

THE NOT-SO-CHOSEN ONE

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EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DUSK

A desolate field with large scorch marks burned into the ground. A MONSTER (30 feet tall, terrifying), dominates the landscape and towers over an eclectic team of brightly-dressed fantasy HEROES.

Together, they shoot volleys of arrows and balls of magical fire up at the creature, but their attacks are too weak to pierce through its thick hide.

The Monster ROARS in outrage, and the sound is so loud it sends tremors throughout the field, knocking them helplessly to the ground.

With massive, thundering steps, it comes at the heroes and raises a grotesque foot, ready to crush them into oblivion.

CHAMPION (O.S.)
Hold it right there, creature! Only
one thing's getting crushed today,
and it won't be my friends.

The CHAMPION (20s) - a knight in gleaming white armor with hair like Fabio and a voice like Buzz Lightyear - emerges from behind the Monster in a swirling cloud of dust. Somehow, his outfit remains spotless.

The Monster charges straight for him.

With every step, the difference in size grows more and more absurd, but the Champion just smiles as he raises his shield and braces for impact.

BAM!

The Monster SLAMS into the Champion at full speed and his shield EXPLODES in a burst of white light that lights up the field like the middle of the day.

The Monster stumbles back, angry and confused, which gives the heroes enough time to regain their footing.

Enraged, the Monster slams its claws into the ground and RIPS out a boulder, raising it high above its head.

TWANG!

A tiny, almost laughably insignificant crossbow bolt flies up and hits the Monster between its eyes.

It goes cross-eyed, looking at the bolt, then lets out a long groaning death rattle and falls to the ground with a thunderous BOOM!

The heroes cheer, then quickly converge on its corpse.

WIZARD
We did it, guys!

ELF
And it only took us five tries!

HEALER
I hope it dropped a set of
enchanted mail. I--

CHAMPION
(interrupting)
I'm sorry, what exactly did we do?

The Champion walks up and joins the others, but does not join in on the looting.

GNOME
(looking at the body)
Is that a trick question?

ELF
We finished the raid, Roger. We
beat the final boss!

CHAMPION
Oh really? Did we beat the final
boss, or was it just me? Cause from
where I'm standing, it looks like
you all got caught in its AOE
attack and ended up on the ground.

GNOME
Hey, I got the killing blow!

CHAMPION
Yes Dennis, because you're the DPS.
Anyone with half a brain and an
internet connection can do what you
do. But could anyone else have
taunted the boss to draw aggro at
exactly the right moment? Could
anyone else have parried its
legendary attack and debuffed it in
time for you to finish it off?

WIZARD
We get it, Roger. You were great.

CHAMPION

No, I was incredible. And I don't think a little recognition is too much to ask.

The heroes collectively sigh and roll their eyes.

ELF

(sarcastically)

Roger Breton is the greatest hero in all the realm. Is that what you want us to say? Us mortals could never understand his talent--

CHAMPION

(interrupting)

Okay, if you're gonna be like that then... oh crap.

HEALER

What's wrong?

CHAMPION

My dad's calling. I gotta go AFK.

GNOME

But Roger, it's raid night. Doesn't your dad know you're "the greatest hero in all the realm."

CHAMPION

Yeah, but my grandpa's coming to visit.

GNOME

And?

CHAMPION

And if he's half as bad as my dad says, then slaying Azmorendicar the Soul-Flayer's gonna seem like a walk in the park.

INT. ROGER III'S ROOM - NIGHT

The extensively decorated room of a pre-teen boy. Posters of superheroes and fantasy characters line the walls, various action figures (still in their boxes) lay scattered around the room, and a pile of dirty laundry sits on the floor.

ROGER III (13) - an energetic kid wearing an esports jersey - sits in front of a gaming PC which shows characters that look suspiciously like the Champion and the other heroes.

On the side of the screen, a chat log shows a transcription of everything they've been saying.

ROGER JR. (O.S.)
(yelling)
Roger Cornelius Breton the Third,
you get down here right now! Do not
make me come up there.

ROGER III
(yelling back)
Jesus dad, I'm coming. You can't
pause an online game!

Roger III scrambles out of his chair and heads out of the room without turning anything off.

On his screen, the phrase "Roger Breton is the greatest hero in all the realm" blinks slowly in and out of existence.

EXT. GAS STATION - MORNING

A busy interstate gas station. A beat-up old pickup with its windows rolled-down pulls in and heads to the nearest pump.

CAR RADIO (O.S.)
And although prosecutors say this
verdict is a significant step on
the road to justice, it may be of
little comfort to those whose
pensions were embezzled. For more--

The radio cuts off and ROGER (70s) - an old man wearing a crucifix and a deeply set frown - steps out.

Across the street, a STRANGER (30's, kinda sketchy), crosses through traffic with an empty gas can. He sees Roger and makes a beeline towards him.

STRANGER
Excuse me sir, do you--

ROGER
(interrupting)
No.

STRANGER
But I didn't--

ROGER
(interrupting again)
You're gonna ask me for money, and
I'm gonna to tell you to fuck off.
So why waste any more time?

STRANGER

But, my son's back at my car and--

ROGER

(interrupting again)

Fuck. Off.

STRANGER

Right... Sorry to bother you.

(he gestures to the
crucifix)

And I hope you have a blessed day.

The Stranger smiles weakly and heads over to someone at a different pump. Roger snorts and flips him the bird.

INT. GAS STATION - MORNING

A decent-sized gas station with multiple cash registers, but only one CASHIER (20s, bored). Two SOCCER MOMS (30s, head-to-toe athleisure) are chatting at the end of the line.

Roger enters and heads to the auto supply section. He grabs a bottle of fuel injector cleaner and grumbles at the price.

SOCCER MOM

It's ridiculous! The kids can't get enough of them, but it's nothing but peanut butter and jelly.

OTHER SOCCER MOM

Does the crust really make that much of a difference?

SOCCER MOM

Apparently!

(she holds up a box of
Uncrustables sandwiches)

At this point, I'm lucky if I can get them to eat anything else.

EXT. GAS STATION - MORNING

THE MANAGER (30s, tired), leans against the store and watches cars fill up while he smokes.

Roger exits with a box of Uncrustables and scowls when he smells the cigarette smoke.

ROGER

Get that shit out of your mouth.
You look fucking disgusting.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

ROGER JR. (40s, frazzled), stands with a backpack slung over one shoulder in front of Roger III and ELOISE (8, adorable). They're lined up like soldiers receiving orders and the mood is similarly grim.

ROGER JR.
Okay, one more time just to make
sure we're all on the same page.
Grandpa is from?

ROGER III & ELOISE
(in unison)
A different generation.

ROGER JR.
And sometimes he can be?

ELOISE
Difficult?

ROGER III
Obnoxious?

ROGER JR. (CONT'D)
That's not-- well, close enough...
In the end, though, he really does?

ROGER III & ELOISE
(in unison)
Love us.

ROGER JR.
That's right. And just as long as
you don't try to argue with him or
disagree about anything you'll be
fine. Oh, and make sure you don't--

He's cut off by the sound of political talk-radio and a car pulling into the drive. He hugs both kids and heads outside.

EXT. BRETON FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

A standard suburban home with a well-tended yard. Roger Jr. exits with the backpack still slung over his shoulder and finds Roger unloading his truck.

ROGER
There's my boy. Nice of you to come
out after I've finished unloading.

ROGER JR.
Hey Dad... nice to see you too.

ROGER
That's quite the bag for an
overnight trip.
(he laughs)
Sick of me already?

ROGER JR.
Look Dad, the servers in Kansas
aren't responding. It's gonna take
a lot longer to fix than I thought.

Roger's trademark frown deepens into a scowl.

ROGER JR. (CONT'D)
I know it's not ideal, but--

ROGER
(interrupting)
Not ideal? Junior, I just drove six
fucking hours to come see you.

ROGER JR.
And you will! Just a few days later
than we planned...

ROGER III
What's really going on here? Are
you mad at me for some reason?

ROGER JR.
No, come on. That's ridiculous.

ROGER
And don't act like I'm stupid.

ROGER JR.
I'm not! Jesus, I thought you
wanted to spend time with the kids!

ROGER
No, what I want is for you to stop
fucking me over. Call in sick.

ROGER JR.
Well, that's not gonna happen. So
are you going to help or do I need
to make other arrangements?

The two share a long, hard stare.

ROGER
Pay me.

ROGER JR.

What?

ROGER

If you're really gonna make me play
nanny I'm not gonna do it for free.

ROGER JR.

Dad, if you need money then--

ROGER

(interrupting)

You know goddamn well this isn't
about money!

Roger Jr. sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose.

ROGER JR.

You really haven't changed a bit...

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Roger sits on the couch in-between Roger III and Eloise.
There's no sound but the soft hum of a fan and nobody is
talking or even looking at one another. It's awkward.

ROGER

So, uh, Roger. Your Dad tells me
you like sports.

Roger III gives a slow, non-committal nod.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Well, it took me a while, but I
found your Dad's old glove in the
attic. I thought maybe later we
could have a catch in the yard.

Eloise snickers.

ELOISE

Roger likes esports.

ROGER

Oh, like soccer?

ELOISE

(giggling)

No, video games.

ROGER

Sweetheart, video games are the
opposite of playing a sport.

ROGER III

No they're not! Esports take just as much skill and strategy.

(he points to his jersey)

Would Gatorade sponsor OpTic Gaming if they didn't play a real sport?

ROGER

Wait, so that jersey is for playing video games? You don't even need pants to play video games!

Roger III starts to argue, but quickly remembers that he's not supposed to. Instead, he just stares down at his feet.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Uh, what about you, Eloise? Your Dad says you're quite the dancer.

Eloise is pleased by the compliment, but Roger III snorts.

ROGER III

Yeah, Tiktok dances.

(he sees Roger's blank expression)

It's a social media thing.

ROGER

Right...

Roger looks to them both, inviting either to contribute to the conversation. Neither does.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Hey, how about a treat?

Roger pulls out his box of Uncrustables and places it onto the coffee table. He looks expectantly at both kids, but falters when he sees they're not into it.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Or do you not like these?

ELOISE

They're okay.

ROGER III

Yeah, I'm not really hungry.

ROGER

Right. Okay then...

Another awkward silence.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Should I just leave you alone?

Both kids snap to attention, but hesitate before saying anything -- which is all the confirmation he needs.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Go on, then. Do whatever you want.

Roger III and Eloise get up slowly, like it's some kind of trap. But when nothing happens, they dash up the stairs.

ROGER (CONT'D)
I'm getting paid either way...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roger snores softly on the couch while the TV blares.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.)
And, if true, these reports would
prove they knew about the leak days
before it was reported to the EPA.

INT. ROGER III'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Roger III sleeps peacefully with a half-eaten bag of cheese puffs at his side, his mouth and fingers coated with dust.

His monitor powers on by itself.

"Roger Breton is the greatest hero in all the realm" starts flashing on the screen and the entire room begins to shake.

Action figures tumble off shelves, posters peel off walls, and speakers tip over and vibrate like a phone on his desk.

Finally, the monitor itself shudders off the table and falls to the floor with a CRASH!

Roger III bolts upright and stares out in terror.

Water starts seeping up from the floor. First as a trickle, then as a raging torrent that covers the room.

SPLASH!

A single, leather gauntleted arm bursts out of the water, followed by another. Finally, the soaking wet form of KAELELYN (20's) emerges. He's powerfully built and moves like a cat in his soft leather armor. He has a dark complexion and menacing eyes that peak out over a mask.

Kaelryn instantly crouches down into a ready position and draws a curved blade from his bandolier. He takes stock the room, then advances towards Roger III.

Roger III scoots back and hides behind his sheets.

The water churns and ARGENCIA (20s, beautiful) emerges, landing gracefully on her feet. She has a kind face and is wearing fine robes with elaborate gold embroidering.

She places a calming hand on Kaelryn's shoulder, then walks up to Roger III and crouches down to his level.

ARGENCIA

Easy child. Neither I nor my
companion mean you any harm.

It's an absurd situation, with two ridiculously dressed adults standing in his room while it fills with water, but the soothing calm of her voice does seem to put him at ease.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

We have come seeking Roger Breton,
the greatest hero in all the realm.

ROGER III

Th-That's me...

KAELRYN

Then the ritual was a success.

ARGENCIA

Roger Breton...

She bows and gestures for Kaelryn to do the same. He reluctantly follows.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

I am Princess Argencia, and this is
Kaelryn of Hessive. Our world has
been overtaken by a great evil and
we are seeking a champion to turn
back the tide.

As she speaks, Roger III's face changes from one of apprehension to excitement. This kid was raised on fantasy adventure media and this is his chance to go on an adventure of his own. By the time she's finished, he's adopted his best approximation of a heroically stoic expression.

The door jiggles, then flies open and sends a small flood of water out into the hallway.

Roger stands in the doorway, pointing a shotgun into the room as Eloise stands wide-eyed at his side.

ROGER

What the fuck is this? Who the fuck
are you and what the fuck are you
doing in my grandson's room?

Kaelryn springs into action, putting himself between Roger and Roger III. Argencia also moves forward, holding her hands up in a placating gesture.

ARGENCIA

Please sir, we mean you no harm!

ROGER III

(embarrassed)

Grandpa, stop! They're here because
they need my help.

ROGER

They're gonna need a doctor's help
if they don't back the fuck up.

(he points the shotgun)

I'm serious. I will blow your
goddamn head off.

With a pained expression, Argencia waves her hands in an intricate pattern and the shotgun turns into a sunflower.

Roger looks down in shock, then points the flower at Kaelryn and tries to fire.

Nothing happens.

In one fluid and well-trained motion, Kaelryn sweeps Roger's legs out from underneath him and grabs him by the throat, pinning him onto the bed and bringing a knife to his neck.

KAELRYN

I will not allow you to come near
the Champion.

ROGER III

Stop it!

ARGENCIA

Please! This is not necessary!

ROGER

(gurgling)

Fuck. You.

Roger brings his knee up into Kaelryn's groin and he stumbles back, doubled-over in pain. Then Roger charges. The men collide at full force and fall tumbling to the ground.

The water flashes, and they both disappear.

ARGENCIA

No!

(she turns to Roger III)

We must make haste, Champion. I regret there is no further time for me to explain, but if your heart is as true as the Oracle foretold, you will have the courage to come.

She reaches out her hand.

ROGER III

My lady, I accept your quest and pledge to faithfully--

Roger's hand bursts up and grabs Argencia by the leg. She gasps, then PLUNGES down into the water and disappears.

ROGER III (CONT'D)

No!

Roger III leaps down into the water, but all the magic seems to be gone. There is no more light coming from below and the incoming current of water has stopped.

Roger III and Eloise are left standing in a soggy room with nothing but the sound of water trickling down the stairs.

EXT. SWAMP - AFTERNOON

A dreamlike mist hangs over a mire that's dotted with shallow pools of water. Everything is completely still and silent, as if the landscape itself were holding its breath.

Three figures ERUPT from a pool, coughing and sputtering.

Argencia is the first to emerge, wading over to the edge where she starts wringing out her robes.

Kaelryn does his best to drag Roger out of the pool, but the older man struggles and tries to kick free.

KAELRYN

Incompetent, stupid old man!

ROGER

Let me go, goddamit! That first kick was just a warning!

Kaelryn finishes dragging him out of the water and forcefully dumps him into the muck.

KAELRYN

Try that again and I will shatter your legs and leave you to crawl.

ROGER

Big words coming from the cunt I found in a little boy's bedroom.

Somehow, Roger has managed to keep hold of the sunflower and he levels the sadly drooping plant at Kaelryn.

ARGENCIA

Enough! This quarreling will help none of us achieve our aims.

ROGER

Sorry sweetheart, but my only 'aim' is to go back and call the police.

KAELRYN

Pity you lacked such foresight when you dove straight into our portal.

ROGER

Look, I'll make this easy. Get out of my way or I'll shoot you dead.

Argencia moves her hands in a different pattern and a piece of wetland shrubbery transforms into a glass sphere.

KAELRYN

Careful old man. Few have ever said such things to me and lived. Were--

CRASH!

Argencia FLINGS the sphere down into the ground where it shatters into a thousand tinkling shards.

ARGENCIA

(yelling)

I said enough!

Both Kaelryn and Roger are momentarily cowed, looking up at her in unison with wary expressions.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

It is to our shame that we have brought you to our realm, but there is no way to return you from here.

ROGER

What the fuck does that mean?

ARGENCIA

That we need a moment to confer.

Argencia motions for Kaelryn and they step over to the side.

KAELRYN

We had him! The Champion was within our grasp, and we allowed this senile old fool to distract us!

ARGENCIA

I know, but our next course of action is all that matters now.

KAELRYN

We must return to the Oracle, no?

ARGENCIA

Indeed. He is the only who can return him home.

KAELRYN

No! The Oracle is miles away, across treacherous terrain. To say nothing of the Dark Lord's forces already closing in! Our cause is too important to risk bringing an impotent old fool.

While they're discussing, Roger tiptoes over to the water. He slips in quietly and starts wading towards the middle.

ARGENCIA

We have a responsibility to ensure his safe return because we are the ones who brought him here! Besides, do you truly believe the Champion will agree to help us if we allow harm to befall his elder?

(she crosses her arms)

We are bound to this course, Kaelryn -- by duty and necessity.

KAELRYN

Very well, princess. Now--
(he sees Roger is gone)
Where is he?

Kaelryn whips his head around, scanning the swamp until he sees ripples in the pool and bubbles coming up from below.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)
Seven stars!

He sprints back into the water and splashes unceremoniously to the center. Kaelryn dives under, then returns moments later with Roger swearing and sputtering over his shoulder.

ROGER
Fuck! Why won't you just let me go?

Kaelryn wades back to the edge, then tosses Roger down with more force than is probably needed.

KAELRYN
How is it that a man of your advanced age has no more sense than a child? Would you plunge your arm into an open flame if you did not have a minder?

ROGER
(muttering)
Oh, I'm gonna plunge into something, alright...

