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SWORD
OF
JUSTICE

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"FEAR IS THE FUEL
BLOOD IS THE SPARK
KINDLE THE RAGE
AND BRING FORTH THE DARK"

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THEN

THE BARBARIAN
THREAT IS WITHIN OUR
VERY WALLS, JACOB! I TRIED
TO CONTAIN IT, BUT AS YOU
CAN SEE, IT'S INSIDIOUS,
COMPELLING ME TO HELP
IT GROW!

YOU
RENT YOUR
OWN FLESH?!
WHY?!

THE
FEAR IS
THE FUEL...

YOU
DON'T KNOW
WHAT IT'S BEEN LIKE, TO
HIDE THE TREACHERY I FEEL
UNDER MY OWN SKIN. TO
GIVE IN TO IT IN PRIVATE,
BUYING ME A FEW
PRECIOUS HOURS
FREE FROM...

... BLOOD...
WHICH IS... THE
SPARK...



MY MOTHER WAS INNOCENT!

EVEN DEAD, HER BETRAYAL CONTINUES!

HER BARBARIAN KIN AND THEIR TAINTED BLOOD! THEY ARE TO BLAME!

SHE WEAKENED US FROM WITHIN! I HAD TO DO SOMETHING!

JUSTICE BE DONE!

FATHER, DON'T--

NGAAH!

OH...
...SO CLEAR NOW... SO VERY CLEAR...

...DO NOT TOUCH... MY BLOOD...
...BLOOD WILL... MARK YOU...

LEAVE ME... RUN... NEVER RETURN...

...OR BLOOD...

*...WILL...

*...FIND...

...YOU...



Now.

IT HAUNTS ME STILL, FATHER.



WHAT IN--?



WHAT'S MAKING THAT SOUND? IS IT... MUSIC?

IS IT YOU WHO SINGS TO ME, OR THE BLADE?

OR BOTH?



IT SINGS, BUT IT CAN'T BE FOR ME.

MY SOUL ISN'T WORTHY OF SUCH A SONG.

PLEASE, END THE SONG. IT SURELY IS MEANT FOR ANOTH--





IF I'D KNOWN, I WOULD HAVE BECOME A FUGITIVE SOONER.

SO HOW DOES ONE BECOME A PRISONER OF A SWORD THAT HAS NO HAND TO WIELD IT?

IT WAS SOMETHING I CALL "ANGELIC RESONANCE."



THE HIGH HEAVENS, IT IS SAID, IS HOME TO AN OBJECT OF PERFECT BEAUTY: THE CRYSTAL ARCH. SOME BELIEVE THE ARCH RESONATES, SENDING OUT A KIND OF SONG FROM WHICH THE ANGELS ARE FORMED AND GIVEN THEIR POWERS.

I THOUGHT THIS RESONANCE MIGHT SHAPE THE PATHS OF HUMANS AS WELL. I'LL ASSUME YOU LACK ANY MYSTICAL TRAINING AND JUST TELL YOU THAT I WAS RIGHT. I ALSO FOUND A WAY TO DETECT POWERFUL FLOWS OF THIS RESONANCE FROM THE CRYSTAL ARCH.

IT'S WHAT LED ME HERE, TO THE SWORD, BUT I BECAME CAUGHT IN THE FLOWS, FORCED TO WAIT AND WATCH FOR A WORTHY BEARER. THAT'S YOU, BY THE WAY.

I STOOD WITH THE SWORD WHILE MY MIND FILLED WITH GLIMPSES OF YOUR LIFE, JACOB. WHATEVER POWER IS AT WORK HERE KEPT ME FREE FROM HUNGER, FROM THIRST, THOUGH I FOUND MYSELF COMPELLED TO RECORD WHAT I SAW IN STONE.

A PITY I FINISHED SO QUICKLY. I STOOD GATHERING DUST FOR WHAT I'M GUESSING WERE MONTHS. I'D BETTER NOT LOOK ANY OLDER, OR THAT SWORD AND I WILL HAVE WORDS.



SO IS IT CONTROLLING US NOW?

NO, THE FLOWS WERE RELEASED ONCE YOU TOOK UP THE SWORD. IT'S PROBABLY WHAT DREW YOU HERE, SO...



YOU DID COME ALONE, DIDN'T YOU?

