

KILL SHAKESPEARE

*What **Fables** does for fairy tales, **Kill Shakespeare** does with the greatest writer of all time.*

This dark take on the Bard pits his greatest heroes (Hamlet, Juliet, Othello, Falstaff) against his most menacing villains (Richard III, Lady Macbeth, Iago) in an epic adventure to find and kill a reclusive wizard named William Shakespeare.

"A fantastic concept, cleverly executed with style and smarts. Lots of cool Easter Eggs for the literary-minded, but still plenty entertaining for the rest of us dummies!"
—John Layman (Writer of *Chew* and former literature major)

"Bravo! *Kill Shakespeare* is a tale woven with the wit, magic and myth, worthy of Will himself."
—Des McNuff (Artistic Director, The Stratford Shakespeare Festival)

"*Kill Shakespeare* is full of dark laughs, shocking alliances, bad puns and wild violence. Like the best of Shakespeare himself..."
—Patton Oswalt (Comedian, Writer of *Serenity*, Star of *Ratatouille* and *King of Queens*)

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1 KILL SHAKESPEARE: A SEA OF TROUBLES

MCCREERY • DEL COL • BELANGER

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McCreery Del Col Belanger

KILL SHAKESPEARE



"*Kill Shakespeare* builds on the type of literary-comics hybrid that has made titles like *Fables* and *The Unwritten* so engrossing."
— Scott Thill, *Wired.com*

"Stories within stories about stories... it's easy to get that recipe wrong, but McCreery and Del Col get it gloriously right. And it was about time someone went after Bill."

—Mike Carey
(Creator of *The Unwritten* and *Lucifer*)

"What I do want is writers who know how to dream and artists who brush with their souls. To that end, *Kill Shakespeare* is a smashing success."

—Ain't It Cool News

"*Kill Shakespeare* is great fun. Fantastic graphics, energy and artwork and a novel and exciting take on killer Shakespearean themes."

—Michael Hirst
(Writer and Creator of *The Tudors*, Writer of *Elizabeth*)

"*Kill Shakespeare* is a comic book that crosses worlds and genres and happens to star a who's who of Shakespearean characters. It's an idea so crazy and awesome that I have to ask, why hasn't someone thought of this before?"

—WatchPlayRead

"Having suffered a few slings and arrows in my time, I was captivated by Hamlet's mystical quest. Brilliant conceit and beautifully illustrated, especially Lady Macbeth."

—Paul Gross (Star of TV's *Slings & Arrows*)

"You can mark this one in the genius column... The creative team behind *Kill Shakespeare* have crafted an ingenious story out of an insane concept that celebrates all there is to love about Shakespeare while simultaneously thumbing its nose at it."

—Weekly Crisis

"Dynamic art, break-neck pacing, and clever use of the Bard's own words make this series fun and educational."

—Kate Dacey, *Good Comics for Kids*

"Fresh and conceptually inventive... Easily one of the more exciting new projects bouncing around."

—Calvin Reid, *Publisher's Weekly*

CREATOR BIOS

ANTHONY DEL COL (CO-CREATOR / CO-WRITER)

Anthony has worked in the music, film and television industries, produced two independent feature films, and most recently assisted with the management of international pop star Nelly Furtado and her world tour.

CONOR MCCREERY (CO-CREATOR / CO-WRITER)

Conor has served in both creative and business positions for film and television companies, contributed over 1,000 stories and articles for media outlets, and also provided expert analysis for Canada's Business News Network.

ANDY B. (ARTIST)

Andy works out of the Toronto-based Royal Academy of Illustration & Design and has done work for publishers D.C. Wildstorm, Devil's Due, and Boom! He is the creator of Zuda Comics' *Bottle of Awesome*.

IAN HERRING (COLORIST)

Ian is a recent graduate of the illustration program at Canada's Sheridan College. He fell into coloring when interning with Andy B. and Ramon Perez at the Royal Academy of Illustration & Design, and has worked on *Bottle of Awesome* and *Raising Hell*.

KAGAN MCLEOD (COVER ARTIST)

A graduate of Sheridan College's illustration program, Kagan has worked for magazines, newspapers, and design firms around the world, including Canada's *National Post* newspaper, *Glamour*, *Wired*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *GQ*, *Newsweek*, and *Mad*. His martial arts graphic novel, *Infinite Kung Fu*, is scheduled for release in 2011 with Top Shelf.

KILL SHAKESPEARE

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Foreword by Darwyn Cooke

I suppose we'll start this with my rather sketchy credentials: There is no love lost between myself and the Bard in question. As a matter of fact, in high school if someone had yelled "Kill Shakespeare" I'd have zealously seconded. My memories of high school Shakespeare are not unlike my memories of French language class: vague and irritating, like there was a different word for everything. Three pages into that muckety-muck and I'd gloss over and reach for a Ross MacDonald novel or a Detective Comic. Class discussion often amounted to the teacher reading the play a line at a time with a crushingly thorough translation of each word and phrase and cunning inference. For my story-starved teenage brain it was like being beaten to death with a dictionary in slow motion. My inability to fall into the old man's pentameters and rhythms kept me from enjoying his work on any level other than plot construction and basic character interplay.

That being said, here we are.

So let's look at this shiny new collection and see if we can figure out how these guys kept me from glossing over and reaching for the aforementioned MacDonald novel.

Comic creator and pundit Frank Santoro is a wise and passionate advocate of comics. He recently wrote:

The market can now support multiple perspectives. It is not a monolithic community. There is no official definition of Comics now. It's too big. Finally 'comics' doesn't just mean American mainstream super-hero action adventure stories. (Well, comics never meant just that genre, but y'know what I'm saying: Marvel and DC have lorded over the form for almost 50 years.) In 2009 you can walk into a comics store like Copacetic Comics in Pittsburgh and see no superhero comics on display at all. There are enough "alternative" or "literary" comics/graphic novels out in the world to fill a whole (small) store. And there are "alternative" publishers who don't use (or are shut out from) the Direct Market and who use book trade distributors to get the work out to stores.

So we got what you might call a bifurcated market. The two traditions, once folded together in the same market, have split. There are two sandboxes now. What that means is that if you grew up reading comics from, say, 1999 to now you didn't necessarily have to read superhero comics to get your comics fix or even go to a store that sold both. This is a good thing. It's a new audience, and a broader one than maybe any of us old school dinosaurs could have anticipated.

I couldn't agree more with Santoro's assessment. With such a broad area of opportunity available, is it possible to create entertaining comics that will attract an audience outside the superhero and artcomix demos? The more immediate question is: will it sell well enough to feed and clothe you? With a market this large and undefined, how can you be sure you're not going to fade into the sea of work on the shelves? I sense that this was top of mind for Anthony and Conor when they built this project, much as it was on my mind when I began looking at my first book outside the big two. The answer is, if you're worried that no one at the party will recognize you, bring a famous friend along. For myself, that was an amoral thief named Parker and his Grand Master, Donald Westlake. These guys... well, let's just say they started at the top.

The title alone is a work of genius. *Kill Shakespeare*. I could spend a lifetime in a climate-controlled room full of monkeys with a monolithic story title matrix running 24-7 and it would never produce a better, more provocative title.

Then we have a premise that lives up to the title. All of Shakespeare's "creations" live in a kingdom ruled by their deity: the Bard himself. The good and evil forces within this kingdom are in a race to possess the Bard's mythical quill—the source of all power and life.

Here is the point in most independent projects where after a promising launch and another spotty issue or two everything fades away. To mount a project of this size, you need more than a catchy title and an evocative premise to drive your passion to create. You need to be entrepreneur as well as artist. You need the vision and

foresight to construct a solid long-term plan and then find a way to finance that plan through to its conclusion. Do you hear that? *Really* hear that? Because it's a lot tougher than it sounds. Weeks and perhaps months of shaping your premise into an entertaining story that lasts 12 issues. Endless rounds of potentially humiliating meetings with potentially helpful investors, using your charm and passion to convince them to put their money where your mouth is. The horrifying work of attracting and auditing a publisher that you trust to give your efforts the best leg up in the market. Then there's the actual creation of the work, the damned endless stream of pages needed to fuel serial fiction of a periodic nature. Once you're actually in the shit, say, working on issue four or five, you're juggling three issues through various stages of creation/production, you're coordinating with your publisher, editor, and printer, you're tracking sales and evaluating what's working and what isn't, you're doing all the press you can. Signings. Misprints. Paying people in a timely fashion.

If the above paragraph was an old EC Horror comic, the shock ending would be "And now, do it all in your spare time because you need to stay at your day job if you want to keep yourself in Ramen and cut-rate California wine! Ha ha ha ha!"

What I'm saying is it takes gigantic, Vegas-sized gambler balls and a work ethic to match to pour this kind of effort into something with no guaranteed outcome. So before I even opened the first issue, they had my professional admiration.

From a storytelling standpoint, I was impressed. Deft handling of dozens of known characters and a quest-driven plot that keeps the story rolling forward. Classically retarded individuals such as myself with only a passing knowledge of these characters are given everything we need to enjoy the story without having to read dense thickets of expository narrative. For example, I remembered that Othello had a "brother," but not his name or personality. In *KS* this all comes out organically, through dialogue and action. I never feel I need to research to enjoy the current chapter. Visually, Belanger has had the sense to commit an ocean of time to design so the reader is immersed in a convincing "world" where these characters live and breathe. There's no cheating on backgrounds here or vague scumbling—I have no idea if the details are authentic but they're executed with a clarity and confidence that convinces.

My only problem with *KS* is that I always thought Hamlet was a bit of an emo douche. Am I right? He's like the hole in the donut of life. Always whining. I suspect that the boys have a long-term character arc that will make a man out of him.

So my hat is off to these young men.* They're pragmatic enough to create something with obvious market potential and universal recognition and passionate enough to actually follow through and produce quality work.

Imagine fifty such tight creative teams at work today. That is where the mass market will "discover" us. Again. It probably won't even be in print form. It certainly won't be through four-dollar "super-jock" floppies or artfully crafted lit-comics. It will come through entertainment with broad appeal and creative execution.

Darwyn Cooke
2010
Just East of Burnham Wood

"I'd like to note that my hat is also off to me for sparing you, dear reader, the obvious comparisons to the LOEG template and for not using an actual quote from Shakespeare during this entire introduction. Y'know, something horrible like, "Read on, MacDuff!"

Darwyn Cooke is an Eisner and Harvey Award-winning comics creator whose major works include DC: The New Frontier, Selina's Big Score, The Spirit, and adaptations of Richard Stark's Parker novels, including The Hunter and The Outfit.

WE CAN NO OTHER ANSWER MAKE BUT THANKS, AND THANKS...

What an incredible journey this has been thus far... We have so many supporting players we wish to credit in this adventure...

Owen and Elizabeth McCreery, Brian McCreery, Anna Del Col, Jim and Marianne Del Col, Jennifer Heath, Crystal Luxmore, Trina Mendoza, Mom and Pop Belanger, The Belanger Brothers, Vanessa King, Anthony Iantomio, Jeremy Boxen, Sir Tom Stoppard, Arvid Nelson, Dave Elliott, Becka Kinzie, Arwen Savage, Darwyn Cooke, J. Bone, Ty Templeton, Ramon Perez, Kalman Andrasofszky, Scott Hepburn, Willow Dawson, Cameron Stewart, Stuart and Kathryn Immonen, Mike Cho, Kwanza Johnson, Ben Abernathy, Ron Perazza, Kody Peters, George Zotti, Chris Butcher, Doug Simpson, Kevin Boyd, Gina Gagliano, Martha Comog, Simon Dimuantas, Kuo-Yu Liang, Calvin Reid, Rich Johnston, Mark Askwith, Sarah Hashem, CYBF, Josh Howard, Chris Smith, Sharon Fleming, Ted Fleming, Frank Galea, Andrew Apangu, Al Bugeja, Rob Chiasson, Steve Lawlor, Sarah Stevens, Debby de Groot, Lonnie McCullough, Dan Smith, Jason Chan, Spencer Rysdale, Tony Kramreither, Michael Ball, Danielle Restivo, Marla Boltman, Jethro Bushenbaum, Clement Wan, Samir Jain.

Every single person at IDW and Diamond — they have been a pleasure to work with — but especially Chris Mowry for all his hard work.

Every writer, blogger, podcaster, reader, and fan who has talked to us — or others — about our series.

