

Devil's Wager - Ben Orthey

Jatson cracked two deadbolts into place and slammed back against the entryway. He stared at his hands and slid to the floor. The heist replayed in his head. Argo shot down from the aqueduct. Satia and Horick ambushed in the courtyard. Rainor and Faustin snared in a rope trap racing through the corridors.

Jatson had scrambled to a...particularly desolate wing of the lord's treasury. Two chests lay empty on the floor. A mirror hung on the wall across from him. Guards shouted beyond the door. He stood. Watched his reflection furrowing its brow. "How did everything go to shit so fast?"

As the sentence left his mouth, Jatson froze. His reflection had not moved its lips. The face in the mirror flashed a devilish grin. "I suppose that would be my fault."

Jatson reeled. "You...you...me?"

"Not you, no. I am the lord's Hissing Mirror. Think of me as an omniscient assistant. I've brought kingdoms to ruin and saved empires from worse. Disarming your heist was child's play. Executing the precise schematics to corner you here now...was brilliance."

BANG! BANG! Guards at the door. "Why does the lord want me here now?"

"He wants you dead, the small-minded smatchet. But here is my wager. I'm looking for a new partner. Someone...hungrier. I can get you out of this room without a scratch on your head, for repayment promised."

BANG! BANG! Jatson swallowed hard. "Anything."

"Everything."

Jatson had no idea what that meant, but neither had he any choice. "Fine, then. Deal."

Untitled - Micah Kinard

"Speeak" he pled in trance-like whisper, "speak, speak, pleeease"

Timeless eyes searched themselves within polished mythril as tireless fingers traced the serpentine frame.

"Pleeeaaase" the plump man continued from beneath a pile of fresh bloody furs.

"They're gone, all of 'em...the antlers...we have them...now SPEEAAK"

The temperature plummeted queuing tendrils of frost to creep the windows like spectral ghouls feeling their way through blind planal transfer.

A soft hiss became the only sound as metal scales beneath his trembling fingers began to

warm and constrict.

“Ssssaaaaaiinnt...”

“Yesyesyes!”

“Yeeeaarrsss”

“1742 years it’s been, and I killed them...all, I got the antlers, aaand the elves are making it, just like you said. Is it time??”

The room was silent again...

“Please please ple...”

At once the metal turned fluid and slopped to the floor, a pool of silver abyss, reflecting nothing as a slivering body breached the surface.

A broad metallic head rose, whip-like tongue sampling it’s new dimension.

“iiiiit is tiiiiimme”

The gored tinkerer trailed viscera as he groveled from the bloody pelts toward the god-like serpent, “wwwhats next, mirror?”

“He must feed”

“Yes, tonight, they welcome me as they sleep, just as we planned, and... he can have all of them”

“Summon hiiiiimm”

The giant serpent lurched, constricting and relaxing, as it heaved a long curvature up its great throat and dislocating it’s jaw.

A twisted horn fell to the ground in simmering iridescent slime.

“Uuuussse the mouthhh piieecee”

“But who will come??”

“Balrog, devil, sin...one name... Kraaammpuuss”

The Hissing Mirror by Ian

Xandelar’s eyes peered back at him from below. He stared down as thunder broke and the first drops of rain fell in the courtyard. Rain spattered around him, rippling his reflection as he stood in the growing puddle. He did not recognize himself.

“Xxxandelar!”, something whispered. Reaching into his pocket and pulling out the mirror, Xandelar looked at his reflection. His shivering lips moved. “We mussst go! Your time hasss come!”

The castle doors swung open as Xandelar entered. The guards on either side of him stood sharply. “Your grace!”, one of them said as they bowed.

Xandelar brandished his sword and slashed, severing the guard’s head. The second guard stepped back and tripped. When he looked up toward the traitorous prince there was a sword to his neck. “Xan”, the guard said. “You don’t have to – “. Xandelar gripped and stabbed into the guard’s neck.

He stood and looked toward the torchlit throne. With sword in hand, he walked toward his mother. As Xandelar approached a tear fell from his eyes onto the feet of the woman before him. He raised his sword and slowly cut. Blood spilled, and he fell onto his knees. He looked at his mother and into her cloudy eyes. “It’s over”, he whispered as he crashed to her feet.

The queen raised her head as she reached for Xandelar. She grabbed the mirror from his pocket and looked at her reflection. Her mouth twisted into a smile. “That is for uss to decide.”

Untitled by Josh

“So, you said the horn is blown and the guy drops dead?”

“In a manner of speaking.”

“Ok and then a guy with a sword comes in and kills this Balrog?”

“...Correct.”

“With a sword?”

“You havent seen the sword. And he brings quite the armory with him, things I can hardly, oh excuse me, Beth would you please show the families to the tent, they’ll catch cold out there.”

“Families of?”

“Both the sacrifice and our evenings protagonist.”

“The guy blowin and the guy fightin I gotcha. So he knows hes gonna die when he blows the thing?”

“He has spent his whole life working toward this day, dreaming of it.

“Uhuh and the guy with the sword. Trained his whole life to probably die?”

“He is Templar.”

“Right.”

“Peter would you tell everyone minute to showtime, thank you. Shall we.”

He gestured to two seats. A man walked out in a kind of tactical armor and helmet, faceplate up. The sacrifice had taken his place near the horn. He wore a relaxed robe down to his ankles and tied at the neck. He approached the horn reverently, placed his lips upon it, grabbed it with both hands, and blew. The walls of the arena shook and everyone covered their ears. With a gust of wind and flame he was gone. The templar pressed a button on his wrist, smiled, and his helmet hissed shut. He drew his sword, as he did the ground began to tremble.

