

Exile

Episode 2
"Shame and Sorcery"

by
Drew Castalia

A 13-part series inspired by

Avernum
PC CD-ROM 2000-present
developed by Spiderweb Software

Second Draft
Sept 2009

FX. DEEP BELOW THE EARTH

The striations of a million years of sediment and decay, rocks and oil and soil of brown and black, slide past.

QUEEN (V.O.)

No one goes to Exile of their own
free will.

They rush faster, and faster, until they blur like a running river.

FERRIS (V.O.)

Exile?

The streaming earth/water jumps and distorts with flashes like lightning and the ripples of heat, withholding enormous pressure that boils out of it like bubbles from a soup bursting and revealing behind them a cool green light.

QUEEN (V.O.)

Royalty like us would have to do
something *terrible* to warrant
Exile.

But then the fabric of the earth heals...

FERRIS (V.O.)

For the murder of one of the
Empire's mages? He'll be sent to
Exile with the other traitors and
thieves.

As it careens past, the fabric rips apart again. And again until the pressure is too much.

QUEEN (V.O.)

Increasingly, it seems to be the
price of failure.

It tears itself apart like wet paper, dissolving as -

EXT. PORTAL HILL - FORT EMERGENCE - EXILE

ERIKA stumbles out of the emergence portal: an oval of cracking purple light and energy that sticks to her in shreds as she tumbles down the side of a hill.

She rolls once then scrapes to a halt next to the FIRST PRISONER, who was cast into the portal before her.

Hugging her shoulders and shivering, Erika follows the First Prisoner's gaze up towards EXILE. The great cave.

Above them, twenty miles above them, green and yellow lights from phosphorescent lichens illuminate a vast rock ceiling covered in stalactites and clefts like scars.

The hidden places harbor shrieking things, lizards or bats, enormous ones that swoop in and out of the light like prehistoric monsters, then go quiet suddenly.

The cave seems to stretch on forever, obscured near the horizon by the stone walls and battlements, torch-lit, of Fort Emergence.

The Fort is not very large, but it is very full.

SOLDIERS dressed in tough, gray leather jerkins or occasionally shoddy chain mail run through the streets shouting and taking orders.

EXILE SOLDIER

Gap in roster on the south wall!

EXILE SOLDIER #2

More pitch for the gate!

EXILE SOLDIER #1

Gap in roster at the south tower!

EXILE SOLDIER #3

Where's the quartermaster?

EXILE SOLDIER #2

At the prefecture, there's no time,
rally to me!

Still more men, CRAFTSMEN and PAGES, assist the militia.

Behind Erika, the CAPTIVE BARBARIAN falls through the portal. Yelling, he crashes down next to the other prisoners and is still.

They take in the commotion together, completely stunned and battered.

No one seems notice their arrival except ONE MAN, robed and hooded, who walks angrily towards them from the other side of the yard.

HOODED MAN

(shouting over the din)

New arrivals? Don't be stupid,
take cover!

BARBARIAN

(frightened)

Effeyer helmbestua cartas..!

He scrambles to get up but is too weak.

HOODED MAN

What? Speak up! Are there more of
you?

Arching overhead: a fireball trailing vapors smashes into the portal hill. Rocks and debris scatter everywhere.

EXILE SOLDIER
Shaman at the east gate!

HOODED MAN
Damn it! Where are my
reinforcements? You all - follow
me, *now!*

Erika and the Barbarian help each other weakly to their feet.

The trio of prisoners trip after the man to an

OVERHANG BY THE NORTH WALL.

He sits them down firmly.

HOODED MAN (CONT'D)
*Stay here. I'm needed elsewhere,
but I'll be back.*

Another fireball arcs down not far away, detonating a supply cart that goes to pieces along with two nearby, screaming SOLDIERS.

Multiple cries for help drift down from the ramparts onto Erika and the others as another streak of fire explodes in the crenellation overhead.

Just when it couldn't get any worse, another explosion obliterates the fort wall next to them. Chunks of rock the size of a person go flying and rip into the landscape.

Through the dust and smoke:

A SLITHERKAI WARRIOR - a tall, muscular, bipedal reptile - charges through the gap.

It roars around a bristling mouthful of razor teeth.

INT. RUINED INFIRMARY - EXILE - LATER

Erika opens her eyes to a blurry plane of stars, twinkling overhead.

She smiles. Under the sky she's safe, safe from...

She frowns.

Erika's vision sharpens. The stars transform into drops of moisture, clinging like fruit to dark stalactites on the cave ceiling far above.

She flinches as one of the drops splashes on her face.

When she opens her eyes again, the Hooded Man is there looking down at her...

Erika starts and falls off of the low palette she was lying on: under his hood, the man looks eerily like Candred, but not the same. He's thinner, more drawn. He smiles disarmingly.

VANOUS

Don't be afraid, the raid is over for now. Do you remember me? My name is Vanous.

At the commotion, other ARRIVALS, including the First Prisoner and the Starving Man, stir from resting places around the infirmary. Soldiers and supplies stream past the broken infirmary walls.

ERIKA

Candred...?

VANOUS

(shaking his head)

Van-ous. Do you understand the Imperial tongue?

Vanous reaches to help her up, but Erika pulls back, wild-eyed.

VANOUS (CONT'D)

I'm not whoever you think I am. I'm in charge of this Fort, while it lasts that is. I was appointed by Solberg himself, the highest authority we've got down here. You may not know much about Exile, but you're one of us now.

(ironic)

The empire of Exile welcomes you.

ERIKA

Empire?

VANOUS

I can see you're confused. I did what I could for your shoulder, which was infected, nothing I could do for your hand. Your friend's mainly undernourished and should recover quickly.

Erika looks at the Barbarian for the first time, lying next to him on an identical palette and breathing shallowly.

ERIKA

(frowning)

Friend?

VANOUS

That's right. What's your name,
friend?

ERIKA

(she has to remember)
Erika. Erika Larsdaughter.

VANOUS

What was your occupation back on
the surface?

ERIKA

Blacksmith.

VANOUS

Are you any good?

Erika thinks.

ERIKA

I once made a sword for a Prince.

VANOUS

There aren't any princes in Exile,
but that'll do. What was your
crime?

Erika looks at the man anxiously, as if he, Candred, might
remember at any moment his own murder.

ERIKA

I killed a man.

VANOUS

I see.. Well, that might come in
useful. Still, I think the Fort
needs all the metalworkers it can
get right now. Check in with
Lighta at the smithy. It's under
the east tower. Tell her you're
the replacement for the last smith.

ERIKA

(holding up her blackened
hand)
But...

VANOUS

Don't worry, you can't be much
worse than the last one.

Vanous eyes a wheelbarrow with a couple of corpses as it
trundles past, as if to make his point. Erika goes pale.

Vanous moves on to the next arrival, the Starved Prisoner.

VANOUS (CONT'D)

State your name, occupation, and crime.

STARVED PRISONER

(hesitant at first)

Telot Rufo, I was a farmhand.
Escaped from service.

VANOUS

A runner, eh? Can you carry messages?

Telot nods warily.

Vanous scribbles something on a bit of parchment from his cloak.

VANOUS (CONT'D)

Then take this to the commander of the south tower. He'll give you more after that. Welcome to Exile, citizen.

(Telot gets up to go)

Oh and runner? Exile needs you. You're getting another chance here, not a free pass. Work for us, and you'll be treated more fairly than the Empire ever did. Leave us and you lose the only protection we have down here: each other.

Telot watches Vanous move on to the First Prisoner, then ventures out into the fort.

VANOUS (CONT'D)

Name, occupation, and crime?

FIRST PRISONER

My name's Caris. I didn't do anything. I swear. Send me back, please!

Vanous picks up a sheaf of leather from a crate.

VANOUS

You can't go back. Try and return through that portal and you'll be torn to shreds. Believe me, it's been tried. Anyway, we need you. The enemy threatens us on all sides, and my reinforcements are a week late. I need all the men - women - I can get. So... take this to the quartermaster. Tell him we need new ropes for the supply carts. I promise, after all this is over you can go free.

(MORE)

VANOUS (CONT'D)

We're all free here in Exile, it's just in your best interest to help us. We're not barbarians, you know.

INT. DOTHAN'S CHAMBERS - FORT EXILE - DAY

Trophies in the colors of Valorim lay about on rich, well-polished tables. They reflect the ample sunlight from a series of frosted windows. Drifts of paperwork collect around the trophies like a fungus.

DOTHAN, relaxed in faux-armor, gestures at a rich leather chair, one of several in his airy chambers.

DOTHAN

Barbarians eh?

Preiur, in chafing ceremonial military garb, sits gratefully.

DOTHAN (CONT'D)

I wouldn't think some filthy nephilium would be a problem for a trained captain of the Empire. We've been fighting the tribes here in Valorim with success for years.

PREIUR

It wasn't the nephilium who killed our mage. One of the villagers demonstrated some magical skill of his own.

DOTHAN

The one you brought here? That takes guts, old friend. You know the Empire frowns on unauthorized magic, and not in vain. A rogue magic user endangers more than just the peace.

