating, spectral hand appears on the outside of the carriage door. Still concentrating, Kassorin moves the hand over to the lock. After a brief moment of fiddling with a lock pick, there is a click as the lock releases and the hand pulls the door open.

Kassorin moves back to check on Arihana.

KASSORIN

Rise and shine mate. It would appear our exit is at hand.

ARIHANA

(Groggily)

Our? Weren't you just saying something about looking out for ourselves?

KASSORIN

(Holding up the chain)

Can't really run off on your own when you're bound to someone unfortunately. Now come on. We shouldn't waste time here.

Together, the pair clamber out of the toppled carriage.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRYSIDE - CONTINUOUS

The carriage exterior is an arrow filled, blood splattered mess. It has tipped onto its side and slid a few meters off to the side of the road, caking the side in dirt and mud.

The carriage driver has been impaled by a massive javelin which has left him pinned to the front of the cart. The arrows in the cart are also slightly oversized, with wickedly carved black metal tips.

The SOUND of frantic FIGHTING can faintly be heard coming from down the road.

KASSORIN

(looking at the javelin)

Fucking hell. What sort of beast threw that thing?

ARIHANA

(pulling the chain)

Hey, stay focused. We need to grab our things and get out of here before whoever they're dealing with down there makes their way up here.

The pair move to the back of the carriage. Among other things, there is a large lockbox strapped to the cart.

Arihana takes a moment to pick the lock and open the box. Inside the box are both of their personal effects. The pair take a moment to grab their items.

KASSORIN

Right, well, if we have everything,
shall we be going?

ARIHANA

Whoever attacked the transport had
their ambush focused on the road.
We have no way of being sure there
aren't any others further ahead. I
say we take off east, away from the
road.

KASSORIN

You'll find no objections here.
After you.

The pair take off running into the countryside. There are a few problems with their coordination initially, both of them alternating tripping the other by not moving in sync.

After the initial blunders, they quickly fall into a rhythm and begin running as best they can.

As they crest a rather large hill, Arihana stops suddenly at the top, causing Kassorin to do the same.

KASSORIN (CONT'D)

What is it-

Kassorin's eyes go wide as he sees the scene unfolding in the valley below him. Arihana's face is pale and their breathing is growing increasingly panicked.

Situated on the flatland below the hill is a small village. It is only a handful of houses and a farm. The houses are heavily burnt, with several of the roofs caved in. The farm has been completely uprooted in a desperate search for food.

Between the hill and village is a valley littered with corpses. These bodies belong to the villagers, though it does not appear to be everyone who could fit in the village. It would be roughly about half of the estimated population.

There are butchered bodies of young and old alike, though most of the villager corpses are men. Each of the men have an improvised weapon, either a sickle or a pitchfork, on the ground with them not far from where they lay.

Another portion of the corpses found in the field are men in similarly styled chain mail shirts. These men, despite being dead, seem to belong to a group far more capable than the villagers. They appear to most likely be soldiers, though they do not bear any sort of insignia on their persons. There are longswords and iron spears scattered across the field.

The final portion of corpses belong to neither villager nor soldier. These corpses are that of gnolls, hyena like monsters of men, and goblins, small green and brown wicked creatures. There are far more of these bodies littering the valley than any other. There are also far more of these bodies still living than any other as well.

Gnolls and goblins chatter back and forth as they run through the village. The goblins run house to house, taking anything that looks like it could be of value, while the gnolls rip up shriveled, unripened plants in the farm. The larger and more fearsome looking gnolls are feasting on the corpses of villagers that fell within the bounds of the village itself.

A ways away, moving steadily up a hill in the distance, is a medium-sized group of villagers fleeing in all directions. There is no unity or cohesion as they run. There are a few soldiers amongst them, but they are not there to protect. Instead, these remaining soldiers are fleeing faster than many of the villagers, knocking aside any who get in their way.

A band of goblins laugh and jeer as they chase after the fleeing villagers. Some stop occasionally to fire off arrows, laughing even harder when they manage to hit their mark.

Standing alone in the valley, still continuing to fight, is Lady Josefine. She is moving continuously, careful to not allow herself to be boxed in.

In one hand she wields a beautifully crafted sabre. She swings out with long practiced and well refined strikes, felling any of the goblins brave enough to approach.

Engraved on the blade of the sabre is an insignia of a weeping willow. Circling the base of the tree is a shattered crown.

With her other hand she channels arcane energy, alternating between deflecting arrows and parrying sword strike. Occasionally, she sends out a small bolt of fire at a gnoll archer setting up a shot.

While the number of gnolls and goblins surrounding her are rapidly thinning, Josefine is all too aware of the large, lumbering orc slowly making its way towards her.

As the orc approaches, the other creatures fall back in a sign of respect.

KASSORIN (CONT'D)
What in the nine hells are those?

ARIHANA
(gesturing to Josefina)
There's still someone fighting.

KASSORIN
Well we'll say a pray for her soul
when we get a chance. We need to
keep moving.

ARIHANA
I'm going down there.

KASSORIN
Not with me chained to your leg you
aren't. Trust me mate, this is no
time to start playing hero. Not
against those beasts.

Kassorin turns to walk away. In a flash, Arihana whips one of their daggers from their belt and presses it against Kassorin's neck.

ARIHANA
I told you, I'm going down there.
Now either you can come along and
be useful, or I can cut out your
dead weight right here and now.

Kassorin turns to face Arihana. There is no fear in his eyes. There is no sign of remorse or hesitation in Arihana's. Instead, their face is clear and determined.

A tense moment passes as their gazes remain locked. Quietly Kassorin weighs his options.

