

The Golden Knight

Written by

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EXT/INT. TAVERN - DAWN

A once-bustling smugglers' tavern sits in ruin. Dust lingers in shafts of sunlight breaking through boarded windows. Shadows stretch along the warped wooden walls.

A dozen figures sit around a long, circular table. They are **THE FALLEN CROWN SYNDICATE** – monarchs, spies, and bounty hunters cloaked in red colors and deeper secrets.

The only sounds: low murmurs and the occasional clink of metal mugs from the outside.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS, a former monarch pushing 70, wears emerald, gold, and ruby rings on his veiny bony fingers.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS

We're running out of options, my fellow sovereigns. The hunt for a plan grows weary, and time no longer favors us. What happened to Leeroy and his spies was a tragedy, but we cannot afford another raid. If we don't act soon, it's our necks that will hang in their place. Now... What have we gathered for today's council?

Their cups are filled with wine. Outside, the slow footsteps of peasants ring faintly.

INQUISITOR MARTYN, a spy and former KNIGHT OF JAVAR, leans forward.

INQUISITOR MARTYN

The King is welcoming a young monarch from Yurmen, which means King Salo's assembling new allies... and a grand army.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS

How do we know of this?

INQUISITOR MARTYN

Their ships have been sighted from the docks, my lord, and the Golden Guard haven't raised a blade. My spies say the sea-scum wear skin like dry bark, and hunger burns in their eyes: blue as the sky, yet mirroring the depths below.

DUKE HAWKMANN OF CAREMOR, red haired, slick undercut haircut, in a fine red-and-blue coat, fidgets with a diamond-made cane. His eyes lock onto shadows sliding across the walls. One silhouette doesn't move.

HAWKMANN

Hmm, how about we wrap this up, aye? I have a feeling we're being watched.

INQUISTOR MARTYN

Nonsense. No one is mad enough to defy the Syndicate in broad daylight. Besides, my men would have their heads before sundown... for half a handful of gold. Am I right, lads?

The bounty hunters, smug men in their thirties, laugh arrogantly.

The wind rattles the shutters, tearing the curtains. Hawkmann's face twists with irritation. He signals his men to close in protectively.

HAWKMANN

Why have we never changed locations? I implore you all to let us adjourn this meeting for another day.

INQUISTOR MARTYN

(frustrated)

First you arrive late, and now you wish to delay Chancellor Invictus's affairs?

HAWKMANN

It is all a matter of security, my amicable conspirators. And you, you out of all people, should know more about that than anyone else in this tavern. Especially after your precious kingdom was rag-dolled by Salo's men.

Martyn slams his fist on the table's edge. Hawkmann leans back and waves his hands with a smirk.

HAWKMANN

Oh, my apologies, dear Inquistor. I'm but a simple, clueless Duke... am I not?

INQUISTOR MARTYN

You've no right to mock me, clown!
Your beloved Caremor was snatched up
too, mind you!

HAWKMANN

Still got my diamonds and the manhood
to keep 'em. Can you say the same?

The room stiffens. Wine cups pause mid-air.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS

(slamming the table)

Enough! Enough with this petty
nonsense!

Hawkmann shrugs his shoulders. Martyn's eyes twitch. Invictus
looks at the rest with composure.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS

Thank you for your... whispers,
Inquisitor Martyn. As you all know, we
are not far from the outskirts of this
wretched, forsaken land—left to decay
under the careless hand of King Salo.
His reign festers like rot beneath
gold, and yet, the people, out of mere
fear, still call him their savior.

Suddenly, RUNNING FOOTSTEPS scrape past the tavern's exit.

A GLASS shatters outside, carried away by the wind.

Then—silence.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS

What was that?

INQUISITOR MARTYN

You two.

TWO ASSASSINS slip out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. TAVERN - DAWN

Two Assassins step outside, their hands holding their sharp
daggers.

ASSASSIN 1

I'm sure Lautreus took care of the noise already.

ASSASSIN 2

Yeah. Bastard is tough as nails.

They look left to right before their eyes land on the lifeless bodies of two fallen kin.

At opposite corners of the tavern, TWO CLOAKED FIGURES wait in silence.

The assassins kneel beside the corpses. One of them reaches for a horn to sound the alarm.

Before he can breathe a word, both cloaked fighters strike. The struggle is brief. Two more bodies hit the ground.

CLOAKED ASSASSIN 1

If one of them has sense, they will ask for your sword. Remember our training.

CLOAKED ASSASSIN 2

Aye, aye.

CLOAKED ASSASSIN 1

We strike on my signal.

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN - DAWN

Hawkmann drinks wine from his bronze cup and winks at Martyn. He twirls the cup idly between his fingers. While looking amused, the other monarchs sit tense. We hear murmurs in the background.

New allies? It will be impossible to beat him.

From the sea? Our coasts are done for. Should we even try?

I have friends in the court. Perhaps they could orchestrate a trial, or attempt to kidnap the princess.

Hawkmann then looks at the door.

HAWKMANN

What a strange occurrence... Perhaps some drunk tripped on one of those

bottles littering the streets. Such individual must've been blind. Ha!

We hear a muffled PUNCH. Then another. The sound of a blade sinking into flesh.

Every Syndicate member lurches to their feet. Chairs scrape violently against the warped floor. Goblets spill wine that runs like blood across the table.

Their eyes dart to the shuttered windows and door while their fingers tremble over jeweled rings and hidden daggers.

Hawkmann springs to his feet and raises his sharp cane.

HAWKMANN

Was I wrong to suspect, Inquisitor?

INQUISITOR MARTYN

Perhaps not. I suggest we arm ourselves.

One assassin reappears in the doorway. His mask is smeared with blood.

INQUISITOR MARTYN

What was the noise?

CLOAKED ASSASSIN 2

Seems a beggar wished to disrupt the meeting, my lord. Lautreus silenced him. He's guarding the door now.

Hawkmann sits again while holding his cane. He crosses his legs, grabs his wine goblet, and drifts his attention towards the assassin.

The assassin's blue robe parts are long enough to reveal boots... and at his waist, a LONG SWORD.

HAWKMANN

(taunting)

Nice sword you've got there, friend. Where did you obtain such a shiny weapon?

CLOAKED ASSASSIN 2

(hesitating)

The beggar had been rifling through a fallen knight's corpse. The sword still bore the sigil of the Golden

Guard. I couldn't risk him slipping it to someone outside.