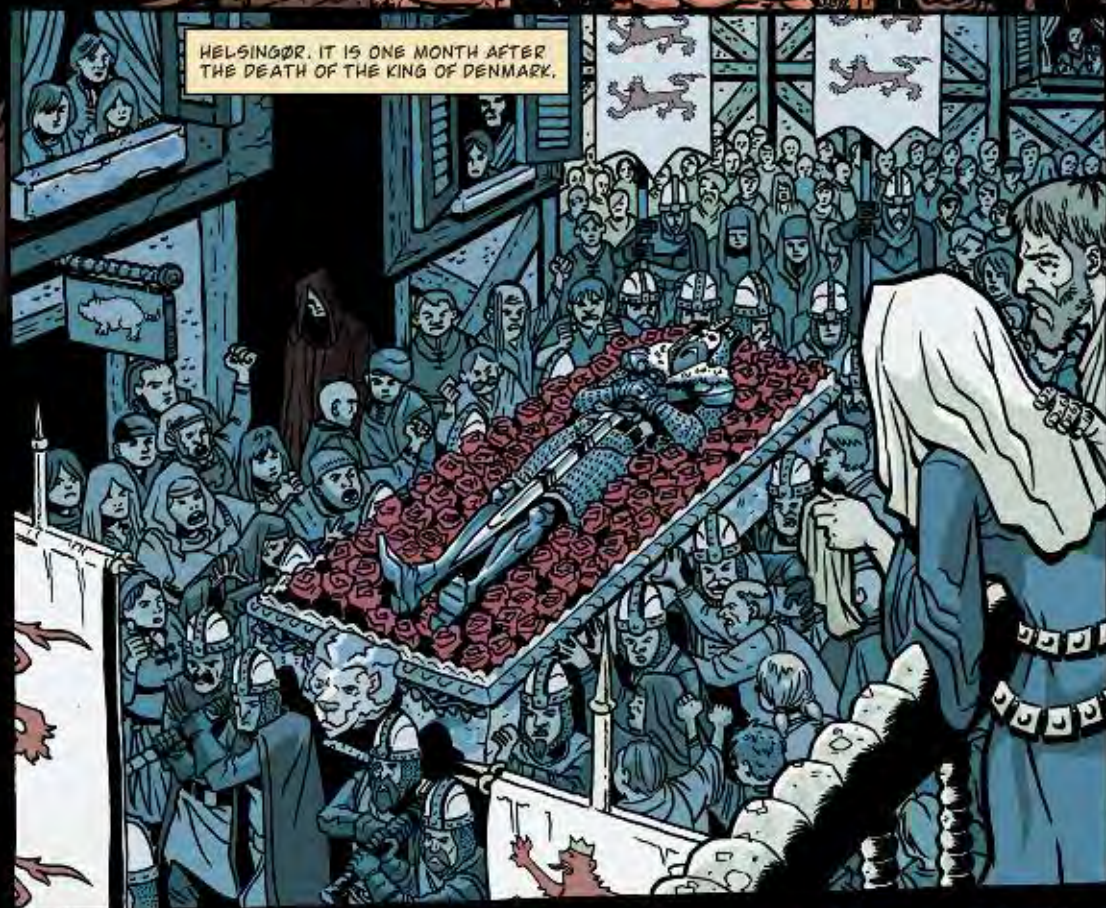
And, of course, the big man himself... William Shakespeare (or Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, or Edward De Vere...)!



THE FUTURE.

"ARISE, SHADOW KING..."

...YOU
BELONG TO
ME NOW.





IT IS ONE WEEK SINCE THE KING'S SON, HAMLET, KILLED THE NOBLEMAN POLONIUS IN A MISTAKEN ATTEMPT TO REVENGE HIS FATHER.



HOW NOW?
A RAT? DEAD,
FOR A DUCAT,
DEAD!

URGK!

I AM
SLAIN!

O, WHAT
HAVE YOU
DONE?



POLONIUS...
YOU WRETCHED FOOL...
I THOUGHT YOU WERE
YOUR BETTER. THE
KING... MY UNCLE...
I THOUGHT...

OH, WHAT A
RASH AND BLOODY
DEED! MURDERER!
MURDERER!

IT IS ONE WEEK SINCE HAMLET'S MOTHER GERTRUDE FORSOOK HER SON.



IT IS THREE DAYS SINCE THE PRINCE ADMITTED TO HIS CRIME AND RETURNED THE BODY TO POLONIUS'S FAMILY.



CLAUDIUS HAS DECREED THAT NONE SHALL HARM HAMLET. BUT THE NEW KING HAS BANISHED HIS NEPHEW FROM DENMARK; HAMLET IS NEVER TO RETURN ON PAIN OF DEATH.



HAMLET'S SHIP, THE ANTONIO, WAITS TO TAKE THE PRINCE TO ENGLAND.



LORD HAMLET, WE MUST GO. SOON IT WILL BE TOO DARK FOR THE ANTONIO TO CAST HER LINES.

SHUSH. LET THE PRINCE MAKE HIS FINAL PEACE.



GOODBYE, FATHER.



NAH, ROSENCRANTZ. GUILDENSTERN IS RIGHT...



...AND I AM AS SHOCKED AS YOU.



RRRR GRRRR





HAMLET.



FATHER?



FATHER? IS THAT YOU? DO YOU AGAIN APPEAR BEFORE ME, NOT AS FLESH BUT AS SPIRIT?


HAMLET... SON OF HAMLET...




...COME TO ME.

BLOOD OF ROYAL BLOOD. NOBLE BLOOD WHO SPILLS NOBLE BLOOD.






YOU WERE NOT
THERE, FATHER.
YOU DO NOT
KNOW...



INDEED I DO,
HAMLET, SON OF
HAMLET. AND I KNOW
THOU CANST BE A KING
IF THOU ARE WILLING.
SIMPLY SLIP THE BLADE
BETWIXT CLAUDIUS'S
SHOULDERS...

WHO
ARE YOU?
HOW DARE YOU
SPEAK TO ME OF
MURDER? I AM
NO KILLER.



ARE YOU
NOT?

ARE YOU
SO SURE OF
THAT?



HEHAHAH
HEHAH!



I AM NO
KILLER!




I AM NO
KILLER!



M'LORD.
KEEP YOUR
PEACE, I BEG
OF YOU.

WHO DO YOU
SHOUT AT,
HAMLET?




I DO NOT
KNOW...

...I DO NOT
KNOW.



...IF YOU CHOSE
TO SAIL BACK WITH
SWORD NOW AND
CAST DOWN YOUR
UNCLE...





I KNOW, ROSENCRANTZ.
I COUNT YOU BOTH AS DEAR
FRIENDS, READY TO SUPPORT
ME IN ANY FOLLY I MAY
SUGGEST. I KNOW YOU WILL
NEVER FORSAKE ME—NOT
FOR GOLD NOR PROMISES
OF POWER.

BUT THERE
IS ENOUGH
BLOOD ON MY
HANDS.

IT WAS BUT AN
ACCIDENT. A CASE
OF MISTAKEN
IDENTITY.

PERHAPS,
BUT POLONIUS
IS JUST AS
DEAD BECAUSE
OF IT.

YOU CAN STILL TAKE
BACK HELSINGØR, LORD.
THE PEOPLE WOULD
FORGIVE YOU. YOU ARE
THE RIGHTFUL HEIR.

RETURN WITH
ARMS AND PAINT
MY BLOODY HANDS
REDDER...

...OR MUCH
OFFEND MY FATHER
AND FORGET HIS
MURDER?

HOW AM I
SUPPOSED TO
KNOW WHICH
CHOICE IS
RIGHT?

HAMLET, I MUST
CONFESS SOMETHING
TO YOU. THERE ARE
MANY WHO WISH NEVER TO
SEE YOUR RETURN FROM
ENGLAND. THEY FEAR
YOU SHALL INDEED
RAISE AN ARMY.

THIS LETTER WAS TO BE YOUR DOOM. IT GIVES INSTRUCTION TO THE KING OF ENGLAND TO KILL THEE WITHOUT HASTE OR DELIBERATION.

I SEE. A KING'S RANSOM FOR THE DEATH OF A KING'S SON.

AYE. CLAUDIUS BADE GUILDENSTERN AND I TO GIVE THIS TO HIS MAJESTY 'PON OUR ARRIVAL.

AND SHALL YOU?

NO. YOU ARE OUR FRIEND, HAMLET, NOW AND FOREVER-MORE—

"—AND THAT IS HOW ONE MAKES A DIFFICULT CHOICE, HAMLET..."

"...ONE LETS GO."



"FATHER..."



...FATHER.



HAVE MERCY
UPON YOUR
SON.



"FATHER..."



"...FORGIVE ME."







FOLLOW ME.
FOLLOW ME TO
THY DESTINY,
SHADOW
KING.

THOU ART THE
ONE WHO SHALL
PASS INTO THE
FORBIDDEN PLACE.
THOU ART THE ONE
WHO SHALL TREAD
UPON THE GLOBE'S
FLOOR.



WHAT
MANNER OF
DEVIL HAUNTS
ME?

YE SHALL
KNOW THAT
SOON
ENOUGH.

SOON
ENOUGH!



HAHAHA
HAHAHA!

CRACKKKKK

TO ARMS!
TO ARMS!
PIRATES!



















SIR, ARE YOU THE
PIRATE CHIEFTAIN?
AM I THEN YOUR
CAPTIVE?

HA!
I APOLOGIZE,
I FORGET YOUR
SITUATION.



I AM RICHARD THE
THIRD, LORD OF THIS
LAND AND CERTAINLY
NO PIRATE. THOU ART
MY MOST HONOURED
GUEST.

COME.



I PROMISE I
SHALL NOT FEED
YOU TO THE SHARKS
UNTIL AFTER WE
SUP TONIGHT.



A LIBRARY.

HMMM?

I AM NOT
UNLIKE YOUR FATHER,
HAMLET. I BELIEVE THE
WAY TO MAKE MY PEOPLE
STRONG IS BY UPLIFTING
THEM. FIRST A LIBRARY,
THEN A COURT HOUSE,
THEN SCHOOLS. I WILL
BUILD MY PEOPLE.



SIR, HOW DO
YOU KNOW
ME?

YOUR
DELIVERANCE
TO ME WAS NO
ACCIDENT.

"THE EYES OF
HEAVEN SHINE
THROUGH THE NIGHT.
HIS FURY A TEMPEST
RAGING; CARRYING THE
SHADOW KING FROM A
LAND BEYOND."

THOSE ARE
THE WORDS OF THE
PROPHECY THAT FORETOLD
YOUR COMING, HAMLET. THE
NIGHT BEFORE YOU ARRIVED
HERE, THE STARS—HEAVEN'S
EYES—SHONE WITH STRANGE
COLOURS. A GREAT TEMPEST
THE LIKES OF WHICH HAVE
NEVER BEEN SEEN
BATTERED THIS
LAND.

WE HAVE BEEN
WAITING FOR YOU,
HAMLET. YOU ARE THE
ONE FATED TO CHANGE
THE LIVES OF MY
PEOPLE. YOU ARE
MEANT TO DO A GREAT
GOOD, PRINCE.

I WISH ONLY
TO HELP THIS
GREEN LAND
BECOME GOLD.

BUT THESE ARE
TURBULENT TIMES
AND I HAVE ENEMIES
BEYOND MY BORDERS.
BUT WORSE...

... WORSE ARE
THOSE WITHIN. THEY
SOW SEEDS OF DISCORD IN
ORDER TO REAP REBELLION.
WARMONGERS MORE
INTERESTED IN SEIZING
POWER THAN MANAGING
IT JUSTLY.

THESE... ZEALOTS
RALLY AROUND THE
BANNER OF A MAN. SOME
SAY HE IS A GOD, OTHERS
SAY HE IS MERELY A WIZARD.
YOU ARE MEANT TO STOP
HIM, HAMLET. YOU ARE
MEANT TO SAVE US.

WILL YOU
FREE US FROM THE
TYRANNY OF WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE?



THIS IS
MADNESS. I AM NO
TOOL OF THE FATES...
NO MESSENGER SENT
FROM ONE GOD TO
FACE ANOTHER.



THOU ART
MORE THAN
THOU
REALIZES.



STORIES ABOUT YOUR ARRIVAL
HAVE BEEN TOLD FOR DECADES IN
THIS LAND. MY WISE WOMEN HAVE
SEEN YOU, THERE IS NO MISTAKE.
YOU ARE THE EMBODIMENT OF
PROPHECY, HAMLET.