KASSORIN
(Sighing)
Fine. We'll do things your way
mate. But on two conditions.
Firstly, we don't fight any more
than we absolutely have to. We go
down, help whoever is left get
away, and then we run like hell
ourselves. Secondly, you will owe
me one favor I can call upon at any
moment free of charge.

ARIHANA
(extending their hand)
Agreed.

Kassorin takes the hand and shakes it. Together, the pair make their way down into the valley.

Lady Josefine is covered in sweat, dirt, and a myriad of cuts and bruises. Her sabre is slick with blood and her arms shake with exhaustion. Her breath is coming in raggedly as she tries to catch her breath.

The gnolls and goblins around her have almost all dispersed. The ones she did not manage to slay herself have backed away from the fight, giving the orc a respectful distance. The orc smiles as it is just it and its prey in active combat now.

The orc brings down its axe towards Josefine in a heavy strike. An arcane glyph flashes in the air in front of her hand as she uses magic to parry the axe into the ground away from her. It buries into the ground with a forceful thud.

Using her momentum, Josefine spins into an upward slash with her sabre, catching the orc across the eyes. The glyph around her hand flashes red as she immediately follows her attack with a bolt of fire. It streaks out from her hand and strikes the orc squarely in the face.

The orc howls in pain. It lets go of its axe and swings out wildly with its fist. Its arm manages to connect with Josefine. The force of the impact catches her off guard. She drops her sabre as she is lifted off of her feet and flung back.

Josefine hits the ground hard as the wind is knocked out of her. In a daze, she scrambles about for a weapon. She crawls over to a nearby body and pulls the sword out of its chest.

This is the lifeless body of Ethro.

Stunned, Josefine rises to her feet. Her vision is blurry, but she can still see the orc pull its axe from the ground and begin walking towards her. She raises her sword in one last defensive stance.

A swirling ball of green and black energy strikes the orc in the back of the head, knocking it off balance. In the same instant, Arihana leaps up from behind the orc and drives their twin daggers into its throat. Together, they both fall to the ground.

Arihana falls on top of the wide-eyed, still struggling orc body. They twist their daggers and rip them out. Black ichor splatters out and the orc goes limp.

A stunned Josefine looks up at Kassorin and Arihana.

JOSEFINE

(coughing)

This place isn't safe. You both
need to-

Fatigue sets in as the adrenaline begins to fade. Josefine starts to fall to her knees, but plants her sword into the ground to keep herself upright. Her face is covered with sweat and her breathing is intensely labored.

ARIHANA

You're right. Its not safe here.
Which is why you need to come with
us.

JOSEFINE

But my men. They're-

KASSORIN

Dead or fleeing from the looks of
it. There's nothing else for you to
do here but pick a side and join
them.

JOSEFINE

Then I fight and I die. I led them
here, I commanded them to their
deaths. I would dishonor their
memory by running.

KASSORIN

What about the ones who fell
believing in you? What about the
ones who followed you into death
because they believed your cause
just? You want to speak of
dishonor? You would dishonor their
sacrifice by falling here.

ARIHANA

He's right, much as it pains me to
admit. The dead are gone. There's
nothing further you can do for
them. All you can do now is fight
to live in their place.

Tears form in Josefine's eyes. She looks around at the bodies of her fallen soldiers as well as the villagers they were unable to protect. She sees the remnants of the runners crest the hill, and the goblins give up pursuit as they do.

Josefine steels herself and wipes the tears from her eyes.

JOSEFINE

Very well. There's no further purpose I can serve here.

KASSORIN

Glad to hear you say it. Now, shall we run? I think the others have finally noticed that we killed their friend here.

The sounds of SNARLS and BARKS begin to rise as the nearby gnolls and goblins rush towards the trio. On the ground beside them, the orc gurgles and coughs up ichor. The wound in its throat is slowly closing as it starts to move again.

JOSEFINE

How the hell is that thing not dead?

ARIHANA

Let's go. Now.

Arihana grabs Josefine's hand and starts to run up a nearby hill. Kassorin, feeling the chain go taught, takes off running with them as well.

The orc slowly rises to its feet and doubles over, coughing up more of the ichor lodged in its throat. It lets out a bellowing cry and lumbers after the trio along with the other gnolls and goblins.

At the crest of the hill, Kassorin motions for the others to stop for a moment. He closes his eyes in concentration, and a flash of electricity passes between his hands. He continues concentrating until both of his hands are vibrating uncontrollably with the amount of static energy passing between them.

As the goblins and gnolls reach the halfway point up the hill, Kassorin claps his hands together. There is a deafening BOOMING sound as a wave of force erupts from his hands.

The creatures rushing up the hill are thrown back from the force of the magic. Some hit the ground dead while others struggle to stand back up. The orc at the base of the hill drops to one knee in pain, but still rises back to its feet after a moment.

Kassorin smiles smugly. He has effectively cleared out all the pursuers chasing after them. He turns to the others.

KASSORIN

Shall we?

Arihana shakes their head in begrudging admiration. Together, the three of them take off running across the countryside, putting more and more distance between them and the monsters they've left behind.

As the figures of its quarry fade in the distance, the orc gives up pursuit. It lumbers its way back to the burning remains of the village. The other, smaller creatures all follow suit.

It is clear that they are looking to the orc for some sort of command.

The orc gathers all the creatures with it in the ruined remains of the town's farm. It holds out its hand expectantly.

One of the larger gnolls rushes up to the orc's side. It is holding a rolled up banner of some sort.

With a ROAR, the orc slams the banner into the dirt of the farm. The cloth unfurls in the wind, stretching until its symbol can be clearly seen.

The symbol is a blood stained image depicting the six Lords of Law standing on either side of an empty throne.

As the banner unfurls and blows in the wind, all the creatures join the orc in a monstrous cheer of victory.

FADE OUT.

EPISODE END