PREIUR

Of course. I'd love to talk about how brave I was, but really the boy could hardly stand, let alone speak a spell. Although...

He frowns, then shakes his head.

PREIUR (CONT'D)

But he's gone now. I thought I would drop in and stay a while to see my old friend and how's he's been. That was quite an impressive display with the runner.

DOTHAN
 (rolling his eyes)
 Ugh. It happens every time. I swear I sweat more chasing prisoners than I did as a lieutenant in the army.

PREIUR
 (grinning)
 You're getting lazy, captain. You should apply for another promotion.

Dothan chuckles.

DOTHAN
 I may not have to apply. This job's been good for me. I've made a lot of friends you know...
 (a thought occurs to him)
 You know... You're one of the Empire's best. Everyone knows it. I could remind my friends, maybe get you a better assignment. It wouldn't take more than a couple promises to make it happen, and I owe you at least one.

Preiur's grin slips. Dothan's widens.

PREIUR
 I don't think so, Dothan. If I make Battalion Commander, or even General someday, you know I've got to believe I did it myself. All that stuff we tell prisoners about the Empire being about justice.. what we tell them is true, isn't it?

DOTHAN
 (smiling)
 You are good. You're trustworthy. Maybe I should say, trusty, with your word and your sword. Still, it probably means you're going to have to spend a few more years slaughtering barbarians.

PREIUR
 (stiffly)
 I can live with that.

DOTHAN
 (serious)
 Listen to me Olle... I'm not just trying to tempt you. You know Tenet's in a bad position right now.

(MORE)

DOTHAN (CONT'D)

I'm offering you a way out of there. The Empire has nothing but respect for your Prince, but the rest of that family... If something were to happen to him, who knows what would happen to Tenet itself.

This gets Preiur's wary attention - was it a threat?

INT. THRONE ROOM - ESCARPA - DAY

STEWARD

Ferris Prazac, my Lord.

KING ALMON, 48, although not a small man, appears small in the basin of his throne. Like the flat floors and walls of the Escarpan court, Almon's clothes and the tapestries of the palace walls are inlaid with colorful ceramic chips in the image of a bursting seed: his family crest.

He spreads his arms wide as the STEWARD recedes.

ALMON

Escarpa welcomes you to its lands, Ferris. What can I do for you, Prince?

At Almon's side, FLEST, his teenage daughter, stands with practiced posture.

Before them, Ferris kneels on an injured knee. His arm hangs in a sling.

FERRIS

My Lord Almon, Princess. I come on behalf of my mother.

ALMON

I see your her marks on you.
(laughs)
Forgive my manners. Please stand up, my boy. It's been too long. Let's see what you've grown up to become.

Ferris lifts himself painfully.

ALMON (CONT'D)

Ah! As I suspected. A warrior, just like his father. Broad shoulders and a handsome face.

Flest follows her father's praise with her eyes.

ALMON (CONT'D)

Do you remember Ferris, my dear?

FLEST

We used to play king and queen together in the castle at Tenet.

ALMON

Ah, yes. I miss those days. You were so young, and the games less dangerous.

He gestures at Ferris's bandages.

ALMON (CONT'D)

You did not receive those bruises at play.

FERRIS

These are from... barbaric nephilium, my Lord, driven into Tenet by the Empire.

ALMON

Is that so? By the Empire you say?

Almon chuckles nervously.

ALMON (CONT'D)

Never mind. I don't wish to be dragged into Imperial politics.

FLEST

I think they're fascinating.

ALMON

(annoyed)

My daughter doesn't yet comprehend how dangerous the world can be. But rest assured you are safe here, and welcome. I insist you stay as our guest, young Ferris. All I have is at your disposal. Name what it is you wish of me.

Ferris's gaze shifts to Flest.

FERRIS

I am here to reestablish the bonds between our families, Lord. What else?

INT. ALMON'S CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - NIGHT

A splendid but intimate dinner. Ferris and Almon pick over a platter of roasted animal while Flest watches her father carefully.

A hearth in the corner gives the room a rich, sooty quality. Around the edges, a gold inlay of lizards glitters faintly.

Other examples of opulence stand out among the otherwise plain decor.

A FLUTIST plays in the background, but keeps open a wary eye.

ALMON

I hope you're eating your fill.
There's no room for prudence in
these halls.

He dips a finger into the sauce and sucks on it to show it's not poisoned.

Ferris looks to a grotesque gold statue of a calf on the mantelpiece.

FERRIS

Truly.

ALMON

I think you flatter me.

FERRIS

For such a poor country, your
possessions are very beautiful.

Ferris's gaze drifts around the room, then settles on Flest, who was watching him anyway. She smiles, unperturbed. Almon stiffens.

ALMON

We all have our vices.

FERRIS

(still looking at Flest)
Not all.

She finally looks away.

ALMON

Your mother is well, I hope.

FERRIS

She lives like a queen.

ALMON

And your brother.

FERRIS

(bitter)
Also.

Almon laughs.

ALMON

I was right. You are a warrior.
Younger sons so often are.

FERRIS
I choose my own path.

FLEST
That must be nice.

ALMON
(annoyed)
My daughter does not appreciate why
I have kept her out of politics.

FLEST
Because women don't understand the
intricacies of court.

ALMON
Because they are so frequently at
the heart of them.

Almon squints at Ferris. He lifts the knife and cuts a slice
of meat.

Flest glares at her father.

FLEST
Prince Ferris. You must have been
very brave, fighting those
butchers.

Almon shoots her back a warning look.

FERRIS
Butchers, my Lady?

FLEST
The nephilium. Did you know they
came from Escarpa? Our land? They
troubled us for years.

ALMON
I am only sorry they trouble Tenet
now.

FERRIS
It's not your fault.

There is a tense silence.

FERRIS (CONT'D)
Did I say something wrong?

ALMON
No, of course not. Forgive me.

FERRIS
My Lord, there's nothing to
forgive.

(MORE)

FERRIS (CONT'D)

You and your daughter are the pictures of politeness and good faith.

ALMON

Just as you are the picture of valor.

False smiles all around.

INT. GUEST QUARTERS - ESCARPA - NIGHT

A long low thunder follows Ferris into his room. He sighs, exhausted after a long night of insinuations and implications. He scans the decorations with distaste: two braziers cast a low light on the stucco walls and a colorful bed.

CALLoux

My Lord.

He jumps and reaches for his sword.

FLASHBACK:

QUEEN

No one goes to Exile of their own free will. Prisoners. Criminals, thieves, murderers, inconvenient vassals.

END FLASHBACK.

Ferris snaps out of it. CALLoux is there, bright eyes peeking out from under a dark hood, even darker in the low light.

CALLoux

Did I startle you?

Ferris pulls his hand from the grip of his sword and massages his forehead.

FERRIS

Calloux? How did you get in here? Almon's got the place covered in guards.

CALLoux

I'm very good at *hiding* my talents.

He grins at his own pun.

FERRIS

Did you bring it?

Calloux fetches a vial of liquid from his robe and holds it to the light.

CALLOUX
Talent number one.

FERRIS
How much?

CALLOUX
Three drops. Any more would be ...
unfortunate.

Ferris hesitates.

CALLOUX (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

FERRIS
Father used to have her family over
every summer, before he died. We
played together in the cloisters.

CALLOUX
I remember. You did whatever she
wanted.

FERRIS
(bitter)
You're thinking of my mother.

CALLOUX
Hopefully I'm not the only one.

Ferris takes a deep breath.

FERRIS
The princess is just a child.

CALLOUX
No. She's a woman now. And you're
a man. Be careful.

Ferris meets his gaze, then snatches the vial from him.

FERRIS
Three drops. Now go. I'm tired.

INT. GUEST QUARTERS - ESCARPA - LATER

Ferris tosses and turns in his bed. He pushes the covers
back, sweating in the hot humid air.

Propped up against a wall in the corner, his sword reflects a
deep red in the sultry light of the brazier. Ferris tries to
ignore it.

EXT. OPEN SMITHY - FORT EMERGENCE - EXILE

Erika sweats outrageously in front of the forge.

She turns her head away and squints her eyes as another smith at the bellows, LIGHTA, pumps red life into the coals.

LIGHTA
(grinning)
You're not used to the heat down here, are you?

ERIKA
For some reason I thought it would be cold in Exile.

LIGHTA
Some places it is. Some places melted rock runs like water. The caves trap the heat.

ERIKA
(shivering)
It sounds terrible.

LIGHTA
You get used to it. Your lungs adapt; you start to think of mushrooms as a delicacy; and after a couple of years, your skin loses its color. I used to be quite a looker.
(sardonically)
No sun.

One-handedly, Erika pulls out an axehead with a pair of tongs. She puts it on the anvil.

She bangs on it a couple of times, welding together the chipped edge.

LIGHTA (CONT'D)
Doesn't matter now I guess, got a husband down in Cotra. Name of Hegget. We're good folk you know, Exiles. Not like the Slitherkai.

Then she drop the axehead into a bucket of water.

HISS.

ERIKA
Those lizard creatures?

LIGHTA
Barbarians. Tribal and violent. And huge.

ERIKA
(grim)
I saw one.