HAWKMANN

Hmm, good answer.

INQUISITOR MARTYN

I suggest you stop making a mockery of my men, Hawkman. As you can see, they are very competent on their own.

HAWKMANN

Unlike yourself, old cunt. Him? Part of your army? Haha! Have you truly gone blind, Inquisitor?

The tension simmers. Eyes dart across the table, now towards the Assassin.

THE SYNDICATE fears a traitor is in their midst.

Then a gasp comes from the outside. All heads snap toward the door.

A SEVERED HEAD rolls across the tavern floor, spinning to a stop at Martyn's feet.

The BOUNTY HUNTERS leap up, drawing their steel to shield their masters. But poisoned DARTS hiss through the air, striking their necks. One by one, the hunters stiffen, clutching at their throats before collapsing into heaps on the tavern floor.

Through the haze strides **SIR GARIAN** – early thirties. His dark hair is cropped short, combed to the side but rough from travel. A thick mustache connects to strong sideburns, meeting a full, rugged beard streaked with the dirt and a vertical scar of war on his left eye.

He approaches the Syndicate, his Golden sword pointing at the severed head at Martyn's feet.

His eyes meet the assassin's for a brief, knowing look while the remaining guards tighten their stance around their masters.

The assassin pulls back his hood. **SIR GRAYSON**, Garian's young apprentice, reveals a rounded cleric's style haircut.

SIR GRAYSON

By order of the Crown, you are all

under arrest! Submit to the Spires or die.

At the table, HAWKMANN leans back with a sly smirk, tapping the jewel of his cane against the floor.

HAWKMANN

(to Martyn)

Told you. Only a fool of a spy parades with a sword that size. And polished too. Am I right, young man?

Grayson nods.

Martyn looks away, his fingers curling against the wood of the table. He says nothing.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS

(to Garian)

What do you want from us?

SIR GARIAN

It would serve us well if your guards would lower their blades, Chancellor. Or else, they shall meet their companions' fate. Cold on the ground. Is that not so, Grayson?

SIR GRAYSON

Aye, Captain.

SIR GARIAN

(to the Syndicate)

Then heed my command. Stand down, or make your peace with the floor.

The Syndicate's guards hesitate, then slowly lower their blades. The moment stretches, until Martyn raises his sword and blindly launches at them. His men follow.

Suddenly, Garian and Grayson strike. Steel flashes in the dusty light. Tables topple, goblets shatter, and cloaks whip through the air.

The remaining bounty hunters lunge at the knights, but Garian parries and drives one into the wall. Grayson disarms two before a third collapses to the floor.

Twelve armed, trained fighters fall before their blades without slowing their pace. It was as if cutting down a dozen men were nothing more than breakfast for both Spires.

Hawkmann seizes the moment, darting toward the back door.

Without breaking his rhythm against Martyn, who tries to cut his arm, Garian spins, and pulls a dagger from his belt. The blade arcs through the air, and strikes Hawkmann squarely in the eye.

Hawkmann stumbles, clutching his face, collapsing briefly to the floor. Blood drips down his cheek, but he grits his teeth and scrambles upright, staggering, but still managing to escape into the streets beyond the tavern.

Martyn lunges at Garian again in desperation. Once more, his dagger is raised, but Garian sidesteps effortlessly. With a single, brutal strike, he knocks Martyn to the ground, then drives his sword through him. Martyn's body goes still as his eyes grow wide in disbelief.

The remaining Syndicate members are cut down, but most are bound. Grayson secures the chains around the highest-ranking nobles. Garian watches Hawkmann vanish into the distance, regretful, but then turns back to finish the cleanup.

SIR GRAYSON

(to Garian)

All others accounted for, captain.

SIR GARIAN

Good. Let them remember the price of betrayal.

Chancellor Invictus sits on the floor, laughter rattling from his chest, breaking suddenly into bitter shouting.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS

Betrayal? You mere fool. We were all betrayed by the King! All of us! Monarchs! Proud sons of Javar! Until that filth you call King occupied these lands a long... long time ago. And you... with that armor on, you're nothing but a slave... and you will forever remain a slave... A betrayer, a snake to your own people. Have you no shame?

A SCREAM echoes from somewhere outside the tavern. A woman's voice, terrified, cuts through the moment. Garian seems troubled, as his eyes are now filled with regret and memories. He scratches his scar, almost to the point of kneeling down to catch a breath.

Invictus laughs, until Grayson kicks him in the face.

SIR GRAYSON

That's enough. Now all of you, stand up.

The scream persists. Grayson checks on Garian, who nods back. He stands up and grabs the noble by the elbow. He pushes him to the exit.

C.U. of Garian's eyes being struck by the merciless sun.

CUT TO:

I/E. GOLDEN GATES, KING'S GUEST BALCONY - AFTERNOON

MATCH CUT FROM GARIAN'S BACK TO MAIDEN WHO WALKS FROM BALCONY'S KITCHEN, SERVING DRINKS TO THE MONARCHS.

The scene shifts from shadow to light. Beyond the **GOLDEN GATES**, where wealth separates itself from hunger.

The **GOLDEN GATES** rise like a sunlit fortress, a wall of gold and stone towering impossibly high. On one side, desert and dust stretch endlessly, hunger and misery marking the lands. On the other, gardens bloom in lush abundance, fountains sparkle, and courtyards shimmer with marble, subjects, and flowers. Wealth and power thrive behind these walls, a kingdom within a kingdom, untouched by the suffering beyond.

The balcony gleams with polished **GOLD** and **CRIMSON** banners.

KING SALO sits at the head of the table, surrounded by ministers and nobles. His fourteen-year-old daughter, **ALICE**, sits nearby, watching carefully.

The table groans under roasted meat and sweet wine. One minister, **HIERARCH JACOBS**, gnaws at a cut so raw that blood dribbles down his chin. Alice's eyes widen in unease.

Jacobs has short hair and harsh facial features that make his face almost grotesque. His imposing frame and broad shoulders command attention even in his fuchsia clergy robes.

MINISTER 1

The peasants have discovered another body this week. Their testimony, though crude, was most... precise.

HIERARCH JACOBS

Hmph. The fiend moves unseen. Should

he be taken, God's mercy shall guide his soul, and His wrath shall crush the devil that possessed him.