I FEAR HE DIDN'T, LOVE, THOUGH NOT FOR WANT OF TRYIN'.

CALL HIM "KINSLAYER." HE'S GOT NO RIGHT TO A PROPER NAME.

YOU LED US ON A MERRY CHASE, EH, JACOB?

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE WENCH, STROM?



YOU CAN DIG MY ARROWS OUT OF HER HIDE!



DON'T KILL THEM! THEY'RE ONLY DOING THEIR DUTY!

NO PROMISES. THEY APPEAR TO LIKE THEIR DUTY A LITTLE TOO MUCH.



I WISH YOU'D LEFT YOUR FRIENDS AT HOME!

I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY FOUND ME!



AND I THOUGHT YOU WERE A CONSTABLE'S SON.

I JUST COULDN'T LET YOU GO UNTIL I RETURNED YOUR STOLEN PROPERTY.

I GAVE THE THIEF THE SAME "JUSTICE" YOU GAVE YOUR FATHER. NO NEED TO THANK ME.



I CAN'T KEEP NOT KILLING THEM FOREVER, JACOB!

JACOB?

THAT WAS MURDER, IVAN...



I'M SURE
YOUR DEAR
OL' DAD WOULD
AGREE.

ARREST
HIM.
HARSHLY.



...SO LEAVE FANCY
TRICKS TO NOBLE FOOLS
WITH HIRED GUARDS, JACOB.
AND DON'T GO RUSHING IN
LIKE A WOUNDED BULL UNLESS
YOU WANT IT TO BE
YOUR LAST FIGHT.

YOU'RE NOT
SCORING POINTS WITH
A CROWD FOR A TOURNEY.
AND NEVER THINK YOUR
ANGER MAKES YOU
UNBEATABLE...



JUST DO
WHAT YOU MUST AND
DO IT QUICKLY. PUT
ASIDE ANY JOY OR LUST
FOR GLORY.
THINK
ONLY OF THE
DUTY YOU
FULFILL.



TAKE NO PLEASURE IN THE BLOOD YOU SHED.

YOU MAY SOMEDAY HAVE TO BARE STEEL AGAINST ONES YOU CALLED FRIENDS.

EVEN KIN MAY SOMEDAY FALL UNDER THE SHADOW OF YOUR DUTY, AND YOUR BLADE.

EVEN ME, YOUR VERY OWN FATHER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO SPILL MY HEART'S LIFE WITHOUT HESITATION.

WAIT, YOU DIDN'T HESITATE, DID YOU?

IT FILLED YOU WITH FEAR, SEEING MY BLOOD UPON YOUR SWORD, DIDN'T IT? THAT WAS THE MOST SHAMEFUL PART, FOR ME.

FEAR WAS THE FUEL; BLOOD WAS THE SPARK... BUT YOU WERE A DAMP RAG, A JOKE OF A MAN, WHO TOOK TO HIS HEELS RATHER THAN REVEL IN HIS WORKS.

CAN'T YOU EVEN BRING YOURSELF TO DELIVER KILLING BLOWS, JACOB?



HERE, LET ME SHOW YOU HOW IT'S DONE!

I OFFER YOU THE SAME DEATH AS YOUR BLACK-HEARTED MOTHER!



SHE-- --WAS INNOCEN--

THIS HEADSMAN'S HEARD THAT SONG TOO MANY TIMES. COME ON, FIGHT WELL OR YIELD!



IVAN, I DON'T WANT TO KILL YOU BUT I WILL IF YOU DON'T LEAVE THE WOMAN, SHANAR, BE!



SUCH THREATS! LUCKY FOR ME THERE'S AN EXTRA SWORD ABOUT.



WHAT ARE--?



...KINDLE THE RAGE AND BRING FORTH THE DARK!



RISE, FOOL! WE ARE NOT DONE WITH YOU YET!



I SAID RISE!



GOOD MORNING, SUNBEAM! IT LOOKS LIKE YOU HAD A POOR NIGHT. I'M HAPPY TO SAY YOUR DAY WON'T BE MUCH BETTER.



YOUR BONDS WILL SLACKEN. YOU'LL PICK UP THAT SWORD AND KEEP IT POINTED DOWN. ANY FOOLISHNESS, AND YOU'LL BE LUCKY IF YOUR HANDS STAY ATTACHED TO YOUR WRISTS, UNDERSTOOD?