ARGENCIA
Grandfather, Kaelryn and I have agreed to escort you to the Oracle. Once there, he can instruct us how to return you to your realm.

ROGER
No thanks.

Kaelryn and Argencia look to each other in surprise.

ROGER (CONT'D)
I think I've figured out what's going on.

Argencia starts to protest, but Kaelryn cuts her off.

KAELRYN
Princess, please. I would like to hear our wise friend's explanation.

ROGER
None of this is real.
(he smiles)
This is either a stupid dream, or my dumbass grandson's smoking something a lot stronger than weed.
(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

Either way, the safest thing for me to do is to stay put and not do anything stupid.

ARGENCIA

So you intend to... wait here?
That's preposterous! It will be dark soon and this area is unsafe!

KAELRYN

Yet surely that is not our place to decide, Princess. Are we to abduct him if he does not wish to go?

ARGENCIA

But the Champion, and Dark Lord...

KAELRYN

Are clearly beyond his interest. In truth, we may even be doing him a disservice if we stay and attract those who would do him harm.

ARGENCIA

(to Roger)

Are you certain of this course of action? Is there nothing I can say that might persuade you to come?

ROGER

Yes! Just get the fuck out of here and leave me alone!

EXT. SWAMP - LATER

Hours pass via accelerated timelapse. The sky grows dark and shadows deepen as the mire becomes a more sinister place.

Roger remains by the pool, looking wet, miserable, and cold.

In the mist, a figure coalesces and slinks towards the pool. It's large, clearly predatory, and interested in Roger.

As it draws near, the PANTHER'S features grow more distinct. Its glowing purple eyes burn with hate, and its oversized mouth is filled with too many teeth.

It lets out a high, gloating YOWL.

Roger yelps and sees it coming straight for him. For a moment, he's paralyzed by fear. Then, he starts laughing.

The Panther stops and looks around, then growls even louder.

ROGER
 (laughing)
 Here kitty, kitty...

That's the last straw. The Panther unsheathes its claws and falls back on its haunches, ready to kill.

TWHIP!

An arrow comes flying out of the mist and hits its shoulder.

The creature snarls and wheels around to see Argencia sprinting through the mire with a bow. This time, however, she raises the angle and fires a shot high into the air.

As it travels, Argencia waves her hands and the arrow transforms into a net that falls down onto the Panther.

It HOWLS with rage and easily shreds through it, but not before Kaelryn comes flying in and SLAMS into its side.

ROGER (CONT'D)
 Ah Christ, not you guys again. What the hell are you doing back here?

Kaelryn slowly turns to face him, eyes wide.

KAELRYN
 What are we doing here!?
 (he flings a dagger)
 We are saving your miserable life!
 Not that I understand why...

The Panther regains its footing and charges straight at him.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)
 For you are without question the most aggravating.
 (he throws another)
 Incompetent.
 (and another)
 And foolish old man I have ever had the misfortune to--

The Panther crashes into Kaelryn and sends them both flying.

Kaelryn uses the momentum to duck into a roll, but the Panther is even quicker. It lands on its feet and pounces, shredding through armor and leaving half his chest exposed.

ARGENCIA
 Kaelryn!

Argencia takes her bow and tosses it to him.

He snatches it out of the air, and by the time he can bring it to bear, she has already transformed it into a spear.

KAELRYN

Many thanks, Princess!

Kaelryn HURLS the spear and hits his mark, sending it through the roof of its mouth and out the back of its head.

The Panther stumbles, then falls onto its side where Kaelryn slits its throat in one swift, practiced motion. It gurgles piteously, then dissolves into a viscous black ooze.

ARGENCIA

Are you wounded?

KAELRYN

No. The beast caught my shoulder, but my pauldrons were up to the--
 (he sees she means Roger)
 And he's certainly fine! He could not have even pulled a muscle, sitting there as he was.

ROGER

And I was doing just fine until you numbskulls came back.
 (he swats at Argencia as she examines him)
 I thought we agreed you were going to fuck off and leave me alone.

KAELRYN

Would that we could, old man. But the Princess insisted we watch from afar until you came to your senses.
 (he gestures at the muck)
 Only neither of us could have guessed you would remain in this filth for hours until finally letting a panther eat you alive!

ROGER

A fake panther. Real jungle cats don't look like that.

KAELRYN

Fake!? Do these wounds look--

ARGENCIA

(interrupting)

I believe you, grandfather. Since coming to our world, you have seen many strange and incredible things.

(MORE)

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

It is not unreasonable to think
this is merely a dream.

(she points to the trees)

But we have set up camp nearby with
a fire and warm food. Surely there
can be no harm in waiting in a more
comfortable place?

Roger is obviously miserable and cold, but doesn't seem to
want to give in so easily.

ROGER

I don't know...

KAELRYN

Or I can carry you there. For I
have no further patience for
waiting in the mire and attracting
more of the Dark Lord's servants.

ROGER

(sneering)

Well, since you asked so nicely...

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A small, cozy campsite with clean bedrolls and a Dutch oven
suspended over a low fire.

KAELRYN (O.S.)

And should you see such a creature,
do not sit there and do nothing.
The servants of the Dark Lord will
not hesitate to tear you to pieces.

Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger all emerge from the foliage
looking tired, dirty, and wet.

ARGENCIA

And here we are: a warm place for
you to spend the night.

Roger grunts disapprovingly, but wastes no time walking over
to a bedroll and collapsing down onto it.

Argencia ladles some of the soup into a cup for Roger, while
Kaelryn begins taking off his armor.

KAELRYN

Did you hear what I said, old man?
Alert us if you see another one of
the Dark Lord's creatures.

ROGER
(unphased, eating soup)
Why do you call him that, anyway?

KAELRYN
The Dark Lord? Because he is an agent of treachery and deceit. A tyrannical madman and the despoiler of all things noble and pure.

ROGER
(still slurpin' away)
Right, but he doesn't have a name? I mean Adolf was a prick, but we still called him Hitler.

ARGENCIA
He was once known as Spellthinor, if you must know. But who he is matters far less than what he's become. By using forbidden rituals to learn magic outside his given domain, he traded his soul for mastery of the nine mystic devotions. He is truly the greatest evil our realm has ever known.

ROGER
Unlike you guys, who only steal kids.

KAELRYN
For the last time, the ritual was meant to summon a hero. We simply did as the Oracle instructed.

ROGER
Oh, so you were just following orders? Never mind, then.

KAELRYN
Listen well! You may lack the sense to believe that which is before your eyes, but the Oracle's gift is very real. Would the Dark Lord--

ROGER
(interrupting)
Yeah, I think I've heard enough.

Roger finishes his soup and begins tucking himself away. He's filthy and still slightly damp, but it's not like he's gonna have to deal with the mess in the morning.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Goodnight and goodbye. This may not
be the strangest dream I've ever
had, but it's probably the dumbest.

Kaelryn finishes removing his armor and sits by the fire.

Argencia, meanwhile, is off to the side waving her hands in
a dizzying series of gestures and transforming pieces of
brush into cushions and sheets. She's already finished an
entire bed, complete with throw pillows and a duvet.

ROGER (CONT'D)
(muffled)
You know, only one thing happens
when you bring a kid into a war.

There's a long silence as they wait for him to finish.

ARGENCIA
What is that?

ROGER
They die.

EXT. CAMPSITE - MORNING

Roger sleeps peacefully in his bedroll while Kaelryn sits
hunched over a fire cooking breakfast. The sizzling sound of
meat frying in the pan blends seamlessly with the morning
songs of birds and 'other creatures' in the forest.

Roger's eyes open slowly as he gets his bearings. Then, all
at once, he bolts upright and looks wildly around the camp.

KAELRYN
Good morning, grandfather, I have
excellent news! It seems that,
against all odds, I still exist!

Roger thrashes his way out of the bedroll and looks down at
his arms and legs. They're caked in dried mud.

The ambient sounds of the forest become muffled and Roger's
pounding heart grows louder and louder. He clutches the side
of a tree and slides down, hyperventilating.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)
What's the matter? I thought you
understood everything, old man.

Roger's breathing grows faster and the world begins to spin.

ARGENCIA (O.S.)
You were right. The conjurer has
summoned more beasts, but has not--

Argencia walks into camp with a bow slung over her shoulder.
She stops dead in her tracks when she sees Roger.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)
What happened!?

KAELRYN
A much-needed dose of humility.

ARGENCIA
And you left him like this?

KAELRYN
The old man will not come to any
harm if we let him simmer in his
clarity. And breakfast would have
burned if I'd left it unattended.

Argencia shoots him a glare before coming to Roger's side.

ARGENCIA
Easy now, breathe easy.

She places a reassuring hand on Roger's chest and puts her
face right in front of his.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)
You are safe and among friends.

She takes slow, exaggerated breaths and soon Roger's own
breathing slows to match her pace.

ROGER
I-I don't understand...

ARGENCIA
And that is well. You need only
know that you are among friends who
have fresh clothes and a warm meal
to share. You may even have
Kaelryn's portion, if you wish,
since he has so clearly forgotten
the dictates of hospitality.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

Roger sits at the base of a tree and eats with a glassy-eyed
expression. He's wearing a clean facsimile of his old
clothes and the sunflower sits drooping in his lap.

Elsewhere, Kaelryn and Argencia are tearing down the camp.

ROGER
(matter-of-fact)
I think I'm having a stroke.

Argencia hurries over.

ARGENCIA
Are you unwell?

ROGER
I'm dying, actually. But there's
nothing you can do. If I'm not
high, then I must be in a coma.

Kaelryn rolls his eyes and sighs loudly.

ARGENCIA
And what does that mean?

ROGER
That I'm completely fucked.

ARGENCIA
Then perhaps you should seek out
the Oracle. There are none wiser
than he, grandfather, and we just
so happen to be heading that way...

ROGER
Okay, Jesus, I'll go. But my name's
Roger Breton, not "grandfather."
You've gotta stop calling me that.

KAELRYN
Nonsense. That's the champion.

ROGER
Yeah, he's named after me, dipshit.
He's Roger Breton the third.
(he sighs)
I'd hoped he might pass it on when
he had kids of his own someday.
But, well, let's just say he thinks
video games are a sport...

EXT. SWAMP - AFTERNOON

Two PANTHERS race through the underbrush, barreling through
rotten logs and trampling over wildflowers. One stops to
sniff at the ground, then BOUNDS off a different direction.

They BURST into a small clearing, and three little DEERLINGS freeze in place. Each has a budding pair of antlers that emit dazzling colors as they tremble together in fear.

The Panthers stalk forward in separate directions, cutting off any chance of escape. The littlest one closes its eyes.

TWEEE!

A shrill whistle sounds from off in the distance and both Panthers immediately stop what they're doing to turn around.

The CONJURER (40s, evil), steps out into the clearing with a silver whistle between his teeth. He's wearing dark robes and a tall pointy hat.

The Panthers line up dutifully while dozens of SOLDIERS come stumbling out of the trees. Each is in heavy chain mail and wear large silver helmets that look just like human skulls.

In other words, they're clearly the bad guys.

The CAPTAIN (50s, also super evil), goes to the Conjurer.

CAPTAIN

Your creatures are proving to be more of nuisance than a boon, wizard. They've once again failed to find the right quarry.

CONJURER

My darlings can hardly be held to blame. They were sent to seek and destroy, and have done both admirably. It is not their fault that our wise lord has yet to rid this region of its... 'pests.'

He nods to the deerlings as they race off to safety. Held entirely in his thrall, neither Panther moves even an inch.

CONJURER (CONT'D)

But I think we may not be as from our prey as you think.

The Conjurer points towards the smoldering remnants of a small firepit at the edge of the clearing -- right where Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger were sleeping hours before.

EXT. FOREST - AFTERNOON

A bucolic little mushroom house with tiny little doors and windows.

A PIXIE in an adorable straw hat is tilling a miniature garden while his PIXIE WIFE stands off to the side with a baby on her hip.

A shadow falls over them. The Pixie Wife points up and screams.

WHAM!

A massive sneaker descends from the sky and OBLITERATES the mushroom house in a single step.

That sneaker belongs to Roger, who looks exhausted as he trudges through the woods with his sunflower.

ROGER

Wait! Hold on a goddamn minute. I need to take a break.

Kaelryn sighs loudly and emerges from the foliage ahead.

KAELRYN

I swear to each of the seven stars, if you need to urinate once more...

ROGER

First of all, fuck you. One day your bladder won't be so much bigger than your brain, and it's coming a lot sooner than you think.

Argencia emerges from the forest behind them, holding some kind of rake that she's using to obscure their tracks. When she sees what happened to the pixies' home, she kneels down and tries to repair it with her magic.

The pixies lay into her in a torrent of accusatory squeaks.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I just need to take a breather. It's been a long, long time since I've had to do a trek like this.

KAELRYN

Do you realize the Princess and I made this journey in a single day? And yet, with you here slowing us--

ARGENCIA

(interrupting)

Kaelryn! Why don't you go and scout the way ahead? You can find the most easily traversable path while Roger and I recover our strength.

Kaelryn narrows his eyes, but does not protest.

KAELRYN

Just don't give him any water. That
is the very last thing we need.

Kaelryn stomps away and they are left alone with the sounds
of the forest and angry squeaks from pixies down below.

ROGER

Is he always an asshole?

ARGENCIA

Kaelryn has lost much. His people
were the first to fall to the Dark
Lord and many of his friends and
family died in the fighting.

Roger gives a non-committal grunt.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

That pain continues to fuel his
thirst for revenge. But yes, it
does mean he can be a bit of an
'asshole.'

Roger snorts and cracks a smile for the first time all day.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

Have you no flowers in your realm?

ROGER

What? Of course we do.

ARGENCIA

Then why carry that one?

ROGER

You wouldn't ask that if you knew
how much a Remington costs.

ARGENCIA

My mother used to love flowers too.
She had a whole wing of the royal
gardens with many just like that.

ROGER

(uncomfortable)

I'm sure they were very pretty...

ARGENCIA

They were, but I never truly
appreciated them.

(MORE)

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

You see, my mother was also a metamorphoser, so I often wondered why she bothered tending plants she could have made with magic. It wasn't until after she died that I realized every flower grown in soil is a reflection of someone who loved it.

ROGER

I'm sorry for your loss.

ARGENCIA

Thank you. Some days I miss her terribly, but I am glad she passed before the Dark Lord came to power. It would have broken her heart to see the gardens burn.

ROGER

(angry)

Oh there it is. I get it now.

Argencia blinks in confusion.

ROGER (CONT'D)

(still angry)

This is your angle, right? Spin me a sob story about the 'Dark Lord' so that I'll feel bad for you?

(he stands up)

Does that make Kaelryn the bad cop?

Argencia bursts into laughter, which ticks Roger off more.

ARGENCIA

Never in all my days did I think I'd find someone as suspicious as Kaelryn. And yet here you are, his equal in every way!

ROGER

Yeah? Well maybe he's not quite as stupid as he looks.

Kaelryn emerges from the trees, flush from exertion.

KAELRYN

(breathless)

We have a problem...

EXT. CHASM BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

An old rope bridge sits suspended over a chasm with swift-running water down below. A dozen SOLDIERS stand around on either side, watching the tree line with disinterest.

Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger lie hidden a few feet into the woods, safely observing from a distance.

KAELRYN

They haven't been here for long. If only we were making better time...

ROGER

And there's no place else to cross?

KAELRYN

On our own, we would bridge the gap further downstream, but you lack the necessary strength and skill.

ARGENCIA

Then we'll have to eliminate them. It's a respectable complement of men, but if we work quickly, they won't be able to raise an alarm.

KAELRYN

And what of the next patrol? What will they do when they find these men missing or dead? Seven Stars, we're going so slow they'd have to try not to catch us!

(he turns to Argencia)

How much longer will we carry this dead weight? Your compassion is admirable, but surely you can see he's become too great a burden.

Argencia starts to protest, but looks over to see that Roger is gone. They both scurry to the edge of the trees and see Roger angrily striding towards the soldiers.

Kaelryn tries to go after him, but Argencia holds him back. It's too late for that now.

ROGER

Afternoon!

The soldiers all turn to face him and one holds up a hand.

SOLDIER

I'll need to see your pass before you can cross, grandfather.

ROGER
Hmmm, haven't got one.

There's a few moments of stunned silence as everyone reacts to Roger cheerfully admitting to a capital offense.

SOLDIER
(slowly)
So, you are traveling illegally?

ROGER
I hope not. My son usually keeps track of things like that. You see, he doesn't trust me with anything important, except watching his kids. It seems like just yesterday I was wiping his ass, but now--

SOLDIER
(interrupting)
And where is your son, grandfather?

ROGER
No clue! Last time I saw him he said he'd be gone for a few days.

Roger leans against one of the bridge's support poles.

ROGER (CONT'D)
But I'm happy to wait for him here. I've been pretty lonely since my wife died, so it'd be nice to have someone to talk to for a change.

The soldier is clearly uncomfortable and looks to his comrades for support. Somehow, each of them has suddenly become engrossed in doing something else.

ROGER (CONT'D)
I just never thought it would be like this, yaknow? One day your whole life revolves around taking care of someone you love, and the next... nothing. Now I wake up in a cold bed, with no one to care if--

SOLDIER
(interrupting)
Grandfather, I just remembered our chronomancer warned us of a storm.

ROGER
(looking up at clear sky)
Really? It seems nice out to me.

SOLDIER

Yes. He, uh, warned it would be moving in rather quickly.

(he sighs)

Look, you are clearly not one of the fugitives we're looking for. Why don't you cross and I'll check for a pass when your son arrives.

ROGER

If you think it's for the best...

SOLDIER

I do... for your safety.

Roger makes his way slowly across the bridge. As he goes, he smiles and tries to make eye contact with every soldier he passes. Each, in turn, coughs or looks away.

EXT. FOREST - AFTERNOON

Roger scowls and stomps through the forest alone.

The sound of pounding footsteps and broken twigs herald the arrival of Kaelryn and Argencia as they come up from behind.

ARGENCIA

That was amazing, Roger!

KAELRYN

A remarkable display of subterfuge, indeed. Those men would not even acknowledge you were there!