MINISTER 1

I beg your leave, Hierarch Jacobs, but do you mean his sins might yet find mercy?

HIERARCH JACOBS

One must grasp the truth ere passing judgment. What is truth without knowledge?

MINISTER 2

The folk have taken to calling him The Red Butcher. A phantom steeped in blood.

FEMALE MINISTER

Is it true, then, that none know of his visage? Nor the place where he treads?

MINISTER 2

Aye... only the trail of horror left in his wake at each foul crime.

MINISTER 3

It is said he has claimed the hands of three Syndicate lieutenants already. The city trembles in fear.

Alice shifts uneasily, glancing toward her father, her small hands clutching the edge of the table.

KING SALO

Fortunate is it that he abides beyond our gates, dear ministers. Let him purge the streets of unworthy scum; the better for our kingdom it shall be.

The ministers nod in unison. The great doors of the diner swing open. Sir Garian and Grayson enter.

SIR GARIAN

Chancellor Invictus has been captured, Your Majesty. All accounted for, except for the Duke of Caremor.

Salo lifts his cup, pleased.

KING SALO

Well done, Captain. A toast... to the Golden Spires. May their loyalty remind us that duty, and not glory, guards the crown.

The ministers raise their cups. Sir Garian and Grayson bow their heads in appreciation.

From across the hall, young Princess Alice beams at Sir Garian and offers a shy, innocent wave.

Sir Garian catches her gaze, a rare softness touching his scarred features as he returns a subtle nod and a faint smile.

Suddenly, Alice rises from her seat and dashes across the hall toward him.

HIERARCH JACOBS

(startled)

Princess?

Without hesitation, Alice wraps her arms around Garian's armored leg near the doors, peering up at him with bright, affectionate eyes.

ALICE

Welcome back, Uncle Garian.

SIR GARIAN

(warmly)

It's a blessing to stand by your side again, Princess.

He rests a gauntleted hand gently atop her head, then lays both hands on her small shoulders with quiet reverence.

King Salo watches the moment unfold. He takes a slow sip from his cup.

ALICE

(turning to Grayson)

Welcome back too, Sir Grayson.

SIR GRAYSON

(bowing slightly)

Your kind words honor me, my lady.

SIR GARIAN

(to Alice, kindly)

Go now—join the feast and delight your father with your joy. I shall remain close. You've my word.

Alice curtsies with practiced grace, then skips back to her seat.

Sir Garian and Grayson now guard the hall's entrance. From where he stands, Sir Garian sees the Golden Gates—his expression distant, contemplative.

Sir Grayson glances at his mentor, thoughtful.

SIR GRAYSON

The Princess holds a great fondness for you, does she not?

SIR GARIAN

I was but twenty when the late Queen brought her into this world. After her passing... I became something of a guardian to the girl. A brother, perhaps. At times, even a father.

Sir Garian watches Alice sit on her chair. He takes a moment to admire her.

SIR GARIAN (CON'T)

Evangelia loved me as she did her daughter. And I loved her in return. With honor.

SIR GRAYSON

(softly)

Peace be upon her.

SIR GARIAN

Aye. Peace be upon our beloved Queen.

SIR GRAYSON

I never had the chance to serve her. What was she like?

SIR GARIAN

A mother's heart in a land ruled by swords. Even now, her presence lingers in silence, in memory... in Alice. She

was rare. A light that shone beyond
the ashes of this world.

SIR GRAYSON
(nodding)
Hmm... I see.

Grayson's eyes drift toward Hierarch Jacobs, who is savoring
the last of the red meat on his plate with quiet delight.

SIR GRAYSON
I've heard among the Spires that
Hierarch Jacobs took you in when you
were but a child. Forgive my asking,
Captain—but were you raised as an
orphan?

SIR GARIAN
(curtly)
Growing bold, are we?

SIR GRAYSON
(immediately)
Forgive me, Captain. My tongue ran
ahead of my place. I did not mean to
intrude.

SIR GARIAN
Apology noted...

The ministers finish their plates. Hierarch Jacobs rises,
lifting a golden goblet of wine with measured grace.

SIR GARIAN (CONT)
(staring at Jacobs)
And accepted.

HIERARCH JACOBS
May I entreat all present to lend
their ears before we depart this
gracious luncheon?

The table falls silent; the whispered talk of the serial
killer ceases. All eyes turn to Jacobs.

HIERARCH JACOBS
Most honored King Salo—Savior of
Javar, and Father of the Reprimanded—I
offer my deepest gratitude for hosting
this noble feast upon your cherished
balcony. As Hierarch of the Clergy, I

vow with steadfast discipline that the virtues you uphold shall be passed unto the peasants, though oft ungrateful of your teachings and clemency. Were they but thankful for your great deeds, they would not be clutched by selfishness and poverty. I beseech you, King Salo, grant them forgiveness, for repentance alone paves the way to a brighter morrow.

The King inclines his head briefly. Jacobs turns his gaze toward Sir Garian and Sir Grayson.

HIERARCH JACOBS

(pointing at both Spires)

God alone knows the secrets they keep, the nightmares they endure beyond our gates, and the horrors they face so that we, blessed children of Javar, may feast in peace with our beloved King. As Hierarch of the Clergy, I offer my humble gratitude for our King, and for our Spires.

Sir Garian and Sir Grayson bow their heads solemnly.

The King raises his cup.

KING SALO

For a Golden Future!

EVERYONE

For a Golden Future!

The ministers drink from their goblets as maidens begin clearing the plates from the table.

EVANDRA, A YOUNG BRUNETTE MAIDEN, casts a shy glance at Sir Grayson while collecting Jacob's empty bloody plate.

Grayson returns a cunning smile, causing her cheeks to flush a soft pink.

Sir Garian notices.

SIR GARIAN

(teasing)

Planning on getting lucky tonight, Sir Grayson?

SIR GRAYSON

(shy)

Who's getting bold now, eh?

SIR GARIAN

Take ease, lad. A Spire does not tangle himself in bedtricks. Besides, she might be too good-looking for the likes of you.

SIR GRAYSON

She smiled at me. That means she likes me, right?

SIR GARIAN

Perhaps she mocks your hair. Or perhaps she truly favors you. Both are possible. Mind which you hope for. Unless, of course, there's an affair I've yet to be informed of.