SO YOU CAN KILL ME WITHOUT THE SHAME OF FACING AN UNARMED OPPONENT?



WE'VE FELT THE BLADE'S TOUCH ENOUGH. NOW PICK IT UP OR LOSE MORE BLOOD.

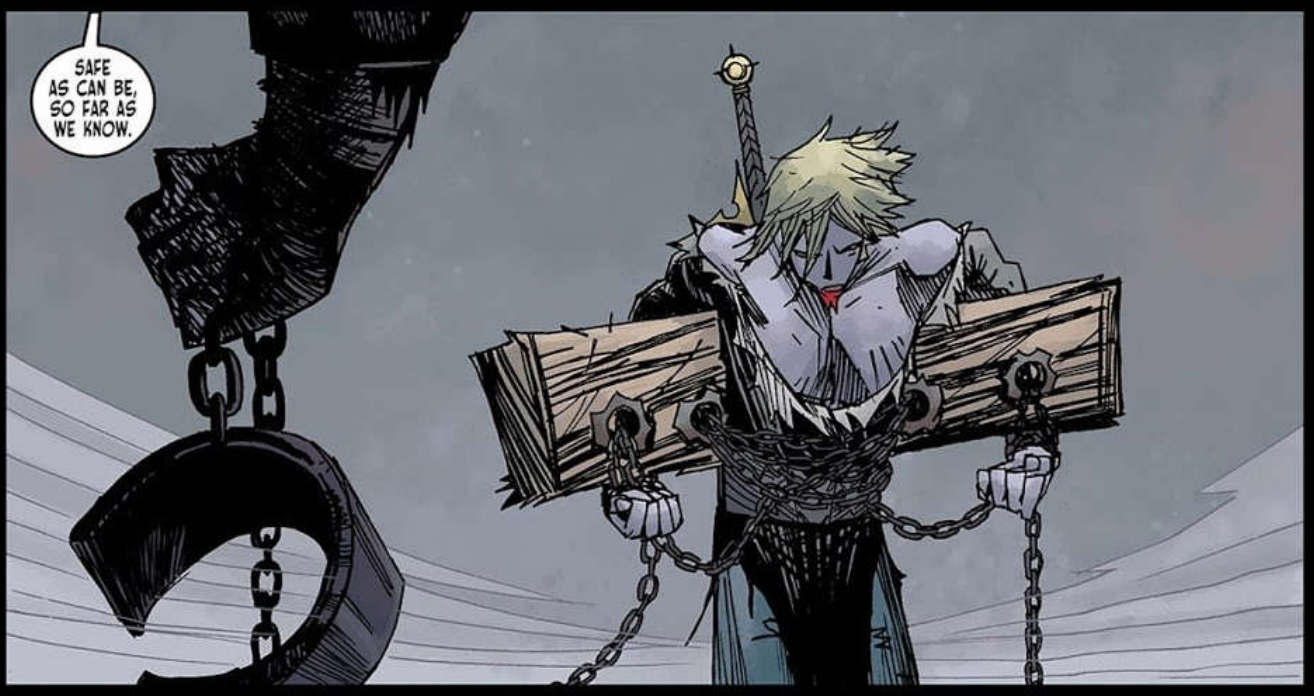


NOW PLUNGE THE BLADE INTO THE WOOD.

IMAGINE IT'S YOUR FATHER, IF THAT HELPS.



WHAT DID YOU DO WITH SHANAR? WHERE IS SHE?



SAFE AS CAN BE, SO FAR AS WE KNOW.



YOUR TRICKSTER WHORE VANISHED LIKE A FEAST DAY FIREWORK SOON AFTER YOU FELL. SHE BEGGED FOR HER LIFE. I ALMOST OFFERED HER FREEDOM IF SHE WOULD SLAY YOU, BUT THE WITCH WAS ONLY BUYING TIME TO READY HER SORCERY AND ESCAPE.





THE CREATURE WAS STILL ALIVE!

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO MY PEOPLE?

A BETTER QUESTION WOULD BE HOW DID HE FEEL THAT BOAR WITHOUT USING HIS BOW?



YOU! THEY SAID YOU FLED!

ME? THEY LIED. THEY TOLD ME IF I DIDN'T DEPART, THEY'D KILL YOU.