ROGER

It's really not that hard.

(he looks at Kaelryn)

Not when you're a burden.

INT. DARK LORD'S SANCTUM - EVENING

SPELLTHINOR (obscured by a dark hooded robe), stands hunched over a crystal ball in a room filled with tall marble pillars. A large set of ornate doors mark the entrance.

knock... knock...

SPELLTHINOR

Enter!

The doors fly open and SLAM against the wall, sending an ominous echo throughout the sanctum.

The STEWARD (50s, timid and mousey), steps into the sanctum clutching a piece of parchment to his chest.

STEWARD

My lord Spellthinor, first of his name, conqueror of the five realms, and holder of the arcanist's--

SPELLTHINOR

(interrupting)

Spare me your obeisance. There is a time for groveling and a time for telling me what I wish to know.

(he waits)

... and this is the latter.

STEWARD

O-of course, my lord. But I fear the news I bring is most troubling.

SPELLTHINOR

Oh, how have my servants failed me this time? Do the wayward assassin and sorceress pretender yet live?

STEWARD

I am afraid so, my lord. Our men arrived too late to stop the ritual, and they found three sets of tracks leading out of the mire.

SPELLTHINOR

Troubling news indeed... Tell me, was this brought to us by courier?

The Stewards nods, uncertain.

SPELLTHINOR (CONT'D)

Excellent. Have him seized and killed -- discretely of course. Then do the same for anyone else he might have told.

A look of sheer panic flashes across the Steward's face, and Spellthinor waves his hand in annoyance.

SPELLTHINOR (CONT'D)

But not you, of course. When I do eventually have you killed, it will be quick and without warning. Your many years of loyal service have earned you that much, at least.

The Steward adopts a new expression, an even mix of relief and new-found concern.

STEWARD

Th-thank you, my lord.

SPELLTHINOR

But be sure to act quickly. We cannot allow word to spread of this 'Champion's' arrival. I have spent far too long eliminating all hope of resistance to have a 'hero' come and rile them all up.

The Steward backs out of the sanctum, bowing every few steps until he's out in the hall. The doors SLAM shut.

Spellthnor smiles to himself and leans over his crystal ball. The smoke inside swirls into figures and shapes.

SPELLTHINOR (CONT'D)

The "greatest hero in all the realm," here for me?

(he chuckles... evilly)

He must be mighty indeed if he means to make it all the way here.

EXT. ROAD TO KARAK'NAH - GOLDEN HOUR

A long caravan marches slowly down a gravel road. More than a dozen SLAVES pull the wagons while, alongside, others trudge in silence and are goaded on by mounted SOLDIERS.

Roger sits in the back of one of these wagons, cleverly disguised as a sack of potatoes. Only his head is visible, sticking out from a mountain of spuds, and the two human-shaped lumps on either side seem to indicate he's not alone.

KAELRYN (O.S.)

Get down! Your head's sticking out!

ROGER

I can't fucking breathe and my legs are falling asleep. I'm not gonna die underneath a pile of potatoes.

ARGENCIA (O.S.)

Roger, these men have imperiled themselves by lending us cover. We should not repay their kindness with ingratitude.

ROGER

Look, I didn't ask anyone to stick
their neck out for me. The way I--
(the potatoes rustle)
Ow, fuck, stop that! Jesus, just
gimme a second to catch my breath.

Roger wiggles back under the potatoes. His face is still
exposed, but low enough for Kaelryn to stop bothering him.

ROGER (CONT'D)

You know this is all bullshit.

KAELRYN (O.S.)

So you have said... many times...

ROGER

Because there's no way an evil
wizard would need all these people
to grow potatoes for him.

KAELRYN (O.S.)

The people of your realm must be
virtuous indeed if you find slavery
such an odd practice.

ROGER

Jesus, no. But if this asshole
could do everything you say, why
wouldn't he just conjure potatoes
out of thin air, like she does?

ARGENCIA (O.S.)

I do not 'conjure' anything, Roger
Breton. I transform solid forms
through the arcane art of
metamorphosis. But your point is
well taken. Since Spellthinor has
mastered all nine mystic devotions,
he could simply manifest more
potatoes, if he so wished.

ROGER

So what, he does this for fun?

KAELRYN (O.S.)

What use is power if there are none
to wield it against?

ARGENCIA (O.S.)

Indeed, for one like Spellthinor I
believe that cruelty may be the end
itself, rather than a means.

ROGER

Bullshit. There are easier ways to fuck over lots of people at once.

KAELRYN (O.S.)

Very well, the next time I see the Dark Lord of the five realms I will be sure to ask him about his governing philosophy. Right after I finish carving the still-beating heart from his chest.

The caravan crests over the top of a hill, revealing the town of KARAKH'NAH. It's a modest medieval city with fortifications that face inward, giving the distinct impression that they're only here to keep people in.

ERAK (30s, muscular), splits off from a column and walks up behind the wagon. He clearly wields some kind of authority, because the others immediately conceal that he's gone.

ERAK

(whispering)

We are almost to the city. Stay hidden until you hear the signal, then move quickly. I am not certain how much time you will have.

ARGENCIA (O.S.)

I lack the words to properly thank you, Erak. Your generosity is matched only by your courage.

ERAK

I only wish I could do more. The real thanks will belong to the Champion when he fulfills the prophecy. And on that day, I should very much like to buy him a drink.

Roger snorts.

ROGER

(muttering)

Not unless you're planning to buy him a juice-box.

ERAK

What?

KAELRYN (O.S.)

Pay him no mind, friend. You are a true ally to the cause.

Erak snags a potato and stashes it in his pants. He winks to the pile of potatoes then retakes his place in the column.

When the convoy reaches the gate, the slaves gratefully drop their lines and queue up behind the cart.

One-by-one they step forward and take a single potato, then submit themselves for inspection by the GATE CAPTAIN (slovenly, fat), and his LACKEYS.

On his turn, Erak also grabs one, but is quickly stopped.

GATE CAPTAIN
Oi, what's this, then?
(he points to Erak)
A little keepsake from the field?

ERAK
No, I mean, uh...

Two lackeys grab Erak and haul him down onto his knees.

ERAK (CONT'D)
Wait, please sir! My wife and daughter are both very ill. I just need a bit more to keep them fed.

GATE CAPTAIN
Oh, then by all means! Just remind me, was it your wife or daughter who worked in the fields today?

ERAK
N-Neither, sir?

The Gate Captain drives his foot into Erak's stomach and sends him to the ground, gasping for air.

ERAK (CONT'D)
Mercy! Please have mercy!

At these words, the other slaves surge forward and form a semi-circle around the commotion. From the outside, they look eager to see a beating, but in practice they've momentarily walled-off the cart from view.

Kaelryn is the first to get out, moving like a cat's shadow as he glides towards the gate. Next is Argencia, then Roger, who causes a small avalanche of potatoes as he emerges.

GATE CAPTAIN
(putting on a show)
Mercy, eh? Here is what mercy our Lord shows to thieves!

The Gate Captain motions for his lackeys and they begin kicking and stomping Erak into the dirt. Within moments, their jeers and laughter drown out his cries of pain.

With everyone else distracted, Kaelryn and Argencia easily slip by undetected. Roger, however, stops in front of gates and stares back at the scene, as if oblivious to the danger.

KAELRYN

(hissing)

What are you doing, old man!?

Roger makes no reply, transfixed by the man being beaten.

Seconds pass. If anyone were to look up they would spot him immediately...

Kaelryn rushes back and YANKS him over to safety.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)

What were you thinking!? Of all the times for your feeble-mindedness--

ROGER

Hey, fuck off! I'm just tired.

(he looks back)

I'm just a little tired...

Kaelryn snorts in disgust before pulling up his hood and stalking into town.

Argencia comes up beside Roger and laces her fingers between his. She squeezes gently, then starts pulling him into town.

ROGER (CONT'D)

That kid's a goddamn idiot -- getting his ass kicked for three people he barely even knows.

ARGENCIA

That makes him a hero, Roger.

(she winces at a

particularly nasty hit)

And possibly a martyr.

ROGER

Yeah, an idiot...

EXT. KARAK'NAH - EVENING

Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger walk down a busy street, trying not to attract any attention. It's decently lively, with workers returning home and merchants packing up their stalls for the day.

In fact, it might almost seem normal, if not for the soldiers standing watch on every corner.

ROGER

Where is this oracle anyway? And how the hell does he stay hidden in a place like this?

KAELRYN

(laughing)

The Oracle isn't in Karak'nah.

ROGER

Then why the fuck are we here!?

ARGENCIA

To acquire an offering. If we want the Oracle to help you get home--

KAELRYN

(interrupting)

And retrieve the Champion.

ARGENCIA

Then we must present him with a suitable gift from the archivist.

ROGER

So then how much further is it?

KAELRYN

Not far at all! In fact, you can almost see the sanctum from here.

Roger visibly brightens before seeing that Kaelryn is pointing to a mist-covered mountain in the distance.

In that moment, Roger seems to age 10 years. His already leisurely pace becomes glacial and his shoulders slump into a posture of profound weariness.

ARGENCIA

Was that truly necessary?

KAELRYN

Does he not deserve to know where we're going? You know as well as I the challenges that await, and they will be even greater for one with his... infirmities.

ARGENCIA

Then perhaps we should sleep here.
A night in a safe bed could help
steel him for the trials ahead.

KAELRYN

Impossible. We are pursued even
now, and each moment we linger
serves only to endanger us both.

ARGENCIA

And Roger.

KAELRYN

Hmmm?

ARGENCIA

It would imperil all three of us.

KAELRYN

Yes, of course. Roger as well...

INT. THE SCROLLERY - EVENING

Organized chaos. Shelves upon shelves overflow with scrolls
and lopsided towers of tomes lay all about this dusty shop.

Kaelryn and Argencia speak with the ARCHIVIST (60s, bookish
with lopsided glasses), while Roger sits slumped over in a
chair by the door.

ARCHIVIST

So you found the Champion?

KAELRYN

(laughing)

The old man? Stars, imagine that!

Roger is clearly on the edge of exhaustion, but still finds
energy to flip him the bird.

ARGENCIA

The ritual was a success, but we
failed to retrieve the Champion. I
am loathe to ask, for you have
already sacrificed so much, but
will you help us once again?

ARCHIVIST

Princess, I would lend a thousand
scrolls if they could be of use,
but I do not have any of sufficient
quality for the Oracle. I will need
time to transcribe one.

KAELRYN

Unacceptable. We need to leave now.

ARCHIVIST

I suppose I could search for a tome in my collection, but it would be far worse than your last offering.

KAELRYN

So be it. Have it ready when I return from scouting the gate.

Kaelryn gives a curt nod, then heads to the door, knocking over several stacks of books in the process.

EXT. STREETS OF KARAK'NAH - CONTINUOUS

Kaelryn exits out onto the street and walks at a brisk pace. With his hood pulled up, and the speed with which he weaves through the crowd, he's almost impossible to track.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - LATER

A cobblestone square with a quaint little fountain, several shuttered businesses, and a prominent inn overlooking it all. At the very center, a cage sits suspended by a winch, and a HESSIVITE (40s, kinda fat), lies motionless inside.

Kaelryn crosses through the square, but stops dead in his tracks when he sees the man in the cage. He looks around, then grabs the closest PASSERBY.

KAELRYN

Excuse me, sir. What do you know of the prisoner in that cage?

The Passerby tries to wriggle free, but Kaelryn's seemingly casual grip on his shoulder is surprisingly strong.

PASSERBY

Him? He's a dissident. Found guilty and sentenced to death by exposure.

(he tries to pull free)

It's a nasty bit of business, but better than it could have been for defying the Dark Lord.

Kaelryn releases the passerby, then pulls back his cloak and carefully touches the knives along his bandolier, counting each one as he notes all the guards around the square.

INT. THE SCROLLERY - LATER

Argencia stands by the shelves, perusing several volumes at once while the Archivist expertly weaves through precarious stacks of tomes. Roger remains passed out in the chair.

There's a loud jingle and the sound of scraping wood as Kaelryn shoulders his way inside.

KAELRYN

I've changed by mind. We cannot go
to the Oracle with an offering that
is anything less than ideal.

Everyone but Roger looks up at Kaelryn in surprise.

ARCHIVIST

Now? My lord, even if I were to
begin immediately, it would not be
ready until the morning.

KAELRYN

Then do as you must. It may even be
good for us to remain overnight.
(he gestures to Roger)
For Roger's sake, of course...

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Warm, homey, and almost bursting with patrons crammed in as tight as they can fit. Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger sit wedged in the corner by a section for pixies drinking out of thimbles while a MINSTREL plays jaunty music across the bar.

The TAVERN KEEPER carries two full trays of food and deftly dodges SOLDIERS who grope at her as she goes by. The BARKEEP watches and forcefully cleans an already spotless mug.

When the food arrives, Roger digs in immediately, grabbing a big chunk of meat and eating it with both hands. Argencia, however, slides her dish over to Kaelryn.

ARGENCIA

You should have Kaelryn season it
first. He's adept at such things.

Kaelryn pulls a few bottles of spice from his bandolier and lines them up on the table like an expert chemist.

ROGER

(between bites)
Bullshit. You don't put ketchup on
a porterhouse.

Kaelryn slowly and deliberately applies an array of spices and rubs to the meat, his focus utterly trained on the task.

KAELRYN

Proper seasoning does not mask the flavor of a dish. It coaxes it to the forefront and emboldens it.

He slices off a small segment and offers it to Roger, who rolls his eyes but tries it anyway. It's freaking delicious.

ROGER

(annoyed)

If you're so goddamn good at this, why bother killing people at all?

KAELRYN

Because the world needs dead tyrants more than good food.

A couple sitting behind them stands up and leaves, clearly hoping to avoid such openly seditious talk.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)

Perhaps there will be justice in the world to come. Then, perhaps, I could lay down my blades and rest.

ROGER

Just make sure you've got enough saved. Retirement's a hell of a lot more expensive than you think.

KAELRYN

Oh, you'd be surprised how readily funds come available when one travels with a metamorphoser.

(he pulls out some rocks)

Take our payment for tonight's lodging, for instance...

ARGENCIA

(annoyed)

My order is forbidden from using magic for personal gain.

(she sighs)

But then again, my order is gone.

Argencia waves a hand over the stones and they transform into gold. Roger snorts and shakes his head in disbelief.

MINSTREL

Worry not, citizens of Karak'nah,
 there will be many more jovial
 refrains taken up this evening. The
 night is young, and I am still
 painfully sober. However, I'd like
 to play for you a different kind of
 song.

Up on the stage, the Minstrel opens an odd case and removes
 a contraption with strings, knobs, and a crank at the side.

MINSTREL (CONT'D)

This song is dedicated to the Lord
 protector of the realm.
 (he nods to the soldiers)
 Without whom it would have never
 been written.

The Minstrel turns the crank and colors start to coalesce in
 the air. They mix and swirl together, forming a verdant
 forest, a simple cottage, and a table filled with food.

Then, he starts to play.

The forest rots away, the home falls into disrepair, and the
 food decays.

One by one, the patrons go quiet as they're struck by the
 sadness of the song and haunting emptiness of its melody.

Kaelryn pulls out a pipe and takes a long draw, Argencia
 absently pushes at her food, and Roger rubs his crucifix.

The forest is clear-cut to the ground, the house becomes a
 rundown shack, and the food spoils into rotting garbage.

The once boisterous tavern is now still, with everyone in
 quiet contemplation. Everyone but the soldiers, that is.

MINSTREL (CONT'D)

Gentlemen, please! If I could
 kindly ask you to wait until the
 song is finished--

Drunken soldiers rush the stage, manhandling the Minstrel
 and RIPPING the instrument out of his hands.

The floating images disappear into a puff of blue smoke.

ROGER

I think I'm gonna head upstairs.

KAELRYN
That seems very wise.

Roger gets up, leaving most of his food uneaten.

ARGENCIA
Could you close the tab on your
way? A few pieces should suffice.

Roger grunts and grabs a handful of gold nuggets before heading for the bar. He stops halfway and turns back.

ROGER
But don't bring that shit upstairs.
(he gestures to the pipe)
You look fucking disgusting.

Kaelryn glowers, but says nothing as Roger leaves.

KAELRYN
How can so much bitterness reside
within one little whelp of a man?
Truly, it defies explanation.

ARGENCIA
I don't know, you seem to manage it
well enough.

Roger drops the payment at the bar and heads for the stairs.

KAELRYN
Comparing me to the old man?
Hardly. We share nothing but a--

BARTENDER
(yelling)
Hey, you! What nonsense is this?

The Bartender holds up a handful of ordinary rocks and points an accusatory finger at Roger.

For the most part, everyone is still preoccupied with the soldiers bullying the Minstrel, but a few heads do swivel.

Argencia is out of her seat in a flash.

ARGENCIA
A thousand apologies, good sir. My
grandfather must be confused.

Roger scowls.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)
He surely meant to give you this.

Argencia reaches into a pouch and pulls out another handful of gray rocks. By the time they reach the counter, however, it is a glittering pile of assorted gemstones.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)
Surely you can understand...

INT. MASTER SUITE - NIGHT

A very well-furnished room at the top of the inn with two large beds and a fireplace. It's the nicest room in this joint, which is saying something for an inn of this size.

Argencia is sprawled out like a starfish and snores softly, while Roger lays on his side facing the window.

Kaelryn is crouched down by the window in full armor, quietly tightening his bandolier. He is completely barefoot, however, and his boots are tucked away beneath one arm.

Gingerly, he unlatches the window mechanism and opens it slowly to keep the joints from making any noise.

There's only one problem... Roger isn't asleep.

ROGER
Yaknow, those usually work better
on your feet.

Kaelryn whirls around and draws one of his daggers.

KAELRYN
(whispering)
Seven stars! Why are you awake?

Roger takes a few seconds to stretch, enjoying every moment.

ROGER
Well, I was fast asleep until you
stomped over here and started
making all that racket.
(he yawns)
Is there a reason you were about to
jump barefoot out of a window?