The young maiden, balancing a tray of plates, walks past them towards the kitchen. She steals one last glance at Grayson before lowering her eyes in a shy flush.

SIR GRAYSON

Where does it state that a Spire cannot have a relationship with a woman?

SIR GARIAN

You may court if you must—but you are too green to risk making a child and calling yourself a man. Use your mind and heart. Not your groin. Trust me, that keeps a man's name clean.

SIR GRAYSON

Seems you have experience on the matter, Captain. Have you ever fallen in love?

SIR GARIAN

Duty must come before blood or love, Sir Grayson. If you choose to take a lover, guard your heart well. Do not let attachment be your downfall. Understood?

SIR GRAYSON

Aye, Captain.

The Ministers now bow low. They kiss the King's hand and walk towards the exit.

At the banquet table, young Evandra collects the remaining goblets. Alice leans forward, a playful smile curling at her lips.

EVANDRA

How was the meal, my lady?

ALICE

It was splendid! Thank you, Evandra.

Alice watches as Sir Grayson and Evandra trade a glance

ALICE

Isn't Sir Grayson rather handsome?

EVANDRA

(flustered)

Oh, Princess... he's the handsomest man in the kingdom. Have I been that obvious?

ALICE

Are you courting him?

EVANDRA

(nervous laughter)

I-I mean... perhaps...

ALICE

Shall I tell my father?

EVANDRA

Oh dearest, you're so kind. Perhaps there's no need...

ALICE

(calling out, excited)

Father! May I present Evandra to Sir Grayson? They seem quite in love!

King Salo regards Evandra with a lingering, almost predatory gaze. His expression twists in part amusement, part disgust.

KING SALO

Do not speak of love, child. You've yet to understand what *that* means.

Alice lowers her head, chastened.

Salo's eyes remain fixed on Evandra. Her hands tremble around the silver goblet. He then shifts his attention to an uneasy Sir Grayson.

The King smirks and raises his voice.

KING SALO

Evandra, ignore my daughter's nonsense
and return to your duties.

The King locks eyes with both spires, sensing a shift in their posture. Jacobs raises his eyebrows.

KING SALO

Since you find me in generous spirits,
Evandra and Sir Grayson shall have the
night. This applies to you as well,
Sir Garian. I will have your posts
replaced by the Guard for tonight, so
that you may rest... and enjoy.

Evandra and Alice exchange a quick, thrilled glance before Evandra hurries back toward the kitchen.

KING SALO

Sir Grayson, escort my daughter to her
chambers. Make sure she behaves and
keeps her questions to herself.

SIR GRAYSON

Yes, my lord.

Sir Grayson and Alice exit. The balcony grows quiet as only King Salo, Sir Garian, and Jacobs remain.

The King rises from the head of the table and strides toward the balustrade overlooking the Golden Gates. His robe trails softly behind him.

Before Jacobs can speak, the King lifts a hand.

KING SALO

No need for more preaching, Hierarch
Jacobs. I must speak with Sir Garian:
alone.

HIERARCH JACOBS

As the will of the Most Honored King
decrees, so it shall be.

Jacobs bows and turns to leave. As he passes Sir Garian, he

pauses, placing a hand upon his shoulder

HIERARCH JACOBS

The King awaits you, brother Garian.
It gladdens my heart to see you walk
once more in mercy's light. Until we
meet next.

Jacobs leaves, shadows swallowing him as he passes through
the royal doors.

Sir Garian steps forward, approaching the King.

SIR GARIAN

My King?

KING SALO

Did you know of their affair?

SIR GARIAN

I learned of it only today, my lord. I
thank you for your blessing, as does
Sir Grayson.

KING SALO

It matters little. It's all part of a
greater design.

King Salo glances aside, motioning Garian to stand beside
him. They stare at The Golden Gates.

KING SALO

The fortress of a lifetime. Beyond
them lie the ruins of abomination... the
remnants of conquest... of Hell itself,
where demons roam and slaughter all
that is pure. My sweet Alice... she must
be kept safe from harm's way.

SIR GARIAN

I will protect her with my life, my
lord.

KING SALO

The princess is clever, yet a fool
when curiosity takes her.

SIR GARIAN

Yes... I won't argue with that.

KING SALO

It is no laughing matter, I tell you. While you were gone, she tried to sneak into the archives to read forbidden texts about the world beyond. Then she tried to slip past the market gates for a glimpse of the desert.

King Salo turns to face Garian.

KING SALO

Did I tell you why I conquered?

SIR GARIAN

I believe you haven't, my lord.

KING SALO

My father was a pacifist, blinded by honor, and it cost him his life. I broke the accord of coexistence, because the realm was rotting with too many factions, too many plagues, and too much weakness. When I declared myself King, I united every province, every field and stone, not for glory—but for the good of my people. For my legacy.

C.U. on GARIAN, lost in thought.

CUT TO:

EXT. WARZONE FIELD - DAWN

INSERT OF FLASHBACK:

A younger Garian lies on muddy ground with blood streaking from his brow. Smoke drifts across a ruined battlefield. A SILVER KNIGHT looms over him with a raised sword.

Steel clashes as Garian struggles to his feet.

A BRUNETTE WOMAN cries out, throwing herself over him. Her scream echoes as the image fades.

Garian reaches for her, but she is gone.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. KING'S GUEST BALCONY - AFTERNOON

The King rests a heavy hand on Garian's shoulder.

KING SALO

And look at us now... rising above all
who came before me.

The King now grabs his neck gently with both arms, like a father does to a son.

KING SALO

Tell me, Sir Garian. Am I a fair or
cruel King?

The distant cries from the brunette woman resurface in Garian's mind, who tries not to flinch nor to make a grimace.

SIR GARIAN

Unlike the forsaken souls who wander
beyond the Golden Gates, you have
given me purpose. And for that gift, I
would spill my blood for this blade
until my dying breath. You are our
true King. Our savior...

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS (V.O.)

You're nothing but a slave... and you
will forever remain a slave...

King Salo taps Sir Garian on the cheek, a smirk curling on his lips.

KING SALO

Good. Take your rest, Sir Garian. You
and Sir Grayson shall join us for the
morrow's meal. I hear our new guests
are... difficult company.

SIR GARIAN

Yes, my lord.