NO. NO, I
AM NOT.

LORD RICHARD, I
THANK YOU FOR YOUR
KINDNESS BUT I BEG
OF YOU TO RETURN
ME TO MY HOME.



I CAN OFFER YOU A
GREATER PRIZE, HAMLET.
WHAT WOULDST THOU SAY IF I
TOLD THEE I COULD RETURN
YOUR FATHER FROM THE
GRAVE?

I WOULD SAY MY
FATHER IS DEAD AND
THE WORMS OF DENMARK
FEAST UPON HIS
BONES.



KRRRRR



COME.



HAMLET,
SON OF HAMLET,
BLOOD OF ROYAL
BLOOD. THOU ART
NOT LIKE OTHER
MEN.

HAMLET,
SON OF HAMLET...
FOLLOW US TO THY
DESTINY, SHADOW
KING.

YOU! FOUL
CREATURES!

THESE
FIENDS HAUNT MY
DREAMS. ARE THEY
YOUR SERVANTS,
RICHARD?

THEY ARE.

I'LL HAVE NO
MORE OF THIS
MADNESS.

HAMLET, DO NOT
DAMN MY PEOPLE TO THE
TERROR OF SHAKESPEARE. I
BEG OF THEE. I KNOW YOU
DO NOT YET BELIEVE IT
BUT YOU SHALL SAVE
THEM.

YOU SHALL, HAMLET.
THE PEOPLE SHALL SING
YOUR PRAISES. YOU WILL BE A
SAVIOUR TO THEM. YOU WILL
RULE BESIDE ME, WISELY
PROTECTING ALL.

PLEASE.
LET ME
PASS.



I AM SO TIRED.
I ONLY WISH TO
SLEEP AND WAKE
FROM THIS CRUEL
DREAM.

AND WHAT
OF THY FATHER,
SHADOW KING? WILL
YOU IGNORE A CHANCE,
NO MATTER HOW
SLIGHT, THAT HE CAN
BE SAVED?



WHY DO YOU PROMISE
ME WHAT CANNOT BE
DONE? WHY DO YOU
NAME ME THUS?

IS THE THRONE
OF DENMARK NOT
RIGHTLY YOURS?
AND YET THOU ART
LESS THAN A TRUE
KING.



"THE FATHER'S GATES SHALL OPEN SWING,
A WELCOME TO THE SHADOW KING.
THE TWO SHALL CLASH AND BLOOD WILL POUR,
AND THINGS THAT WERE SHALL BE NO MORE."



AND THIS FATHER?
THIS IS THE WIZARD-GOD
SHAKESPEARE?


IT IS.

AND YOU WISH ME
TO SPILL HIS BLOOD?
TO MURDER A MAN I
HAVE NEVER MET?



NO, HAMLET.
THE SOURCE OF
HIS POWER RESTS
IN ONE OBJECT IN
HIS POSSESSION.
ALL YOU NEED DO
IS BRING ME HIS
QUILL.

THEN WHY
NOT DO SO
YOURSELF?




DOST THOU
NOT LISTEN,
SHADOW KING?

CANST
THOU NOT
HEAR?


ONLY THOU
CAN FIND WHERE
SHAKESPEARE
DWELLS.

"THE FATHER'S DWELLING'S CUNNING COWL'D.
ONLY THOU MIGHTST BE ALLOWED,
TO CROSS THE THRESHOLD OF HIS LAIR,
WHERE FAIR IS FOUL AND FOUL IS FAIR."



HAMLET, NONE CAN
FIND SHAKESPEARE. I
HAVE LOST SCORES OF MY
OWN MEN TRYING TO FIND
THE COWARD TO DRIVE
HIM TO THE LIGHT.

IF YOU ARE TRULY
WHO I BELIEVE, THEN
ONLY YOU CAN FIND HIS
ACCURSED HOME.



AND WHO
SHALL BRING MY
FATHER BACK FROM
HADES? IS THAT
TOO A POWER THAT
I POSSESS?

NO, THAT
POWER IS MY
OWN.



SEE THIS POWER? AS HE IS RENEWED, SO TOO SHALL YOUR OWN FATHER BE.

TRUST ME. SAVE MY PEOPLE. QUILL FOR FATHER? IS THE PRIZE NOT WORTH THE PRICE?







...SHAKESPEARE
SHALL DIE AT
HAMLET'S HANDS.



AND ALL THIS
LAND SHALL
BE OURS.

CHAPTER TWO

MANY OF MACBETH'S SOLDIERS HAVE YET TO TAKE THE AGREED-UPON POSITIONS, MY LORD.

ERROR OR INTENT, RATCLIFFE?

THEY ARE BUT A FEW DAYS LATE.

AND HIS BLACK GUARD?

MACBETH HAS NOT MOVED THEM IN ANY THREATENING WAY. YET THEY REMAIN ONLY A FEW DAYS' MARCH FROM OUR WESTERN LANDS. SHALL I REINFORCE THE BORDER GUARD IN CASE THE TRUCE FAILS?




THE GUARD'S REPUTATION OVERSTEPS ITS VICTORIES.

BESIDES, I HAVE TAKEN MEASURES TO ENSURE A TRUCE IS NOT NEEDED.

I SHALL HELP THEE. IF I MUST KILL THIS SHAKESPEARE TO SAVE MY FATHER, SO BE IT.

YOU HAVE CHOSEN WELL. MY KINGDOM AND YOUR FATHER BOTH OWE YOU A GREAT DEBT.





MY LORD, ARE YOU SO CERTAIN THIS HAMLET IS THE ONE? THE "SHADOW KING" THEY SPEAK OF IN THE FIELDS AND IN THE MARKET STALLS?

YOU SAW THE SAME SKIES AS I HAVE, RATCLIFFE. DID NOT "THE EYES OF THE FATHER SHINE IN THE NIGHT"? DID NOT A "TEMPEST RAGE" AS THE WITCHES FORETOLD?

THEN WHY LET HIM LIVE? NOTHING GOOD FOR YOUR EARS IS SPOKE OF IN THIS PROPHECY. WHAT BENEFIT ACCUES TO YOU IF SHAKESPEARE THE WIZARD IS ROUSED IF—AS IS SAID—A LORD FALLS BECAUSE OF IT?

AND PERHAPS LET FATE FIND ANOTHER TO PLAY THE SHADOW KING'S ROLE? NAY, RATCLIFFE.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THIS GAME, MY LORD. BE BOLD, BLOODY AND RESOLUTE. KILL THE BOY AND KILL THE PROPHECY.

IT IS SAID THAT TRUE MAGIC CAN NEVER BE BROKEN—BUT IT CAN BE TWISTED.


IF SHAKESPEARE EXISTS, OUR SHADOW KING WILL FIND HIM—BE SURE OF THAT. BUT ALSO BE SURE THAT HAMLET SHALL KILL SHAKESPEARE. I HAVE A GIFT FOR THE BOY THAT WILL MAKE SURE OF THAT.



AND THEN THE QUILL SHALL BE MINE. AND IF THERE BE MAGIC IN IT? IF THE TALES BE TRUE? THEN I SHALL BE THE ONE TO WIELD IT.

TRUE MAGIC—NOT FAITHLESS WITCHCRAFT.






YOU ARE
NOT ONE FOR
HORSES, ARE
YOU, HAMLET?

NO, SIR. I
ALWAYS PREFERRED
THE SEA TO THE
STABLES.




HO!
HOLD!



WHAT OF MY
MAN? THE SAILOR YOU...
HELPED? THE MAN WITH
THE PATCH?

AS YOU CAN
APPRECIATE, OUR...
HELP... TAKES TIME
TO BE FELT
SUFFICIENTLY.


HE WILL
BE READY TO
GREET YOU
'PON YOUR
RETURN.



HOW ARE
WE TO FIND THIS
SHAKESPEARE?
THESE WOODS SEEM
ENDLESS.

THAT POWER
LIES WITHIN
YOURSELF. NOT
WITH I.

BUT YOUR
PROPHECY...?



IT ONLY TELLS US
THAT THE SHADOW
KING SHALL BE THE
ONE TO DISCOVER
SHAKESPEARE'S
EVIL LAIR.



WHERE
AM I TO
START?

THIS IS
FOOLISHNESS,
RICHARD. I CANNOT
FIND A MAN I HAVE
NEVER SEEN, IN A LAND
I HAVE NEVER VISITED.
SPEAK SENSE.




PERHAPS YOU
NEED BUT TAKE
A MOMENT?

AH, IAGO. I WAS WONDERING WHEN
YOU WOULD MAKE YOUR PRESENCE KNOWN.
RARE IS THE CONVERSATION THAT IS NOT
TREATED TO YOUR HONESTY.

FORGIVE MY
INTRUSION INTO
YOUR AFFAIRS,
SHADOW KING—


—HAMLET.



HAMLET, DO
NOT THINK THAT I
MEAN TO INTRUDE INTO YOUR
DESTINY—NOTHING WOULD BE
FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. BUT
IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THIS
MAELSTROM OF EVENTS HAS
LEFT YOUR BRAIN HEAVY
AND YOUR SPIRIT
DISTRACTED.

TRUST IN YOUR OWN
ABILITIES. I BEG YOU
TAKE A MOMENT TO REST
YOUR MIND, YOUR HEART, YOUR
SOUL. WITHIN YOU LIES A GREAT
ABILITY—THE POWER TO
PIERCE SHAKESPEARE'S VEIL
OF DECEIT, TO FIND THIS
MONSTER. THE FATES
WOULD NOT LIE.

YOU EXPECT
ME TO FIND THIS
INVISIBLE PATH
BY... RELAXING?



I KNOW I AM NOT
WISE ENOUGH TO COUNSEL
YOU, BUT IT SEEMS TO ME
THAT TO FIND SOMETHING
ONE MUST FIRST BE
PREPARED TO
LOOK.



WILL YOU
HUMOUR A NEW AND
NOT-YET-DEAR
FRIEND?

VERY
WELL.



WHAT
DEVILRY?!



NOT DEVILRY,
GOOD HAMLET.
DESTINY.

OUR ROAD TO
FREEDOM IS NOW
CLEAR. THE SHADOW
KING SHALL LEAD US
AND WE SHALL DEFEAT
SHAKESPEARE!



THE SHADOW KING!















WHY WOULD
THOSE MEN
ATTACK US?

NOT US,
RICHARD.

THE PRODIGALS
BELIEVE SHAKESPEARE
TO BE A GOD WITH DIVINE
RIGHT OVER THE LAND AND
DAMN US PETTY MORTALS
WHO MIGHT BELIEVE
OTHERWISE.



I'M TOLD
YOUR FATHER
WAS A KING.
SURELY YOU MUST
KNOW OF THE
MADNESS OF MEN
SEEKING
POWER?



AWE,
I KNOW.



YOUR LORD
HAS PROMISED ME
SOMETHING PRECIOUS
BEYOND WORDS IF I
FOLLOW THE DESTINY
HE BELIEVES IS
MINE.



I KNOW. NO
FATHER COULD BE AS
BLESSED TO HAVE A
SON SUCH AS YOURSELF.
I WILL DO EVERYTHING
IN MY POWER TO AID
YOUR QUEST.

IT IS GOOD TO
HAVE A FRIEND IN
THIS STRANGE
WORLD.

SLEEP WELL,
HAMLET. I MUST
GO CHECK ON
THE GUARD.



ARE YOU WELL, LAD? THE EVENTS OF THE DAY HAVE NOT SAPPED YOUR SPIRIT?



I AM JUST NOT USED TO MEN WAVING AXES SO CAVALIERLY ABOUT ME.



IT IS A SIGHT I HAVE GROWN ALL TOO FAMILIAR WITH.



MY ARM? IT MAKES THEE CURIOUS?



I DO APOLOGIZE. I WAS RUDE.

NAH, HAMLET, I AM NOT ASHAMED OF MY FORM. DO NOT BE ASHAMED TO GAZE UPON IT.



I DO NOT WISH TO SEEM... DOUBTFUL...

...BUT RICHARD, IF THOU CANST TRULY RETURN MY FATHER, THEN WHY NOT USE THE SAME POWER TO RESTORE YOUR OWN ARM?



I PREFER TO STAY AS I WAS MADE. MY ENEMIES SEE IT AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS.