KAELRYN
It helps minimize noise.

ROGER
Right... and the window?

Kaelryn grimaces and looks out into the town square. Is he really about to explain all this to Roger?

KAELRYN

Did you see the man being held in
the cage down below?

ROGER

Yeah. Seems like a lucky guy.

KAELRYN

He is my brother.

ROGER

Wait, really?

KAELRYN

He is of Hessian, like me. We were
born beneath the same stars and
raised upon the same sand. And as
my countryman, the same blood flows
within our veins.

ROGER

Ah, so bullshit.

KAELRYN

No, duty. I'd hoped a man of your
advanced age might know of it.

ROGER

Enough to know it ain't worth shit.

Kaelryn sighs and shakes his head.

KAELRYN

Then perhaps I'm going down there
to risk my life for no reason at
all. Regardless, will you please
stay quiet and breathe no word of
this to the Princess? You know as
well as I that she would insist on
lending aid, and we cannot afford
to risk us both.

Roger considers for a moment, then pulls out his crucifix.

ROGER

Alright. I swear in Jesus' name
that I won't say anything.

Kaelryn nods, impressed by Roger's conviction, then climbs
out the window and disappears.

Roger waits a few seconds, then hurries over to Argencia.

ROGER (CONT'D)
(shaking her gently)
Hey, wake up. Kaelryn's about to do
something stupid.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

At this time of night, the town square looks completely different. The only people still out are the hooded civilians hurrying to their destinations and the handful of WATCHMEN stationed on roofs and scattered around the square.

A LOOKOUT (tired), leans against a pole with a large bell hanging off it. He's posted right by the cage, where the Hessivite sleeps soundly.

The Lookout yawns and his eyes begin to droop.

High above, a rooftop watchman takes a dagger to the back. A second hears and investigates, only to get one of his own.

The Lookout pulls out a flask and takes a quick swig.

Kaelryn drops down from the roof and silently dispatches another. Two watchmen nearby fall back in surprise, but he's on them in a flash, CRACKING their heads together.

This, finally, makes enough noise for the Lookout to hear.

Squinting as he looks out into the night, he grabs a lantern and heads towards the commotion.

LOOKOUT
Hello? Who goes there?

The light shows Kaelryn finishing them off with a knife.

LOOKOUT (CONT'D)
(shouting)
Help! Alarm! He--

The Lookout whirls around, looking for backup, but finds only carnage. He's all alone.

He DASHES back to the alarm bell and YANKS it as hard as he can, but nothing happens.

Kaelryn reaches into a pouch at his side and pulls out a severed bell clapper. He tosses it down at the Lookout's feet, then RAMS a blade into his chest.

The Hessivite shies away to the far side of his cage.

HESSIVITE

Please sir! I promise I won't tell anyone what I've witnessed.

KAELRYN

Breathe easy, brother.
(he pulls down his hood)
I am not the agent of your ruin,
but of your salvation.

HESSIVITE

You're... of Hessive?

KAELRYN

I am indeed. And by the will of the stars it's where you will be soon.

Kaelryn lowers the cage to the ground and pulls out a set of lock-picks from his bandolier.

HESSIVITE

What is the name of my savior?

KAELRYN

I am no one's savior yet, brother.
We must still clear the city gate--

HESSIVITE

(interrupting)
Please, my children must know the
of the man who saved my life!

Kaelryn smiles bashfully.

KAELRYN

Very well, my name is Kaelryn.

HESSIVITE

(coldly)
Finally...

Kaelryn looks up in surprise and gets BLASTED by a bolt of magical lightning. The force sends him flying back onto the cobblestones where he spasms uncontrollably.

The Hessivite opens the cage door (it was never really locked) and strides forward. Everything about him seems different now, from his expression to the way he moves.

Kaelryn tries to draw a dagger with trembling hands, but the Hessivite hits him with another shock. Shattered windows open up and GUARDS pour in from alleys and shops.

This whole thing was a trap.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)

I swear to all seven stars, if I'd
had to spend another day in that
bloody cage...

KAELRYN

Wh-Why?

HESSIVITE

Because some of us know better than
to bite the hand that feeds us.

(he laughs)

You still believe she was worth it?

An APPRENTICE comes running up and gives him a cloak.

APPRENTICE

Is that truly the assassin?

HESSIVITE

It is indeed. If only rats were as
gullible as my kin. Then we'd need
only dangle one over a fire and
watch the rest run into the flames.

APPRENTICE

Shall I bind him for questioning?

HESSIVITE

No need. Better to kill him now and
start searching for the others.

ARGENCIA (O.S.)

(shouting)

No!

Every head swivels to see Argencia on the roof with her bow.
She fires an arrow, but the Hessivite zaps it from the air.

HESSIVITE

The Princess! Get her!

The guards level their crossbows and fire, but she
transforms their bolts into ribbons with a wave of her hand.

The Hessivite UNLEASHES a bolt of lightning and the rooftop
behind her EXPLODES in a shower of burning tiles.

Dodging the shingles, she jumps down and is quickly
surrounded by guards. But that's right where she wants them.

In a dazzling display of mastery and speed, Argencia weaves
her magic, turning boots into stone and weapons into straw.

Somehow, despite being outnumbered, she seems to be winning.

APPRENTICE

It's the assassin she wants! She'll
surrender if--

The Apprentice sprouts an arrow in the middle of his forehead. But the damage is already done. Together, the guards turn to Kaelryn and advance on the helpless assassin.

Argencia cries out in frustration, then dashes towards him and transforms her cloak into a crystalline shield.

ARGENCIA

Please! You must rouse yourself!

Kaelryn tries and fails to get to his feet. His arms and legs are still shaking too badly.

KABOOM!

The crystalline barrier SHATTERS into a thousand pieces as lightning strikes it from above. The concussive force sends Argencia reeling, and she falls to the ground in a daze.

All around the square, windows are blown to smithereens.

HESSIVITE

Quickly, bind her arms!

A few soldiers manage to pull themselves out of their post-lightning-strike stupor and seize Argencia by the arms.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)

And search the inn for any others!

INT. MASTER SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Roger hurries away from the shattered window.

ROGER

Shit. Shit. Shit. Fuck. Shit.

Roger desperately packs up anything and everything within arm's reach, then heads for the door.

He stops, then turns back and retrieves the desiccated sunflower from underneath his bed.

EXT. STREETS OF KARAK'NAH - NIGHT

Hundreds of CITIZENS jostle and press up against one another as they make their way to the town square.

Roger, meanwhile, is the only one going the other way.

He's forced to the side of the street, where he wriggles his way through the mass of humanity trying to sweep him along.

At the end of the road, the town gate sits unguarded.

Technically, there's still one guard on duty, but he is craning his neck to see what's going on. To someone trying to get out, it would be child's play to slip by undetected.

Roger stops and stares at the gate for a few long moments, then sighs and ducks down a side street.

INT. THE SCROLLERY - NIGHT

Roger slips in and peeks out the window to make sure he wasn't followed, then goes to bar the door.

ROGER

Is there anyone you can contact for help? Because Kaelryn and Argencia are in pretty deep--

Roger turns back to face the main shop for the first time.

Staring back is an incredulous squad of SOLDIERS holding the Archivist down with a knife to her throat.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Shit...

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

A huge crowd of people murmurs with excitement. The guards are doing their best to section off this area, but it seems like half the town has gathered to witness the spectacle.

In the middle of it all, Kaelryn and Argencia kneel before the Hessivite with their arms bound behind their backs.

A small opening forms in the crowd and the guards bring Roger out in chains. They take him beside Kaelryn and Argencia and force him down onto his knees.

Roger gasps out in pain.

HESSIVITE

My my, an old man and an invalid?
Next they'll be sending children to
face the Dark Lord!

Roger laughs and the guards give him a strange look.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)

Well grandfather, I'll give you the same offer. Tell me all that you know and you may go free.

ROGER

Sure. Fuck it.

Kaelryn fights hard against his restraints and tries to lunge at Roger, but only manages to fall on his face.

HESSIVITE

(surprised)

Well, perhaps you dissidents are not all as witless as you seem. Tell me, where is the Champion?

ROGER

Not here. These dipshits brought me back instead.

HESSIVITE

Hmmmm, that seems unlikely. The Dark Lord's greatest assassin and the metamorphoser princess are many things, but they are not complete fools. They would never mistake someone like you for the Champion.

(he laughs)

I'm almost insulted you think I'd believe such a thing.

ROGER

I don't care what you believe. It's the truth.

HESSIVITE

Perhaps. But there is only one way to know for certain...

ARGENCIA

Please, he doesn't know anything!

HESSIVITE

Then he will serve as a strong reminder to these good people of what happens to those who oppose our wise Lord.

(he cracks his knuckles)

Last chance, grandfather. Where is the Champion?

ROGER
(through gritted teeth)
In his room, watching grown men
play video games.

HESSIVITE
Very well...

The Hessivite creates an electrical current between his hands, then reaches forward and grabs Roger by the head.

Nothing happens.

ROGER
(not looking up)
Get on with it, you little shit.

HESSIVITE
Ho ho! I see you are trained in the
art of resisting interrogation.

ROGER
What?

HESSIVITE
Are you prepared to resist... this!

The Hessivite creates an even larger arc between his hands, then LAUNCHES it straight into Roger's chest.

Nothing happens.

ROGER
(to Argencia)
What the fuck is going on?

Argencia stares back at him in awe.

Everyone else seems to feel the same. A stunned silence has overtaken the crowd and even the guards seem uneasy.

HESSIVITE
Enough of this. I said ENOUGH!

The Hessivite extends his arms and channels a TORRENT of pure energy. Smoke fills the air and his hair stands on end.

Roger is completely fine.

ARGENCIA
Can you not see that which is
before your eyes, wizard? The
Champion is already here.

HESSIVITE
 (panting and wheezing)
 Im... possible. Utterly... pre...
 posteros...

ARGENCIA
 As the Oracle's chosen, he is
 immune to your dark magics.
 (to the crowd)
 Karak'nah, this is your Champion!

HESSIVITE
 (yelling)
 Silence! Everyone go home at once!

Nobody moves an inch.

ARGENCIA
 (to the crowd)
 The Champion has come to deliver
 you from bondage, but only if you
 have the courage to act. If you
 have ever felt a longing for
 freedom in your heart, now is the
 time to rise up and claim it!

HESSIVITE
 Stop her! Somebody find a gag!

A soldier steps forward and puts a gauntleted hand over her mouth. She tries to bite down, but it doesn't work.

The town square falls silent. The city holds its breath.

CLANG!

A guard falls to the ground. Behind him, the Barkeep stands with a cast-iron pan.

Across the square, another guard gets hit by a rock.

Then, all hell breaks loose.

People SPRING into action and set upon the guards. They have little to no equipment, but vastly outnumber their foe.

Children throw bricks from windows, pixies untie boots, and the Minstrel even uses his instrument to whale on a guard.

The Hessivite screeches and fires off indiscriminate bolts of lightning. Each kills dozens at a time, but his men are mixed up in the crowd and he's hitting just as many of them.

Falling back on their training, the guards try to form a defensive formation, but there are simply too many to stop.

Closer and closer they come, on the verge of breaking through. Kaelryn and Argencia ready themselves to spring into action the moment they're freed.

KABOOM!

An MASSIVE explosion of lighting rips a hole through the crowd and opens a path to the main road.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)
Regroup beyond the main gate!

The Hessivite takes off running and the few remaining guards hurry after, firing randomly with their crossbows.

The townsfolk cheer.

EXT. INNER GATES OF KARAK'NAH - SUNRISE

Jubilation. The streets are alive with bloodstained revelers celebrating their new-found freedom.

Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger sit atop horses overladen with gifts. Unfortunately for the animals, there's a long line of others with even more to give.

The Archivist stands beside Kaelryn's horse, fussing with his bag and trying to secure a comically oversized scroll.

ARCHIVIST
Yes my copies are much smaller, but
this is the original manuscript.
(she gestures to Roger)
What am I saving it for if the
Champion is already here?

Roger grunts and looks away in discomfort.

Erak emerges from the crowd and comes up beside Kaelryn.

KAELRYN
(without looking up)
Apologies, friend, but we cannot
accept any more gifts.

ERAK
Then the apologies are mine, for I
have nothing to give but my thanks.

KAELRYN

Ah, Erak! My friend, you need only embrace and defend your new freedom

ERAK

I will. I swear it.

(he turns to Roger)

I understand the need for secrecy, but I wish I had known you were the Champion. It has been so long since any of us have known hope, yet you delivered it to us in only one day.

Roger grunts again and eyes the gates leading out of town.

KAELRYN

What I believe 'the Champion' means is that we understand the magnitude of our task, and we will not fail.

Erak bows deeply, his eyes shining with tears.

EXT. OUTER GATES OF KARAK'NAH - LATER

Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger ride out from the town at a gentle trot. Behind them, townsfolk cheer and throw flowers in the air -- a makeshift parade for the conquering heroes.

Argencia beams and waves back to the crowd. Kaelryn makes no such gesture, but his straight-backed posture and the confidence with which he rides betrays a sense of pride.

Roger, meanwhile, tries to make his horse to go faster.

ARGENCIA

(concerned)

Roger, are you well?

ROGER

I'm fine.

KAELRYN

I believe the Princess is concerned because you are less talkative than usual. Mistake me not, I find this a welcome change, but we should know if you've been injured.

ROGER

I'm fine.

(he sighs)

I just want to get as far away from here as possible. I don't want to be around for what happens next.

KAELRYN

And what is that, precisely?

ROGER

You can't liberate a village and leave no one behind to defend it. Sooner or later the other guys come back, and it never ends well.

ARGENCIA

Is it not possible that we've inspired the people of this town? Perhaps we've given them the strength they need to fight back when the Dark Lord returns.

ROGER

Then it'll be even worse.

EXT. CHASM BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

The same little crossing as before, only now it's CRAWLING with soldiers. The Conjuror, the Captain, and their men interrogate the guards while panthers eye them all hungrily.

CONJURER

And so they simply let him through?

CAPTAIN

With no resistance at all. Said he didn't look like a Champion.

CONJURER

So he is a master of disguise, as well... Clearly this 'Champion' is more dangerous than we feared.

INT. MOUNTAIN CAMPSITE - MORNING

Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger sit tucked into a rocky little alcove eating soup away from the elements. Outside, an oppressive white fog obscures how high up they really are.

ROGER

You know I don't want to agree with him, but he's right. You're crazy.

ARGENCIA

You don't understand. The Oracle instructed us to find Roger Breton, but did not specify which Roger Breton. And now we see that you are immune to the power of magic!

KAELRYN

Nonsense. The old man came through a magic portal. Seven stars, he's eating a magic soup right now!

ROGER

(mid-bite)

What the fuck are you talking about? I saw you make this.

KAELRYN

With what ingredients, grandfather? Have you seen us carrying bags of potatoes and fruit?

Roger looks over to Argencia, who shrugs.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)

A metamorphoser can transform the very soil beneath your feet into edible food.

Roger chokes and sputters, coughing up handfuls of dirt.

ARGENCIA

See, that proves it beyond doubt!

(she gestures grandly at Roger coughing)

Magic is fueled by will and powered by belief. Whereas my belief allows me to transform substances, Roger's disbelief grants him his immunity.

KAELRYN

And what of it? Even if I were to believe the old man's senility gives him some kind of power, why must he be the one to wield it? Your mother was a metamorphoser, could the boy not have this gift?

ARGENCIA

I suppose it is possible...

Kaelryn claps Roger on the back, which dislodges more dirt.

KAELRYN

Of course it is, because he lacks any heroic virtue. He's a coward, with no honor, who divulged our secrets to a dark wizard at the first sign of trouble. Stars, he would have fled the city if he hadn't been captured so quickly!

ROGER

So I should be like you? With your bullshit that almost got us killed?

KAELRYN

Yes. If you had any honor at all you would know that it is better to die a man than to live as a coward.

ROGER

And you think any 'man' who died in war gives a fuck about honor now?

Kaelryn pulls a blade.

KAELRYN

Speak ill of the fallen once more and you can ask them yourself.

Roger levels the sunflower right back.

ROGER

Go ahead sunshine, fucking try me.

Tense, steely silence. Their glares could drill holes through arctic ice.

ARGENCIA

Enough! The Oracle can tell us for certain if Roger is the Champion. But we must coexist until then.

Kaelryn sheaths his dagger.

KAELRYN

Very well, but the Oracle will only confirm what I've said. He is weak and mistrusting of others. He is concerned only with his interests, and never a higher purpose.

(he gestures to Roger's crucifix)

And he claims to not believe in magic, yet wears a talisman around his neck. He is a hypocrite and a fool, but no champion of mine.

ROGER

You're right, I'm not your guy...

He rips the crucifix off his neck and HURLS it off the side of the mountain.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Cause I don't believe in bullshit.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - AFTERNOON

Strong winds and a narrow path. Kaelryn and Argencia lead their horses on foot through near white-out conditions while Roger rides behind, looking miserable and cold.

EXT. PILGRIM'S CAMP - EVENING

Two fallen boulders block a large section of trail. A camp of PILGRIMS has taken up refuge behind it, and their animal droppings seem to show they've been here for several days.

MALCOLM (50s, kindly), steps away from the camp and waves.

EXT. PILGRIM'S CAMP - LATER

Kaelryn, Argencia, and Roger sit with the pilgrims around a roaring fire. Each of them has a small bowl of stew and Kaelryn's pot is suspended over the flames.

MALCOLM
I may simply be grateful to eat something other than rations, but this may be the best stew I've had.

ROGER
(muttering)
You wouldn't say that if you knew what it was made out of...

ARGENCIA
It was the least we could do in exchange for your hospitality.

MALCOLM
You're welcome. Though we would hardly refuse you in such a gale.

ARGENCIA
Which is strange, is it not? We are far removed from the season for such storms, and even then, I've never seen one quite this bad.

MALCOLM
That's because this isn't a storm.

Everyone falls into a somber, knowing silence.

ROGER
What the fuck does that mean?

ARGENCIA
That Zerabro'ath has awakened.