LIGHTA

Exile has been trying to push them
out of these caverns for months.

ERIKA

Where do they go after that?

Erika selects a damaged from a barrel and tosses it into the
forge.

LIGHTA

Hell.

She heaves mightily at the bellows, forcing Erika to turn
away as the heat blooms against her face again.

Her head turned, she sees out of the open side of the smithy:

Vanous, at the shattered fort wall, carving a spiderweb of
milky energy across the gap with his dagger.

Erika's eyes widen. She starts breathing heavily and can't
take her eyes off him.

Vanous ripples, Erika's vision blurring into a memory of
Candred at Willing river, weaving barriers to protect the
village.

She pulls away from the forge, the world spinning then
stopping as she grips the quenching bucket and vomits into
it.

Lighta steps to her side. She puts a hand on Erika's wounded
shoulder, concerned.

Erika winces at the touch.

LIGHTA (CONT'D)

I think you'd better take a break.
Get out of the heat, you know?

EXT. WEST WALL - FORT EMERGENCE - EXILE

Erika approaches Vanous at the wall, unsteady on her feet and
as wary as she's ever been.

Signs have been posted: "Invisible spellwards, do NOT enter!"

ERIKA

What are you doing?

VANOUS

(without turning)

Ah. Erika, isn't it? I'm warding
this gap in the wall. The Sliths
will not come through here again:
they know from experience.

He nods at a large reptilian skeleton on the ground.

VANOUS (CONT'D)

The magic is potent, but very draining for me. If I doze off even for a minute, they vanish.

(laughs)

And then this would be a very dangerous place to be.

ERIKA

They're beautiful.

Vanous stops weaving. He lets the magic web sag and turns his attention to her. His face is drawn and thin with long hours of effort and little rest, but he shows a sudden and intense interest.

VANOUS

Yes they are. Quite a sight. So did you come here just to see my work?

ERIKA

I was confused. I just wanted to make sure that...

(staring hard into his face)

You remind me of someone.

VANOUS

Yes, I remember. Who was this remarkable fellow?

ERIKA

He was the man I killed.

A silence long enough to be awkward.

VANOUS

What can I do?

ERIKA

Tell me how to get out of here.

Vanous laughs.

VANOUS

There's no way out of Exile, girl. If there were, one of us would have found it. At least Solberg would.

ERIKA

Solberg...?

VANOUS

The greatest of us. And the first. He's worked to free Exile since the beginning. He created the portal for the Empire, and was cast into it for his trouble. He created the mushrooms we eat, sculpted the Tower of the Magi out of the very earth. Don't you think if there was a way out of Exile someone like him would have found it by now?

ERIKA

Where is he?

VANOUS

(amused)

You can't leave this fort. You can see my wards, that means you've got some magic in you, but I guarantee you it's not enough to get past an army of Slitherkai. They're fierce and have a strange magic of their own. You've already seen some of it.

Erika shudders.

VANOUS (CONT'D)

Why don't you stay here at the fort... I mean, even if we survive this? I can help you, teach you words to guide you - magic. If you're strong enough, they may one day guide you to the Tower and to Solberg, as you wish.

ERIKA

(frowning)

I guide myself.

VANOUS

That's an acceptable illusion for a young woman, but not for a mage. Your first lesson shall be that whether magic is guided or magic guides, to have it is to have a path. The greater your skill, the greater your destiny.

INT. BALLROOM - ESCARPA - NIGHT

A courtly dance. Participants switch partners, swinging them around. It's the same dance played in Tenet, but performed among the unusual decor of Escarpa: friezes and beads and smoky light.

Ferris's partner is, of course, Flest. He pulls her closer; she smiles.

From the side, Almon watches them, much as the queen watched her son at the dance in Tenet, with a pensive finger to his lips.

INT. MUSHROOM GARDEN - ESCARPA - NIGHT

Flest, still in her fancy dress, tiptoes through a drift of flower-shaped mushrooms to a bench by a pool of water. Light from stars above the open roof and from smoking braziers around the room reflect in the water.

Ferris tries to copy her, limping, but slips and ends up falling in the mushrooms. Flest laughs like a bell.

FLEST

Oh, you poor injured thing. Come here.

Ferris grunts, then gets up and sits next to her. She pets his bandaged arm.

FERRIS

I think you've got a mold problem.

She laughs.

FLEST

It's the mushroom garden.

Ferris looks at her incredulously.

FERRIS

Who gardens mushrooms?

FLEST

There's nothing we can do about it. It's the weather. They just grow. Might as well... you know, garden them.

FERRIS

(sarcastic)

Yes, that would be my first inclination too.

FLEST

Don't let my father hear you talk like that. He's very fond of them.

FERRIS

Imprisoned for insulting the King's mushrooms, what would my mother say?

Flest laughs, but then becomes quite solemn, and chooses her words carefully.

FLEST

That's all we ever ask, isn't it?

Ferris frowns.

FERRIS

Come here.

She sidles closer, then tentatively she lays her head on his shoulder.

He smiles to himself in victory, but then, so does she.

FLEST

Just like old times.

INT. OUTSIDE ROYAL CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - NIGHT

Ferris and Flest, arm in arm, walk the last few feet of their evening together. A passage to the royal quarters is marked by a gold statue of Almon with his crown on.

FERRIS

This is it. See, I'm getting to know the place rather well.

FLEST

You'll find it ages on you quickly.

FERRIS

But you will stay as beautiful as you are forever.

FLEST

(sadly)

I know you're trying to be sweet.

Ferris produces a mushroom from behind his back, plucked from the garden. Its top is split into sections like petals.

She takes it and pauses, seeming to muster her courage.

FLEST (CONT'D)

Come with me to my room.

Ferris blinks, startled.

FERRIS

But, your father -

FLEST

- let's not think about our parents right now.

She tugs at his hand.

INT. FLEST'S CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - NIGHT

Flest sits on her bed next to Ferris. Paintings from foreign places in foreign styles cover the walls.

FLEST

You're so brave, and clever. A hero. You have such adventures...

She reaches up and touches his bandaged arm.

FLEST (CONT'D)

Such excitement. Such intrigue. Meanwhile, I'm locked away in this horrible country. We don't have such liberal traditions as you in Tenet. We don't send girls away to learn about the world. We will never have a queen. Sometimes I wish I could have a taste of what it's like.

Ferris shifts awkwardly.

FERRIS

Would you settle for a taste of wine?

Flest smiles, a sultry nod.

Ferris goes to a decanter on the other side of the room and pours two glasses.

FLEST

I'm not stupid you know.

Ferris freezes in the process of extracting the vial of poison from his pocket.

FLEST (CONT'D)

I would be good in court, if it weren't for my father. Just as I'm sure you would be if it weren't for your brother. Sometimes I wish they were just... out of the way.

Ferris hesitates as he holds the vial over one of the glasses.

FLASHBACK:

QUEEN

Royalty like us would have to do something *terrible* to warrant Exile.

END FLASHBACK.

Ferris shakes his head, disoriented. He puts one, two, three drops into Flest's cup.

FLEST

But there's nothing we can do about that. We are powerless against all the things that wish to control us.

Then four. Five. He dumps the whole bottle in.

FLEST (CONT'D)

Take me with you.

Ferris puts the vial away.

FERRIS

Excuse me, my Lady?

Flest frowns.

FLEST

Take me with you to Tenet. I'll do anything to get away from here.

Ferris brings the cups over and hands one to her.

FLEST (CONT'D)

Please. I can help you and your mother with whatever plot you're working on right now.

She gulps down her wine at once then looks him in the eye.

FLEST (CONT'D)

I can help you against the Empire.

Ferris splutters a little in his wine.

FERRIS

Excuse me, my L - ?

FLEST

- I told you, I'm not stupid. My father's been terrified of you ever since you arrived in Escarpa.

FERRIS

What - what do you mean?

She smiles, coy.

FLEST

A pair of diplomats from the Empire convinced him to drive the nephilium south into Tenet. All the riches you see around you? His reward.

She beams up at him proudly. Ferris ponders this and then the empty goblet in her hand.

FLEST (CONT'D)

Do you see? I can be useful. Take me away with you and you will have your revenge. He'll be crushed. Losing his only daughter.

Ferris stares at her, shocked.

FLEST (CONT'D)

I can be a very potent ally. I'm observant. I know things ... about Garzahd, the court mage, things not even my father knows.

FERRIS

Like what?

FLEST

First, promise you'll involve me in your scheme.

FERRIS

I ... I promise.

She smiles, then opens her mouth, but it won't close again. She frowns and rubs her eyes, then stares at her hands in terror.

She looks up briefly at Ferris, then collapses on the bed.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

You have your wish, lady.

INT. FLEST'S CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - DAY

The room is full of concerned NOBLES. Flest lies, very pale, on the bed. King Almon crouches next to her. Ferris stands at his shoulder wearing an anxious face.

The crowd parts for GARZAHD, a long-bearded court mage in his 50s.

ALMON

Where have you been?

GARZAHD

I came as soon as I heard, my Lord.

ALMON

My daughter has taken deathly ill. The physicians agree on nothing but that. You are my mage. You must cure her.