IT MAKES THEM FOOLISH. IT MAKES ME POWERFUL.



AND FOR MY OWN PEOPLE, TO HAVE A RULER WHO IS FLAWED? IT LETS THEM TAKE COMFORT IN THEIR OWN WEAKNESSES.

NOW, HAMLET, GO SLEEP. WE WILL NEED YOU TO SHOW US OUR PATH AGAIN TOMORROW.





















RICHARD HAS LEFT US TO DEAL WITH THAT BASTARD MACBETH. BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE—THE SHADOW KING AND SHAKESPEARE ARE WHAT YOUR LORD VALUES MOST.

FOR RICHARD'S HONOUR—AND OUR LIVES—WE MUST FIND HAMLET.



BE WARY, BUT PRUDENT. KEEP UP YOUR BRIGHT SWORDS...



...OR BLOOD SHALL RUST THEM.

GAAAH!

AAAGH!



NOW TO FIND
AND KILL THE
SHADOW KING.



AAAAHHH!!



AH, IT RISES.

I WAS FEARFUL
I WOULD BE
FORCED TO EAT
YOUR BREAKFAST
MYSELF...







CAREFUL,
YOUNG EGG,
YOUR SHELL IS
CRACKED.



WHO ARE YOU?
WHY DID YOU
STEAL AWAY
WITH ME?



I MIGHT
DESCRIBE IT
AS RESCUING
THEE.



FROM MY
FRIENDS?



YES, OF COURSE
YOUR FRIENDS. THE
FOLK WITH THE
SWORDS AND BOWS
WHO INTENDED TO
KILL YOU...



...HOW COULD I
HAVE DOUBTED
THEIR FRIENDLY
INTENTIONS?



I MUST
RETURN TO IAGO...
TO RICHARD... THEY
WILL BE SEARCHING
FOR ME.



I MUST TELL
THEM THERE
ARE TRAITORS IN
THEIR MIDST.

CALM
YOURSELF, EGG.
I WILL EXPLAIN
ALL.



DO YOU PLAN
TO HOLD ME
HERE?



OF COURSE
NOT, SIR. SIMPLY
TAKE YOUR
LEAVE.



YOU WILL
JUST LET ME
WALK AWAY...?

FALSTAFF.

AS YOU
LIKE IT.



KSSSSSSHHHSSSSSSHHHSSSSSSHHH



WHERE
IS THE
PATH?



UHH...



WHERE HAVE YOU TAKEN ME...?

FALSTAFF.



ALLOW ME TO MAKE YOU A BARGAIN...?



HAMLET.

WELL, MASTER HAMLET, WILL YOU ALLOW A MAN WHO HAS PROVIDED YOU WITH NOTHING BUT GOOD FOOD AND GOOD WIT, NEITHER OF WHICH I MAY SAY YOU HAVE SHOWN THE GOOD GRACES TO CONSUME, TO ESCORT YOU FROM THESE WOODS TO A SAFER PLACE WHERE YOU CAN THINK UPON YOUR CHOICE OF FRIENDS?

SO, HAMLET. WHICH SHALL IT BE? FAT MAN...

...OR FOREST?



EVEN IF I GRANT THAT YOU SAVED MY LIFE, FALSTAFF, I DO NOT KNOW YOU.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I WOULD ACCEPT THIS OFFER TO TRAVEL WITH YOU?

FATE...

...AND A COMPLETE LACK OF BETTER OPPORTUNITIES.





KEEP A CIVIL TONGUE IN MY HOUSE—OR I'LL HAVE IT TORN OUT.



MOVE YOUR MEN BACK TO PROTECT THE WESTERN BORDER, MACBETH, OR BY WILL'S TEETH I SHALL TEAR APART THIS CASTLE, BURN YOUR FIELDS, RAPE YOUR WOMEN AND THE DOGS.



EMPTY WORDS. I KNOW YOU HAVE NO APPETITE TO FACE MY BLACK GUARD.

BUT COME IF YOU MUST, RICHARD. SEE HOW THIS DOG'S BITE BELIES ITS SIZE.





MY LORDS,
WHY ALL THIS
TALK OF
BLOODSHED
AND RAPE?



SURELY, LORD
RICHARD...



...BOTH YOURS
AND MY HUSBAND'S
LIPS CAN POUR
FORTH SWEETER
WINE?

...AND SO I SAY TO
YOU TRULY: IF THOU
DESIREST TO DIP THY
WICK—AS SOME MIGHT
CALL IT—THEN MAKE SURE
THE WAX BELONGS TO NO
OTHER MAN ELSE THY
CANDLE MIGHT BE CUT
SHORT.

AS FOR MYSELF?
WELL, YOU MIGHT SAY,
"GOOD FALSTAFF, HOW DOES
ONE MAN, DESPITE SUCH
OBVIOUS SUPERIOR BREEDING,
COME TO BE THE WICK THAT
DOES THE TRICK FOR HALF A
DOZEN LADIES OVER HERE?
AND OVER THERE,
ANOTHER SIX?"

AND I WOULD
SAY TO YOU IT IS
DUE TO THE ROBUST
CHARACTER...

...OF THE
TALLOW...

...THAT NATURE
HERSELF HAS
BLESSED HER SON
FALSTAFF WITH.

FATES, I
ASK YOU FOR
BUT ONE
LIGHTNING
BOLT.

HMMPH.

THRRWIRRR



WHAT?
MORTALS, ARE
YOU STOLEN
DUMBS?

THRRWWIARR THRRWWIARR



TO POKE
AT MAGIC
WITH YOUR
THUMB?



HAVE YOU
NO SENSE OF
YOUR GREAT
LUCK?

TO BE
GRACED BY
GOODFELLOW
FUCK?



THIS IS A
GOOD SIGN, MY
FRIEND.

THRRWWIARR





COME E'EN—
AS THEY SAID
YOU WOULD,
FIND THE MASTER,
WHO WEARS
GLOBE'S HOOD.

MOVE
HASTILY, OH
SHADOW KING.
IF SHAKESPEARE'S
RE-BIRTH YOU
SHALL RING.

THRRWWIIRRR

WHY NOT
TAKE THEM TO
YOUR MASTER
YOURSELF?

THRRWWIIRRR

MY FATHER'S WILL
DOTH BIND ME TIGHT. 'TIS
NOT PUCK'S TASK TO
BRING HIS LIGHT.

THOUGH I BE MAGIC,
AND I BE MOST GRAND,
MAN'S FATE LIES IN YOUR
FICKLE, MORTAL, HAND.


THRRWWIIRRR

AHH, BUT TO
SEE THE CHOSEN
ONE... AYE, THAT
BE WORTH ANY
PRICE.

I GO.
I GO.

YOU ARE TRULY
BLESSED, HAMLET. IT
IS RARE TO SEE ONE OF
THE TRUE PRODIGALS, LET
ALONE TO BE TOUCHED BY
ONE THE LIKES OF ROBIN
GOODFELLOW.

PRODIGALS?



SO IT IS
AGREED THEN? OUR
BLACK GUARD SHALL WORK
WITH RICHARD'S MEN IN
PATROLLING THE WESTERN
FLANK AGAINST THE
THREAT OF TITUS.

AND, IN
EXCHANGE, YOU
SHALL PAY TO US
THIRTY PERCENT OF
THE TRIBUTE
RAISED IN THE
REGION.

YOUR WIFE IS A
SKILLED STATESWOMAN
AND A FORMIDABLE
NEGOTIATOR.

SO YOU ACCEPT
OUR TERMS?
UNDERSTANDING
THAT THE GUARD ONLY
ANSWERS TO THE
HOUSE OF MACBETH,
THE THANE OF
CAWDOR?

THE GUARD
MAY FIGHT WITH
YOUR MEN, BUT
THEY ARE NOT
YOURS TO
COMMAND.

I DO.

SINCE IT WAS
YOUR WISDOM THAT
AVERTED WAR, MY
LOVE, YOU SHOULD
SIGN FOR THE HOUSE
OF MACBETH.


I TRUST
YOU HAVE NO
OBJECTION TO A
WOMAN'S HAND
SEALING THIS
PACT?

NONE,
LADY. NONE
AT ALL.



STOP!
STOP!

YOU TELL ME
YOU ARE IN LEAGUE
WITH MURDERERS AND
I AM EXPECTED TO
STAY LIKE THE RAT
IN THE TRAP?




NOT
EVERYTHING...
HAHH... IS AS YOU
BELIEVE.


HAHH, HAAH,
WILL'S BLOOD...
HAHH... YOU SHALL
KILL ME IF YOU RUN
MUCH LONGER.

I SAW THESE
"PRODIGALS" TRY TO
KILL RICHARD, THE
RIGHTFUL RULER OF
THIS LAND.

HAHH... NOT
EVERYTHING
IS AS YOU
BELIEVE.



NO, FRIEND
HAMLET. BUT THIS
LAND DOES CRY
OUT FOR YOU.



TELL ME,
HAMLET—THAT VILLAGE
YOU STOPPED IN? HOW DID
THOSE PEOPLE LOOK?
DID THEY LOOK WELL? DID
THEY SEEM WEALTHY?
HEALTHY? HAPPY?



LIAR.


PERHAPS,
PERHAPS NOT. BUT I
WOULD WAGER YOU
WHATEVER RICHARD HAS
OFFERED TO YOU FOR
YOUR HELP APPEARS
TOO GOOD TO BE
TRUE.

I HAVE NO FALSE
GOLD WITH WHICH TO
BRIBE YOU, HAMLET. I
CAN ONLY TELL YOU THAT
IF YOU CHOOSE TO MEET
THE FATHER—IF YOU BRING
SHAKESPEARE BACK TO
US—THEN YOU WILL HAVE
DONE THE GREATEST
GOOD.




SO YOU
THINK I AM
TO MEET AND
SAVE A
GOD?

IF YOU
CHOOSE.



'TIS TRUE, HAMLET. I BELIEVE IN SHAKESPEARE. I AM MYSELF ONE OF HIS PRODIGALS. BUT I BELIEVE HE SHALL RETURN TO RENEW THIS WORLD'S BEAUTY. AND I BELIEVE YOU ARE FATED TO MEET HIM.



THAT IS THE TASK RICHARD SAYS I AM FATED FOR.

PROPHECY CAN BE READ MANY WAYS, HAMLET. WE PRODIGALS SEE THEE AS THE ONE TO RETURN SHAKESPEARE TO HIS PEOPLE. TO SAVE OUR FATHER, OUR PROTECTOR.


WHY WOULD YOU WISH FOR ME TO MEET YOUR SAVIOUR? SO I CAN KILL HIM?

KILL? NO, NEVER.


YOU ARE MAD. THIS WHOLE WORLD IS MAD.



YOU FOLLOWED ME?



I CAN PROMISE YOU THEY WERE EVEN LESS SO AFTER RICHARD LEFT, AFTER HE HAD BUTCHERED THE SONS OF EVERY FAMILY.



IF I CHOOSE?

I WILL NOT FORCE YOU. BUT I SHALL JOURNEY WITH YOU TO THE VERY END IF YOU SO DESIRE.



GODS, I NEED A DRINK.

AH, NOW ON THAT QUEST YOU HAVE NO CHOICE ABOUT MY COMPANY.



AYE, NOW
HERE SHALL BE
THE RUB.



LUSTY
WENCHES!
FALSTAFF IS
HERE!



FALSTAFF!



WOULD IT
PLEASE MY
LORD TO DIP HIS
QUILL INTO MY
INKWELL?



NO, M'LADY.
MY QUILL IS...
ADEQUATE?

BWAHAHA
HAHAHA!

















YOU ARE
INCREDIBLE.

IT ALL WENT
AS WE PLANNED.
HE FEARS THE
BLACK GUARD SO
VERY MUCH.

CAN YOU
BLAME HIM?
THERE ARE NO
SOLDIERS LIKE
THAT IN ANY
LAND.

A
TOAST?

YOUR
NECTAR IS
WHAT I WISH
TO DRINK.

HAVE IT
ALL, MY
LORD.

HURRRR...?

ARRRR?

WHHAA
AATT EEEW
DUUN DO
MEEE?


AH,
HUSBAND...

...I WAS
WAITING FOR YOU
TO AWAKEN.






WHHAAAAS
APPENG?




OH, MY
DARLING, DO NOT
WASTE YOUR LAST
BREATHS.



COME. KISS
YOUR WIFE
GOODBYE.