ROGER
And what the fuck does that mean?

KAELRYN
Zerabro'ath is the scourge of the mountain. A primordial force that terrorizes those who seek to petition the Oracle.

ROGER
So more fairytale bullshit. Is this guy worse than the evil wizard?

KAELRYN
Different. Zerabro'ath is the one of the oldest dragons, but does--

ROGER
(interrupting)
Wait wait wait, are you fucking serious? You think a dragon is causing the weather?

Everyone nods solemnly.

ROGER (CONT'D)
What a load of shit.

In an instant, the wind around Roger dies down. His hair is no longer buffeted around and he already seems warmer.

MALCOLM
Oh, I assure you he is a very real. As a drake of the tempest domain--

ROGER
(interrupting)
So no one's gonna leave until the wind dies down? And since you think it's being caused by a dragon, you're not even gonna try to find a way through?

PILGRIM
Any fool who tried would be frozen within minutes.

MALCOLM
To say nothing of an encounter with the drake itself.

ROGER
Great, I'll do it.

Roger stands, to a cacophony of alarmed protests.

ARGENCIA
Roger, you can't!

ROGER
No, you can't.

Roger pushes his way through various pilgrims trying to stop him from leaving. Kaelryn catches him at the edge of camp.

KAELRYN
Roger, listen to reason...

ROGER
And don't you fucking start with me. You win no matter what! Either I find a way through, or I don't come back at all, which is what you've wanted all along.
(he shrugs free)
And besides, if you don't like it, just come out here and stop me.

Kaelryn does try to follow, but is immediately buffeted back. The wind's grown much stronger since they arrived.

ARGENCIA
Roger, please! We can discuss this!

Roger turns and stomps off into the night.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - NIGHT

Snow. Wind. Blizzard-like conditions in the heart of a roiling storm.

Roger, completely unaffected and undeterred, makes his way slowly up the path. He may not be hindered by the weather, but he's still old and this is rugged terrain.

MALCOLM (V.O.)
Though I am sorry to say it, you should prepare yourselves for the worst. It may be that your grandfather never comes back.

KAELRYN (V.O.)
Only if he starves. Surely the great Zerabro'ath would not trouble himself with the likes of Roger.

Roger stops to catch his breath and re-tie one of his shoes.

MALCOLM (V.O.)
Not if the legends are true. The
sages say he guards these peaks
like a jealous lover and treats all
incursions as a personal affront.
In fact, I once heard...

EXT. ZERABRO'ATH'S LAIR - NIGHT

A rocky outcropping by the mouth of a cave. The weather here is calm, but misty, and the area is well-lit by moonlight.

Roger, drenched in sweat, limps his way over to a small boulder and sits down on it gingerly.

ROGER
(muttering)
That wasn't so bad. If everyone
wasn't such a goddamn pussy...

The sky darkens and Roger is plunged into the shadow of something MASSIVE.

ROGER (CONT'D)
(oblivious)
I mean, really, is there anything
they won't fall for?

Roger glances up and sees what's blocking out the moon.

EXT. PILGRIM'S CAMP - SAME TIME

Kaelryn, Argencia, and the other pilgrims lean forward on the edge of their seats while Malcolm tells them a story.

MALCOLM
And then, with but a single breath,
the entire platoon was gone.

KAELRYN
To a man?

MALCOLM
Not quite. The sages say
Zerabro'ath left one man alive,
that he might tell the tale of his
comrades' doom.

INT. CREVICE - SAME TIME

WHOOOOOOOSH!

A deafening roar and blinding white frost fill a crevice that Roger has squeezed himself into.

Roger coughs and sputters, but is otherwise unharmed.

A giant yellow eye appears for a moment, then leaves when it sees that he's still alive.

WHOOOOOOOSH!

ROGER
(coughing)
Jesus Christ! Would you cut that
shit out!?

The giant eye reappears.

ZERABRO'ATH
I do not understand. Why are you
not dead?

ROGER
For the same reason I don't get
presents from Santa Clause anymore.

ZERBRO'ATH
Hnnnnnn. Because you have offended
him in some way?

ROGGER
No, because he isn't fucking real!

EXT. PILGRIM'S CAMPSITE - SAME TIME

2ND PILGRIM
And there they placed the largest
ruby in all the realm, hoping to
lure the drake from its lair.
(he pauses for effect)
Only they didn't know that
Zerabro'ath was already gone. And
that he was right. behind. them.

INT. CREVICE - SAME TIME

ZERABRO'ATH
Truly, what manner of dragonslayer
hides at the first sight of his
foe? Why don't you come out into
the open and face me with courage?

ROGER
The kind that isn't here to slay
dragons.

(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)
I just want to find a way up the
Oracle's mountain, but a giant
scaly asshole is in my way.

ZERABRO'ATH
(yelling)
The Oracle's Mountain!?!
(the eye disappears)
THE ORACLE'S MOUNTAIN!?!

The crevice shakes and the entire mountain rumbles.

ZERABRO'ATH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
This mountain is MINE. And I was
here long before he ever came.

ROGER
Yeah yeah, whatever. Show me the
deed and then we can talk.

Long pause.

ZERABRO'ATH (O.S.)
Very well...

EXT. PILGRIM'S CAMP - SAME TIME

4TH PILGRIM
And to this day, if you listen
closely, you can still hear the
echoes of Sir Conrad's screams.

1ST PILGRIM
That's ridiculous. Sir Conrad the
Slayer lost an arm battling the
necro-scorpion of Cataloma pass.
Nothing could hurt worse than that.

4TH PILGRIM
Ah, but they did not even come to
blows. Sages say that one look at
the drake in all his terrible glory
was enough to drive him mad...

INT. CREVICE - SAME TIME

Roger has wiggled his way over to the mouth of the crevice,
where he looks at a comically oversized scroll of parchment.

ROGER
I'll be damned, you really do own
this place. God it must be ancient.

ZERABRO'ATH

No more than a few thousand years -
- not that you can tell. The
dwarves used shoddy materials and
the North face is already starting
to erode.

ROGER

Ugh, contractors.
(he nods knowingly)
But wait, if you own the mountain,
why don't you just kick the Oracle
out? Or, you know, eat him?

ZERABRO'ATH

Would that I could, Roger Breton. I
fear the same accursed fog that
obscures my view, shields him from
those who would do him harm.

ROGER

So an eviction notice is out of the
question?

ZERABRO'ATH

And that is not even the worst of
it! Every year his wretched
pilgrims come and leave their waste
on the slopes of my home. As though
it were not enough to brazenly
encroach upon my lair, they must
also be discourteous.

ROGER

I know how you feel. We had a few
litterbugs before we got the HOA.

EXT. PILGRIM'S CAMP - SAME TIME

ARGENCIA

I fear I do not understand. How
could the drake swallow him whole,
yet also toss his skeleton from the
highest peak of the mountain?

2ND PILGRIM

Regurgitated him, probably.

4TH PILGRIM

Indeed, dragons have two stomachs.
They can do things like that.

Everyone around the fire nods their heads in agreement, as
though this makes perfect sense.

INT. CREVICE - SAME TIME

ROGER

Then he called the cops on me, even though the poop was from his dog!

ZERABRO'ATH

The audacity of mortals...

ROGER

You're tellin' me.

(he sighs)

Yaknow what I think you should do?

ZERABRO'ATH

I would welcome your counsel, Roger Breton.

ROGER

Buy another mountain.

ZERABRO'ATH

And abandon my home? Never.

ROGER

No, nothing like that. I just think you should get one for the summer. Beverly and I used to go down to Florida when it got cold, then come back right before tourist-season. Maybe you could do the same thing?

ZERABRO'ATH

But surely you would not have me surrender to the 'litterbugs?'

ROGER

No, not a surrender -- a vacation. And if I'm being honest, you seem pretty damn overdue.

EXT. PILGRIM'S CAMP - LATER

The snow has stopped falling and the wind has died down, but everyone is still too enthralled by the stories to notice.

1ST PILGRIM

And with one impossibly huge talon, the drake lifted the horse and--

ROGER (O.S.)

(interrupting)

Hey.

Everyone gasps and falls back in surprise. Kaelryn, in particular, draws his daggers and adopts a fighting stance.

ARGENCIA

Roger, you've returned!

She leaps to her feet and runs over to hug him.

KAELRYN

And the wind... it's stopped...

MALCOLM

But how? Surely you did not encounter the drake.

ROGER

Yep. Saw his cave and everything.

MALCOLM

And you... prevailed?

ROGER

Uh, I dealt with the problem, if that's what you mean.

Everyone around the fire stares at Roger in disbelief.

ROGER (CONT'D)

But make sure you pick up all this trash before you leave. We're on private property for chrissakes.

EXT. STREETS OF KARAK'NAH - NIGHT

Chaos. Smoke. Screams. A city on fire. Squads of soldiers race down alleys, chasing civilians and cutting them down.

The Hessivite gleefully watches the carnage unfold while, right beside him, the Conjuror observes dispassionately.

Two panthers drag up a battered and bloody Erak while the Captain follows closely behind and wipes blood off his hands

HESSIVITE

Hmmm, not so brave now? If only the 'Champion' were here to save you...

Erak tries to struggle, but the panthers hold him fast.

CONJURER

Do you always play with your food?

HESSIVITE

Why, if you're implying--

The town falls into darkness as something ENORMOUS blocks out the moon. Everyone from soldiers to civilians and even the panthers stare up in amazement.

Erak begins laughing hysterically.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)

Enough! We'll see how much mirthful you are when your tongue has been torn from your throat.

CONJURER

No, let's hear what he has to say.
(he kneels down)
Tell me friend, what is so amusing?

ERAK

(laughing)

You're doomed. Each and every one of you is doomed. It took the Champion a single day to drive Zerabro'ath from his lair and your 'Dark Lord' will be next.
(he breaks down into fit of crazed laughter)
You've already lost!

The Hessivite channels a SURGE of magical electricity into Erak. His body smokes and convulses, then finally goes limp.

CAPTAIN

That settles it, I imagine. We'll find no surer proof they've ventured up the mountain and that our little hunt ends here.

CONJURER

Why not continue the chase? Surely we're no more than a day behind.

HESSIVITE

(laughing)

Because the mists will hinder and confuse our efforts. Were it simple to summit the Oracle's mountain we would have dealt with him long ago.

CONJURER

I don't know...
(he points up)
It seems simple enough to me.

Up on the mountain, a clear path cuts through the mist. Like someone immune to its power has been blazing a trail...

EXT. MOUNTAIN CAMP - MORNING

Roger sits on the edge of a bedroll, looking out over the edge of a cliff. From here the mist is thin enough to see the forest down below, or what little has not been cut down.

Argencia comes over and sits down beside him.

ROGER

Shit, don't tell me we gotta go.

ARGENCIA

No, we may yet rest awhile longer.
I simply wanted to give you this.

Argencia pulls out a crucifix and hands it to Roger.

ROGER

How the hell did you find this? It
must have fallen hundreds of feet.
(he considers)
Or is it...?

Argencia looks down sheepishly and the crucifix turns to dirt in his hand.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Well, I appreciate the thought.

He tucks the handful of dirt into his pocket.

ARGENCIA

Do you mind if I ask who it is? The
man on your talisman?

ROGER

That guy? He's the biggest sucker
in history. I never understood the
appeal, but my wife was a big fan.
(he laughs darkly)
Not that it did her any good...

ARGENCIA

What do you mean?

ROGER

I mean that I smoked for a hell of
a lot longer than she did, but God
still gave her cancer and not me.
(he tosses a rock)
He's a bit of a cunt, like that.

ARGENCIA

She must have been a wonderful, for you to honor her memory so.

ROGER

The only good person in the whole world, if you can believe it. Everyone else is a slimy rat bastard. And now that she's gone, that's all there is left.

ARGENCIA

Even you?

ROGER

Especially me. Beverly loved me for 60 years and all she ever got was a shitty ring and a son who never calls.

ARGENCIA

Somehow, I doubt she would agree.

ROGER

Somehow, I think you're right. And that's why I loved her. She was my beautiful, wonderful little fool.

The two of them sit together for a few moments, watching the sun crest over the horizon.

ARGENCIA

When my mother died, father said it was as though "the world had lost its hues." He would walk through the royal gardens, but could see none of its colors.

ROGER

That sounds about right.

ARGENCIA

He also said that, were it not for me and his duty to the kingdom, he would have fallen to despair.

ROGER

And how's he doing these days?

ARGENCIA

He's gone. He died trying to save me from an assassin.

Roger looks up in surprise, then to Kaelryn over by a fire.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

My point is that I do not believe you are a "slimy rat bastard," Roger Breton. But you may be in need of a purpose.

ROGER

Okay, you can cut the hard sell. I've already decided to help.

ARGENCIA

(excited)

You have?

ROGER

I'm still pretty sure that none of this is real, but the 'Dark Lord' seems like a real prick. If your Oracle thinks there's some way I can help, then I'll give it a try.

(he looks to Kaelryn)

And could you imagine the look on his face?

Argencia lunges at Roger and wraps him in a hug.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Easy there, Princess! Any more and you'll send us both over the edge.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - AFTERNOON

Argencia and Roger ride along an easy trail while Kaelryn scouts up ahead. Roger looks over at Argencia, then spurs his horse forward to catch up with Kaelryn.

ROGER

Hey, you're a cold-hearted son of a bitch, right?

KAELRYN

I trust this is leading somewhere and that you are not simply tempting me to hurl you from the side of the mountain.

ROGER

That's exactly what I mean! You must have killed dozens of people and felt nothing at all, right?

Kaelryn doesn't respond, but does not deny it either.

ROGER (CONT'D)

So then why did you join Argencia
when you were supposed to kill her?

KAELRYN

I see we have been sharing
secrets... Very well. When the Dark
Lord's armies finished their bloody
conquest of Hessive, he offered me
a choice: serve him or watch as my
people were massacred one-by-one.
From that day forth, I killed many
good and honorable men, including
the late king of this realm. But
Argencia was different. When the
Princess looked into my heart, she
saw something I had long thought to
be dead. She saw hope for
redemption, and offered me a chance
to reclaim what I had lost.

Roger bursts into laughter.

ROGER

And you fell for that? Christ, she
probably would have said anything
to save her life.

KAELRYN

Roger, what exactly did she tell
you?

ROGER

Nothing. That's why I'm trying to
piece this all together.

KAELRYN

Then allow me to explain. Argencia
is the strongest metamorphoser in
all the realm and one of the most
powerful mages writ large. My only
hope was to catch her unawares.

ROGER

Wait, you're not saying...

KAELRYN

That her father found me first?
That she came upon me mere moments
after I had killed the king?
(he turns and smiles)
I did not spare Argencia, Roger
Breton. It was she who spared me.

ROGER

But that... doesn't make any sense.
Why the fuck would she do that?

KAELRYN

An excellent question, though
perhaps better directed to her.

ROGER

No, I'm serious. That is batshit
fucking crazy. She saw you murder
her own father and then let you go?
Christ, you could have turned
around and killed her at any time!

KAELRYN

And yet here I am. Her belief in
me, however irrational, was the
catalyst I needed to change. And
perhaps that's why it worked. She
is a metamorphoser, after all.

ROGER

Or maybe you're both fucking crazy.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - AFTERNOON

Argencia waits by her horse while Kaelryn paces impatiently.

KAELRYN

You haven't been giving him water
whilst I look elsewhere, have you?

Argencia shoots him a reproachful look.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)

Very well. I'm simply astounded
that a fully grown man needs to
stop every half hour.

ARGENCIA

Take heart. The Oracle is not much
further and we will soon have the
clarity we seek.

KAELRYN

And by the stars let it be with a
champion that can hold it in...

Argencia's expression turns to sheer horror. Kaelryn wheels
around to see a panther slinking up from behind.

Kaelryn draws his daggers and Argencia pulls out her bow.

A second panther emerges. Then a third. Then a fourth.

A squad of soldiers crest over the rocks on either side of the trail and point crossbows down below.

Argencia nocks an arrow and fires at one of the panthers, but it gets ZAPPED out of the air by a flash of electricity.

The Hessivite and the Conjurer join up from behind.

CONJURER

The prudent choice would be to
lower your arms and surrender.

Lightning crackles in the Hessivite's hands and in his eyes.

HESSIVITE

But I truly hope you do not.

EXT. CLIFFSIDE - AFTERNOON

Roger finishes relieving himself over the edge of a cliff. He zips up with a grunt, then turns to rejoin the others.

ZAAAAAP!

Roger freezes and looks towards the source of the noise.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - CONTINUOUS

Kaelryn, bloodied and out of breath, stands over a handful of soldiers and two piles of steaming black goo. Argencia is at his back, holding a large wooden shield over their heads that is riddled with crossbow bolts.

Up above, Roger's head just barely pops into view.

Kaelryn FLINGS a dagger at the Conjurer, but the Hessivite effortlessly zaps it out of the air.

CONJURER

We can keep at this all day, if you
wish. There's another squad coming,
and I can always conjure more pets.

ARGENCIA

(shouting)

Then send them! We will die before
we yield to you!

Kaelryn scans the area, then slowly lowers his weapons.

KAELRYN

If I give you the Champion, will
you let the Princess go?

ARGENCIA

Kaelryn, you can't!

HESSIVITE

You are in no position to
negotiate, 'brother.' Lay down your
arms and you may yet live.

CONJURER

Why not make the trade? Each moment
we tarry is a moment the Champion
slips further from our grasp.

KAELRYN

Then we have a deal?

ARGENCIA

Kaelryn, NO!

Argencia tries to grab Kaelryn, but he bats her hand away
and grabs her by the throat.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)

(gurgling)

I... trusted you...

KAELRYN

(softly)

I know, Princess. And that is why
this must be done...

CONJURER

Yes assassin. If you direct us to
the Champion, we will release the
Princess. You have my word.

KAELRYN

And his?

(he nods to the
Hessivite)

Swear upon the seven stars that you
will let her go.

The Hessivite sighs and rolls his eyes.

HESSIVITE

Very well, I swear it upon all
seven stars... but only if you
deliver the Champion to us.