GARZAHD

My skills are not in healing, my Lord.

ALMON

Then what are they in, for the spirits' sake? Hm? Skulking in the cellars? Not being where you are needed? Petty illusions of grandeur? Cure her!

Tight-lipped, Garzahd sits at Flest's side and peers at her.

GARZAHD

What is wrong with her?

ALMON

Burn you, it's not cramps!

Garzahd sighs.

GARZAHD

My Lord, magic requires a context to work. I need to know the cause so I can influence the effect.

As Garzahd talks, Almon grows more and more angry.

ALMON

Get out, then! Find the cause in your books, or the effect, I promise, will be quite severe.

Garzahd meets his eyes, then gets up and retraces his steps. He bumps into Calloux in the doorway as the Steward leads him in. Garzahd glares at the stranger and pushes past.

STEWARD

My Lord, an outsider. Calls himself Calloux and claims some remedy.

Almon ignores him up until that last word, then turns. His face melts into hope.

ALMON

Fortune, is that you?

CALLOUX

My Lord, I am a traveling magic user of small skill. My parents fell to a sickness like described by your heralds. I have studied the healing magics ever since -

Almon leaps up from the bed and gestures for him to sit in his place.

ALMON

Yes, yes! Perhaps you will have the opportunity to revenge yourself on fate, sir, for your parents. But if your magic can cure my daughter, all my riches are yours...

Calloux examines Flest and goes very, very pale. He looks, barely containing his fury, at Ferris.

CALLOUX

It is very serious, my Lord.

Almon swallows heavily. Ferris averts his eyes.

ALMON

Can you do it?

Calloux sincerely hesitates.

CALLOUX

I will need a variety of herbs... and quiet.

ALMON

I will fetch the cook. Everyone! Back to your duties. Magic will save us. I know it will.

He gives Calloux a long look - he wants to believe - then leaves in a hurry. The nobles follow him out, leaving only Ferris and Calloux.

When he's sure the area is clear:

CALLOUX

What were you thinking!

FERRIS

I ... don't know what you mean.

CALLOUX

Three drops! I said three drops! How many did you give her?

Ferris is silent, even impudent.

CALLOUX (CONT'D)

You fool! You've ruined our mission. Flest is sure to die. If Almon finds out, you'll be banished... if your *mother* finds out...!

FERRIS

My mother! I'm tired of hearing people say that.

(MORE)

FERRIS (CONT'D)
I won't be her pawn, and I won't be
lectured by a peasant.

CALLOUX
I am your mother's right hand.

FERRIS
You are a servant.

CALLOUX
We are all servants.

FERRIS
Kneel.

Ferris points at the ground. Calloux swells angrily.

FERRIS (CONT'D)
I said, kneel.

Calloux reaches out and smacks Ferris.

CALLOUX
I serve only Tenet.

Ferris nurses his face, eyes glaring out from behind his
hand.

FERRIS
I expect you will regret that.

CALLOUX
Just what is the matter with you?
This is not the Prince I educated!

INT. GUEST CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - DAY

Ferris rushes into his chambers, upset and sweating. He
tears off his jacket but is arrested by the sight of his
sword, gleaming in the corner.

He goes to it and fingers the wolf sigil in the base.

INT. FLEST'S CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - DAY

The steward brings herbs and leaves to Calloux's side. He's
set up a miniature lab and arranged a palette with little
piles of ground herbs across several tables.

He's torn up a handkerchief and written symbols on the paper,
figures mainly, but he's scattered in some cryptic-looking
runes.

He wraps up a bundle of herbs in one of the handkerchiefs and
buries it in the coals of a nearby brazier. The smoke it
gives off is blue.

Flest sweats through her sheets.

INT. FLEST'S CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - LATER

Garzahd watches Calloux suspiciously from the doorway.

Calloux takes a veined rock that's been carved into a bowl from his workbench. He combines two herbs in the bowl part of the rock, then crushes them with a pestle. They ignite together, melting the veiny minerals in the rock.

He collects the drippings in a spoon, blows on them, then puts the spoon in Flest's mouth.

He notices Garzahd watching him. Self-consciously Calloux makes a symbol in the air, not really knowing what he's doing.

Garzahd purses his lips.

INT. FLEST'S CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - NIGHT

Calloux is asleep at Flest's side. Almon comes in and takes her hand. He holds it to his forehead.

INT. GUEST CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - DAY

Ferris drafts a letter at his desk, his sword lying flat on the table just above, when there's a knock at the door.

Almon comes in, tentatively. He looks past Ferris at the letter.

ALMON

To your mother, I presume.

Ferris says nothing.

ALMON (CONT'D)

Make sure to write how much you love her, whatever else it might say. I don't want to know.

Almon comes further in and takes a seat on his bed. Ferris glares and puts away the letter.

FERRIS

Does the princess improve?

ALMON

Never. Garzahd thinks this Calloux fellow is a fake.

FERRIS

He's ... he seems like a good man.

ALMON

Don't we all?

He laughs bitterly, but reserves a glance to see how Ferris took the comment.

FERRIS

Is there something I can do for her, my Lord?

ALMON

I ask the same thing all the time. I think we are powerless, though. We are all pawns.

They share a sympathetic moment.

FERRIS

My Lord, I ... I have a confession to make.

Almon blinks.

ALMON

You?

Ferris struggles with himself. He eyes his sword.

FERRIS

I... I... I am the one responsible for your daughter's condition.

Almon frowns, confused, anger brewing beneath his eyes. Ferris glances up at him and grits his teeth, an internal battle tearing him apart.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

I... She... She asked me to take her with me when I returned to Tenet.

ALMON

Take her with you? I don't understand.

Ferris gets a grip on himself.

FERRIS

That much is obvious. She hated you for trapping her here. She wanted to help Tenet against you. I said no, of course. Our families are too close for bad blood. She was very upset. She threatened to... My Lord, I think she poisoned herself.

Almon is horrified. He rocks back and stares into space, stunned.

ALMON

Did she say anything else?

FERRIS

She told me that the Empire had you drive nephilium into Tenet.

ALMON

What?!

FERRIS

Don't be more of a fool than you already are. You did their bidding like a plaything.

ALMON

She told you that?

FERRIS

She told me everything.

Almon looks stricken. It takes him a horrible moment to collect himself. He stands up.

ALMON

The things children will say to get away from their parents... The things they will do...

He gives Ferris an angry look and leaves, very carefully, very politely, very sadly, shaking his head.

INT. GARZAHD'S STUDY - DAY

Garzahn pores over stacks of books at his dusty desk, some bound with scales and tattooed skin. The room is underground - no windows - just a million candles and a gigantic circled calligraph on the wall: hooked and horned and demonic looking.

He turns a page to an illustration of a tremendous warrior laid on his deathbed, his children praying at the warrior's side with clasped hands.

The warrior is decorated with streams of burgundy moss flowers instead of blood. One of the flowers has been circled and magnified in the margins: a runic script describes it underneath.

Garzahn frowns. He looks up and slams the book shut.

INT. OUTSIDE ROYAL CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - DAY

Garzahn hauls his book past the golden statue of Almon, a fury in his eyes.

GARZAHD

Almon!

INT. FLEST'S CHAMBERS - ESCARPA - DAY

GARZAHD

Almon!

Garzahd sweeps into Flest's room, but stops short.

Flest smiles up at him from the bed. A beaming Almon and Calloux sit on either side.

FLEST

Garzahd!

GARZAHD

My... my Lady.

Calloux glares triumphantly.

ALMON

I suppose our friend Calloux is not so inept as you thought! Ha!
 Never mind, Garzahd. You need not fear for your place.
 (half to Flest)
 All is forgiven.

GARZAHD

My Lord, I know what caused the sickness. It was -

ALMON

I do not want to know. We have only to be thankful that she is still with us.

Flest catches the hint and her smile fades. Ferris comes in and freezes. He struggles for something to say.

FERRIS

Thank the spirits you're all right.

FLEST

Indeed. I hear my recovery was unexpected.

FERRIS

Have you, ah, any idea what happened?

Garzahd starts to speak up, but Almon steps in.

ALMON

A mystery it shall remain.

FLEST

It was a very terrible feeling, being near death. It has a bitter taste you know, like wine.

Ferris goes pale.

FLEST (CONT'D)

I apologize if you had business with me, Prince. I should take some time to recuperate. Perhaps you should go back to your mother. No doubt she is anxious to hear from you by now.

Ferris looks from Flest, to Calloux, to Almon, to Garzahd. Icy stares, all. He swallows and bows, low.

FERRIS

Your request is my command. My Lady. Lords.

He backs out of sight.

Flest turns to Calloux. She takes a deep breath and smiles.

FLEST

Now that the danger is gone, perhaps we should talk about your reward. Father?

ALMON

You have demonstrated extraordinary devotion and loyalty to the nobility today, freeman. In addition to some wealth which has recently come into my possession, I insist you stay with us for a time as a personal guest of our family.

CALLOUX

I am not used to living in a castle, Lord.

ALMON

You may find it suits you, sir. I know some others who may find it suits you, too.