BUT DO I RUN AGAIN? I DESERVE PUNISHMENT FOR...

NOT FROM THEM, YOU DON'T.

I THINK ONE LESS MAN IS GOING TO RISE FROM THAT MEAL THAN STARTED ON IT. I'D RATHER NOT BECOME DESSERT.



IS ONE OF THE MEN... SCREAMING?

IF HE IS, HE SHOULDN'T BE AT IT FOR LONG...

...AND IT'LL ATTRACT ANYTHING THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE FIND US INTERESTING.

THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON...

I WAS JUST ABOUT TO SEARCH FOR YOU.

I SAID I WOULD BE AN HOUR OR SO GATHERING HERBS AND RARE PLANTS.

THOSE HERBS LOOK LIKE CLOTHES.

SEARCH THE FOREST LONG ENOUGH, AND YOU'LL EVENTUALLY UNCOVER A BANDIT OR TWO. IT'S WHY MY FATHER DIDN'T WANT ME FOLLOWING IN HIS ALCHEMIST FOOTSTEPS.



THEY PARTED WITH THESE WILLINGLY?

EVENTUALLY. THEY DID ATTACK ME FIRST, I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW.

HOW MANY WERE THERE?

AT LEAST ONE THAT WAS YOUR SIZE. NOW GET DRESSED.



HOW DID YOUR OWN PROJECT GO?

FAIRLY WELL, I THINK.



IT'S NOT MASTER CRAFTSMANSHIP, BUT IT WILL SERVE.

SO WHAT DO YOU PLAN ON DOING NOW?



I'M... NOT SURE. I DON'T THINK I SHOULD RUN ANYMORE. I'M ALMOST THINKING I SHOULD...

...GO HOME.

PERHAPS, THOUGH I DOUBT THE SWORD CHOSE YOU TO TURN YOURSELF OVER TO THE TENDER MERCIES OF MADMEN. NO OFFENSE TO YOUR HOMETLAND, OF COURSE.



THEY WEREN'T LIKE THIS, NOT WHILE I WAS GROWING UP. THE BARBARIANS BROUGHT THEIR CURSE TO STAALBREAK.

I SAW WHAT YOU WENT THROUGH, JACOB; THE SWORD SHOWED IT TO ME.

THESE BARBARIANS YOUR PEOPLE FIGHT AREN'T THE GUARDIANS OF MOUNT ARREAT THE HISTORIES TELL US ABOUT.



THE HISTORIANS NEVER FACED DOWN CHIEF KHELRIC OR WATCHED HIM DRENCH OUR WALLS IN BLOOD!

WELL SAID, KINGSLAYER!



HELLO AGAIN, WITCH! WE SPIED THE FLASHY SPELLS YOU USED ON THOSE HIGHWAYMEN FROM OVER A MILE AWAY. WE GAVE THE WRETCHES A MERCIFUL DEATH RATHER THAN THE HUMILIATION OF DEFEAT YOU LEFT THEM WITH, ESPECIALLY THE ONE WITH NO CLOTHES.

I WARNED YOU WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE FOUND YOU AGAIN.



YOU THREATENED TO KILL JACOB BECAUSE YOU WERE TOO WOUNDED TO FACE MY POWER IN COMBAT.

TRUE, BUT OUR WOUNDS ARE BOUND AND YOU HAVE JACOB IN YOUR TENDER CARE, SO ALL ARE EQUAL, YES?



I SAW WHAT YOU DID TO THAT BOAR! I'LL SOONER SEE YOU IN--

DON'T LET ME GET TOO MUDDY, JACOB..



A THOUSAND CURSES UPON EVERY WITCH AND THE HAGS WHO BIRTHED THEM!



LORD IVAN, WE MAY HAVE THEM YET!



I SAID... NOT TOO... MUDDY...

WHAT--? BUT WE WERE... HOW?

I AM... A WIZARD... REMEMBER?