Kaelryn nods.

KAELRYN

The Champion went to relieve
himself and is not far from here.

Argencia lets out a choked sob.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)

Last I saw, he was headed that way.

Kaelryn points down a path -- the exact opposite direction
from Roger.

CONJURER

Captain! Take half your men and my
remaining servants to find our
quarry. The rest will remain to
help keep watch over our 'friends.'

The Captain barks orders and the soldiers fall into line.
The remaining panthers slink away to follow.

Kaelryn glances up to where Roger is hiding, then pointedly
looks over to the scroll in his bag.

In all the commotion, it's practically unguarded.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - LATER

Roger RACES up a trail as fast as he can with the scroll.
He's drenched in sweat and laboring hard beneath its weight.

At a particularly steep part of the trail, Roger throws the
scroll down in frustration, then collapses down onto a rock.

His breathing slows, his head falls forward, and Roger
allows his eyes to close... just for a moment.

Voices. Two of them. Coming from below.

Roger startles and leaps up to his feet. He runs to the
scroll, then backtracks and goes for the flower.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - SAME TIME

A SKITTISH SOLDIER (20s, nervous), and an ARROGANT SOLDIER
(20s, douche), work their way up the path with swords drawn.

SKITTISH SOLDIER

I just don't see what good we're
going to do on our own. Why send
two men when the bloody drake of
the peaks wasn't enough?

ARROGANT SOLDIER

Well we can't very well search all
these trails together, can we?
Besides, your 'Champion' is nothing
more than a decrepit old man.

SKITTISH SOLDIER

Tell that to the electromancer!
They say he dueled him in the town
square and won.

ARROGANT SOLDIER

And did they also say that he is
seven feet tall with only one arm,
like Sir Conrad the Slayer?

SKITTISH SOLDIER

You can laugh all you like, but--

Roger steps out from behind a rock, sunflower levelled.

ROGER

Hands up and don't fucking move!

The Skittish Soldier freezes, dropping his sword and
throwing his arms in the air. The Arrogant Soldier smiles.

ARROGANT SOLDIER

Or else you'll harm the pretty
little flower? I must say,
grandfather, you've chosen quite
the hostage.

ROGER

It's not a flower, and I said DON'T
FUCKING MOVE!

The Arrogant Soldier stops, but loses no trace of his smile.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Just... stay where you are... I
need a minute to think...

ARROGANT SOLDIER

Take all the time you need,
grandfather. In fact, why don't you
sit down and rest?

ROGER

Please, I am begging you... don't
make me kill you...

(his hands shake)

You're just a fucking kid...

This finally does give the Arrogant Soldier some pause. A flicker of doubt crosses his face and he sheathes his sword.

The Skittish Soldier takes this opportunity to run.

As he does, Roger flinches and the other man seizes his chance, charging forward and SLAMMING Roger onto the ground.

ARROGANT SOLDIER

Tell me, grandfather, are you going
to kill me now, or later?

Roger tries to crawl over to the sunflower, but the Arrogant Soldier delivers a vicious kick to the ribs.

ARROGANT SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Frankly, I'm disappointed.
(another kick)
Nothing more from the 'Champion?'

Roger tries to shield himself from the worst of the blows, but the Arrogant Soldier picks him apart where he's weakest.

Then, for the next few moments, all the wonder and whimsy of this magical world falls away and it's nothing but a helpless old man getting stomped into the ground.

ARROGANT SOLDIER (CONT'D)

What do you say, Champion?
(he hauls him up)
Have you had enough?

Roger reaches into his pocket and FLINGS a fistful of dirt into his eyes. The Arrogant Soldier stumbles back, cursing.

ARROGANT SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Why you treacherous old--

SCHIIIIICK!

Roger grabs the man's sword and drives it into his gut.

The Arrogant Soldier looks down in dismay, then up at Roger. Blood gurgles from his mouth and he falls to the ground.

ROGER

(hoarse)

Oh God why did you make me do that?

On the ground, the Arrogant Soldier feebly tries to pull the sword from his stomach.

ROGER (CONT'D)

No! No don't do that!

Roger limps over and kneels beside him. He grabs the man's hands and presses them against the wound.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Apply pressure and wait until your
unit arrives. Do not try to pull it
out on your own, understand?
(he slaps him gently)
Look at me soldier. Understand?

The Arrogant Soldier looks up at Roger with terror and bewilderment, but nods his head yes.

Roger groans and gets to his feet, then grabs the scroll and starts dragging it up the trail.

INT. ORACLE'S SANCTUM - EVENING

A rough, unimproved cave with stalactites dripping water. The space is illuminated by the soft glow of a reflecting pool and the ORACLE (6, wearing monk's robes), sits cross-legged facing the water. All around, piles of books and old scrolls lay strewn about in no discernible order.

Roger comes limping in with the scroll.

ROGER
I'm looking for the Oracle.

The Oracle turns to face Roger, his face stoic and calm.

ORACLE
Then you have found what you seek.

ROGER
No, I mean the Oracle of the
mountain. He's--
(he considers)
Goddammit, you're him, aren't you?
No wonder they tried to kidnap my
grandson -- he's twice your age.

ORACLE
In the eternal present, all things
are the same age. The fly and the
dragon can both only be as old as
the 'now.'

A horn blows in the distance.

ROGER
Fuck it, whatever. I just need to
know how to get home.
(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)
(he sighs)
And how to beat the evil wizard...

ORACLE
And which question will you ask?

ROGER
What do you mean? I just told you.

ORACLE
You have but one offering, Roger
Breton. And thus are entitled to
only one question.

ROGER
What, are you hourly or something?

The Oracle stares back, unblinking.

ROGER (CONT'D)
You might have everyone else around
here kissing your ass, but where
I'm from, children do what they're
fucking told. Now are you going to
start talking, or am I gonna--

Roger stops himself as he realizes the absurdity of his
situation. With a heavy sigh, he plops down onto the ground.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Can you at least tell me if I'm the
Champion? Was Argencia right?

The Oracle picks up a smooth stone and tosses it into the
reflecting pool. Ripples emanate out from the center.

ORACLE
A wave is not a state of being, it
is a series of sequential actions
that make the form of a wave. I do
not know if you are the Champion,
but I do know what a champion would
do. As, I think, do you.

The two sit in silence while Roger ponders that answer.

ROGER
What kind of fortune cookie
bullshit is that? If you can't even
give me a straight fucking answer,
then what good--

Roger doubles over. His injuries are catching up to him. He starts to laugh, but that only makes it worse.

ROGER (CONT'D)

(hoarse)

I've lost my fucking mind, haven't I? There's nothing I can do here.

ORACLE

Your friends thought you could.

ROGER

Well I don't have any friends.

(he stands unsteadily)

And I didn't ask to come here. I'm not equipped to deal with any of this and I don't owe anyone shit.

(he sighs)

So just tell me how to get home.

ORACLE

If that is what you wish.

(he gestures to the pool)

These waters can restore that which has been lost. If you wish to return home, simply step into the pool and remember whence you came.

Roger grunts and limps over to the water. The Oracle holds up a hand and stops him at the edge.

ORACLE (CONT'D)

But Kaelryn and Argencia will die if no one comes to save them.

Roger steps down into the pool.

ROGER

That's not my problem.

INT. BRETON FAMILY BASEMENT - AFTERNOON

A basement cluttered with the detritus of a two-child family. Bikes, tennis rackets, and stuffed animals sit in piles they're definitely gonna get around to tidying later.

Roger III's broken monitor and the rest of his waterlogged electronics sit in a cardboard box by the stairs.

The screen sparks and jumps partway out of the box. Then it ERUPTS into a raging torrent of water that spits Roger out in a sopping wet heap.

ROGER JR. (O.S.)
Hello? Is someone down there?

Roger Jr. creeps downstairs with a bat held high.

ROGER JR. (CONT'D)
I'm warning you, I-- Dad?!

EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

A fancy Catholic hospital with gleaming windows and a picturesque outdoor campus.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Roger sits upright in a hospital bed, looking tired and very small. A decorative crucifix lays face down on the end table and his desiccated sunflower sits in a vase.

Roger Jr. speaks in hushed tones with a DOCTOR by the door. The two shake hands, then Roger Jr. knocks and comes in.

ROGER JR.
Well, the doctor says there's two ribs that you didn't break, so that's good news.

ROGER
Damn. Have to try harder next time.

Roger Jr. pulls up a chair and sits down beside the bed.

ROGER JR.
I know I've said it a thousand times, but thank you.

ROGER
Then, for the thousand-and-first time, it's not a big deal.

ROGER JR.
But it is, dad. Those people were waiting for me to leave so they could break in and take my kids.
(he shudders)
If you hadn't been there...

ROGER
But I was.

ROGER JR.
I just wish I knew if they were still out there, you know?
(MORE)

ROGER JR. (CONT'D)
(he looks pointedly)
Are you sure you don't remember
anything else that happened?

ROGER
Not a thing.
(he shrugs)
Hell, maybe it was magic.

ROGER JR.
What, like a miracle? Don't tell me
you've found Jesus or something.

ROGER
The opposite, actually.
(he gestures to the
crucifix)
I tossed him right off a cliff.

ROGER JR.
So this was you?
(he fixes the crucifix)
This is a Catholic hospital, dad.
You can't do that.

ROGER
For as much as I'm paying, I can
decorate however I goddamn please.
And if I wanted to sit here and
watch someone dying all day I'd
have them bring in a mirror.

ROGER JR.
Dad, you're not dying. The doctors
say you'll be fine in a couple
months. After that, though... what
do you think about moving here?

ROGER
(laughing)
And live with you? Jesus kid,
there's cheaper home security.

ROGER JR.
No, not with us. I don't think we
are equipped to handle your needs.

ROGER
Wait, you mean a home!?

ROGER JR.

A retirement community. I've been looking at a few places online and I think we have some good options.

ROGER

Junior, this is ridiculous. I'm not going to move and you can't fucking make me. So drop it.

ROGER JR.

I mean, I don't want to make you. But if it comes to that...

ROGER

But why!? What the fuck did I do?

ROGER JR.

You disappeared for an entire week! Then came back beaten halfway to death with nothing but a sunflower and no memory of what happened.

(he sighs)

I am so damn grateful that you were there to protect my kids, but I'm scared to death you're gonna end up hurting yourself or someone else.

ROGER

Junior, come on, don't do this...

ROGER JR.

Then tell me where you were! Tell me anything that happened. Hell, if you had a flashback then at least tell me where you thought you were. But I can't let this happen again.

ROGER

Dammit I... I can't...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Day turns to night turns to day turns to night. Roger remains unmoving with a deeply set scowl.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Roger sits in the dimly lit room with a half-eaten tray of food on his lap. At the foot of the bed, STACY (30s, cheerful), updates his vitals on a whiteboard.

ROGER

This pudding tastes like dirt.

STACY

Oh, I'm sorry you don't like it.

ROGER

I didn't say that. I said it tastes like dirt. And trust me, I'm something of an expert.

Stacy laughs and shakes her head.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Wait weren't you here this morning?

STACY

Yes sir.

ROGER

And last night?

STACY

Mhmm.

ROGER

Then go home. No one should have to put up with me for that long.

STACY

Oh, it's not so bad. It's not like I have to eat the pudding.

(she turns back to Roger)

I'm just covering a few extra shifts. Angie is on vacation and May's daughter is sick.

ROGER

You know, if you give a bum an inch, they always take a mile.

STACY

Then I guess it's a good thing I've got plenty to give.

ROGER

(shaking his head)

You fucking idiot...

Stacy's smile fades into a frown.

STACY

Mr. Breton, I don't appreciate being spoken to that way. I treat you with courtesy and I expect to be treated the same in return.

ROGER

Yeah, well the sooner you get out of here, the sooner you won't have to deal with me anymore.

Stacy pulls up a chair and sits down beside him.

STACY

Is there something wrong? I know you didn't like the food, but can I get you something else? Do you need more medication for your pain?

ROGER

No, I'm fine. Or at least I will be once you leave me alone.

STACY

Are you sure? Because it's my job to make sure you're comfortable.

Roger glances at her and smirks.

ROGER

Well, now that you mention it, I have been pretty lonely since my wife died. It might be nice to have someone to talk to for a change...

(he stifles a laugh)

You see, my son thinks I'm useless and senile, but he's the only person who'd even know if I was gone. My grandkids hate me, the world is shit, and sometimes in the morning, before I remember she's gone, I reach across the bed and--

Roger looks up and sees Stacy nodding attentively.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Look, you don't have to keep pretending to care. There's nothing medically wrong with me.

STACY

Who's pretending? It seems like you're going through a tough time.

ROGER

Yeah, but you're, uh, not supposed to give a shit.

STACY

And if I do?

ROGER
(chuckling)
Then you're even more fucked than I
am. Take it from someone who knows,
sweetheart, nothing good ever comes
from caring too much.

Stacy looks over to the withered sunflower in the vase.

STACY
Because you'd never do something
mushy and sentimental, right? Like
hold onto a beat-up old flower.

ROGER
It's not a-- nevermind.
(he sighs)
Look, what do I gotta do to get you
to leave?

STACY
Just tell me the truth. What's
going on and how can I help?

ROGER
(angry)
Fuck it, you want the truth? How
'bout I start from the beginning?
We lost a war 50 years ago and no
one bothered to remember.

STACY
50 years ago..? You mean---

ROGER
(interrupting)
Vietnam. When we fed 50,000 dumbass
kids into a meat grinder for no
fucking reason.

STACY
I'm so sorry. I can't even imagine.

ROGER
It was hell on earth. The absolute
worst of humanity crammed in one
place. We'd lose friends taking a
village, just to leave it behind
the next day. We'd see the burned
bodies of little kids and have no
idea if it was us or the VC.
(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

(he leans forward)

But the worst part of it all was coming home and being surrounded by goddamn children like you who don't know anything about the world or what it's really like.

(he sighs)

So if you wanna 'help,' you can start by growing the fuck up and learning some things can't be fixed.

Stacy takes Roger by the hand.

STACY

I'm sure that was hard to share...

ROGER

Yeah, well, it probably wasn't half as bad as dealing with me. So why don't you just go?

STACY

Because I have something I want to say, too. I may not have ever been to war and I may never know what it's like, but that doesn't mean I haven't also seen my share of evil.

ROGER

Sure.

STACY

Mr. Breton, I've seen children lose parents, good men die alone, and so many people in terrible pain I can't do anything about. But do you know what keeps me going? What I do when I'm overwhelmed, working back-to-back shifts and a grumpy old man cusses me out for doing my job?

ROGER

Steal morphine?

STACY

I remember the people who need me. The kids in pediatric oncology who are afraid of the dark. Miss Rosetta, who hasn't had a visitor in months. The nursing student who cries in the bathroom after every shift.

(MORE)

STACY (CONT'D)

These people rely on me, so I can't afford to get overwhelmed by the darkness -- I'm just too busy being the light.

ROGER

(laughing)

You read that in a Hallmark card?

STACY

No, I feel it in my heart. The point is, those people give me purpose; a reason to wake up in the morning and a sense of perspective when I start feeling sorry for myself. And, if I had to guess, I think you know exactly what I mean.

ROGER

Well, you're now the second person this week to tell me to get a job.

STACY

That's not really what I mean...

ROGER

What both of you failed to realize, however, is that no one needs a broken down piece of shit like me.

(he points to himself)

In case you haven't noticed, I can't help anyone. Hell, if you ask my son, I can't even help myself.

STACY

And what do you think?

ROGER

That I'm tired. That my ribs are broken and that a stupid nurse won't leave me alone.

STACY

Well, I think you're more capable than you know. And that it takes far less than you think to be a hero for someone in need.

ROGER

Jesus would you give it a rest?

STACY

I'm serious! It doesn't even need to be much. Maybe you could call someone you know is lonely. Or maybe this whole thing has been tough for your son, too. Maybe he needs some support from his dad.

(she squeezes his arm)

Regardless, I bet if you dug deep, you'd realize someone out there really does need your help.

Roger looks outside and, for a moment, seems very far away.

ROGER

(softly)

And if I fuck things up even more?
What if you're wrong and I just end up dead?

Stacy gives him an odd look.

STACY

I think that's... unlikely. But even so, wouldn't it be better to try? You either deal with the pain of failure or the pain of regret -- I suppose it's up to you to decide which is worse.

Stacy pats his arm affectionately, then goes to continue her rounds, leaving Roger alone, staring hard into the darkness.

After some time, he presses the 'call' button on his bed.

Stacy pops in.

STACY (CONT'D)

You need some more pudding?

ROGER

I think I need to call my son...

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - MORNING

Roger Jr. leads Roger III and Eloise through a steady stream of doctors and nurses. He looks even more stressed than usual and the kids seem like they'd rather be anywhere else.

When they reach Roger's room, he gets down on their level.

ROGER JR.

Okay, let's go over this one more time before we head in. Grandpa is?

ROGER III & ELOISE
(in unison)
Emotionally volatile.

ROGER JR.
Yes, but in the end he did?

ROGER III & ELOISE
(in unison)
Save our lives.

ROGER JR.
And since having you here is the
only thing he wants, we're gonna?

ELOISE	ROGER III
Behave?	Put up with him?

ROGER JR. (CONT'D)
Sure... close enough.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Roger sits upright, looking more engaged than he has in some time. There's a knock at the door, and his family enters.

ROGER JR.
Hey Dad, I got a few friends here
who wanted to see you.

ROGER III & ELOISE
(in unison)
Thank you for saving us from the
pedophiles.

ROGER
Uh yeah, anytime... But real quick,
could you go find nurse Paige? I
need to change my lunch order.

ROGER JR.
Don't you have a button for that?

ROGER
Ha! Wouldn't that be nice? But for
real, she's the one in white shoes.

ROGER JR.
(reluctant)
Okay, I guess I'll go find her...

He steps out into the hall and Roger waves the kids over.

ROGER

We need to talk about last week.

Roger III and Eloise share a glance, but step up to the bed.

ROGER III

Yeah, thanks again grandpa. For the pedophiles.