Calloux holds back a smile. Garzahd seethes in the corner.

EXT. BEFORE THE HIGH HOUSE - DAY

Ferris rides, hard, down into the valley where the High House stands. His mounted GUARDS trail after.

EXT. THE GATES OF THE HIGH HOUSE - DAY

Ferris and his men canter through the streets of the city. The markets and steep crooked houses have all been decorated in a stunning display of gaiety.

The TOWNSPEOPLE are practically already celebrating, happy enough to be preparing for a festival and not carpentry, butchering, weaving, or what else they normally do.

They go quiet as Ferris passes through the crowd. They look at him, concerned, remembering his chaotic ride to the High House down this same street.

A DYER comes forward suddenly with a garland of colored paper flowers, a big grin on his face.

DYER

My Lord!

Ferris goes straight for his sword and the dyer stops, startled, and staggers back. His guards look between themselves, uncertain.

Ferris wrestles control back over himself. He gives the dyer an apologetic look and nods, but keeps moving forward.

A banner over the entrance to the keep reads: "FREE DAY."

INT. GREAT HALL - TENET - DAY

Ferris is admitted into the great hall, his arm still in a cast. Prince EMOT, the QUEEN and AIMSITY are there waiting for him.

AIMSITY

Hail, Prince Ferris!

EMOT

The Lieutenant is of course referring to the weather. The dowser claims a storm approaches. So much for the beginning of Spring, eh?

AIMSITY

The dowser always claims a storm approaches. Hence the name.

EMOT

Excellent, Lieutenant. We ought to put you in charge of puns.

AIMSITY

Puns are difficult subjects. You would have a rebellion on your hands within weeks.

EMOT

(laughs)

Indeed we would!

Ferris makes a big deal of peeling off his riding glove.

EMOT (CONT'D)

So was your mission a success,
brother?

FERRIS

Of course it was.

The Queen smiles to herself, then brusquely turns on her heel and walks away. Ferris watches her go, annoyed.

EMOT

Excellent. Our two families have
been strangers for far too long.
Now what shall we have you do?
Can't keep you off the road for
long.

Ferris scowls and pushes past after his mother.

EMOT (CONT'D)

I wasn't serious, brother.

But he's on his way. Aimsity shrugs, then follows after.

INT. CASTLE CORRIDOR - TENET - DAY

Ferris limps impatiently down a wide, airy hall with large decorative windows. Aimsity struggles to keep pace beside him.

AIMSITY

I see you are still carrying that
sword, my Lord.

FERRIS

What of it?

AIMSITY

You should be careful, my Lord.

FERRIS

That's the idea.

AIMSITY

I know what it's like when someone
tries to kill you. Constantly
watching the corners. Hand always
on your hilt. The bad dreams...

Ferris stops.

FERRIS

Dreams?

AIMSITY

...but sometimes, in such
circumstances, men make masters of
their swords.

FERRIS

What do you mean, Lieutenant?

AIMSITY

When I was your age, my patrol was ambushed by a battalion of our own men on the border. We thought they were nephilium at first, they fought hard enough; but they were militiamen from Valorim. This was back before the Empire put a garrison there. Many of us were injured... or killed.

He frowns with his scarred eyebrow.

AIMSITY (CONT'D)

They had been harassed, by wolves of all things, for weeks. They were so desperate for a real target that they struck at the first one they found - it was us, their reinforcements. I had to melt down my armor because I couldn't get my commander's blood out of the scratches.

FERRIS

What are you saying?

AIMSITY

Let it go, my Lord. It brings out the worst in you.

Ferris considers him very carefully.

FERRIS

I'm trying, Lieutenant.

Aimsity bows, then is surprised when he looks up to see Ferris already on his way. He peers after the young man, concerned.

INT. QUEEN'S CHAMBERS - TENET - DAY

Ferris marches directly into the room, an anxious DOOR GUARD just behind him. The Queen, sitting on her bed, waves the guard away, amused.

FERRIS

Thank you, mother, for being so concerned. Yes, my arm is feeling better, mother. No, the knees aren't giving me too much trouble. Indeed, it was an exhausting journey.

QUEEN

The stablemaster tells me that may be your own fault. Your horse was run ragged getting here.

FERRIS

My horse! I thought it was just my brother you cared about more than me.

QUEEN

(serious)

Do not joke about my affection. I love you more than any. Come here and sit. I needed to talk to you quickly without drawing attention to us. Angering you was the simplest way.

Ferris blinks, put off guard. He sits.

FERRIS

You have a scheme for everything, mother. Why here and not in the throne room?

QUEEN

This is the real throne.

She reaches out and caresses the memorial carving of her husband on the bed.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Is Calloux in place?

FERRIS

Last I saw him, perfectly so.

QUEEN

Good. He is an excellent servant.

FERRIS

(bitter)

And I, mother?

QUEEN

Yes... I have another task for you.

FERRIS

... so soon? Mother, I'm tired. Sometimes I can't even think straight. I keep having these dreams -

QUEEN

There is no time to spare. The Free Day ceremony is coming up soon.

(MORE)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Your brother will be out in the city more often, you know him; he will need a bodyguard to keep an eye on things.

Ferris looks very uncomfortable.

FERRIS

Guarding my brother? ... Surely that's Aimsity's job?

QUEEN

I need someone I'm sure I can trust on this matter. I don't have to tell you again how important his safety is.

FERRIS

You know I can't stand him. I would sooner sup from the guarderobe.

QUEEN

Please don't fight me on this. I need you, child.

FERRIS

You need my obedience.

The Queen's smile fades.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

I said I'm tired, mother. I'm tired of being the second son. Even if something happens to my brother and Tenet is mine, the Emperor will come and take it from me. Is this my destiny: to be a pawn? Risking my life on schemes to benefit my self-important, talentless brother?

QUEEN

Oh, my darling. Envy is not a good enough reason to abandon your country.

FERRIS

What is?

The Queen blinks at the unexpected question.

INT. STUDY - TENET - DAY

Ferris leans on the lintel of the room's only window, looking bored out onto the sprawl of the capital city below him. Behind him, Emot, bespectacled, scribbles letters at a desk.

EMOT

You're in my light, brother.

Ferris shifts lethargically away from the window and into the corner.

FERRIS

Wouldn't want that.

Emot continues to scribble while Ferris unconsciously traces the shape of the wolf on the pommel of his sword. He pulls his finger back suddenly, cut.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

Ow!

Emot looks around querulously.

EMOT

I feel safer already.

FERRIS

Ha ha.

Ferris frowns at his sword; a hint of blood stains the mouth of the wolf.

EMOT

Want to take over signing invitations for a while?

Ferris observes him dubiously. Emot shrugs and gets back to work.

EMOT (CONT'D)

Very well. Ha! Here's one for King Almon and his family. Do you think I should specifically mention Flest? Back when she used to come over for the weekends, I always thought there was something between you two. You used to love besting each other at...

He catches Ferris's dark glance.

EMOT (CONT'D)

What, is she married now?

FERRIS

No.

EMOT

Well then!

He scribbles something down on the letter.

EMOT (CONT'D)

Do you think I should courier a letter to Captain Preiur? I would so love if he were to make it.

FERRIS

Fort Exile is weeks away.

EMOT

There's just enough time if he rides hard enough.

FERRIS

Wait. Let me do it. I know him better.

Emot shrugs and passes him a piece of paper and an inkwell.

EMOT

Seeing as you've been so enthusiastic to help... Just hurry, he's such fun at parties.

Ferris raises his eyebrows.

EXT. THE GATES OF THE HIGH HOUSE - TENET - DAY

Ferris follows Emot through the city, jumpy and distracted. Emot meets with excited MERCHANTS and peasant FAMILIES, holding out his hands to be touched and smiling, always.

He joins the Dyer over a steaming barrel of purple hyacinth. The dyer dips a ladle into the barrel and hands it to Emot. The prince turns around and drizzles the dye on a lamb held still by the dyer's SON. The PEASANTS around them clap.

While the rest are grinning, the dyer looks past Emot at Ferris - warily.

EXT. BUTCHER'S SHOP - TENET - AFTERNOON

A BUTCHER helps Emot into an apron and guides him as he reaches into the ribs of a dead horse. Emot pulls out the heart and the butcher's ASSISTANTS cheer. He turns around to show Ferris, his apron covered in horse blood.

Ferris starts, then, frowning, turns away. He pretends to scan the CROWD.

EXT. HIGH HOUSE BALCONY - TENET - DUSK

Emot leans over a balcony, engraved with the sun and crown symbol of the Empire, looking out onto mountains where the sun is slowly setting. He smiles, soaking up the warmth.

Ferris, hand resting on his sword, peers nervously down into the city below them where dusk has already fallen.

EXT. TENET - NIGHT

The High House rears like a void empty of stars against the constellated night sky over Tenet. Drifting over the dormant houses of the capital: a droning snore.

INT. EMOT'S CHAMBERS - TENET - NIGHT

Emot snores soundly amidst his legacy: the twinkling inheritance of his father: royal robes, a propped-up suit of armor engraved with the symbol of Empire, portraits of the man in ruddy health...