DRAAAAAHHHH!



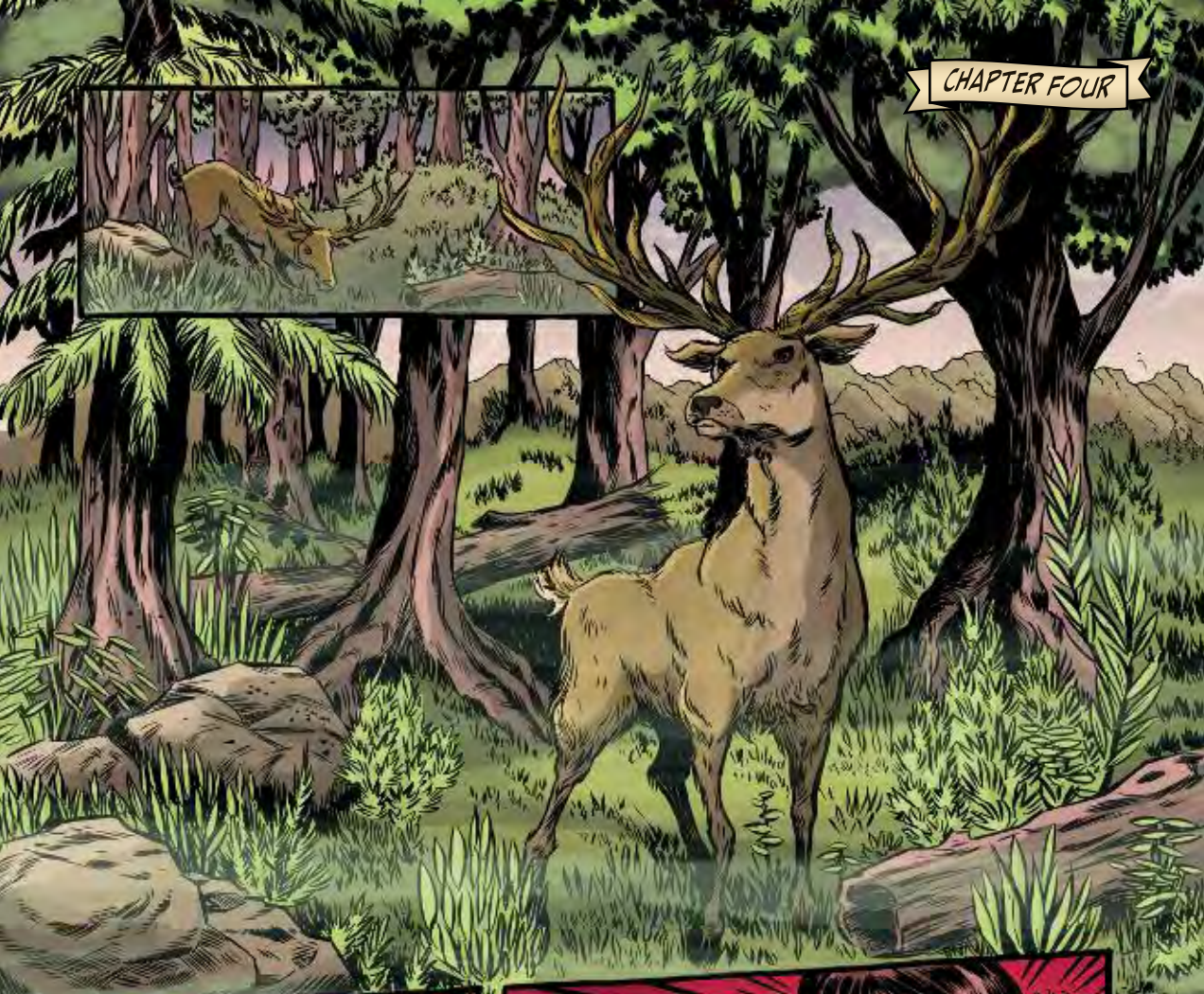
SOME
CUPID KILLS WITH
ARROWS... AND
SOME WITH
TRAPS...




DRAAAAAHHHH!

DRAAAAAHHHH!

DRAAAAAHHHH!



"THERE IS A LESSON
HERE, RATCLIFFE..."




...AS THOU
KNOWS, I ENJOY
THE HUNT.

BUT SOMETIMES,
TOYING WITH AN ANIMAL
SERVES NEITHER MAN
NOR THE BEAST.


NOW, WHAT
SAY MY MEN IN
THE FIELDS?

MORE UNREST.
MANY VILLAGERS
ARE ON THE MOVE.
SOMETHING IS
STIRRING.


BUT THERE IS
GOOD NEWS. THE
LADY CAPULET HAS
BEEN SEEN NEAR
YORKTON.



INDEED? THAT IS
FORTUNATE. I HAVE
GROWN WEARY OF
TOYING WITH THAT
PARTICULAR BEAST.



MAKE SURE
CAPULET IS
CAPTURED...



...I WISH
TO MAKE
HER FEEL
PAIN.



THAT WAS THE
WORST PLAN EVER
CONCEIVED BY MAN
OR BEAST!

WHY WOULD
ANYONE EVER
THINK WE WERE
MAIDS?



YOU HAVE
A BEARD!



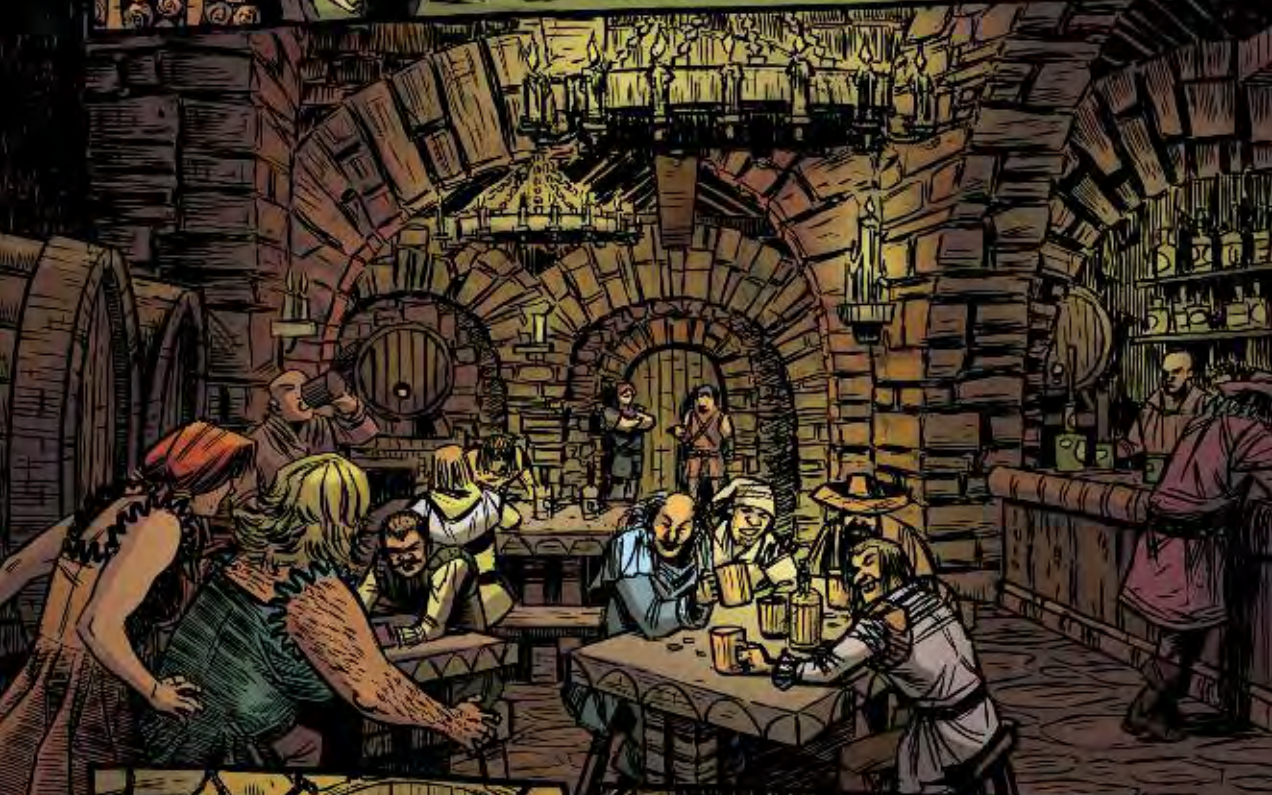
I SAW IT
IN A PLAY
ONCE...




...OF COURSE,
IT DID END IN
TRAGEDY.









YOU UNDERSTAND
WHAT I ASK OF
THEE? OUR VOICE IS
IN OUR SWORDS.

IF WE RISE
TOGETHER, WE CAN
DEFEAT THE FORCES OF
RICHARD AND MACBETH
AND YOUR PEOPLE CAN
TRULY BE FREE.

DEAR ROBERT, I
HAVE CROSSED THIS
LAND SPEAKING TO MANY
BRAVE MEN SUCH AS
YOURSELVES. BELIEVE ME
WHEN I SAY TO THEE THERE
ARE MORE SWORDS FOR US
THAN RICHARD COULD
EVER MOUNT.

I DO, JULIET,
BUT I... I FEAR FOR
THE LIVES OF MY
BROTHERS. THOU ASKS
US TO... TO DEFEAT
RICHARD IN OPEN
COMBAT?

BUT WILL
THEY FIGHT? AND
EVEN IF THEY DO,
LADY, HOW CAN
PEASANTS DEFEAT
PROFESSIONAL
SOLDIERS?

HUSH,
PAROLLES. DO
NOT CHIDE THE
MAIDEN CAPULET—
SHE HAS RISKED
MUCH TO MEET
HERE.

WHO IS THIS,
FALSTAFF?

IT IS HE,
OTHELLO—THE
SHADOW KING.

NO, LET HIM
SPEAK, NERISSA.
ALL OF US MUST
BELIEVE IN THE CAUSE.
I WILL LET NO MAN BE
FORCED TO PUT HIS
SHOULDER TO THE
WHEEL.



WHO? THE
DIRTY BOY IN
THE DRESS?
THIS IS OUR
"SAVIOUR"?



KEEP THY
RIDICULOUS JOKES
TO THYSELF,
FALSTAFF.



WAS THIS
SUPPOSED
TO IMPRESS
ME, LADY
JULIET?

WAS I TO BE ASTONISHED BY SOME
BEGGAR-BOY YOU SAY IS THE
MAN MEANT TO FULFILL
THE PROPHECY?

THIS IS
WHY I SHOULD
FOLLOW THEE, A
SPOILED DAUGHTER OF
PRIVILEGE? THIS CHILD
IS WHY I SHOULD RISK
EVERYTHING THAT I
HAVE GAINED?

YOU MEAN
EVERYTHING
THOU HATH
LET RICHARD
GIVE YOU?

I KNOW THEE,
PAROLLES. I HAD HOPED I
KNEW THEE WRONGLY, BUT
YOU ARE, TO THE LETTER,
THE MAN DESCRIBED TO
ME—A COWARD.



HRARR—

PAROLLES!

WAP



NO, NO,
OTHELLO. LET
HIM STRIKE ME IF
HE WISHES. LET
HIM CAST HIS
REPUTATION
IN IRON.



I PITY THE REST
OF YOU DESPERATE
WRETCHES. THIS
PRODIGAL REBELLION
WILL FAIL.



IT SEEMS
YOUR TASTE
IN WOMEN
HAS NOT
CHANGED.

I HAD HEARD
YOU BEDDED BOTH
DESDEMONA AS
WELL AS IAGO'S
WIFE...



...AND NOW I
SUSPECT YOU RIDE
ANOTHER PALE
HORSE.



HMP?

AHH!
AHHHHHH!



EXCUSE ME,
PAROLLES. THOU
WAS SPEAKING OF
SOMETHING? THY
WORDS NOW SEEM
CHOKED.

AHHHH!
MERCY!
MERCY!

OTHELLO!



'TIS TRUE HE IS A
VILLAIN, MY FRIEND,
BUT IT DOES US NO GOOD
TO BREAK HIM.

BESIDES,
WE STILL HAVE
THESE GOOD PEOPLE
BEHIND ME TO DISCUSS
MATTERS WITH. I WOULD
NOT WANT THEM TO BE
UNCOMFORTABLE.