Sir Garian bows and leaves the balcony.

CUT TO:

INT. SIR GARIAN'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

The chamber is small, its stone walls cracked and rotting.

Spiders weave along the corners. From beyond the wall, the

muffled sensual cries of Evandra rise and fall.

A shirtless Sir Garian sits on a creaking bed, staring at the floor while Sir Grayson's moans drift through the thin wall.

With a slow breath, Garian stands and moves to a broken mirror.

C.U. on his scar: a thin cut at the corner of his left eye.

He runs a hand across it.

GARIAN'S MOTHER (V.O.)
MY SON! PLEASE NO! THAT'S MY SON!

SILVER ARMORED KNIGHT (V.O.)
Quiet, whore!

"SLASH"

YOUNG GARIAN (V.O.)
AAAARGHHHHHHH!

CUT TO:

EXT. WARZONE FIELD - DAWN

FLASHBACK:

C.U. on young Garian's wrist gripping a rusted knife.

He drives the blade into the neck of a silver-armored knight.

He strikes again until GARIAN's FATHER drags him back. Garian fights him off, wild with rage.

A shadow falls over them. Hierarch Jacobs sits atop a white horse, sunlight burning around him.

HIERARCH JACOBS
You shall be pardoned, young one. For
forgiveness, you shall endure penance.

END OF FLASHBACK.

CUT TO:

INT. SIR GARIAN'S ROOM - DAY

Sir Garian lies on the floor with a rusted dagger clutched in his hand.

He suddenly jerks awake with sweat running down his face.

For a moment, he stares at the dagger, unsure of how it found its way into his grip.

Then, a knock at the door breaks his daze.

SIR GRAYSON (O.S.)
My Lord. Our guests have arrived.

Garian pushes himself up and fastens his armor, grunting with fatigue.

SIR GRAYSON (O.S.)
Captain?

Sir Garian opens the door. Sir Grayson bows his head as Sir Garian walks past him in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. KINGDOM HALLS - DAY

Sir Garian and Sir Grayson march down the corridor toward the royal balcony, helmets in hand, their free hands resting near their swords.

SIR GARIAN
When did they arrive?

SIR GRAYSON
Not long past.

A tense silence follows. Garian's expression remains still, though a flicker of irritation passes his eyes.

Sir Grayson's mouth trembles, wrestling with a question he scarcely dares to voice.

SIR GRAYSON
Captain, were we...

SIR GARIAN
(interrupting)
If the walls could blush, they would.
Now, focus. Best we keep our tongues still.

Sir Grayson nods with a faint smile.

Before they reach the doors, a voice rings out.

KING SALO (O.S.)
ALICE! COME BACK HERE!

Alice storms from the king's hall and hides behind Sir Garian.

SIR GARIAN
What troubles you, my lady?

ALICE
Please, protect me.

KING SALO (O.S.)
Sir Garian! Come forth! And bring that
imp with you!

Alice shakes her head, her eyes pleading with mercy.

Sir Grayson and Sir Garian exchange a wary glance.

SIR GARIAN
(whispering)
Follow my lead, Princess.

Sir Garian lays a steady hand upon her shoulder as she clings to his armored leg.

CUT TO:

INT. KING'S GUEST BALCONY - DAY

Sir Garian and Sir Grayson step into the hall. Alice's fingers graze Garian's arm as he guides her forward.

At the head of the table, on a cushioned throne, sits King Salo, flanked by two Golden Spires.

The hall is crowded with Royal Knights in dulled silver armor. Sir Garian's brow twitches as he surveys them.

Seated at the table is **DUKE LEZVARS** (late 20s). He wears a long coat lined with wolf fur over dark blue and red robes.

One of his eyes is scarred and replaced with a crystal, almost mirroring the deep blue of his other eye. Black tattoos of sea monsters also trace his jawline and neck.

Next to him stand a few of his bodyguards: tall, barbaric beings holding long rapiers.

King Salo's gaze sweeps to Alice before he slams his goblet

upon the table, shattering it.

KING SALO
Is this how we greet our guests?
Speak, child!

Alice hides behind Sir Garian, her tears streaking her cheeks.

KING SALO
Enough folly! Sit, and comport
yourself!

Sir Garian gently compels her forward, drawing out her chair.

Duke Lezvars drinks from his goblet with gluttonous abandon, spilling mead upon his chin. Alice averts her gaze as she sits.

In the meantime, Sir Garian and Grayson stand in between the King and his daughter.

KING SALO
Dearest Duke, forgive my daughter's
impudence.

DUKE LEZVARS
In my lands, rebels are cherished.
Young maidens make useful bonds, and
we teach obedience in time.

Sir Garian tightens his grip on the hilt of his sword.

DUKE LEZVARS
(to Garian)
You bear scars, yet look far uglier
than I. How came this wound?

SIR GARIAN
(drily)
On the battlefield.

Duke Lezvars tears into a slab of wild boar, chewing with coarse, wet gulps.

DUKE LEZVARS
(mouth full, grating)
I heard you were the one who dragged
the Chancellor's wretches to justice.
A capable hand, then.

He snaps the bone clean and spits it across the table. Sir Grayson flinches; Sir Garian does not.

A fleck of the Duke's spittle lands upon Alice's cheek.

DUKE LEZVARS

But my men are stronger, swifter, and
seasoned in the ways of the sea,
unlike your Coastal Guard. Am I wrong,
Salo?

SIR GARIAN

Address our King by his title, or I
shall fashion you a new eye.

The barbarians draw their rapiers while the silver knights
unsheathe their swords. King Salo raises a hand.

KING SALO

Enough! Lay down your arms!

Duke Lezvars barks commands in a guttural tongue. His men
lower their weapons, though their breaths come heavy.

KING SALO

We meet to forge an alliance, and I
expect honor in this accord. I trust
you uphold your word, Duke.

Lezvars leans forward, removing a glove to gently wipe
Alice's wet cheeks. He subtly plants a perverse thumb in her
mouth.

DUKE LEZVARS

I'm a man of my word, dearest King.

Alice snaps, biting his finger.

DUKE LEZVARS

Argh!

KING SALO

Sir Garian! Take that insolent wretch
to her chambers at once!

SIR GARIAN

(pleading)
My lord...

KING SALO

I shall deal with her later!

SIR GARIAN
(defeated)
As you command, my lord.