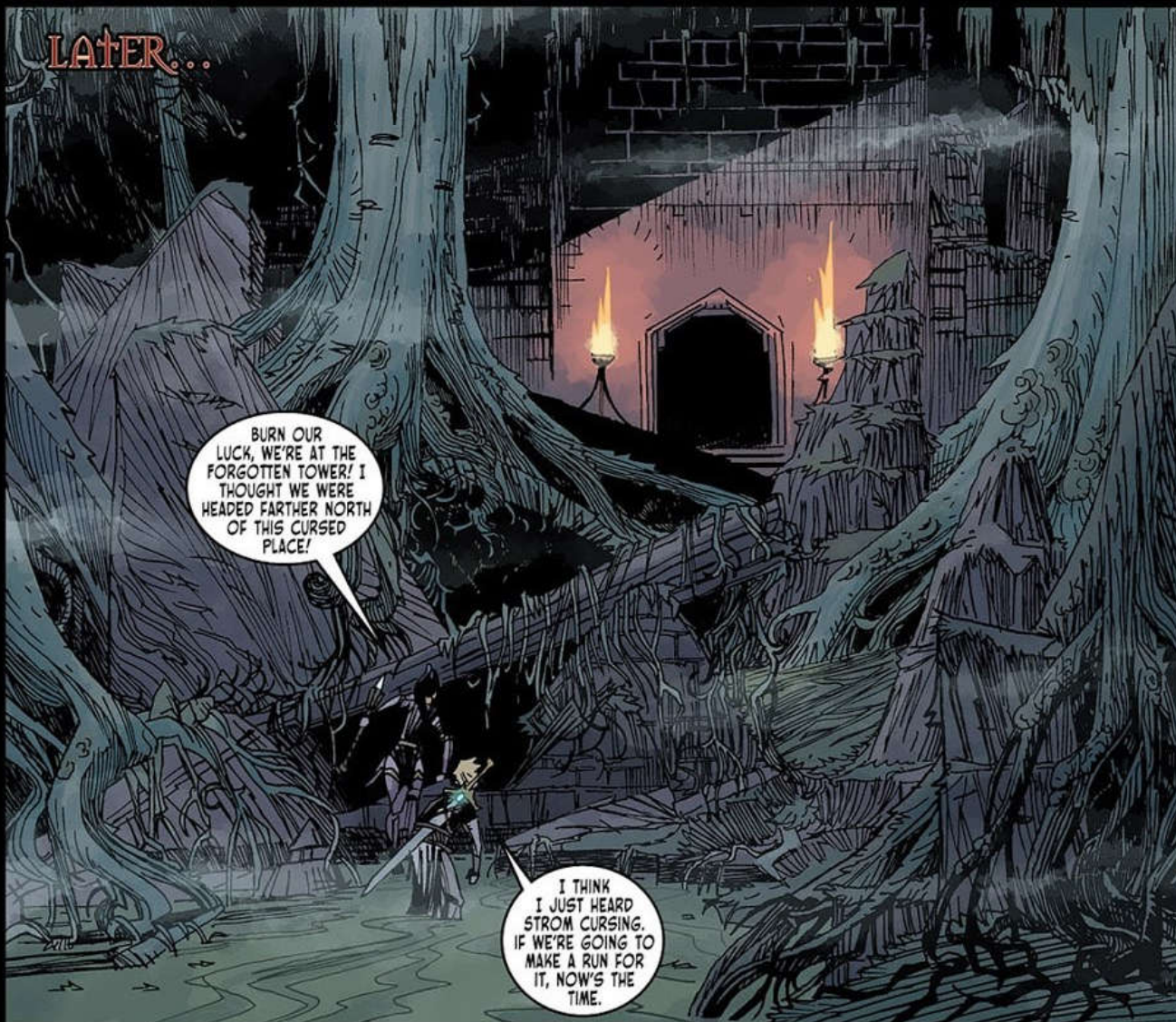


WHERE ARE WE?

A SMALL WAYS... INTO THE BLACK MARSH...

HOW SMALL?

FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN OF IVAN... NOT FAR ENOUGH...



LATER...

BURN OUR LUCK, WE'RE AT THE FORGOTTEN TOWER! I THOUGHT WE WERE HEADED FARTHER NORTH OF THIS CURSED PLACE!

I THINK I JUST HEARD STROM CURSING. IF WE'RE GOING TO MAKE A RUN FOR IT, NOW'S THE TIME.



TOO LATE! QUICK, GET DOWN!

WHY, WHAT--?



WRONGNESS,
HERE...IT MAKES
FOUL AIR,
YES...

...FIND
IT, YES.
END IT,
YES.

EAT IT...
PERHAPS...

• TO BE CONTINUED •