PLEASE,
EVERYONE,
EXCUSE MY...
ROUGH MILITARY
STYLE.

I DO NOT HAVE
THOSE SOFT PARTS
OF CONVERSATION
THAT CHAMBERERS
HAVE.



I APOLOGIZE, MY FRIENDS. I DO NOT INTEND FOR ANY OF THEE TO FEEL PUSHED INTO A DECISION. THE NEED IS GREAT BUT I WILL NOT ALLOW THE END TO JUSTIFY MY MEANS.

NO APOLOGIES ARE NEEDED, LADY CAPULET. THOSE OF US WITH ANY SENSE KNOW YOUR WORDS ARE MEANT TO INSPIRE.

YOU NAMED PAROLLES FAIRLY. HE IS A COWARD AND A THIEF, AND BESIDES, HE STEALS FROM HIS OWN PEOPLE WHEN IT COMES TIME TO RENDER UNTO RICHARD WHAT THE TYRANT SAYS IS HIS.

HAVE NO WORRIES THAT THIS OLD WOMAN IS SWAYED BY A POXY-ANIMAL SUCH AS THAT.

I HAVE NOT A ONE, NERISSA, NOT AS LONG AS GOOD WOMEN LIKE YOU ARE AT MY SIDE.



SO NOW TELL ME, ROBERT, DO YOU THINK THIS TRULY IS THE SHADOW KING?

I COULD NOT SAY FOR SURE, BUT... BUT PERHAPS. THERE DOES SEEM TO BE SOMETHING TO... TO THE BOY, DESPITE APPEARANCES.



WELL, NOW I KNOW WHAT USE I AM TO THY "JULIET."

HAMLET, KEEP THY PEACE...





I AM SORRY, BUT I FEAR OUR DEAR FRIEND FALSTAFF IS PLAYING ANOTHER LITTLE JEST UPON US. THE SHADOW KING IS NO BOY DRESSED AS A HARLOT.

JULIET, THIS HARLOT WISHES TO DEFEND HER FELLOW. MAKE NO MISTAKE, GOOD PEOPLE, FATE HAS GIVEN US A MOST FORTUITOUS GIFT. THIS IS THE MAN WHO WILL BRING SHAKESPEARE BACK TO US.

I KNOW NOT WHAT SIGN THOU THOUGHT THEE SPIED, FALSTAFF, AND THOU KNOWS I TRUST THEE ABOVE ALL OTHERS, SAVE OTHELLO. BUT THE SHADOW KING? THE MAN WHO WILL OVERTHROW RICHARD AND BRING JUSTICE TO OUR LAND?

HE WILL CUT A FINER FIGURE THAN WHAT YOU HAVE BROUGHT TO US.



I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU HOPE TO GAIN WITH THIS LITTLE PIECE OF MISCHIEF, SELLING YOURSELF AS SAVIOUR—

I SOLD MYSELF AS NOTHING, LADY. YOUR MAN HERE IS THE ONE WHO SOLD ME, SAYING HE KNEW OF A FAIR MAIDEN WHO COULD USE MY ASSISTANCE.

IT SEEMS AS IF HE WAS WRONG ON ALL ACCOUNTS AND ALL DESCRIPTIONS.



WATCH THY TONGUE, LAD.

IF I MAY, PLEASE—ALL OF YOU, PLEASE... PLEASE, HOLD YOUR TEMPER.

IT SEEMS WE ARE ALL BECOMING TOO... TOO PASSIONATE FOR THOSE WHO... WHO SHOULD CALL EACH OTHER "ALLY."



AAAAAHHH!



RUN!

AHHHHH!

AHHH!

RICHARD'S
MEN SURROUND
US!

BY THE ORDER OF
RICHARD, I—DON
JOHN—COMMAND OTHELLO
AND THE LADY CAPULET TO
SURRENDER ON THE CHARGE
OF TREASON OR FACE THEIR
DEATH—AND THE DEATH OF
ALL THOSE ASSOCIATED
WITH THEM.



ALTHOUGH, LADY
CAPULET, I WOULD
CONSIDER ANOTHER
ARRANGEMENT
BETWEEN US.



FINE,
DOGS. WE HAVE
NO ISSUE WITH
BRINGING A MOOR
TO HEEL. NOR
HIS BITCH.





KERR-ACK



AGGGGGHHH!

SHHHK



HRK!

CRUNCH



GAHHH!



THUMP



I BEG OF YOU,
GOOD SIR. COME
CLOSER SO I MAY
END THEE.





HOW MANY
OF THEM ARE
THERE?



FEWER
THAN THERE
WERE.



THUMP



WUMP



KRACK



WE GO
OUT THE
FRONT. I
LEAD THIS
TIME,
JULIET.









AAAAAGGGGGGGGGG!





NO, LADY
CAPULET, DON'T
GET UP.

I SHALL
FIGHT THEE WITH
EVERY BREATH
I POSSESS.

I COUNT
ON IT.



AWK!

THWUMP



I WILL
GUT YOU
BOTH!



PLEASE, I BEG
OF THEE TO TRY.
THINK YOU I AM NO
STRONGER THAN
MY SEX?



COME
FOR ME, YOU
PLAGUE-RIDDEN
BASTARD! I WILL
CUT THEE TO
RIBBONS!











NAY, HAMLET. IF ANY MAN DID DESERVE DIE FOR THE TRIALS HE BROUGHT ON ANOTHER, IT IS IAGO...

...AND IF ANY MAN DESERVED TO STEAL THE LIFE BREATH FROM HIS FELLOW, THEN IT IS OTHELLO.



NEVER WERE TWO MEN MORE BROTHERS THAN IAGO AND OTHELLO. AND NEVER WERE TWO BROTHERS MORE CURSED BY JEALOUSY, HATE, EGO, AND HONOUR.



FINISH ME, BROTHER. WE BOTH KNOW I DO DESERVE IT.



SAAAHHH!

SHNK





WHAT IS THIS?
THOU ART LOYAL
TO RICHARD'S
LIEUTENANT?

YOU SAW. HE SAVED MY
LIFE. THIS MAN HAS PROMISED
TO DEFEND ME, TO MAKE SURE I
COMPLETE MY JOURNEY TO
YOUR SHAKESPEARE.

I SAVED
YOUR LIFE,
LADY.

AND I HAVE
ALREADY RETURNED
THAT FAVOUR BY
SAVING THINE.

AND DID I
NOT RESCUE
YOU BOTH?

PERHAPS THOU
DID. BUT PERHAPS
THOU HATH A PLAN
AT WORK THAT I
CANNOT SEE,
IAGO.

IF I AM
ALLIED WITH
YOUR ENEMIES
WHY WOULD I KEEP
THE ARROW FROM
HITTING ITS
MARK?

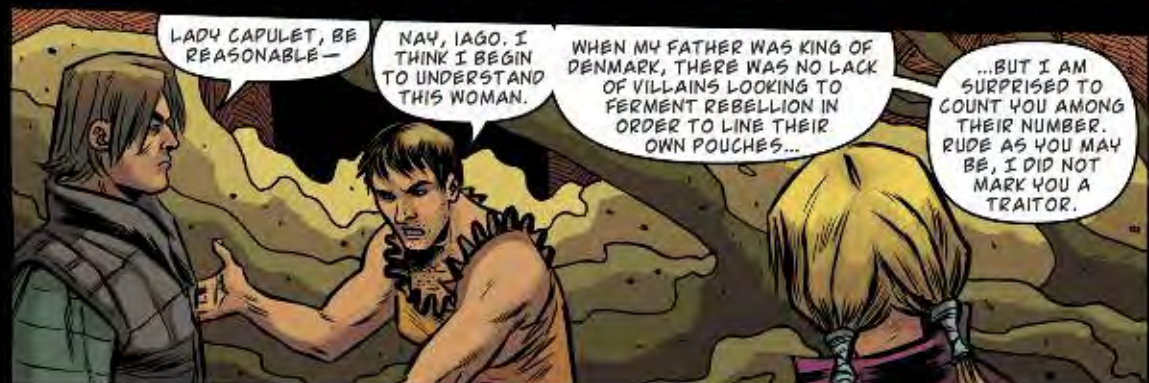


I HAVE BEEN
TOLD I AM A
FIGURE OF PROPHECY
TO THEE. IF THAT IS
TRUE, THEN HEAR MY
WORDS WITH
CARE—

—IF IAGO IS
TO GO, THEN
SO SHALL I.

THREATS? YOU
WASTE YOUR TIME,
HAMLET. I DO NOT
BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE
THE SHADOW KING.

THE MAN
WILL SENT HERE TO
HELP SAVE US ALL IS
NOT SOME BOY BARELY
FREE OF HIS MILK-TEETH.
HE IS A LEADER, NOT
A MERCENARY TAKING
PAYMENT FROM
MEN SUCH AS
RICHARD.



LADY CAPULET, BE
REASONABLE—

NAY, IAGO. I
THINK I BEGIN
TO UNDERSTAND
THIS WOMAN.

WHEN MY FATHER WAS KING OF
DENMARK, THERE WAS NO LACK
OF VILLAINS LOOKING TO
FERMENT REBELLION IN
ORDER TO LINE THEIR
OWN POUCHES...

...BUT I AM
SURPRISED TO
COUNT YOU AMONG
THEIR NUMBER.
RUDE AS YOU MAY
BE, I DID NOT
MARK YOU A
TRAITOR.



HOW DARE YOU! A FOREIGNER LECTURING ME ABOUT MY LAND AND ITS HARDSHIPS? LOOK AROUND. DO YOU SEE WEALTH, SPLENDOR, AND FINE FOOD AMONGST THE PEOPLE THAT SURROUND US?

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN, OH "SON OF KINGS," THAT ONLY THE SPAWN OF A GREAT TYRANT WOULD MAKE PEACE WITH ANOTHER TYRANT.



THE WORLD SHOULD BE GLAD OF THE FACT THY FATHER IS NO LONGER A KING.



HOLD, YOU TWO. THIS BICKERING SERVES NO PURPOSE. WE NEED TO BE AWAY FROM YORKTON—AND QUICKLY.

FALSTAFF, I THANK YOU FOR THE FRIENDSHIP YOU HAVE SHOWN ME BUT I SHALL NOT TRAVEL ANYWHERE WITH HER.

I WILL GO MY OWN WAY.



GAAAAA!



HAMLET, WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO GO LIKE THIS? LET US TREAT THE WOUND.

NO, FALSTAFF, HE WILL NOT LEAVE. I DO NOT BELIEVE HE IS THE SHADOW KING, BUT I WILL NOT RISK HAMLET BEING A TOOL—A PAWN—OF RICHARD'S.

LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU MUST STAY WITH US.

SO I AM YOUR CAPTIVE?



CALL IT WHAT YOU WILL.



WHY WASTE
YOUR TREASURY ON
SUCH TRIFLES AS
COURTHOUSES AND
LIBRARIES?

WHILE YOU SPEAK OF
TRIFLES, I BUILD TRIUMPHS.
THIS CITY SHALL BE A SHINING
STAR IN THE LAND. A LIGHT THAT
EVEN THE LIKES OF TITUS AND
LEAR SHALL NOTICE.

LORD, NEWS
FROM DON JOHN
IN THE OUTLANDS.
YORKTON BURNS. A
SCORE OF OUR MEN
WERE FOUND DEAD.
CAPULET WAS
SEEN...

...AS WAS
IAGO.

IAGO?

HIS BODY WAS
NOT AMONGST
THE DEAD.

DON JOHN
BELIEVES CAPULET
WAS MEETING VILLAGE
HEADMEN... AND HE
HEARS WHISPERS THAT
THE SHADOW KING HAS
COME TO SAVE THE
PEASANTS.

IT IS TIME
THAT I RETURN TO THE
SADDLE. HAMLET MUST
MEET SHAKESPEARE. I
SHALL HAVE THAT
QUILL.

GIVE ME THE
BLACK GUARD TO SET
UPON THESE CURS. THE
PRODIGALS HAVE YET
TO SEE THE LIKE OF
THEM.

THE BLACK GUARD
ARE TO REMAIN WITHIN
MY BORDERS TO PROTECT
MY PEOPLE, AS WAS
AGREED IN WRITING. IF YOU
WISH TO BRAVE PRODIGALS
TO FIND HAMLET, YOU
MUST DO SO WITHOUT
MY MEN.



LADY, IT WOULD ONLY BE FOR A SHORT TIME. YOUR... SOVEREIGNTY WOULD NEVER BE IN QUESTION.