Alice darts to the balcony's parapet and falls to her knees. Sir Garian follows her and kneels beside her.

Behind them the King and Duke's voices resume in low, bitter commerce; Garian keeps his ears fixed on their chatter.

KING SALO (O.S.)
I apologize for her insolence.

DUKE LEZVARS (O.S.)
So long as our accord holds, nothing
is personal.

Sir Garian lifts the diminutive princess with firm hands and carries her across the hall. Duke Lezvars meets the gaze of the Golden Spire, their eyes locked in silent challenge.

The King's chatter resumes over Sir Garian's footsteps heard across the hall.

KING SALO (O.S.)
The prisoners are yours, so long as
they draw breath.

DUKE LEZVARS (O.S.)
Aye, we shall see about that.

At the doors, two Silver Knights grasp the handles and swing them open, clearing a path for Sir Garian and the princess to pass through.

CUT TO:

INT. KINGDOM HALLS - DAY

Sir Garian sets the princess gently upon her feet as the great doors shut behind them.

SIR GARIAN
Are you harmed, my lady?

ALICE
(sobbing)
No... Please, do not let them take me.
Please, please... I shall not misbehave
again, I swear it...

Sir Garian gathers her into his arms, lifting her with care.

SIR GARIAN

Come now. You are safe with me.

Holding her close, Sir Garian quickens his pace down the corridor toward her chambers.

CUT TO:

INT. ALICE'S CHAMBER - DAY

When Sir Garian opens the door, Evandra is bent over the bed, smoothing fresh linens. She startles at the sight of Alice clinging to him, tear-streaked and trembling.

EVANDRA

(to Garian)

Is all well?

SIR GARIAN

Aye. Worry not.

EVANDRA

My dear... you're crying. Shall I tend to you?

ALICE

(sobbing)

Not now... later.

SIR GARIAN

Leave us, Evandra. Resume your duties when I call for you. If any inquire, say I dismissed you.

EVANDRA

As you command, Captain.

She bows low, brushes her fingers softly over Alice's cheek, and slips out.

Sir Garian lowers Alice onto the bed with a gentleness that contrasts the rigid steel of his gauntlets.

SIR GARIAN

Now tell me, Alice. What burst your composure so fiercely?

ALICE

The Duke... his manner was wrong.

SIR GARIAN

Wrong? How do you mean? Did his
crystal eye unsettle you?

ALICE

No... his conduct. He behaved with no
honor. He put his hand upon one of the
maidens... boldly... as though she were
his to claim.

SIR GARIAN

Before the King himself?

ALICE

Yes!

SIR GARIAN

Alice... speak truly.

ALICE

I am speaking truth! And there is
more! The Duke speaks of marriage. My
marriage! And Father means to send me
away across the sea! Please, Uncle
Garian... swear you will not let them
barter me away like a tribute. I don't
want to leave home... I don't want to go
near that man... Please, Uncle Garian...

Sir Garian rises slowly and turns his back.

GARIAN'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Please... do not... let him... go.

A twitch cuts across Garian's brow.

ALICE

Uncle Garian?

He blinks, returns to himself, and steps toward her.
Kneeling, he takes her wrist gently and sees faint burned
marks upon the skin.

SIR GARIAN

What happened to your wrists?

ALICE

Nothing...

SIR GARIAN

Alice. You can trust me.

ALICE

I do not want you telling Father!

SIR GARIAN

I shall not. You have my word.

ALICE

It was Father... When I refused to take the Duke's hand, he seized me, threw me to the ground, and kicked me.

She buries her face in her palms, tears spilling down her wrists and dripping onto her dress.

ALICE

(sobbing)

And I ran. I only wish I were a better daughter...

Sir Garian exhales a long, troubled breath and rests a steady hand upon her leg.

SIR GARIAN

Hush, child. None of this fault lies with you. You are young, and a far finer daughter than you believe. What you did at the table took courage. You defended yourself, and I hold you in high regard for it. But... you must trust your father despite his temper. He means well, even when his ways are harsh.

ALICE

He does not! He keeps me caged like a songbird. I cannot choose anything for myself. And now I am to be sent to that lecher!

SIR GARIAN

All will be well, Alice. My sword bleeds for King Salo... and for you.

ALICE

Swear you will protect me.

SIR GARIAN

Alice...

ALICE

Swear it!

Sir Garian draws a deep breath, then inclines his head.

SIR GARIAN

I swore an oath to your mother... and I
intend to keep it.

Alice throws her arms around him; Sir Garian gathers her with
care and presses a soft kiss to her brow.

SIR GARIAN

The guests will linger but a few days.
Do not torment yourself with fear.
Trust your father where you can... and
trust me where you cannot. I shall
keep watch over you. Aye, even as you
sleep.

ALICE

Thank you, Uncle Garian. This place is
shinier with you in it.

SIR GARIAN

And you as well, princess.

Sir Garian offers a gentle smile, then turns and departs.

CUT TO:

INT. KINGDOM HALLS - DAY

Sir Garian closes the chamber door behind him.

Two SILVER-ARMORED KNIGHTS stand positioned on either side,
spears in hand.

SIR GARIAN

May I help you two?

SILVER KNIGHT 1

Captain... the King has ordered us to
stand guard over the princess's
chambers.

SILVER KNIGHT 2

Aye, and His Majesty has departed for
the coast with our guests.

Sir Garian considers their words, then nods once.

SIR GARIAN

Very well. I'll send for a maiden.

Grant her passage when she arrives. If anyone seeks me, tell them I have gone to visit Hierarch Jacobs in the clerical quarters.

The knights exchange a brief look and bow their heads. Sir Garian takes his leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOTANICAL GARDEN - AFTERNOON

Sir Garian strides through the vast botanical gardens of King Salo's keep. Sunlight spills over marble fountains and trimmed hedges shaped like sacred beasts.

Young aristocrats clash with wooden swords beneath the trees, while ministers stroll along the paths in calm conversation, bowing respectfully to the Golden Spire as Sir Garian passes.

He notices TWO CLOAKED FIGURES near a waiting carriage. Their lower jaws bear the same blackened tattoos as Duke Lezvars.

SIR GARIAN (V.O.)

Hmm. What business have they here?
Best I see the old hierarch now rather than stir trouble.

