

Hell Wolves and Shadow Hawks

Lights up on a clearing in Scorssevain Forest, a dark, dense woodland, full of ancient trees with gnarled bark and twisted branches.

It is night and the clearing has been made into a temporary camp. There is a campfire burning in the centre, rucksacks and tree trunks around, acting as back supports, seats and areas to sleep. Several lanterns provide some light.

CASS is sitting propped up against a log, dozing in the blaze of the fire. BRIZ is resting on his ruck sack, prodding the fire with a long twig. LOBO is sitting crossed legged, whittling a stick with his dagger. PRINCESS OLYDIA is standing, her expression clearly indicating a foul mood. THEODWIN is sitting on a tree stump with a leather-bound book open on his knee and a quill in his hand. He talks as he writes.

THEODWIN: *The Fourth Moon in the Season of Dismay, the Year of Sigphin, God of Poetry. Day one hundred and forty-three of our quest. With the treacherous navigation across the Causarock Mountains a distant memory, we have now embarked on our slow journey through Scorssevain Forest. A full day on foot and we have made very little advancement through the tangled undergrowth. The leg injury, Brizando sustained during our battle to secure Princess Olydia's freedom, is gradually healing with the help of the goosewort poultice I apply twice daily, but it is still uncomfortable and his pain is hindering our progress . . .*

CASS: *(Interrupting without opening his eyes) Theodwin, you do know we can hear you, right?*

THEODWIN: *Pardon?*

CASS: *D'you know you talk out loud to yourself as you write?*

THEODWIN: *Do I?*

CASS: *Yeah.*

THEODWIN: *Really?*

CASS: *Yeah, really.*

THEODWIN: *Ye gods, I had no idea! To me it was an internal monologue.*

CASS: *Thought so 'cos it happens every night. Every single damn night when you sit down to fill in that blasted chronicle, we are treated to a first-person narration of the day's events and, I don't know about anyone else, but I for one am findin' it increasingly tiresome.*

BRIZ: *Me too. It's getting on me tits.*

THEODWIN: *A thousand apologies, gentlemen, you should have said something before. I'm in a world of my own when I do my journal.*

CASS: *I didn't mind to begin with. In fact, for the first few seasons, it was quite cathartic – as you broadcast it to the Sky-Gods, I could unpick any knotty issues from the day, put any quarrels to bed . . . (indicating PRINCESS OLYDIA) . . . but now I have to listen to her dronin' on day in, day out, I just want to have a bit of hush while I try to have a kip.*

OLYDIA: *(Sharply) And just exactly what do you mean by that?*

CASS: *What I mean by that, darlin', is ever since we rescued you from the foul clutches of Gristlespine in Fangdor Castle, you have done nothin' but incessantly moan about everythin' - your achin' back, your broken finger nails, the stale food, Lobo's smelly feet . . .*

BRIZ: *My farts.*

CASS: *Briz's bad wind, the lack of bathin' facilities . . . well, I'm sorry, darlin', but there ain't many mountain streams that get much above freezin' point in this neck of the woods . . .*

THEODWIN: *Except the thermal springs of Tuldum.*

CASS: *Except them, yeah.*

OLYDIA: *Have you finished?*

CASS: *Not even close.*

OLYDIA: *Well, that's just tough because I've heard quite enough, thank you. Now you listen to me, Mr Cassian Bloodbath . . .*

CASS: *Bloodbraid.*

OLYDIA: *Whatever. (Beat) I am a Princess; Princess Olydia, daughter of King Galadhor, supreme ruler of Pomparley, Kingdom of the Virtuous, and I do not appreciate being spoken to in the manner in which you have just done.*

BRIZ: *We can always take you back, love.*

OLYDIA: *Nor do I appreciate being referred as darling or love. From now on you will all address me as your Royal Highness as is befitting.*

BRIZ: *Piss off.*

OLYDIA: *If you fail to do so, I will have my father throw you into the dungeons of Drakmogh as soon as we return to Pomparley.*

CASS: *And if you threaten to do that one more time, darlin', we will deposit you back at the gates of Fangdor Castle quicker than you can say goblin's gonads – no offence, Lobo!*

LOBO: *What?*

CASS: *(To LOBO) Doesn't matter.*

OLYDIA: *(To CASS) You wouldn't dare.*

CASS: *Try me.*

THEODWIN: *Don't go there, dear, he's not bluffing. I've seen that look in his eyes before.*

BRIZ: *And me. D'you remember that time when 'e threw Maud Harehowler back into the Wyrms Pit of Glerme?*

THEODWIN: *Ye gods, yes.*

LOBO: *Arghhh! Splat. (Chuckling to himself) She did regret, she did.*

BRIZ: *All because she came out whingin' over how long we'd taken to rescue 'er.*