NO, IT WILL NOT BE.

SURELY RICHARD DOES NOT NEED A WOMAN'S PROTECTION TO VENTURE OUT INTO HIS OWN LANDS?



MY LADY, YOU DO NOT WISH TO CROSS SWORDS WITH ME OVER SUCH A VITAL MATTER AS SHAKESPEARE'S BUILT.

I HOPE THOU DOTTH NOT TRUST THAT ONE TOO CLOSELY. HER TEETH ARE SHARP IN HER MOUTH.



SHE IS A WOMAN, RATCLIFFE. LET HER HAVE THIS MEANINGLESS VICTORY. IT WILL ONLY DRAW HER CLOSER TO ME.



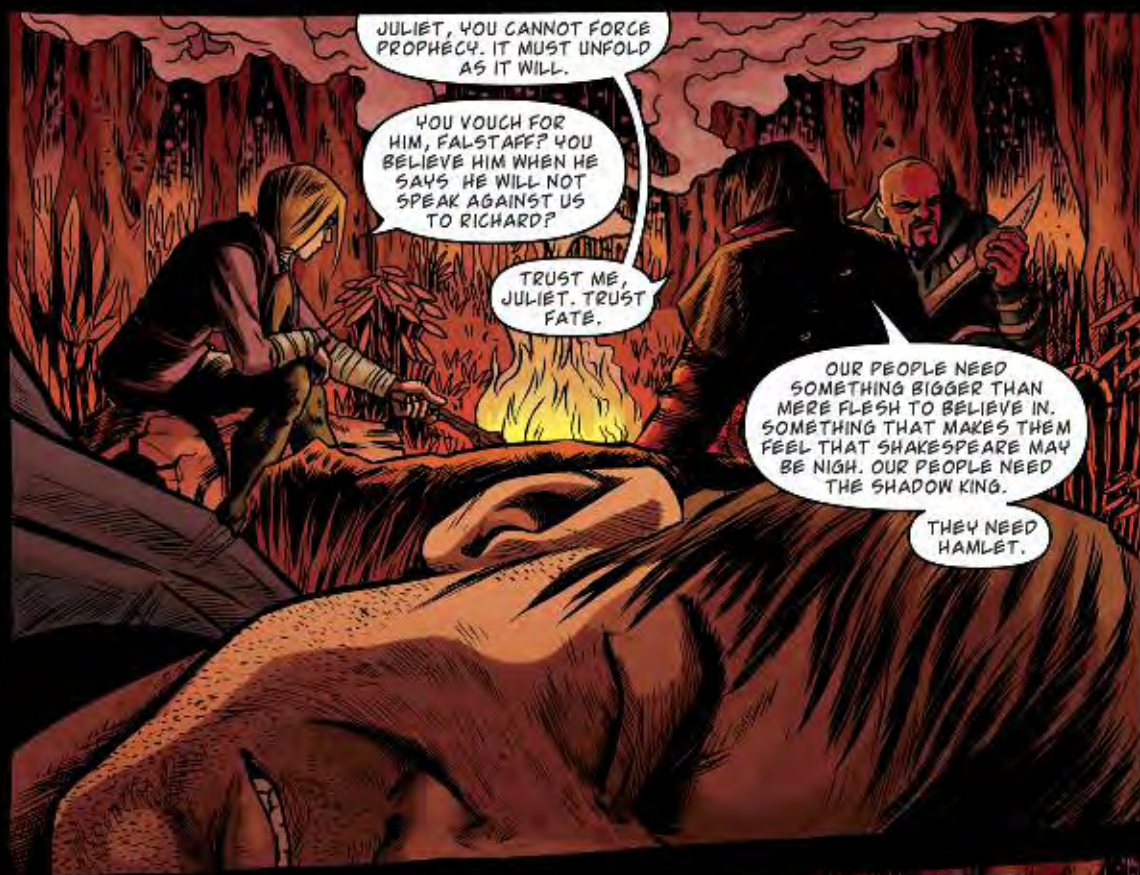
SHE IS BEWITCHING, LORD. STAY SAFE FROM HER SPELLS.

FORCE, RATCLIFFE. FORCE ABOVE MAGIC. THE LADY IS MY POSSESSION, NOTHING MORE.



SHE JUST CHOOSES NOT TO BELIEVE THAT FACT—YET.

NOW, SEND WORD TO DON JOHN TO PRESS THE PEOPLE. SOMEONE WILL KNOW A PRODIGAL. SOMEONE WILL KNOW WHERE HAMLET IS.



JULIET, YOU CANNOT FORCE PROPHECY. IT MUST UNFOLD AS IT WILL.

YOU VOUCH FOR HIM, FALSTAFF? YOU BELIEVE HIM WHEN HE SAYS HE WILL NOT SPEAK AGAINST US TO RICHARD?

TRUST ME, JULIET. TRUST FATE.

OUR PEOPLE NEED SOMETHING BIGGER THAN MERE FLESH TO BELIEVE IN. SOMETHING THAT MAKES THEM FEEL THAT SHAKESPEARE MAY BE NIGH. OUR PEOPLE NEED THE SHADOW KING.

THEY NEED HAMLET.



NNNNNN!

SEE, FALSTAFF? HE IS NO SHADOW KING. OUR SAVIOUR CANNOT BE A FRIGHTENED BOY.



WERE WE NOT MADE BY WILL TO EXPERIENCE LIFE AND GROW, M'LADY? CAN YOU NOT BELIEVE HAMLET WILL DO SO?



WERE YOU ALWAYS WHAT YOU ARE NOW—"JULIET, LEADER OF A REBELLION?"

OR WERE YOU ONCE A FRIGHTENED GIRL?



STOP SPEAKING SENSE, FOOL. IT SUITS YOU NOT.





IF YOU CHOOSE TO GO, HAMLET, YOU MUST GO ALONE.



I WILL NOT ABANDON IAGO IN YOUR HANDS. YOUR COMRADES SPEAK OF MURDER.

IAGO WILL NOT BE HARMED. HE WAS RIGHT. I DO OWE HIM A DEBT.

I GIVE THEE MY WORD HE SHALL LIVE.



AND I SHOULD TRUST YOU? WHY GRANT MY FREEDOM NOW?

BECAUSE FALSTAFF BELIEVES IN YOU AND FOR THE MOMENT THAT WILL SUFFICE.

BUT BE WARY WHERE YOU TREAD, HAMLET. WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO JOIN OR NOT, A WAR IS COMING AND IT WILL NOT SPARE THEE BECAUSE YOU WISH IT TO.



BE NOT AFRAID. FIND WHAT YOU MUST FIND. FALSTAFF WILL KEEP ME SAFE.

THANK YOU, FRIEND IAGO. I... I HAVE NOT KEPT MY OWN COUNCIL SINCE MY FATHER DIED.

I HAVE LOST MY TRUE SELF SOMEWHERE ALONG THIS JOURNEY AND I WILL NOT FIND IT AMONGST YOU.

THEN BE TRUE TO THINE OWN SELF. GO.

FEAR NOT, HAMLET. FATE HAS YET BIGGER PLANS FOR US ALL.



NOW SHALL I START A FIRE FOR AN EARLY BREAKFAST? IT SEEMS OBVIOUS I SHALL HAVE NO MORE BEAUTY REST THIS MORN.



I KNOW, FATES,
THAT NOTHING CAN
COME OF NOTHING...
BUT MUST YOU ALWAYS
PUT SUCH TRIALS IN
FRONT OF YOUR SON
HAMLET?



FATES, I
APOLOGIZE. I
SPOKE HASTILY.
THIS WILL DO
NICELY.

IS SUCH
TREATMENT REALLY
NEEDED? BIND IAGO?
YES. BLINDFOLD HIM
SO HE KNOWS NOT OUR
PATH? FINE. BUT LET
THE MAN RIDE LIKE
A MAN.

IT SHALL NOT
BE IN MY NAME
THAT JULIET'S
PRECIOUS REBELLION
FAILS. I ALSO SHALL
NOT DENY YOU YOUR
PROPHECY,
FALSTAFF.

BUT I
MADE A PACT TO
PROTECT MY LADY FROM
ALL THREATS—INCLUDING
THOSE SHE INVITES INTO
HER MIDST—SO
BOUND HE
STAYS.

ANY DEBT YOU
OWED TO ME AND
MY FAMILY HAS LONG
SINCE BEEN PAID. SO
WHAT THEN HOLDS
YOU TO THIS
"PACT?"

BECAUSE
NEVER HATH
OTHELLO TURNED
HIS BACK TOWARD
HIS FELLOWS.

YOU SHOULD
CELEBRATE THIS
GOOD NATURE, NOT
QUESTION ITS SOURCE.
THAT MORAL NATURE
IS THE REASON I
YET LIVE.

SILENCE, YOU
VILLAIN. SPEAK NOT
FOR ME. THINK THAT
BECAUSE I WOULD NOT
MURDER YOU, HELPLESS
AT MY FEET, THAT I
HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT
YOUR WORDS ARE NO
KIN TO YOUR
DEEDS?

IN TIME I
KNOW YOU WILL
SHOW YOUR TRUE
NATURE. AND
THEN?

I WILL BE
MOST CUNNING IN
MY PATIENCE
BUT—DOTH THOU
HEAR, IAGO?
—MOST
BLOODY.



HAMLET, WHY
HATH THOU
FORGOTTEN
THY FATHER'S
FACE?

NO... NO...
NO... NO...
HOW IS THIS
HAPPENING? HOW
DO YOU VISIT
ME NOW?

SILENCE! ASK
ME NOT THY
FOOLISH QUESTIONS
BUT ANSWER MINE.
WHY HATH THOU LEFT
RICHARD? WHY DO
YE NOT SEARCH TO
KILL THE WIZARD
SHAKESPEARE AND
FREE ME FROM MY
TORMENT?

YOURS WILL BE
THE HANDS THAT
KILL ME. THY
COWARDLY NATURE
WILL DOOM ME,
HAMLET.



FATHER,
LEAVE ME IN
PEACE. I BEG OF
THEE. YOU ARE
GONE AND BEYOND
HELP.

NOT IF YE KILL
SHAKESPEARE! THEN
I SHALL LIVE ANEW
AND DENMARK'S
THRONE SHALL BE
MINE AGAIN.



WEAK
HAMLET.
SOFT HAMLET.
YE BETRAY
THINE OWN
FATHER.

LET GO
OF ME, FOUL
HARBINGER!
YOU ARE NOT
POLONIUS!


YE STEAL
MY LIFE AND
STILL DENY ME?
YE MURDER YOUR
FRIEND'S FATHER BUT
LEAVE THE WIZARD
SHAKESPEARE
ALIVE?

OH, DULL
HAMLET. THOU
TRULY BELIEVES
THOU SEEM A
SAINT WHEN MOST
THOU PLAYS A
DEVIL?


FOOL. YE
ARE YER OWN
DEVIL, HAMLET.
EVERY CHOICE
YE MAKE IS
DAMNED.

HAHAHAHAHA


THIS IS
BUT A VISION, A
FOUL NIGHTMARE
I MUST
WAKE FROM...



NOW, WE ARE
A WORTHY
TARGET FOR
THAT DAGGER
YOU WIELD.



I AM
GOING MAD.



WHAT IS ONE
MORE BODY TO
HAMLET? SAVE
THESE POOR
FOOLS FROM MORE
OF THY BLOODY
BLUNDERS.



YOU THERE! STOP!



GAH!



AHHHH!

SPLASH

AHHHH





LISTEN, PRODIGAL SCUM. RICHARD WANTS THE SHADOW KING. HIS NAME IS WHISPERED BY EVERY PLAGUE-RIDDEN DOG I PASS...

...SO TELL ME WHERE HE IS.





WHERE IS
THE SHADOW
KING?!



WHERE?!



STOP...
STOP, YOU
BASTARD!

THEY SAY YOU
PRODIGALS SHARE
THE TIGHTEST OF
BONDS. WELL, THEN, IF
YOU WILL NOT TALK,
PERHAPS REMOVING
HIS TONGUE WILL
LOOSEN YOURS.



AAAAAHWW!
AAAAAHWW!



TELL ME
WHAT I WANT
TO KNOW,
HARLOT!

GIVE ME
THE SHADOW
KING!



GIVE ME
THE SHADOW
KING!