ROGER

No, no they weren't pedophiles! One of them is a magic princess and the other is a, uh, serial killer... But he only kills bad guys.

ELOISE

Dad already told us it wasn't real.

ROGER

But you were there! How can you say that when you saw it yourselves?
(he considers)
You really are my grandkids...

ROGER III

You don't need to soften it up for us, grandpa. We're old enough to understand what really happened.

ROGER

Oh, yeah? Explain it to me, then.

ROGER III

Dad said they climbed out a window.

ELOISE

And that the other stuff we saw was a 'trauma response.'

ROGER

But what if it was real! What if I came back because I need your help?

Eloise gulps and her eyes take on a wondrous shine.

ELOISE

Both of us?

ROGER

Yes, both of you! The princess and the, uh, murderer were telling the truth. An evil wizard really does rule their world and we really did fight his minions.

Eloise remains held in rapt attention while Roger III tries to resist the siren song of adventure.

ROGER (CONT'D)
But after we got past the dragon--

ELOISE
(interrupting)
You fought a dragon!

ROGER III
Eloise, don't be so gullible. You think grandpa could fight a dragon? He just thinks we're young and dumb enough to believe in this stuff.

ROGER
No, I think you're still young enough that you haven't forgotten how to believe...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Roger Jr. re-enters the room, looking frustrated.

ROGER JR.
Dad, nobody knows a "Nurse Paige."
And they all wear white shoes.

Eloise sidles up alongside him.

ELOISE
Daddy, can I borrow your keys?

ROGER JR.
What? Why do you want them?

ELOISE
Because Grandpa wants to show me the different kinds. He used to make locks in the army.

ROGER JR.
Really? I didn't know that.

ROGER
You mean you didn't listen to something I said? I'm shocked.

ROGER JR.
Okay, real nice.
(he hands her the keys)
Just because I--

ROGER III
(interrupting)
Dad, can you come to the bathroom?

ROGER JR.
Why... what happened?

ROGER III
Well, the toilet kinda clogged. I
jammed a bunch of paper towels down
there, but I think that might have
just made things worse...

Roger Jr. DASHES into the bathroom and Roger III SLAMS the door. Eloise then slides a chair underneath the handle.

ROGER JR. (O.S.)
Hey, what's going on?

Roger springs out of bed, wearing only a hospital gown.

ROGER
Sorry, kiddo. We're going on a
quest, but adults aren't allowed.

INT. ROGER JR'S TRUCK - MORNING

Roger, still in his hospital gown, speeds down the road with Roger III and Eloise in the back. A crucifix, just like the one he used to wear, dangles from the rear-view mirror.

ROGER
Okay, we need to be quick. Your
dad's probably out by now and he's
definitely issued an amber alert.
We'll start by getting your things.

ROGER III
To make a summoning circle?

ROGER
Uh, sure. And Eloise, do you know
where your dad keeps his clothes?

Eloise nods rapidly, barely containing her excitement.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Good. Get anything you think might
fit me and bring it out too.

Roger snatches the crucifix from the rear-view mirror.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Oh, and do you still have that box
of sandwiches?

INT. BRETON FAMILY HOME - MORNING

Roger stands in the living room by a pile of clothes wearing a truly garish mismatch of styles. He has the sunflower in one hand and the box of Uncrustables in the other.

In the middle of the room, Roger III and Eloise have laid out the electronics and await further instructions.

ROGER
Okay, for this to work you have to
close your eyes and visualize where
you want to go. So imagine a little
boy dressed like a Tibetan monk in
a cave. There's also a big glowing
pool that looks like something
you'd see in Vegas. Oh, and--
(he sees their confusion)
Nevermind, just focus on the kid.

The kids close their eyes and focus, brows furrowed.

Nothing happens.

ROGER III
How do we know if it's working?

ROGER
It gushes water... I think. Are
sure you're imagining the kid?

ROGER III
(exasperated)
Yes grandpa, we're doing it. It's
just not working.

ROGER
Well, Argencia has to move her
hands to do magic. Maybe you
should, uh, wiggle your fingers.

Eloise instantly complies, but Roger III hesitates.

ROGER (CONT'D)
C'mon kid, now's not the time to
start doubting this shit. Wiggle
your fingers and fucking believe.

Eventually, Roger III does as he's asked and the two
siblings stand there in silence, looking rather ridiculous.

Nothing happens.

Tires screech and red and blue lights flash in the window.

Roger quietly sidles over to the front door and locks it. He looks back at the kids nervously.

ROGER (CONT'D)
(pointing at nothing)
Holy shit, I think it's working!

The kids both yelp in surprise and try to open their eyes, but Roger rushes forward and covers them both.

ROGER (CONT'D)
No, no, no. Don't lose your focus.

Eloise grins like a maniac and Roger III's self-conscious expression softens into a confident smile.

The screen in the middle sparks and jumps a little.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Holy shit, I think it's working!

ROGER III
Yeah, we heard you the first time.

Heavy footsteps, followed by someone trying the door.

ROGER JR. (O.S.)
Dad, we know you're in there.
Please open the door.

All the electronics are sparking and jumping now. Water seeps up from the floor.

ROGER
(soft-yelling)
Okay, I'm coming. Just gimme a sec.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
Mr. Breton, open the door or we
will be forced to break it down.

More and more water comes gushing out.

ROGER
(still soft-yelling)
Jesus, I'm coming. I'm an old man
with bad knees and broken ribs!

The water spreads further and further across the ground, eventually reaching the front door and seeping underneath.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
Holy shit, we need to go in now!

The door SPLINTERS and comes crashing down. Roger Jr. and a POLICE OFFICER stand in the entryway, bewildered.

ROGER JR.
What the hell is going on here!?

ELOISE
(proudly)
We're going on an adventure!

ROGER
Actually, I am.

Roger III and Eloise both stop and turn to him in confusion.

ROGER (CONT'D)
You kids are great, but I'm not gonna bring two children into a fucking warzone.

Roger SHOVES the kids over to Roger Jr. and steps back into the water. There's a bright flash of light, and he's gone.

INT. ORACLE'S SANCTUM - EVENING

The Oracle sits by the reflecting pool, deep in meditation. Nearby, a handful of dead soldiers lay heaped in a pile.

The water bubbles and churns, then Roger emerges with a soggy box of Uncrustables and his poor bedraggled flower.

ORACLE
(eyes still closed)
Roger Breton. You are here sooner than I expected.

ROGER
You know you'd make a good politician. Taking credit for shit that already happened...

Roger steps out from the reflecting pool and wrings out his clothes. He looks over to the pile of bodies.

ROGER (CONT'D)
What happened there?

ORACLE
They attempted to enter my sanctum without an appropriate offering.

ROGER

Right, wouldn't want to do that...
(he clears his throat)
Do you know why I'm here?

ORACLE

You wish to know if your change of heart has come too late. If Kaelryn and Argencia yet live or if they have perished from your indecision.

ROGER

Yeah, something like that...

ORACLE

You already know the price of my wisdom. I cannot answer your question without an offering.

ROGER

Which is why I brought this.
(he holds up the box)
Try these on for size.

Roger tosses a plastic-wrapped sandwich over to the Oracle. He catches it awkwardly and turns it over in his hands.

ORACLE

I do not understand.

ROGER

It's a sandwich. You eat it.

The Oracle sniffs at the package, then raises the plastic to his mouth and tries to take a bite.

ROGER (CONT'D)

No, no. You gotta unwrap it first.
(he opens the bag)
Now give it a try.

The Oracle takes a hesitant bite and chews methodically.

ORACLE

This offering is... acceptable.

Roger lets out an obvious sigh of relief.

ROGER

So, Kaelryn and Argencia?

ORACLE

Are alive.

Roger throws him another sandwich.

ROGER
And where are they?

ORACLE
In a dark and terrible dungeon.

Another sandwich.

ROGER
Which is where, exactly?

ORACLE
A well-guarded keep, miles away.

ROGER
Fuck. I'll never make it...

The Oracle clears his throat and looks pointedly at the box.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Oh, or do you have an idea?

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - NIGHT

Roger and the Oracle walk up a trail so thick with fog it's like going through the middle of a cloud. The Oracle leads the way, carrying a bundle of sandwiches in his arms.

ROGER
Jesus it's foggy out here.

ORACLE
This shroud is how I conceal my sanctum. Surely you must have passed through it to reach me?

ROGER
I mean yeah, it was always a little misty, but not like this. I can barely see more than a few feet!

The Oracle gives him a puzzled look, but says nothing more.

ROGER (CONT'D)
So what are you showing me? A flying carpet? Giant eagles?

ORACLE
No, something far greater...

The two of them reach a ledge overlooking a refugee camp. In the mist it's hard to make anything out, but the sounds of people talking and children laughing emanate up from below.

They fall silent as Roger and the Oracle step out into view.

ORACLE (CONT'D)

These are the people who have taken up arms against the Dark Lord. They were inspired by tales from Karak'nah, and outraged by the vengeance wrought upon it.

ROGER

Jesus, there must be hundreds of them down there.

ORACLE

Thousands. Many others line the slopes of the mountain and more come to join them each day.

ROGER

And do they all have the same question, or do they each want to ask you something different?

ORACLE

They have not come for me, Roger Breton. They have come for someone to lead them against the Dark Lord. They have come here for a Champion.

More and more people come to catch a glimpse of the Champion. Farmers, merchants, slaves, and children -- all dirty and underdressed, but defiant.

ROGER

What? These people wouldn't stand a chance in a fight. You gotta tell them to go home.

ORACLE

They would not listen even if I did. For they are driven by a force far greater than any I wield.

ROGER

Magic?

ORACLE

Hope.

ROGER
Oh fuck that.

Roger steps out to the very edge of the outcropping and a chorus of excited whispers breaks out below.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Go home, dammit! What the hell are
you people thinking?

Stunned, awkward silence. Somewhere, a child starts to cry.

REFUGEE
And is that your intention? Will
you also flee from the Dark Lord?

ROGER
No, but--

SECOND REFUGEE
(interrupting)
Then we will go too! No true son of
the realm would sit idly by while
another fights for our freedom!

Whoops and hollers break out in the crowd. Some even clap.

ROGER
And have you ever been to war? Do
you even know what the fuck you're
talking about? Because this isn't a
game! If you go out there without
any training you're just gonna die.
(softer)
You're all gonna die...

Excitement drains from their faces. That seemed to hit home.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Look, it's not fair, but there's
nothing we can do with a bunch of
civilians. And even if some of you
are veterans, you're probably...
(a realization dawns
across his face)
Old men...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - EVENING

Roger rides at the head of an army. All manner of people from all walks of life march in uneven columns and carry makeshift weapons. Some even serve as standard bearers, holding banners with sunflowers embroidered onto them.

As they pass through the fields, laborers throw down their tools and abandon livestock to come join the procession.

EXT. FOREST - MORNING

The rebel army marches through open forest.

Pixies swoop by overhead on the backs of small birds and living trees uproot themselves to follow along.

EXT. WASTELAND - DUSK

A SCOUT (terrified), races through scrubland on a horse. He looks over his shoulder, then urges it on even faster.

In the distance, thousands upon thousands of men, women, and forest creatures are singing and marching together.

The rebel host has arrived.

EXT. WARCAMP - EVENING

A bustling camp with 'soldiers' preparing for battle. Mismatched tents dot the terrain and happy music fills the air.

Roger exits a tent, looking tired and worried. He glances down at a scroll of parchment and sighs heavily.

A LITTLE GIRL (7), goes running by, but stops dead in her tracks when she sees him. She looks up in awe, then down to a small wooden doll, which is also holding a sunflower.

EXT. BATTLEMENTS - MORNING

The upper battlements of the Dark Lord's fortress. Dozens of SOLDIERS stand with crossbows trained over the edge and the energy is nervous and tense.

The DARK LORD (late 20s, handsome), strides out from the main keep with the Steward in-tow. He's wearing a stylish half-cape, and no shirt, to show off a set of washboard abs.

DARK LORD

Is it true? Have all my unruly
children finally made their way
home? It's been so long since we've
had a good massacre...

STEWARD

Indeed, my lord. The last of their
forces arrived late last night.

DARK LORD

Excellent! How kind of them to gather here and save me the trouble of hunting them down.

(he laughs)

Now, how many siege weapons have they cobbled together? Or do they mean to dig beneath our walls?

STEWARD

N-Neither, my lord. The rebels seem only to be... waiting?

DARK LORD

Then they seek open combat. Splendid. Send word to the commanders to sally forth and indulge them. But make certain they focus their efforts against the Champion. Once he falls, I have no doubt the rest will soon follow.

STEWARD

Of course, my lord. But it may be somewhat difficult to find him.

DARK LORD

Nonsense. The Champion is an old man. He wears odd clothes and carries a flower at all times. How much more distinctive could he be?

STEWARD

I fear that is the problem...

The Steward gestures out over the battlements. Below, the rebels have massed in dozens of loosely organized squares -- and each is being led by an old man with a flower.

EXT. FORTRESS - MORNING

Roger, wearing a hooded cloak, and three HUNTERS sneak through the thickets by the outer walls of the fortress. Ahead, Timothy (16, servant), hides by the service entrance.

Roger pulls off his cloak to reveal a matching servant's outfit and a small leather satchel that conceals his flower.

TIMOTHY

So this is the Champion? The hero of legend, fated to save the realm?

ROGER

Something like that...

Timothy looks to a Hunter, who nods and gives him a shrug.

TIMOTHY

Very well. I can help you gain entry to the fortress, but little beyond that. The dungeon is warded by magic.

ROGER

Not a problem. Just get me inside and I'll handle the 'magic.'

EXT. FORTRESS - MAIN GATES - MORNING

A MASSIVE iron portcullis groans and shudders as it rises in the air. KNIGHTS in black armor, SOLDIERS with long pikes, and WIZARDS crackling with energy file out from the keep.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - SAME TIME

The rebel army looks on nervously as the Dark Lord's forces form up in neat columns and lines. Farmers and laborers shift back and forth and look around for some kind of escape, their will already starting to falter.

An OLD MAN (dressed like Roger), hoists a flower in the air.

OLD MAN

Steady lads! Remember the plan...

INT. FORTRESS - MORNING

A very busy, almost frantic hallway with soldiers and attendants rushing by in a dizzying stream of activity. Near the end, a passage leads down to a dimly lit tunnel and a green gem glows brightly above the entrance.

Roger and Timothy, dressed as they are, attract no attention as they slip unopposed through the heart of the fortress. As they pass by, Roger splits off and ducks into the passage.

Behind him, the glowing gem turns red.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - MORNING

The Dark Lord's forces charge. Hoofbeats thunder, men shout, and war-horns blare. Thousands of crossbow bolts fill the sky and ominous blasts of energy shoot out from the wizards.

The rebel army flees.

As they run, the loosely organized squares dissolve, revealing trenches filled with punji sticks.

Sentient trees lift wide planks of wood to shield them from projectiles and pixies swoop by on birds, dropping pouches of colorful dust to obscure the field of battle.

INT. DUNGEON - DAY

A menacing prison filled with every torture device you can think of. Bones sit piled in cages and bloodstained tables with open restraints lay waiting for their next victim.

At the heart of it all, a chain dangles into a pitch-black pit, and Roger turns a crank on the winch holding it up.

KAELRYN (O.S)

You must be quite tenacious, or foolish, if you think your efforts will yield different results. Why don't you spare yourself further humiliation and simply leave us be?

A cage rises into view, revealing Kaelryn and Argencia bound in metal restraints. Neither seems to have bathed or changed and Argencia seems to be in bad shape up on the floor.

ROGER

Well if you really feel that way, I guess I can put you back.

KAELRYN

Roger!?

Argencia's eyes flutter and she smiles weakly.

ARGENCIA

(softly)

I knew you'd come.

Roger wheels the armature away from the pit and sets the cage down onto solid ground.

ROGER

Yeah, I guess you did. You had the prophecy figured out before anyone.

KAELRYN

Yes, but it was not the prophecy she believed in. It was you.

Roger sighs and looks away.

ROGER

I don't deserve it.

KAELRYN

And neither did I. Yet what else
but his deeds can make a man
worthy? And you are here now.

(he snorts)

Though it certainly took you long
enough...

ROGER

Yeah, I guess I took the long way
here... Now let's get these things
off you. Where are the keys?

ARGENCIA

No keys... they're sealed by magic.

ROGER

Even better.

Roger reaches through the bars and pulls at the restraints.

Nothing happens.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Are you sure there's not an actual
mechanism? Cause these won't budge.

Footsteps sound from down the hall.

Roger turns and manages to pull out the sunflower just as
the Dark Lord himself comes striding in -- followed closely
by the Conjuror, his Panthers, and a few other WIZARDS.

DARK LORD

My my! I see the boy-prophet chose
his Champion well! What a clever
ruse to lure my army away, only to
steal inside and loose an assassin.

(he laughs)

It almost even worked!

ROGER

Who the fuck is this guy?

Confused silence. The wizards in the back glance at each
other as if to confirm that's what he really just said.

DARK LORD

Come now, Roger Breton. Though you
may not wish it to be, I think you
already know who I am.

Roger considers for a moment.

ROGER
No fucking clue.

DARK LORD
Then allow me to introduce myself.
I am the lord of the five realms,
the first master of all nine mystic
devotions, and the last ruler this
world will ever know. You may have
heard me called 'Dark Lord' in
hushed whispers and from frightened
faces. You may have even heard me
called 'Spellthinor.' But soon, all
will know me simply as 'Master.'

ROGER
Bullshit.

More silence. A few wizards check their ears.

KAELRYN
(urgently whispering)
Roger, now is not the time! I can
assure you that is the Dark Lord.

ROGER
Right... You think the 'Dark Lord
of all evil' dresses like that? And
that he's the only wizard in the
whole world who does crunches?

DARK LORD
Your insolence, though charming, is
beginning to wear thin. I suggest--

BAM!

The sunflower EXPLODES in a flurry of fire and petals and
the Dark Lord dissolves into a puff of blue smoke.

ROGER
See?