INT. FERRIS'S CHAMBERS - TENET - NIGHT

Ferris, on the other hand, struggles against the visions of another bad dream. He pants, trying to avoid some nightmare.

INT. DAMAGED INFIRMARY - FORT EMERGENCE - EXILE

Erika wakes with a gasp, sweating. She takes a moment to realize where she is.

The barbarian, propped up on his elbow, watches her steadily from the next palette.

BARBARIAN
(accented)
Eri-ka?

ERIKA
Yes...?

The barbarian peers at her carefully, then shakes his head. Not Erika.

BARBARIAN
Elemant.

Shouts drift in from outside. A blaring horn keens.

EXILE SOLDIER (O.S.)
Prepare for attack!

Without warning, the roof above cracks thunderously. The stone upsets and trails of dust billow down onto their heads.

Another explosion nearby makes a section of the ceiling collapse in the corner. Erika rolls off her palette and holds out her hand.

ERIKA
Come on, friend!

EXT. OPEN SMITHY - FORT EMERGENCE - EXILE

Thunderous reports. Shouts. The clash of armor and weapon.

Erika struggles under the weight of the barbarian leaning on her shoulder. She lets the brute down in the corner of the room.

ERIKA
(panting)
The infirmary's been knocked down.

Lighta hardly has a moment for him. She's scavenging weapons from shelves, containers, and buckets, and piles them up for SOLDIERS to use as they dash past on their way to the battlements.

She reaches the last two weapons, a crude spear and a flail. She hands Erika the flail.

LIGHTA
Let's go.

She doesn't understand.

LIGHTA (CONT'D)
Are you coming or what?

Erika looks anxiously between her and the barbarian.

Lighta scowls, then rushes out to join the other soldiers.

BARBARIAN
Eri-ka?

Erika shakes his head. Not Erika.

ERIKA
Coward.

She looks down at her burnt hand.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
I would've saved them if I could.
I would save them if I could.

The black hand descends while the other, strong around the haft of the flail, rises. She takes a deep breath.

EXILE SOLDIER #3 (O.S.)
Scaling ladders on the east wall!

EXILE SOLDIER #2 (O.S.)
I'm need more men up here!

A metallic crunch reaches them from the direction of the front gate.

EXILE SOLDIER (O.S.)
Battering ram!

ERIKA

Maybe my destiny is not so black as
I imagined.

Smiling, she steps forward, increasingly confident,
increasingly sure. Then suddenly: she falters.

A detonation on the battlements overhead shakes the
foundation of the fort. Blocks fall from the wall above.

Shrapnel hisses in the air and knocks her to the ground. A
soldier plummets from the battlements with a pathetic thud.

Coughing, Erika picks himself up, woozy. Screams linger in
the air. She nurses her head.

She stumbles out of the smithy and squints through gusts of
dust and ash. She raises a hand over her eyes to shield
them. Through the veil of ash and cinder she spies:

The fallen soldier. It's Lighta, her head cracked open by
the fall.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

(delirious)

Sister?

(horrified)

Sister!

Her face falls.

EXILE SOLDIER #3 (O.S.)

Sliths on the east wall! All
reserves report!

BARBARIAN (O.S.)

Eri-ka!

Erika twists around and hurries back into the smithy.

The barbarian tugs at a thick rafter that's pinned him to the
floor. Erika run to him and helps him shove it aside.

ERIKA

(still delirious)

Father? Sister's outside, on the
ground. I think she's...!

BARBARIAN

Eri-ka *sheic lotrellf*.

ERIKA

Father, the barbarians are coming!
The village is lost! Sister is
dead! Father, I couldn't save her!

She hauls the barbarian to his feet. He groans.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 No, no use moaning about it,
 father. We have to let it go. All
 of it. The forge, the village,
 even sister. We have to let them
 go to save *ourselves!*

The barbarian doesn't understand her. Together they struggle out into the courtyard.

EXT. OUTSIDE WAREHOUSE - FORT EMERGENCE - EXILE

The two of them limp up to the south wall, which is mostly quiet. The battle rages elsewhere, but the explosions have stopped and given way to the clashing of weapon and armor.

ERIKA
 How do we escape, Father?

Erika picks through the rubble of the south warehouse, looking for something.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 Here!

She produces a coil of leather rope from between two rocks, then stops.

Behind the rope: the unblinking eyes of Caris Belling, crushed by the falling warehouse.

Erika blinks. Then reaches down and toggles one of her eyelids.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 Blink, blink. Now you see, now you don't. Waking, dreaming; fighting, running; living, dying; how do we escape, father?

Her eyes well up, but she snaps out of it.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 This is how.

She ties the rope around the haft of the flail, then tosses it over the south wall. It catches on the stone.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 See, I'm as smart as my sister even though she went to school and was raped.

She beckons the barbarian over to the rope. He looks at her in disbelief.

Erika's smile fades.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 You're useless Father, you know
 that? You can't make a good sword
 and you can't climb a rope. It's a
 good thing you have me around to
 help you out. Still...

She looks around anxiously.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 Shush! There's still one way we
 can go. The mountain pass.

EXT. THE WEST WALL - FORT EMERGENCE - EXILE

This area is the center of the war effort. Stacks of
 javelins, shields, and other equipment sit next to leather
 stretchers filled with battered, unconscious soldiers.

Erika and the barbarian, as stealthily as they can, approach
 the webbed-over gap in the west wall. They stop behind a
 stack for cover.

ERIKA
 (whispering)
 These are the webs Candred wove to
 protect the village. Ironic, isn't
 it? Now we have to get past *them*.
 How? How? How? How? How?

She grips her head. The barbarian watches her a little
 anxiously.

Erika peers around the corner, then they move.

They move to the front of the webbed gap, before the entire
 courtyard. Erika raises her blackened hand and shouts:

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 I, Erika the sorceress, dispel this
 barrier!

(Nothing happens.)

Behind them, Vanous, tending to an injured man, looks up.

The barbarian hisses at her.

BARBARIAN
 Arregv Erika!

ERIKA
 Go!

Erika pulls the barbarian forward. They run at the barrier.

VANOUS
 (reaching out)
 That way is this way! *Make
 Literal.*

As Erika and the barbarian approach the barrier, the world seems to spin in front of them, but they don't spin with it.

Erika finds herself stumbling back into the fort.

VANOUS (CONT'D)
 What are you doing, fools? Are you trying to die?

ERIKA
 (looking up into his face)
 What! Is it Candred?! I should have known you would not stay dead. Because of you I lost my family and was taken to... And I would -
 (struggling)
 I would do it all again. I'm no coward! I'm not useless! Not like my Father, that's for sure!

VANOUS
 What are you talking about? Have you gone mad? You don't know who I am, do you? or where you are, or what you're doing. Calm down girl, and think clearly.

The barbarian looks between them, confused and wary as the battle proceeds to thicken elsewhere.

ERIKA
 I would do it again, too!

She raises her burnt hand.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
 For fear is like the flame. It compels even as it burns. Burn, Candred! Die again, and a thousand times more if necessary!

Lightning crackles, even under ground.

Vanous draws himself up, suddenly angry.

VANOUS
 You call that a spell? I am not afraid, so I do not burn... You do not understand the magic you wield and you try to wield it against me? One of Solberg's mages? I was right - you do want to die.
 (MORE)

VANOUS (CONT'D)
 And your arrogance...! This shall
 be your next lesson.

He draws his dagger from a little sheath at his hip.

VANOUS (CONT'D)
 Playing with magic is like playing
 with fire. *Make Literal.*

At once, Erika's hair begins to crackle and sear. The barbarian lets go of her hand with a yelp.

VANOUS (CONT'D)
 You see what's happening? Do you
 feel it? All spells simply reveal
 the truth. This one makes the
 figurative truth real.

Erika is sweating.

VANOUS (CONT'D)
 Without any context, a spell has no
 meaning and no power. Meaning is
 power. A mage must pay attention
 to the patterns and wisdoms that
 define us so that he may manipulate
 them. That's why you have no power
 over me, girl. You don't know who
 I am, or where you are, or what
 you're doing.

Vanous holds his dagger before him; it shines like a star.

VANOUS (CONT'D)
 The spell you tried to use turns
 fear into fire. Not bad; you
 clearly understand fear. But you
 are mastered by it. You are
 frightened, and delirious, and
 totally at my mercy because of it.

Erika's clothes begin to smoke and crisp. She sinks to the ground and begins to writhe and gibber.

The barbarian, crouching fearfully on the ground, watches Vanous torture Erika, frightened.

VANOUS (CONT'D)
 And where is your mageward?! This
 is mine. I chose it long ago.
 It's symbolic of me and channels my
 essence. Without a ward, your
 power is weak, unfocused, because
 your powers are part of it. The
 ward and the mage seek one another,
 no matter how far apart, in order
 to be whole.

(MORE)

VANOUS (CONT'D)

This is why you're broken, and why
you could never beat me. You have
no mageward. And you will suffer.

Erika screams.

VANOUS (CONT'D)

You will suffer!

The barbarian seizes his neck from behind.

Vanous chokes, splutters, while the brute bears down on him.