Sacrifice of Drakaín Ashenfoot, Prince Under the Mountain by Bryan

Drakaín Ashenfoot, great nephew thrice over to Dane Ironfoot, King Under the Mountain, stood, gasping for breath atop the weather-hewn cliff. A cool breeze threw the many intricate braids of his hair across his face as he scouted the landscape below. Eyes burned like coals behind the wisps of hair and hatred filled the heart of this dwarf. Ashenheart would have suited him better, for his heart was dark indeed.

Several leagues below the remains of the Ashenfoot army were forming a tight circle. Shoulder to shoulder the dwarven warriors intertwined and thrust out the ends of their mighty spears. From this height they looked like a glistening silver sun, perhaps one made of mithril itself.

Across the battlement he could just make out the vast figure of his great great uncle. Seeing him now only fed the fires of madness within. Drakaín had been longing for this day. Decades of planning, heartache, and pain had finally led to this moment. This moment however, was slipping away into a crushing defeat. He fingered the smooth horn at his belt and found himself unhinging it. Death would mean nothing if victory was secured. Dane's troops now surrounded his own and hope was dwindling. He found the horn upon his lips and suddenly the air was rent with its song.

Terror struck Dane as Drakaín crumbled to ash. Hot wind struck Dane in the face and a sharp crack echoed over the sky. A balrog had come. His Doom had come.

Untitled by J.P.

"Remember to be at the spot"—*I knew that! I came up with the plan and every other plan.* Pulling down his mask, bellowing—"and stay alert this time!"

THUD! The door slams, I drive off.

I creep around the building. Same routine, just a different location. We've been successful every time before, I'm sure this won't be any different. Pulling in just a few hundred yards away from the drop-off point, I slowly back into 'the spot'. Gratified, I slip it from my pocket.

Transposed, I get lost in thought.

Thinking of the forebears that used to be with me, I remember them as if it were yesterday. There

was Saint James, scarred by war and betrayal. Everyone knows him because of my plans, I solidified his existence. Then there was Prince Cassidy, gracious and generous. Time and time again, I used his connections to devise the perfect plan. If he just 'generously' listened, he would have never been caught. Oh, I can't forget about the sweet innocence of Queen Tania. Patty was her given name. Such a shame I never took her father's fortune. I slowly coerced her, like many others to be ...

THUMP! THUMP! I quickly forget about my inquisition.

"Stop looking at yourself in that thing," he barked, "we're loaded, let's get out of here!"

I turn the key to start the engine. Pulling onto Fifth Avenue, I quickly accelerate. *Another plan executed and inscribed into history.*

SCREEEEEECH!

A black sedan in front of us, another one behind us. Blue lights flashing, faces yelling and guns pointed. Lord Sutton's replica wouldn't work this time. Who didn't stick to the plan? Complacency has caught up to us again.

I've traveled far to get here—now trapped behind a barbed wire fence, a row of cinder block walls, crammed in an envelope labeled 'Inmate #820880 Personal Property'. Not forgotten nor lost, just waiting for the next person to use me, or I to use them.

Untitled by Chandler

Rhoin, son of Rhori Blacklock, was now sundered from his people. Dusk had passed, and the darkness of night fell heavy upon him as he awoke. The dwarf found himself in the midst of a large encampment of Easterlings. Chains weighed heavy upon his arms and legs, along with the burden of his people.

The men of the east were searching for the hidden halls of the dwarves. The line of Blacklocks had remained on the throne as early as the awakening of the dwarves. Many songs had been sung of the mighty deeds of kings before him, and Rhoin lusted for songs to be written of his years.

He thought of escape, but even if possible, no axe would hew enough men to protect his people, should their halls be found. The night, starless, gripped him in obscurity, and with a tear he laid his head upon the ground.

The tear was hot to his face. But his face continued to feel ablaze, even in the cool night.

He clawed through the dirt, ground yet warming, and pulled up a Balrog's horn. Hot to the touch, death itself silently cried out for release from the horn. The dwarf gave a mighty shout, "Valor of Aulë's hammer strike me!"

With no hesitation, he raised the horn. Fire purged his lips. Life screamed from his lungs into

the horn. For every note that could have been written, a thousand cast aside. The terrible horn rang sweet to the sound of sacrifice.

Untitled by Tim

Her blade flew home, once more, deep and true. Through the hilt, she felt another's soul vanish. Bone slid on steel as her enemy fell away, separating from the edges of the sword with a choking gasp.

Aværas Barran stood over him.

The last foe to fall by her hand.

Night air gave way to morning, filling the great hall with a dank curtain of dew.

Still.

Silent.

Stinking of iron and bile.

The taste of war filled her mouth.

She was the Blood Queen, a title bestowed by those who dared defy her. But, she welcomed it. Reveled in it.

All her kingdoms burned, now bereft of the living. All by her command. All by her blade. He was truly a wonder, coming away clean from each bite with no trace of blood. He remained always bright, ever sharp, reflecting perfectly her countenance as she gazed once more into his depths. She waited for his voice.

Vaath sighed. A deep, guttural vibrato, low, long, and steady. It was never enough. The hunger grew with the violence, always stronger, always demanding more than the blood-toll of the last campaign. Even with that, the hunger was not his. A servant may possess nothing.

For millennia he passed through generations, using the living to break their own and thus, feed his master. He was the last of the Neverborn, a twisted, vile companion of an endless number of kings. Yet she was greater than them all.

"Aværas, it is time," he hissed.