OLYDIA: *I don't care if he takes me back to Fangdor. I've already spent a year languishing within its walls, what's another two or three seasons. It might be worth suffering Gristlespine's practically non-existent hospitality just to be saved by a rescue party with a little more decorum. I can't comprehend what even possessed my father to hire such a bunch of reprobates in the first place.*

CASS: *King Galadhor advertised a pretty hefty reward for your safe return and we came forward to offer our services.*

OLYDIA: *There must have been other, more desirable characters in line for job.*

BRIZ: *They weren't exactly queuin' up, love. Gristlespine's guards 'ave a rather nasty reputation for shoving their hands up people's arses and turnin' 'em inside out.*

LOBO: *Burny, burny, twisty, burny.*

BRIZ: *Yeah, and then spit roastin' 'em over 'ot coals.*

THEODWIN: *Also, the journey to the Kingdom of Mournmyre is notoriously hazardous. You have to battle the raging whirlpools in the Sea of Thessaburn, defend yourself against vampire baboons in the Withered Wastelands of Plimduff, dodge the shrouded cyclone storms as you cross the Blue Mist Desert, fight off hordes of bandits in the Gumtar Slums of Dorgoil . . .*

OLYDIA: *Dorgoil is completely in the opposite direction.*

LOBO: *I had to go see mother.*

OLYDIA: *Whether the journey was fraught with danger or not, that is entirely beside the point. There are numerous bands of adventurers and mercenaries out there available to rent. Why did it have to be you four incompetent misfits?*

CASS: *Hey! We got you out, didn't we? We rescued you.*

THEODWIN: *In record time, I hasten to add.*

BRIZ: *Yeah, we fought off 'undreds of orcs for you!*

LOBO: *We fight, we bite, we kill, we chew their faces.*

CASS: *Yeah, so I don't know what dictionary you've got tucked in your chastity belt there but that is not the definition of incompetent in my book.*

OLYDIA: *I wasn't talking about your rescue efforts. I'll agree you managed to do a reasonable job of that - although you failed to retrieve my priceless ruby droplet*

necklace they'd confiscated – I was actually referring to your heroic kudos, you're hardly qualified for the role. Where's your chivalry? Your honour? Where's your courteousness?

BRIZ: We've never claimed to be 'eroes, love. 'Eroes do it for the glory, we do it for the cash.

CASS: Although, I am often mistaken for a hero. Think it's my smoulderin' charm and rugged good looks.

OLYDIA: You mean the way you swagger around as if you own the place and the little scar on your cheek and daft tattoo of a dog on your arm.

CASS: (Dumbfounded) Dog? Dog! (Pointing to his arm) That is not a dog! That is a hell-wolf. We are the Hell-Wolves . . .

LOBO: Hell-wolves! Hell-wolves!

BRIZ: Avengers of the Wretched.

CASS: I came up with that tag-line.

OLYDIA: Cringe.

BRIZ: (Revealing his tattoo) We've all got one. Theodwin came up with a spell to do it.

LOBO: Magic.

THEODWIN: I'm scared of needles. Necessity is the mother of invention.

CASS: (To OLYDIA) And as for this scar, darlin', I'll have you know, I got this fightin' a centaur in one of the less salubrious taverns of Brattalia . . .

LOBO: Lucky Gargoyle.

CASS: That's the place.

BRIZ: And you were pissed.

CASS: Pissed? I'd had enough ale to render a small giant impotent.

BRIZ: Then this centaur started movin' in on this lady Cass 'ad been makin' a bit of headway with.

CASS: I asked him politely to back off.

BRIZ: But this fella weren't havin' none of it. (With a hand gesture) Started givin' it all that.

CASS: Thought the lady in question would have a better time with him.

BRIZ: Centaurs are particularly well-endowed so I could see where he was comin' from but 'e wouldn't back down.

CASS: Then it all started to kick off. Quite literally.

BRIZ: Cass got caught on the cheekbone with one of his hooves.

OLYDIA: So, you got it in a pub brawl? How heroic.

THEODWIN: *Er, actually, I don't think that's when you sustained the scar, Cassian. I remember the incident distinctly and, as I recall, he grazed your cheek as he brought his leg 'round but it was the barmaid's face that took the full force of the hoof.*

CASS: *Are you sure?*

THEODWIN: *Very sure. Last time we were in Brattalia, I popped into the Lucky Gargoyle for a swift... (gestures drink)... and was served by said barmaid - now known as Lob-sided Lil.*

BRIZ: *Yeah, 'e's right, Cass. Now, I think on it, I reckon you got that scar when that bugbear set upon us in Bog Turtle Woods.*

CASS: *Near the Kingdom of Riphain?*

BRIZ: *That's the one.*

CASS: *Nah.*

BRIZ: *It was. I 'ad to dig out one of its claws out from the wound before Theodwin could sew it up.*

CASS: *(Pause of realisation) That wasn't from my face, that was from Lobo's arse cheek!*