The barbarian squeezes, crushing the mage's throat with ease.
Vanous's eyes fill with surprise - anger - then they roll
back into his head and he collapses, unconscious.

The barbarian tosses the man aside like a doll.

BARBARIAN

Hortk Erika.

He proceeds to Erika, who cries out in pain when the
barbarian lays hands on her.

The girl's whole body is blackened and charred. Every
movement abrades and chafes her cracked skin. Her eyes, like
pearls it, dart up to the webs in the gap of the wall.

The webs grow dim, flicker, then fade away, revealing beyond
them:

An army of Sliths ready to move forward, led by one HUGE
SLITH with blue scales and bone jewelry.

EXILE SOLDIER #2 (O.S.)

They're coming through the wards!
Fall back! Fall back!

The Huge Slith points at her and hisses the attack.

INT. MESS HALL - FORT EXILE - DAY

Captain Preiur dines with Captain Sevasant at the officer's
table in the fort's mess hall. They, and the other SOLDIERS,
with unbuttoned military jackets and discarded helmets, dine
on the severance rations for Exiles: corn bread and wine.

Dothan smacks his lips.

DOTHAN

Those Exiles don't know how good
they have it. Where would they be
without men like us and Hawthorne?
Dead, or imprisoned for life in a
stockade, or made slaves.

(MORE)

DOTHAN (CONT'D)

I'm half tempted to go have some "fun" of my own just so I can get sent down and be on the frontier again. God, I miss those days, eh?

Preiur, and Dothan's other OFFICERS, laugh with him.

PREIUR

They may yet come again. Battalion Commander, anyone?

Dothan's men cheer.

DOTHAN

Ah, but it wouldn't be the same without you at my side, like it was before. The Empire needs a new enemy.

PREIUR

One will always come. As long as there is land on this earth that has not been conquered. Creatures that have not been humbled.

DOTHAN

God, yes, hunting drayks, remember the fights we had?

PREIUR

I remember the smell.

DOTHAN

Oh! Oh... I am eating, brother. Do not even mention... I won't even mention... it does not bear mention...

PREIUR

(to the others)

He's drunk on the prisoners' wine. There must be something to that.

They chuckle.

DOTHAN

It's extra strong - helps keep them from gibbering.

PREIUR

In that case, here, have another glass.

Dothan laughs inappropriately loud.

DOTHAN

You've picked up a wit in Tenet, old friend.

PREIUR

I get more practice with it than
with my sword, that's for sure.

DOTHAN

I feel your pain. I do. Something
which must be remedied.

He stares at his wine, head tilted, then drinks it half down.
Cheers.

A MESSENGER comes weaving his way through the tables to where
they sit.

MESSENGER

A message for the Captain, sir.

Both Preiur and Dothan look up. Dothan giggles. The
messenger clears his throat and hands a scroll to Preiur.

DOTHAN

(singing)
Fie! Who writes to Olle?

PREIUR

(surprised)
My Lord Ferris Prazac.

DOTHAN

What does it say? Sing it aloud!

Preiur gives him a look, then studies the vellum. He frowns.

PREIUR

I am to stay here at the fort until
after our spring festival has
ended.

DOTHAN

Why so grim then, brother! This...
is just the beginning!

He gestures at all the SOLDIERS in the hall, perhaps more
meaningfully than he should.

PREIUR

This letter... it is in his
handwriting, but I cannot detect
the manner.

DOTHAN

Let me see!

He grabs the scroll.

DOTHAN (CONT'D)

Ahhh! That is why. You detect the
manner of a doomed man!

EXT. BALCONY - TENET - DAY

Aimsity and the Queen watch Prince Emot and Ferris, causing excitement among the crowd in the street below them.

AIMSITY

My Lady... have you noticed
Ferris's behavior these last weeks?

The Queen turns to him.

QUEEN

What do you mean?

AIMSITY

Ever since he went out on service
to Willing mountain.... odd
behavior is all. He seems troubled
to me. Sneaking around.

QUEEN

(suspicious)

Do you suspect something?

AIMSITY

Of course not. But carrying that
sword around... even in the castle,
and now insisting on guard duty for
the prince. It's curious.

QUEEN

He seems fine to me.

AIMSITY

I wish Captain Preiur were here.
Sometimes I think he's the only one
who really understands the young
prince.

The Queen stops and glances at Aimsity.

EXT. THE GATES OF THE HIGH HOUSE - TENET - DAY

Below the balcony, Ferris navigates the CROWD, trying not to get separated from Emot as they press in around him.

He peers up and around, and notices Aimsity and the Queen on the balcony watching him. He frowns and turns back to Emot. He takes the prince by the arm and tries to guide him further into the city, away from the keep.

FERRIS

Come on.

EXT. SIDESTREETS - TENET - DAY

They push through the colorful but dirty sidestreets, overhung by tarpaulins that filter sunlight in bleached reds, olive, and yellow onto the cobblestones.

EXT. OPEN SQUARE - TENET - DAY

They emerge into an open area, trailing MERCHANTS trying to offer Emot their goods. A flurry of CHILDREN alight at his side.

CHILDREN

Prince Emot! Prince Emot!

EMOT

(laughing)

We will stop here for a moment, brother.

FERRIS

(sighs)

As you wish.

Ferris takes a seat nearby on the edge of a pool and looks around. Eventually he bores and stares into the clear water. He catches a shape reflected in it and looks up:

It's the INNKEEPER from the Inn for Good, weaving his way through the square, trying not to be noticed.

He sees Ferris see him and freezes.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

You...

The innkeeper darts away into a nearby alley.

Ferris gets up, a second glance back at his brother, and chases after him.

EXT. EMPTY FAIRGROUND - TENET - DAY

Ferris emerges from a jagged hole in the back of a hut covered by colored tarp. He pushes through the stakes of a stockade into a wide field for fairs and events. Mostly-finished tents, games, playground equipment, and signs announcing the Free Day lie strewn about the abandoned area.

The innkeeper, running up ahead, looks over his shoulder anxiously. Ferris pursues.

Ferris rounds the corner of a gigantic boat, suspended above the ground by wooden scaffolding, when he hears a whistle.

He reels just in time to avoid a throwing knife as it embeds itself in the boat by his face.

Ferris crouches and whirls to see the ASSASSIN from the fight at the Inn for Good - running, already on top of him.

He kicks Ferris in the face.

Ferris sprawls backwards onto the ground. He can't draw his sword. Instead, he wriggles away from the assassin, who draws a short blade of his own. With nowhere else to turn, he scrambles into the scaffolding under the boat.

He glances back and sees the assassin look in after him and grunt, then his feet disappear as he climbs up onto the top of the boat.

Hidden underneath, but not very mobile among the forest of wooden supports, Ferris catches his breath. He listens Thump. Thump. Footsteps on the wood above.

They march in a slow circle on top. The footsteps start to head for the prow, and Ferris crawls madly in the other direction, but then they stop, and so does Ferris, listening.

ON THE DECK ABOVE

The assassin listens intently. Then, quietly, he extracts throwing daggers from his belt. He tosses one, casually, at the other side of the boat where it thuds on the wood. Then the other.

Underneath, Ferris hears the sound on the deck right above him. He makes for the other side of the boat as fast as he can. He bolts from underneath it.

He's just about free when the assassin leaps onto his back from the deck above. Ferris gasps, then reaches a hand up to grab his own neck. Just in time: as the assassin pulls his blade across it.

Ferris cries out and spins around. His hand drips with a nasty gash. He reaches for his sword but the assassin is there, pushing him back against a table, jamming it up.

He tries again. Each time he reaches for his sword, the assassin forces him to use his drawing hand for something else: propping himself up after he's been knocked off guard, pushing away a thrust, or hitting back just long enough to keep the assassin away from his throat.

Ferris gets in one good blow when the assassin slashes at him. Instead of falling back, Ferris swings around with the strike and grabs the assassin with his wounded hand.

Grimacing, Ferris twists his body and throws him into a facsimile of the High House, which crumbles.

Ferris grabs his hilt and draws half-way, but the assassin lunges forward and pushes it back into the sheath.

They struggle, Ferris pulling, the assassin pushing, across the symbol of the wolf on the pommel stone.

Then, suddenly, the assassin leaps back, his wrist suddenly lacerated with bite marks.

The assassin stares at his wrist for one fatal, horrified moment before, in a single motion, Ferris draws his sword and cuts the assassin fully across his chest, sending him to the ground.

Ferris catches his breath over the body. He spares a worried glance for the wolf on the sword, runny with blood.

EXT. EMPTY FAIRGROUND - TENET - DAY

Ferris holds the innkeeper up to a ramshackle wall by one hand. Ferris takes and releases a breath into his terrified face.

INNKEEPER

Spirits. Mercy. Save me. Lord...

FERRIS

That would be me.

The innkeeper glances at Ferris's sword.

INNKEEPER

Please don't... not with that.

FERRIS

Why is the Empire trying to kill me?

INNKEEPER

They're not trying to...

Ferris jams him against the wall. The innkeeper gets angry, then frightened again.

INNKEEPER (CONT'D)

It's your brother. He's the one they're after.