As he approaches the Church—its golden and crimson architecture rising like a sanctified fortress—Garian's fingers flex along the hilt of his blade.

The cloaked figures turn their faces upward, watching the King's balcony in eerie silence.

Before Garian can shift his stance, he is met by FOUR GIANT ANGEL KNIGHTS—towering men of six and a half feet, clad in heavy red and onyx armor—accompanied by a young cleric, LUCIUS, robed in white.

LUCIUS

Brother Garian, what a blessing to see you standing hale before the holy doors of Saint Ramadumas. How may the Church be of service?

SIR GARIAN

I seek audience with Hierarch Jacobs.
A matter of fate troubles my thoughts.
May I visit him?

LUCIUS

He just finished giving a sermon.
Angel Benjamin will guide thee to his
sanctum.

SIR GARIAN

Thank you, Brother Lucius.

LUCIUS

May God bring you peace.

Sir Garian follows Angel Benjamin through the wooden doors of the church.

INT. ST. RAMADUMAS CHURCH - AFTERNOON

The church is lined with great murals portraying King Salo as the rising sun. Golden furnishings gleam in the candlelight, while relics taken from distant realms rest inside glass cases along the corridors.

As they walk, the choir's distant chant is the only sound except for the heavy pounding of Benjamin's armor. Garian studies the Angel's towering, beastlike presence.

After a while, they pass the school rooms. Garian meets the gaze of a student being punished. A wooden rod cracks across the boy's back. An unpleasant memory flickers inside Garian's mind. He turns his eyes away.

They then reach the upper stairs. At the landing, Benjamin steps aside and lowers his sword in solemn reverence.

ANGEL BENJAMIN

Good faith, Captain.

Sir Garian nods, approaches the sanctum's door, and knocks.

HIERARCH JACOBS (O.S.)

Come forth.

CUT TO:

INT. HIERARCH JACOBS'S SANCTUM - AFTERNOON

The wooden door groans as Sir Garian pushes it open. Candlelight trembles across the stone walls, three flames flickering atop an iron stand on the desk.

The Hierarch sits alone, hunched slightly over a plate of glistening, blood-red meat. He cuts into it with slow,

deliberate motions, savoring every bite. A goblet of mead rests near his hand.

A massive ruby pendant hangs from his neck, heavy enough to press into the ornate red-and-violet folds of his robes.

HIERARCH JACOBS

Brother Garian... I cannot recall the last time your boots graced these stones. Time cages us, does it not?

SIR GARIAN

Hmm. We are not the innocents we once were, Hierarch.

Jacobs gives a low, amused breath.

HIERARCH JACOBS

What brings you here?

SIR GARIAN

(sarcastic)

Our lovely visitors.

Jacobs wipes his mouth with two fingers, studying Garian with a slow lift of the brow.

HIERARCH JACOBS

Ah. I hear the venom in that. Word reached me of the quarrel between the princess and His Majesty on the balcony. Is that what sits so sharply on your mind?

SIR GARIAN

Not in full. I overheard murmurs of a second bargain between our King and the Duke. Something concerning Invictus and the other captives in the catacombs.

Sir Garian lowers his voice.

SIR GARIAN (CONT)

It seems that the Duke intends to claim them for his own use. His intentions are foul, and no honorable pact should allow such things. That alone breaks Javar's law.

HIERARCH JACOBS

Your concern is understood, Sir Garian. Yet I'm certain the Reapers who guard the catacombs are disciplined in their duty. I do not believe corruption runs among them. Nor do I believe His Majesty would set aside his own rule simply to placate the Duke.

SIR GARIAN

But he already yields. Alice was shamed in full view of the court. And the Duke laid his hand upon a maiden as though she were a thing to be handled, with the King standing by, unmoved, or so the girl claims.

Sir Garian steps closer.

SIR GARIAN (CONT)

If the court itself is silent before such an insult, what assurance do we have that the Reapers will hold to their vows? What tells us they will not bow to the Duke and bring harm upon those who once fought beside us?

Jacobs slams his fist upon the table. The candles quiver. Sir Garian lowers his head in shame.

HIERARCH JACOBS

They are not our allies. Have you come to mock your own upbringing?

SIR GARIAN

I meant no insult to you, nor to the sacrifices of this church, Hierarch.

HIERARCH JACOBS

Then hold fast to the discipline you were taught. Do not let your mask slip, Captain. You serve the Crown. You serve the Faith. And above all, you serve order. If your heart stirs too fiercely, it will betray you before your enemies ever do.

Jacobs takes a slow sip from his goblet. He then sets the cup aside and rises.

HIERARCH JACOBS

I have a presentiment. Come, Brother Garian.

Sir Garian straightens, his hand resting near the hilt of his sword as he follows.

They step out of the sanctum, the wooden door closing behind them with another tired groan.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. RAMADUMAS CHURCH - AFTERNOON

Angel Benjamin stands guard before the chamber.

HIERARCH JACOBS

Come, Brother Benjamin. We shall visit the catacombs with Sir Garian.

ANGEL BENJAMIN

As you command, Hierarch.

They begin their descent. The stone steps wind downward, lit only by narrow slits of afternoon light. Along the right-hand corridor stands a golden statue of Queen Evangelia, her visage serene, her hands lifted in benediction.

Sir Garian slows his pace, drawn to her likeness. The Hierarch halts beside him.

HIERARCH JACOBS

A gem through flesh and soul. Peace be upon her.

Jacobs resumes his pace as they continue down the corridor.

They turn down a narrow passageway as they approach a heavy iron gate engraved with runes of warding.

Benjamin strikes the pommel of his sword against the gate. From the shadows beyond, a figure appears.

A REAPER, clad in blackened armor and a hood of chainmail, steps forward.

REAPER

State your purpose.

Jacobs lifts a hand.

HIERARCH JACOBS
Open the gate. We seek the lower
bounds. By order of the King himself.

Sir Garian's brow tightens. The Hierarch avoids his gaze as the Reaper hesitates before the gate.

The door shudders open, releasing the cold breath of the catacombs.

They enter the catacombs, swallowed by shadow.

CUT TO:

INT. CATACOMB STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

The stairs spiral downward as torches flare against carved walls marked with names long forgotten.

Far below, a distant scream carries faintly through the stones.

ANGEL BENJAMIN
Was that one of the prisoners?

Another muffled scream erupts from the dark.