Another deafening silence. The Conjurer and his men look on
in horror while Kaelryn and Argencia stare in amazement.

ARGENCIA
It was... an illusion?

KAELRYN
It was... a trick?

ROGER
It was bullshit. Just like I said.

Kaelryn and Argencia press themselves against the side of the cage, trying to get a better view of the smoke.

KAELRYN

Nothing left... as though he were
naught but a minstrel's apparition.

ARGENCIA

But... why? Surely the Dark Lord
has no need to veil himself with
illusions. That is, unless...

ROGER

It's all bullshit? Christ, how many
times do I have to say this?

The Conjurer nods his head and his panthers advance,
emitting a low, sinister growl.

CONJURER

An amusing theory, to be sure. But
one that will sadly die with you.

He gestures, and the other wizards begin casting spells.
Kaelryn moves to shield Argencia with his body.

ROGER

Jesus, are you really that dumb?

The wizards pause and look to the Conjurer for direction.
The panthers, likewise, wait for the order to pounce

ROGER (CONT'D)

Or do you know something the
lightning guy didn't?
(he takes a step forward)
Or the dragon?
(and another)
Or the guy I just shot?
(and another)
Because if you don't have a plan to
take on the Champion.

Roger levels the flower and points it into his chest.

ROGER (CONT'D)

You won't like what comes next.

Moments pass and inner conflict plays out on the Conjurer's
face. With only a word, his panthers will attack and every
wizard here will unload everything they've got into Roger.

He looks down at the flower, then up into Roger's eyes...
and surrenders.

ROGER (CONT'D)
That's what I goddamn thought.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - NOON

True battle rages outside. While most of the rebel army has escaped, a makeshift rear-guard tries to cover the retreat.

It isn't going well.

Wizards set the sentient trees aflame, crossbowmen shoot down the pixies, and knights ride down any who try to flee.

One group of FARMERS, in particular, has formed up around the wounded and set their pitchforks to receive a cavalry charge. They huddle together as an entire column of knights thunders towards them with lances lowered and ready to kill.

AWOOOOOOOO!

A horn blares in the distance.

The knights pull up at the very last moment and the wizards halt their barrage. They look around in confusion, then reluctantly turn and head for the fortress.

The rebel army cheers.

INT. HALLWAY - NOON

Kaelryn and Argencia sweep through the halls like a maelstrom of death.

Working in perfect unison, Argencia conjures weapons as fast as Kaelryn can use them and any enemies that come near find their own weapons turned into dust.

Roger, meanwhile, follows behind and carefully steps over the many bodies they leave in their wake.

ARGENCIA
I still do not understand.

She transforms a knight's helmet into a solid block of stone, which sends him crashing to the ground.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)
You tried to use the weapon in the
boy's chamber, but it did not work.

KAELRYN
Don't you see, Princess?
(he hurls an axe)
By accepting he is the Champion.
(MORE)

KAELRYN (CONT'D)
 (and a spear)
 He has mastered his powers, and can
 reverse your enchantments at-will.

ROGER
 Nah, I just had the safety on.

Kaelryn and Argencia look back at Roger and their remaining
 enemies take this chance to drop their weapons and flee.

KAELRYN
 So at any time...

ROGER
 I could have shot you? Absolutely.

INT. HALLWAY - FORTRESS - NOON

The Hessivite, now wearing the gold-embroidered robes of a
 freshly promoted wizard, stands in a sea of soldiers and
 servants rushing by and trying to escape.

The Steward himself tries to hurry past with a bag of coins
 and a few expensive-looking scrolls, but gets pulled aside.

HESSIVITE
 What are you doing, man? Can you
 not see that our lord needs his
 servants now more than ever?

STEWARD
 What he needs is a miracle, and not
 a small one at that. The Champion
 has broken through our defenses!

HESSIVITE
 Nonsense, he's just an old man.

The Steward breaks free and continues fleeing down the hall.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)
 (muttering, unsure)
 He's just an old man...

A squad of BLOODIED SOLDIERS round the corner and go racing
 by. In the distance, a tortured scream suddenly cuts off.

BLOODIED SOLDIER
 He's coming! Oh God, he's coming!

The Hessivite takes a few unsteady steps down the hall, and
 with trembling hands, forms a roiling orb of pure magic. All
 around, the air crackles and hums like a high voltage line.

Kaelryn is the first around the corner, covered in blood and running at full speed. Argencia and Roger soon follow.

KAELRYN
You!

HESSIVITE
You!

The Hessivite UNLEASHES his pent-up energy and sends a cascading wave of electricity down the hall.

Roger shoves Kaelryn aside and steps up to absorb the blast.

Like a rag-doll, the sheer power carries him up off his feet and SLAMS him into the ceiling, then back down onto the ground where he lands in steaming, blackened heap.

For a moment, the hallway is silent.

KAELRYN
NO!

Kaelryn HURLS a dagger and hits the Hessivite in the chest. He staggers back and stumbles down an adjoining hall.

Kaelryn takes off after him in a dead sprint.

ARGENCIA
Kaelryn, wait!

KAELRYN
No! The monster dies, here and now!

Kaelryn disappears down the hall and Argencia rushes over to Roger. He's badly burned and barely even conscious.

ARGENCIA
I-I don't understand...

ROGER
(weakly)
I guess I started to believe.

Roger tries to laugh, but falls into a fit of tortured coughing, instead.

ARGENCIA
Then this is all my fault...

ROGER
Yeah... if it weren't for you I
wouldn't even be here.

Argencia chokes back a sob and Roger places a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

ROGER (CONT'D)
 I'd be safe at home, away from
 danger. And I would be alone.
 (he tries to sit up)
 The way I was before you saved me.

ARGENCIA
 But the prophecy...

ROGER
 Is horseshit.

ARGENCIA
 No! We've come too far to--

ROGER
 (interrupting)
 It's. Horse. Shit. You don't need
 me to kill this sonofabitch.
 (he nods to the flower)
 Though that might be helpful...

ARGENCIA
 (fighting back tears)
 I can't leave you like this...

ROGER
 It's okay; I'm not scared. And you
 can't be either.
 (he presses his crucifix
 into her hand)
 Because there are thousands of
 people out there counting on the
 Champion to save them. And they
 need her to step the fuck up.

EXT. - FORTRESS - ROOF - AFTERNOON

A handful of CROSSBOWMEN stand on the roof, looking out with
 dismay as their forces retreat from the battle below.

A trapdoor FLIES open and the Hessivite comes limping out.
 He's bleeding heavily from the wound in his chest and from
 several others he's sustained along the way.

HESSIVITE
 (yelling)
 Assassin! There's an assassin
 following right behind!

The Crossbowmen collectively flinch back in surprise.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)
 So kill him!

The men look warily at each other, but obey, leveling their crossbows and going single-file through the trapdoor.

Once the last of them is through, the Hessivite calls down a bolt of lightning onto the entrance.

KABOOM!

The explosion sends debris flying and collapses the passage in on itself, sealing the only way onto the roof.

Safe at last, the Hessivite sits down and leans back against the rubble, utterly exhausted.

Behind him, a single gloved hand emerges from the edge of the roof. Then another. Silently, Kaelryn pulls himself up.

KAELRYN

I think I'll start by removing your hands.

The Hessivite jumps to his feet with a yelp.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)

That you might never again weave your wicked sorceries against the innocent and the weak.

The Hessivite backs away towards the other edge of the roof, looking wildly for any means of escape.

HESSIVITE

Brother, why do you pursue me? Is the Dark Lord not your true quarry?

The Hessivite fires a haphazard bolt of electricity, but his injuries and blood loss have slowed him down. The attack is painfully telegraphed and Kaelryn effortlessly sidesteps it.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)

He is`escaping even as we speak!

Kaelryn absently plays with a knife and keeps coming.

KAELRYN

Next, I'll take your tongue.

Another desperate bolt of lightning. Another easy dodge.

KAELRYN (CONT'D)

That you might never again utter your incantations or filthy lies.

HESSIVITE

Is it the old man? What loyalty do
you owe him over your own kin?

The Hessivite reaches the edge. There's nowhere left to go.

HESSIVITE (CONT'D)

(yelling)

You served him, same as I! Yet you
would condemn me for that crime?

(pleading)

Please... we are brothers.

Kaelryn seizes his robes and hauls him over the edge.

KAELRYN

Once you were my brother, and I
would have died for you. But now
you are nothing and will die for
nothing too.

HESSIVITE

(choked)

But why?

KAELRYN

Because the souls of your victims
cry out for vengeance from beyond
the grave.

(he lets him fall)

And because Roger Breton was my
friend...

INT. DARK LORD'S SANCTUM - EVENING

The inner sanctum sits quiet and still, its many pillars
looming ominously in the darkness. The muffled sounds of
combat can be heard from the other side of two wooden doors.

An inhuman cry of pain rings out, along with several other
shouts of terror as the battle grows to a fever pitch.

Then there is nothing. No light or sound from either side.

CRASH!

The doors transform into glass, then SHATTER inward as
Argencia smashes through. A waterfall of shards cascade onto
the ground and go skittering across the floor.

Argencia stalks into the sanctum, holding the sunflower up
to her shoulder in an awkward imitation of Roger's stance.

SPELLTHINOR (O.S.)
(from everywhere at once)
And so the only daughter of the
fallen king has come to me at last,
seeking vengeance for the empire
she lost before it could be hers.

ARGENCIA
I did not come here for vengeance.
I seek only peace.

She advances further into the sanctum, sweeping back and forth for any sign of movement.

ARGENCIA (CONT'D)
But you know as well as I, there
will be neither peace nor freedom
for as long as you draw breath.

Eerie, ominous laughter echoes across the sanctum. A HOODED MAN (60s, gnarled), steps out from behind a pillar.

HOODED MAN
How right you are.

Argencia turns and BLASTS him with the flower. The force from the recoil nearly throws her off her feet and the blast itself vaporizes the Hooded Man into a cloud of blue smoke.

An identical man steps out from behind another pillar.

HOODED MAN (CONT'D)
And yet how wrong.

Argencia BLASTS him too. More recoil. More smoke.

A third Hooded Man steps out.

HOODED MAN (CONT'D)
For there will again be peace.

Argencia tries to fire again, but the flower droops and makes a sad metallic clicking sound.

HOODED MAN (CONT'D)
But only when there are none left
to oppose my rule.

Argencia transforms the flower into a sword, then lunges forward and slashes through him.

ARGENCIA

Do not mistake me for one of your
thralls, wizard! I do not fear your
power because I know you have none.

More than a dozen hooded figures step out from behind
different columns.

HOODED MEN

(in unison)

No power, you say?

(another dozen come)

Your hubris will be your undoing.

(two dozen this time)

Just as it was for the arch-magi.

(they start to advance)

Just as it was for your father.

Argencia lets out a guttural yell and swings her sword in
long sweeping arcs. With each swipe, handfuls of the of the
projections go down, but are quickly replaced by others.

ARGENCIA

Then stop hiding! Come out into the
open and face me!

Spellthinor himself slides out from behind one of the
columns. He's dressed exactly like his illusory doubles, but
has an ornate silver dagger sticking out from a sleeve.

HOODED MEN

(in unison)

Oh my dear...

He rushes in and drives his blade deep into her back.

SPELLTHINOR

Who said anything about hiding?

Argencia gasps in pain and tries to slip from his grasp, but
he hangs on and twists the blade further in.

SPELLTHINOR (CONT'D)

(whispering in her ear)

You are just like all the rest.

(he stabs her again)

Always doubting. Always laughing.

(and again)

So confident in your superiority.

(and again)

But now you truly are like them.

(and again)

Because you are dead.

ROGER (O.S.)
(shouting)
Let her go, you rat fuck piece of
shit!

Spellthnor turns to see Roger leaning on what's left of the doorframe with an ashy trail of blood behind him. He brightens and smiles wickedly.

SPELLTHNOR
Ah, the Champion! What a welcome surprise.
(he lets Argencia drop)
I must say you look more...
seasoned in person.

ROGER
Fuck you.

SPELLTHNOR
(laughing)
And tenacious, too! No matter what is said of your age, incompetence, or weakness, none can fault your spirit. I see why the boy-prophet thinks so highly of you.

ROGER
Yeah, well I have no idea what's so special about you.

A flash of genuine anger crosses Spellthnor's face, but he quickly covers it with a bemused smile.

SPELLTHNOR
You wound me, Champion. I have been accused of a great many evils, but none have ever called me mundane.

ROGER
Crazy, since you're nothing but a bastard in a world full of pricks.

Spellthnor stalks forward, brandishing his dagger.

SPELLTHNOR
And I suppose you are the exception? The virtuous band of martyrs whose friendship shines like a beacon in the wickedness of this fallen world? Is that how you mean to defeat me?

ROGER
No. Nothing that complicated.

SPELLTHINOR
Then please, elucidate me.
(he puts up his hands)
Because from my vantage, you are
running out of friends to lose.

ROGER
Alright. You're gonna die because
you are a slimy, two-faced sack-of-
shit who stole everything he ever
got by tricking honest people.

SPELLTHINOR
You flatter me.

ROGER
Yet somehow, even after all the
years you spent lying, cheating,
and hiding the truth.
(he grins broadly)
You still couldn't see through an
obvious trick.

Spellthinator's eyes go wide and he turns, but it's too late.

Argencia, soaked in her own blood, LUNGES from behind and
wraps the crucifix necklace around his throat.

The two struggle in silence, then come crashing to the
ground where his dagger bounces and skitters away.

He thrashes and gasps, trying to break free, but Argencia
pulls the chain even tighter.

With one last, desperate burst of energy, he reaches out for
the dagger... but falls inches away from the blade. Slowly,
his hand goes limp, then the rest of his body falls still.

Roger hobbles over, looking very old and very very tired.

ROGER (CONT'D)
You had me worried there, kid. For
a second I thought I might actually
have to fight him.
(he kneels beside her)
Princess? You alright?
(he shakes her gently)
Argencia? Can you talk?

A pool of blood spreads from underneath her body, soaking
the hem of Roger's pants.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Oh God... Help! We need help!

EXT. WASTELAND - NIGHT

Kaelryn charges on horseback through a driving rainstorm. Lightning flashes overhead and momentarily reveals two limp bodies on back of his saddle.

INT. ORACLE'S SANCTUM - NIGHT

The Oracle sits by the reflecting pile amidst a pile of empty wrappers.

Kaelryn comes rushing in, drenched to the bone and carrying Roger and Argencia over his shoulders.

KAELRYN
Wise one, please, we require aid.

The Oracle soberly turns toward Kaelryn, his face smeared with peanut butter and jelly.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AFTERNOON

A warmly lit hospital room, almost identical to the one Roger was in before.

Argencia lays in a bed at the center of the room and is connected to a dizzying array of wires and tubes.

Roger III and Eloise are pressed up as close as they can be, while Roger Jr. looks on in sheer bewilderment.

To the side, Kaelryn coolly observes in an oversized shirt that says "I went to the Midwest Regional Ophthalmology Conference and all I got was this stupid shirt."

ELOISE`
And you went in there all by
yourself? Weren't you afraid?

ARGENCIA
A little, I suppose. But I had to
be brave for the sake of the realm.

KAELRYN
Indeed. One is never truly alone
when they walk a righteous path.

ROGER III

Well I would have been furious. I can't imagine what I'd do if my DPS ran off in the middle of a raid to go solo a mini-boss.

Kaelryn rolls his eyes.

ARGENCIA

You are a wise tactician, Roger Breton. I've no doubt your strategic acumen would have been of great help to us on our journey.

Roger III beams and Eloise looks at her in total reverence.

ROGER (O.S.)

What the fuck did I say about trying to recruit my grandkids?

Roger, sitting in a wheelchair and bundled up with miles of gauze, wheels his way into the room.

ARGENCIA

Roger!

Argencia tries to sit up, but is immediately tangled in wires and chastened by a chorus of concerning beeps and buzzes from the equipment she's hooked up to.

ROGER III & ELOISE

(in unison)

Grandpa!

The two kids race over to Roger and wrap him in a hug.

ROGER

Ow, hey watch the--
(they cling even tighter)
Ow, sonofabitch.

ELOISE

Did you really beat an evil wizard?

ROGER III

Yeah, and did you really shoot some guy in the face?

ROGER

No, no, and no to everything else you're gonna ask.

(he finally peels free)

We can't go around talking about this, or they'll lock us up.

(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

And hell, maybe they should. I'm still not certain any of this was real.

KAELRYN

I'm glad to see your wounds have done nothing to check your reckless and foolhardy suspicion, old man.

ROGER

And I'm glad that none of this made you any less of a dick.

Roger slaps him on the back and they share brief glance.

ROGER JR.

Dad, I'm so sorry...

ROGER

You should be. I'm not a fucking babysitter and it was unfair of you to spring that shit on me.

ROGER JR.

What? No, I mean--

ROGER

(interrupting)

I know what you meant. And it's fine. Really. I wouldn't have believed me either.

(he wheels to the bed)

I'm just lucky you raised such gullible kids.

Roger III and Eloise both scowl.

ROGER JR.

Well, I'm going to do everything I can to make it right. I've already called the realtor and told her we won't be listing your house.

ROGER

Nah, you should get rid of it. Somebody ought to live there.

ROGER JR.

What does that mean?

ROGER

That I'm not coming back.

What!? ROGER JR. ARGENCIA
 Roger, no...

 ROGER (CONT'D)
Yeah, this is just a pit stop.

 KAELRYN
Roger, the Dark Lord has already
been slain. I saw the body myself.

 ROGER JR.
See? So you have no reason to go.

 ROGER
Look, I might be stupid enough to
believe in magic, but even I'm not
dumb enough to believe in the
peaceful transfer of power. And
with him gone, there's gonna be
plenty of other nasty fuckers
trying to take his place. Somebody
has to be there to stop em'.

 ROGER JR.
Then let someone else handle it!
Christ, it's a miracle you even
made it this far and now you want
to chance it again? Do you even
have any idea what you're doing?

 ROGER
Honestly? No. And for the first
time in a very long while, that
doesn't scare me at all.