Ferris eases up and the innkeeper gets a breath in.

FERRIS

My brother?

The innkeeper stares into Ferris's face, dried blood caking under his nose, and nods rapidly.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

Tell me everything.

INNKEEPER

I will! We commissioned a sword.
A distinctive sword...

He peers down at Ferris's weapon.

INNKEEPER (CONT'D)

As a gift. To mark the prince
for...

(swallows)

To mark the prince. Without him,
Tenet has no friends on the
Council, or something like that.
The Emperor wants to install a
puppet ruler. Like your father
was.

Ferris's eyes widen. He holds the sword up to the
innkeeper's neck. The innkeeper starts to cry.

FERRIS

What?

The innkeeper looks back and forth to see if anyone is
watching.

INNKEEPER

Please don't kill me! Let me join
you. Please, they're going to send
me down to Exile one way or
another.

FERRIS

To Exile...

INNKEEPER

The punishment for killing a
prince? The punishment for not?
Ha. They're the same.

Ferris considers this.

FERRIS

You'll swear fealty to the Queen?

INNKEEPER

I swear. Anything is better than
Exile.

Ferris laughs bitterly.

FERRIS

Don't speak too soon. It's not
easy being her servant.

INT. GREAT HALL - TENET - NIGHT

Ferris's family, the Queen, Emot, Aimsity, the whole COURT, stands to applaud him as Ferris comes in to dinner. He stops, genuinely surprised, as Emot comes forward and embraces him.

EMOT

Thank you, brother.

He takes Ferris and sits him at the table. A handful of SERVANTS bring in on trays too large for any one of them to carry: a whole roasted horse draped in cascades of fruit. They ease it onto the long dining table in front of him.

EMOT (CONT'D)

That could have been me!

The nobles laugh and take seats around the tables. The Queen beams at Ferris, proudly. Aimsity walks to his side and puts a strong hand on his shoulder.

AIMSITY

I'm sorry. I doubted you, my Lord.
Forgive me.

Ferris smiles and takes his hand briefly.

They eat and toast and celebrate.

INT. CASTLE CORRIDOR - TENET - NIGHT

The Queen walks arm in arm with her two sons, smiling, warm from wine and good feeling.

EMOT

You're radiant, mother.

FERRIS

Oh, it's just a ruse.

The Queen laughs and stops them in front of the hallway to her chambers. She pats them fondly, one at a time.

QUEEN

Oh, my beautiful boys. What would I do without you? That's the question.

They pause, unable to truly answer.

FERRIS

Good night mother.

QUEEN

My dears. Oh. Would one of you bring me some milk from the cellar?
(MORE)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Emot - you know how to apply a little sweetness.

Emot smiles and kisses his mother.

EMOT

Indeed I do. Good night, good night.

Ferris nods as Emot departs; he struggles with a smile as it breaks onto his face.

QUEEN

... which is the reason I need to talk to you alone again, child.

She draws him aside, her radiance, indeed, a ruse.

FERRIS

Mother?

QUEEN

I have another mission for you -

Ferris's face falls.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

We have much work ahead of us. Your next task involves proving to the people, now that we know the Empire's intentions, who their enemy is. The Free Day, our celebration of liberty, is the perfect opportunity to ...

A ringing in Ferris's ears grows and drowns out the rest of the words. He stares dumbly into space and lets them wash over him.

INT. CELLS - FORT EXILE - DAY

Wrapped up in his own thoughts, Preiur paces the halls of the fort. He walks past a passage that opens onto the fort's temporary holding cells. Thick bars hold a handful of PRISONERS. Etched into the wall: "Temporary Holding: Do not feed them!"

Preiur squints. By the uneven light of a torch on the wall, one of the prisoners, from the back, looks just like Ferris.

Preiur approaches the cell cautiously. The prisoner hears him and looks, frightened into his face. It's not Ferris. Preiur blinks.

INT. GREAT HALL - ESCARPA - DAY

Flest sits imperiously to the side of Almon, holding court. NOBLES in the Escarpan style deal with each other on opposite sides of a low sandstone table. She studies them with acumen. Her father watches her sadly - her daughter finally involved in politics.

The steward makes his way around the table and hands a scroll to Almon. He reads it and passes it to Flest: it's Emot's invitation to the Tenet Free Day, the Prazac crest watermarked on the vellum.

Scrawled on the bottom in Emot's handwriting is: "By special request of Prince Ferris."

She crumples it in one hand and tosses it away.

EXT. FORTIFIED GATE - FORT EMERGENCE - EXILE

A HORDE OF SLITHS, armed with their characteristic two-pronged spear, javelins, and plate armor, march through the ruined gatehouse of Fort Emergence. Exile soldiers lie dead or dying on the field. The siege of Fort Emergence is over.

Trailing the column, the huddled and disfigured Erika, bundled in Vanous's thick cloak and guided tenderly by the barbarian, and a handful of CAPTIVE SOLDIERS are marched forward at spearpoint and in shackles.

INT. FERRIS'S CHAMBERS - TENET - DAY

Ferris tosses and turns under the augur of another nightmare. Memories rush up and torment him as a jumble of voices:

FLEST (V.O.)

We are powerless against all the things that wish to control us.

FERRIS (V.O.)

You are a servant.

CALLOUX (V.O.)

We are all servants.

QUEEN (V.O.)

But we must learn to work around those powers that we cannot resist.

AIMSITY (V.O.)

...but sometimes, in such circumstances, men make masters of their swords.

FERRIS (V.O.)

Dreams?

AIMSITY (V.O.)
 Let it go, my Lord. It brings out
 the worst in you.

FERRIS (V.O.)
 I'm trying, Lieutenant!

INT. FORT EXILE - VALORIM - NIGHT

Ferris stands with his mother in front of the portal to Exile, caves and rivers and glowing moss a vague reflection on its now peaceful surface. She wears the runic dress of Ferris's first dream. The fort is deadly quiet in Ferris's dream.

FERRIS
 Mother? I'm ready now. What is to
 be my task?

The Queen smiles. She reveals the sword, the wolf glowing in Exile's light. Ferris takes the blade.

QUEEN
 Something *terrible*.

Ferris nods. Holding the weapon, he turns from the Queen and the cave and the dripping stalactites, all melting away into -

EXT. FAIRGROUND - TENET - DAY

- a parade of music and laughter. Tents in rich colors flap gaily; PEASANTS wander from MERCHANT to PERFORMER to FRIEND; the fairground is abuzz with festivities under the banner, green and silver: FREE DAY.

Ferris, his blade held flat before him, is cheered by fairgoers up the avenue to a royal palisade at its head.

The Queen and Aimsity recline on benches on the dais, Emot on an upholstered throne.

AIMSITY
 Ah, yes! I had forgotten.

Aimsity stands up and clears his throat. Trumpets do most of the silencing.

AIMSITY (CONT'D)
 (to the crowd, affected)
 In lieu of my good fellow Captain
 Preiur, who cannot be here today.
 I, his *Lieutenant*...

Giggles from the crowd.

AIMSITY (CONT'D)
 Ha ha, yes. I, his understudy,
 quite literally...

EMOT

Get on with it or you'll be an actor soon enough!

The crowd laughs.

AIMSITY

Ha, yes. Well you know it's traditional for our very wise Prince -- who would never let one of his best men go --

EMOT

Not one of my best men, no!

The crowd is, once again, amused.

AIMSITY

May I continue, my Lord?!

Emot raises his hands benevolently.

AIMSITY (CONT'D)

-- we usually present him with the best crop from the harvest at the Free Day for each season. A good head of corn, or a perfect apple, as thanks for our liberty. One season, a nearby village wanted to give him an herb called Jailer's Keys.

Laughter mixed with false boos.

EMOT

You should ask them to bring you some to the keep tomorrow! They might come in handy.

AIMSITY

I jest! I jest, when it is not a time for jesting. As we emerge from this bitter winter and the tragedy of our King's death, the harvest has been poor. Many of our crops died in the freeze; most were tainted or maimed. But your prince showed us that our orchards do not bear the only fruit in Tenet. We bear another gift for the Prince, one that represents our bounty - yes - but also our strength. Something that shows we will fight for our Prince through whatever troubles lie ahead...

This last part is especially solemn.

AIMSITY (CONT'D)

Your brother suggested we present you with a sword, a sword forged in our mountain villages, inscribed with your family crest. It could not be a more perfect symbol of our confidence in your leadership, our new Lord. Long live our Prince of Tenet!

CROWD

Long live the Prince!

They kneel as Ferris proceeds up the steps of the dais.

He drops to one knee before the crown prince and offers the sword up.

Emot, touched to blushing, reaches down to take the sword but -

He grasps air as Ferris, his eyes like steel, RUNS HIM THROUGH. Horrified gasps ripple through the crowd.

Ferris tosses his brother's corpse aside, then holds the sword up.

The blood on it steams in the cool plains air.

The Queen, Aimsity, the peasants, they all stare in frozen horror as Ferris addresses them proudly:

FERRIS

The Prince is dead. Now I have earned my right! Banish me! Take this shell to Exile! Take me, or I will kill until my crimes are great enough!

FALL TO BLACK.