SIR GARIAN
That is no ordinary complaint.

HIERARCH JACOBS
Brother Benjamin, lead the way.

They descend further into the catacombs.

Narrow corridors open into wider chambers, some barred with iron grates.

Sir Garian observes the Reapers carefully. Their eyes flick to one another.

Sir Garian then steps closer to the first barred chamber. His eyes sweep the prisoners. Most huddle quietly, their faces pale. But someone in the background catches his attention.

SIR GARIAN
Look here.

Jacobs leans forward. Candlelight from above flickers across Invictus's bruised and scarred skin.

HIERARCH JACOBS

By the saints... some of them have already been punished. This was not sanctioned.

ANGEL BENJAMIN

The Reapers would never...

HIERARCH JACOBS

Normally, no. They are an autonomous force, bound to law and duty. Perhaps, you were right, Sir Garian.

He fixes his gaze on one of the black-armored Reapers.

HIERARCH JACOBS

Explain these wounds.

REAPER

He was punished for his behavior. He must rot beneath the bars. The King and Duke approved it.

HIERARCH JACOBS

It is forbidden by the Church to inflict such harm on a prisoner, let alone the Chancellor, who has served faithfully!

REAPER

Tell that to the King and our new ally.

A PRISONER lunges forward, reaching through the bars. One of the Reapers swats at his fingers. The man cries out in pain.

Sir Garian shoves the Reaper aside.

The prisoner straightens, gathering what strength he has left. His eyes lock on the knight's scar.

PRISONER

That scar... You are the son of Alfred. He has searched for you. Why do you serve this tyrant? Where is your honor?

SIR GARIAN

(hesitating)

Wh-What... How...

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS (O.S.)
He is... but a mere slave...

At once, the other prisoners press against the bars begging for mercy.

Jacobs steadies Garian, guiding him away from the frenzy. The Reapers step back, uncertain.

HIERARCH JACOBS
We shall take our leave. Do not strike these men again, or your souls shall answer in hell.

REAPER
Then return to your clerical chambers and leave us to resume our duty.

Benjamin steps forward, towering over the Reaper. The man swallows, shrinking back a pace. With slow, heavy steps, Benjamin joins Garian and Jacobs as they ascend the stairs.

Sir Garian's breath grows tight in his chest.

HIERARCH JACOBS
What troubles you, my son?

SIR GARIAN
What we do to these men is wrong. They plotted treason, yes—but even traitors deserve mercy. As you once gave me.

HIERARCH JACOBS
And what of the King's wishes?

SIR GARIAN
I shall uphold them... until the moment I judge his treatment unjust.

HIERARCH JACOBS
Would that not make you an enemy of the Crown?

Sir Garian halts.

SIR GARIAN
Careful, Hierarch. I owe you my life, and I strive to remain an honorable man. But do not think I would waver should you conspire against my name.

HIERARCH JACOBS
Should I be concerned?

Benjamin's hand moves toward his sword.

SIR GARIAN
Only if you wish my blade to bear your
stain. The same applies to your Angel.

Jacobs laughs softly, almost fondly. Benjamin drops his
guard.

HIERARCH JACOBS
Ever fierce, Sir Garian. I trust the
prisoner has not shaken your
composure, nor the Chancellor
disturbed your mind with his bold
words. As a Golden Spire, you are no
one's slave. Freedom is still your
breath.

Jacobs and Benjamin pass by Sir Garian.

HIERARCH JACOBS
It was good seeing you, Brother
Garian. May your path be guided by
justice, and your endeavors prosper
under the watch of the Almighty.

SIR GARIAN
What about the Reapers?

HIERARCH JACOBS
Hmm. Leave the matter to me.

Jacobs and Benjamin depart the catacombs as their footsteps
echo in the shadowed corridors.

A sudden scream cuts through the silence. Sir Garian glances
back, torn between duty and mercy. Yet he steels himself,
turning away and leaving the catacombs behind.

CUT TO:

INT. SIR GARIAN'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Sir Garian lies on his bed, listening to the muffled sounds
of Evandra and Sir Grayson, their passionate cries entwined
with the distant rumble of thunder beyond the walls.

He rises and moves toward the mirror, studying the scar

etched across his face. Shadows ripple across his reflection as lightning strikes outside.

CHANCELLOR INVICTUS (V.O.)
He is... but a mere slave...

PRISONER (V.O.)
That scar... You are the son of Alfred.
He has searched for you.

GARIAN'S MOTHER (V.O.)
Do not let them take my son!

Sir Garian presses his hands to his face, struggling to silence the voices that haunt him.

QUEEN EVANGELIA (V.O.)
Garian, my dearest.

He stares back at the mirror.

CUT TO:

INT. QUEEN'S CHAMBERS - AFTERNOON

INSERT OF FLASHBACK

Sir Garian's POV: QUEEN EVANGELIA (30s, brunette) cradles Alice, a small child of two, in her arms.

QUEEN EVANGELIA
Alice, greet your older brother and protector.

Alice beams, a warm, innocent smile at Garian.

QUEEN EVANGELIA
She's beautiful, is she not?

YOUNG SIR GARIAN
Like yourself, dearest Queen.

Tears gather in the Queen's eyes, glistening as they threaten to fall.

QUEEN EVANGELIA
I beg of you, dear Garian. Should misfortune befall me or the King, guard our Alice with all your heart.

YOUNG SIR GARIAN
You have my word, my Queen...

A soft, bittersweet smile touches the Queen's lips as Garian's vision blurs.

END OF FLASHBACKS

CUT TO:

INT. ALICE'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Alice sleeps restlessly, her breaths shallow and uneven as though some distant fear tugs at her dreams.

Then the sound of heavy boots follow. The hinges quiver as the footsteps halt just beyond.

The latch clicks.

The door drifts open, letting in a sliver of torchlight. TWO CLOAKED INDIVIDUALS step into the room, their silhouettes tall and imposing against the darkness. They cross the chamber without speaking, their blue armor shifting quietly with each step.

Alice's eyes flutter open just as a gloved hand covers her mouth. She gasps against the grip while the second guard gathers her up from the bed, lifting her as though she weighs nothing. Her blankets slip away and settle on the cold floor.

She twists once, softly, helplessly. The guards carry her out into the hallway, the door closing behind them with a muted thud.

CUT TO: