

The Rift - Fjörir

As Orrowyn walked through the camp he remembered how warm the Nordic lands used to be. That was over 75 years ago, and much has changed since then. Harald had his men constructing *cheval de frise* to surround the city it seemed. They wouldn't do much good against the woodland elves Akhal-Teke, but it would slow down the humans. *I'll need to have Sharik and Ezadel reinforce those barriers with some magic, just to hold off as many men as possible.*

“Excuse me, sir. The King would like to see you.” Orrowyn turned and spotted a very young man, maybe 17 years of age. Not an ounce of muscle on his body or a scar that told a tale. *Must be Haralds new squire*, Orrowyn thought to himself.

“Where shall I be heading young one?”

“Through those tents ahead. Then make a right and walk until you reach the stairs. Go up and follow the parapet around to the castle. Harald should be out front waiting for you.”

The man turned and walked away without another word. *Haralds men follow his orders to a fault. I wonder if he is that much of a leader or if they're all just scared for their lives.* He was stopped twice more by Harald's men while on his way to the castle. The first group of guards were curious as to what business he had at the castle. He told them the king had sent for him and they reluctantly let him through. The second time, however, he was stopped by an older man. He was well past his day but was still eager to fight for his king. He also knew of Orrowyn and his past.

“Me mum use ta tell me stories of ya when I was a child. The Great Orrowyn, master mage and slayer of evil. She also told me ya had a spell that kept ya young, and invincible too. What say ya cast it on me so I don't die fighting in this battle to come?”

Orrowyn chortled at the question. “Clearly your mother was mistaken, can't you see how old I look now? Tell me sir, what's your name?”

“Charles, but the men 'round here call me Gaffer since I'm the oldest in the camp.”

“Well Charles, if I had that spell I would gladly cast it on you. You’re the only man in this camp who has treated me with respect since I’ve arrived.”

“Oh don’t take that personal, sir. Most of the men here just don’t know who ya are. Once they see what y’are capable of they’ll give you that respect ya seek.”

“Haha whatever you say, Charles. Thank you for the conversation. I’ll be seeing you again soon I’m sure.” The man nodded as Orrowyn began for the castle again. After another minute or so he could finally see it. A hulking stone beast that was originally hid behind towers and barracks for the king’s higher tiered soldiers. As he passed through the gate and neared the courtyard a few hundred yards away, Orrowyn could already hear Harald’s booming voice over the clanging of swords.

“NO. No, no, no, wrong, no! You all will get killed fighting like that. You must be quicker on your feet. The woodland elves will run through you all if you don’t. They fight with a subtle grace that is dangerous because you cannot always tell what they are going to do. They will not fight like the humans. Johan, come here and spar with me. I’ll show you how the elves will fight.”

Harald grabbed one of his men and pulled him to the center of the crowd of soldiers. The man looked absolutely terrified to be fighting against his king. Orrowyn stopped where he was to watch the two spar, as he didn’t want Harald to know he was here just yet. Harald slowly circled the man before starting his attack. The man put his sword up to block the attack but Harald side stepped with ease before slamming his sword into the man’s ribs. He fell to a knee and Harald proceeded to smack the flat of his blade against the man’s skull.

“One of you come join Johan, I’m in need of a real challenge.” Two men stepped forward at once. They looked at each other and as the second went to turn away Harald began laughing. “Hahahaha. Both of you, attack!”

They looked at one another again before they slowly walked to opposite sides of Harald. Johan was still rattled, but he stood and joined the other two. They all charged at once, yet not one of them landed their blow. Harald ducked under the first swing as he swept his leg around to knock Johan’s feet out from under him. The third man thought he had Harald. As he brought his sword down past Harald and into the dirt, Harald had dropped down and spun on his left knee to end up behind the man. He stood and kicked

the man in the back of the knee before he even had a chance to turn towards Harald. All three men writhed in pain on the ground before their fellow soldiers.

“Do you see now? You must take this seriously! I am quick, but the woodland elves will be quicker. Start worrying about avoiding attacks rather than being the first to strike. Patience is key when fighting an elf, you must wait for the most opportune moment to strike.” Harald sheathed his sword and turned to say something else to his men, but that was when he noticed Orrowyn standing in the distance.

“Orrowyn, how nice of you to finally show yourself. Walk with me, we need to discuss our plan of attack against Daealla and Abel.”

Orrowyn began walking through the crowd of men towards Harald. As he neared the king, the two continued through the crowd and into the street behind them. They walked together for a few hundred yards before Harald began talking again.

“My scouts have told me that Abel and Daealla have begun their march towards us. It will only take them two, maybe three, fortnights to make it to the pass. I’d expect the woodland elves to travel on the high roads above the pass and Abel’s men to stay down low, just to avoid an ambush from above. What say you so far?”

“I’d agree. There is no way they haven’t thought through every detail of this trek across Delahden. I highly doubt we will be able to surprise them, unless we attack from behind.” Orrowyn answered.

“And how in fuck’s sake would we get behind them mage?” Harald clearly thought Orrowyn was not taking this conversation seriously.

“My men can create portals for us. The problem is they don’t last very long and are incredibly obvious to those who know how to look for them.”

“So Daealla and her elves? You want us to give our location away before we even ambush them. I thought you were smarter than that Orrowyn. Plus you will not find a damned man in my army who’d be willing to travel through one of your portals. They have nothing against magic, but they will never use it themselves.”

“You’re a great leader Harald, convince them. We would only need about 1,000 soldiers to go along with myself and my men. That would be what, roughly five percent of your army? We would travel back to a place two days behind where your scouts have last seen our enemies armies. That should be more than enough for Daealla to not notice the portals. Your thousand men should be more than enough to intimidate the rear guard. Once the army is facing two directions, you encircle them with your riders and have the brunt of the force attack head on.”

“I don’t like it. Not one bit. I told you already, my men won’t go through your portals. It may be a solid plan, but I won’t do it.” Harald bit back.

“Well what would you have us do then, Harald? Simply sit and wait and let their army lay siege upon your city?”

“DO NOT insult my intelligence Orrowyn. You damn mages always think that you’re better than us all. Of course I don’t simply want them to attack the city... But I do want them to think that’s their best option. I will send a scouting party of a few hundred to attack their forces and scare them. Make them think it’s an ambush and catch them off guard. Hopefully that will rattle their plans and they will be stupid enough to attack the city. Then you and your mages can teleport behind them and do as you please. My men will be able to hold the city without you. Now leave me, I have men to train.”

Orrowyn stopped and stared at the king in disbelief. *He has already gone mad. Drunk of the little power he thinks he has. We will lose so many men with a plan this ignorant and half-witted. I must find a way to convince him of this folly.* “Of course, Harald.” Orrowyn turned to leave, but Harald stopped him one last time.

“Oh, and Orrowyn... henceforth you will refer to me as king. Be sure to let your men know as well.”