SMACK





YOU MUST NOT BE FOUND HERE I HAVE HEARD THAT GOOD ROBERT
IN SHREWSBURY, JULIET.
RICHARD'S MEN SEEM TO
BE EVERYWHERE.

SHALLOW WENT MISSING
AFTER WE MET.



MY SISTER, I
WILL NOT ENDANGER
THOSE UNDER YOUR
PROTECTION. LET ME
SPEAK AND I—AND
THOSE WHO WISH TO
FIGHT RICHARD—WILL
DISAPPEAR.

SHREWSBURY
IS ABUZZ WITH
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE
LADY JULIET'S PRODIGAL
REBELLION. BUT BE
WARE, LADY, THE PEOPLE
ARE SCARED. TONGUES
MAY LOOSEN. DO NOT
TARRY HERE. SPEAK
AND BE GONE.



THE LAD I MET IN YORKTON, IS
HE TRULY THE SHADOW KING?

OR IS HE ONE OF
THOSE WRETCHED
"FALSE SHADOWS"
WHO MISLEAD US AND
PREY UPON OUR
FEEBLE HOPES?



I CANNOT
SAY. BUT I DO
NOT THINK HE
MEANS TO PLAY
US FALSE.



MAY WILL
BLESS THEE
BOTH THEN, MY
CHILD.

MAY
WILL BLESS
THEE.



SQUEEK
KLUP SQUEEK
KLUP

I TELL THEE,
DEMETRIUS—NO
MAN OF RICHARD'S
IS SO DIRTY AND
UNKEMPT. WE NEED
HAVE NO FEAR
HERE.

AND I
SAY TO THEE,
LYSANDER—IT IS
FOOLISH TO TAKE A
STRANGER INTO OUR
HOMES IN THESE
MAD TIMES.

FIE,
DEMETRIUS. ARE
YOU NOT ASHAMED
TO SPEAK SO?
WHERE IS YOUR
WILL-GIVEN
CHARITY?

YOU ARE
AWAKE. GOOD.
WE WORRIED
YOU MIGHT
BE ILL.

WHO ART
THOU,
STRANGER? A
FRIEND OF
RICHARD?

DEMETRIUS!


TAKE NO OFFENSE,
FRIEND. DEMETRIUS
SEES SHADOWS
EVERYWHERE.

FRIEND, SIT
BACK DOWN. ENJOY
THE SOFT PERCH OF
ADRIANA'S LAP.
WOULD THAT IT WERE
MY HEAD THAT HAD
BEEN PLACED
THERE INSTEAD
OF YOURS.

ARE YOU
PRODIGALS?

NO, THOUGH ONE
DAY WE WILL TAKE UP
ARMS AND DEFEAT THE
TYRANT RICHARD.

LYSANDER,
CURB THY
BOASTFUL AND
FOOLISH
TONGUE!



DEMETRIUS, STOP BEING A WOMAN. LET RICHARD'S MEN COME. IF WE WANT FREEDOM WE HAVE TO FIGHT FOR IT. AND IF LADY JULIET CALLED UPON ME TONIGHT I WOULD MARCH BEHIND HER TOMORROW.

THAT IS WHY THOU ART A FOOL... DESTINED TO BECOME A DEAD FOOL.

DEAD FOR A BEAUTY LIKE JULIET? AHH, DEMETRIUS, WHAT BETTER FATE?

A BETTER FATE? PERHAPS LIVING?

ARE YOU NOT TIRED OF THE TAXES, DEMETRIUS?

LISTEN TO YOUR COUSIN, DEMETRIUS. ARE YOU NOT TIRED OF RICHARD STEALING OUR HARVEST FOR HIS SOLDIERS?

BUT DOES RICHARD NOT BUILD SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES FOR HIS PEOPLE TO EDUCATE THEM?


OF COURSE. BUT REBELLIONS ONLY KILL COMMONERS, NOT KINGS.



I DO NOT KNOW WHERE YOU COME FROM, BUT RICHARD HAS NO INTEREST IN AN "EDUCATED PEOPLE."

ANYTHING THAT SCABROUS DOG BUILDS IS FOR HIS OWN GAIN, NOT OTHERS.






AND WHAT OF HIS LIEUTENANT?
THE ONE THEY CALL IAGO?

I KNOW NOT THE NAME. BUT I SUSPECT ANY MAN WHO SOLDIERS FOR RICHARD IS AS EVIL AS HIS EMPLOYER.



THEN WHAT OF SHAKESPEARE?


SHAKESPEARE THE MYTH? OR SHAKESPEARE THE FALSE HOPE?



PAY HIM NO MIND. DEMETRIUS IS ONE OF THOSE WHO MISTAKE FAITH FOR FOOLISHNESS.


IS IT NOT FOOLISH TO WAIT FOR AN INVISIBLE SAVIOUR? TO HOPE THAT A MAN NONE HAVE EVER SEEN WILL COME TO DELIVER US FROM EVIL?

THAT IS WHY IT IS CALLED "FAITH," DEMETRIUS. IF IT WERE A TRUTH ALL COULD KNOW AND TOUCH, IT WOULD BE CALLED "FACT."



WILL SHALL RETURN TO US, DEMETRIUS. ALREADY THERE ARE RUMOURS THE SHADOW KING WALKS AMONGST US.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, FRIEND? DO YOU BELIEVE IN SHAKESPEARE THE CREATOR AND THE SHADOW KING?



FIE, LYSANDER. AT LEAST LET US FIND OUR GUEST'S NAME BEFORE PLUMBING THE DEPTH OF HIS THEOLOGY.

MY NAME IS HAMLET.

WHAT WERE YOU RUNNING AWAY FROM, HAMLET? IT LOOKED AS THOUGH THE DEVIL HIMSELF WAS AT YOUR HEELS.



I WAS LOST... I HAD WANDERED FOR MANY DAYS AND WAS TOUCHED WITH FEVER.

I DO NOT REMEMBER WHAT I THOUGHT I SAW.

WELL, THEN IT IS SETTLED. WE WILL TAKE YOU WITH US. YOU CAN REST AND FIND YOUR STRENGTH AND MEMORY.





HE SLEEPS
WELL, MY
LADY. HE HATH
NO HEAD FOR
WHAT HE MUST
FACE.

WILL YE LET
RICHARD KNOW
WHAT YE KNOW?
THAT THE SHADOW
KING IS AGAIN
WITHIN CAPULET'S
REACH?

LET EVERY
EYE NEGOTIATE
FOR ITSELF.
RICHARD NEEDS
KNOW ONLY WHAT
I DECIDE.

CHANCE IS A NEGOTIABLE
ULTIMATELY NOT A CHANCE



I THINK IT IS
A GOOD SPOT,
LADY. ROOM FOR
THE PEOPLE,
ROOM FOR YOU TO
SPEAK, AWAY
FROM PRYING
EYES—

SECURE,
YES... AND
CLOSE TO A
READY SUPPLY
OF SPICED FOOD
AND STRONG
DRINK?

WELL, YES, IF
ONE IS TRYING TO
CONVERT A MOB,
IT IS BEST IF THEY
ARE FED AND
WATERED.

OTHELLO, MY ONCE
BROTHER, I PRAY TO
WILL THAT ONE DAY I CAN
EARN YOUR FORGIVENESS
FOR MY BETRAYALS.

IT MUST BE HARD
FOR THEE TO HAVE
YOUR GREAT BETRAVER
SO CLOSE TO HAND AND
YET BE SUBJECT TO
ANOTHER'S WILL.

DO YOU THINK THE
LADY CONTROLS ME,
IAGO? IS THAT WHAT YOU
BELIEVE KEEPS YOU SAFE?
DO NOT PRESS ME,
LEST THOU PRESS
TOO FAR.

NO, OTHELLO,
YOU MISUNDERSTAND
ME. I MEAN TO PRAISE
THY DEemeanOR, WHICH
HAS CHANGED SO MUCH
FROM WHENCE I KNEW
THEE FIRST.

THE OTHELLO
I ONCE SERVED
WOULD HAVE TORN
APART THE GLOBE
TO HAVE IAGO'S
HEART IN HIS HANDS,
TO SQUEEZE
IT AND THEREBY
END ME.



BUT NOW, OTHELLO, YOU HAVE BECOME A DIFFERENT MAN. A MAN NOT RULED BY HIS DARK PASSIONS. A MAN WHO LOOKS TO SERVE WILL'S GREATER GOOD.

I WILL NOT BATTLE WORDS WITH THEE, IAGO. THOU ALWAYS TWISTS THEM TO THINE OWN NEEDS.



KEEP HIM AWAY FROM ME, LADY.



WHAT DIDST THOU SAY TO OFFEND OTHELLO?

I AM AT FAULT, MY LADY. I WISHED SO BADLY TO MAKE AMENDS I PLAYED MYSELF FALSE AND OTHELLO KNEW.

I TOLD HIM I WAS IMPRESSED THAT HE DID NOT KILL ME AND THAT HE HELD YOU IN SUCH ESTEEM THAT HE WOULD DENY HIS NATURE.



MY ERROR IS PRETENDING THAT I CARE NOT WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE, AND OTHELLO CAN SENSE THIS.

MEN SHOULD BE WHAT THEY SEEM.



BE TRUE, IAGO. THE QUALITY OF WILL'S MERCY IS NOT STRAINED. HE SHALL GIVE ALL OF US WHAT HE BELIEVES WE HAVE EARNED.

THANK YOU, MY LADY. I WILL TRY TO BE TRUE.





HNAGH?



SEE? I TOLD
THEE THAT PIG
WOULD WAKE
HIM.

FALSTAFF?
JULIET? THOU
HAST FOLLOWED
ME?

YOU SAID I
WOULD BE FREE.
YOU LIED!

NOT AT ALL, LAD.
->CHOMP-> I TOLD
THEE LADY FATE WOULD
BRING US TOGETHER, DID
I NOT? ->CHOMP-> I
JUST DID NOT EXPECT
HER TO WORK SO
QUICKLY...

WE CAME HERE
ON OUR OWN COURSE,
HAMLET. AND I KEEP MY
PROMISES. YOU ARE
FREE TO MOVE ON
FROM HERE IF
YOU WISH.

BUT IT WOULD
BE GENTLEMANLY
FOR YOU TO SPEND
SOME TIME IN THE
FIELD TO PAY THESE
FINE TOWNSFOLK
FOR THY LODGINGS
AND FOOD.

WHOMP

YOU HAVE
IMPRESSED
SOMEONE, HAMLET.
A PRETTY GIRL
GAVE ME THESE,
FRESHLY CLEANED
AND REPAIRED,
AND SEEMED
CONCERNED OVER
HER HANDIWORK.

THANK
ADRIANA WHEN
THOU SEES HER. OR
WILL YOU CONTINUE
TO TURN YOUR BACK
ON CLOTHES AND
COME TO WORK
NAKED?



I SHALL
SEE THEE
IN THE
FIELDS.







THEN SAY THOSE WORDS WHEN YOU WOO.
BUT NOT "DECENT." DECENT IS FOR A
HUNTING DOG OF MIDLING QUALITY,
NOT A BEAUTY WITH CHESTNUT
TRESSES.

FINE, THEN.
MY WORDS ARE
VINEGAR, NOT
HONEY. BUT, I
HAVE NO DESIRE
TO "WOO" ANY
MAID.

DIDST THOU
DESIRE TO HURT
ONE?



ALL
EFFORTS I
MAKE ARE
WRONG.



I SPEAK TO
A WOMAN HONESTLY AND
CAUSE HER PAIN. I CHOOSE TO
DEFEND MY FATHER AND I
LEAVE A MAN DEAD.



I LEAVE YOUR
SIDE TO CHART MY
OWN DESTINY AND
I FIND MYSELF
CURSED TO BE A
COWARD.

I WATCHED
THEM TEAR YOUR
MAN SHALLOW'S
TONGUE OUT. I
WATCHED THEM
TORTURE A
WOMAN.

AND I DID
NOTHING...

...I DO
NOTHING.



I HAVE LOST
THE IMMORTAL
PART OF MYSELF,
AND WHAT
REMAINS IS
BESTIAL.



AHHH... LORD RICHARD, THOU HATH THE VERY ANSWER MY WIT... AHH... DEMANDS.

I HAVE AN ANSWER THAT WILL SERVE... ALL MEN.

WHAT ACTION DO WE TAKE NOW THAT IAGO HAS DISAPPEARED? WHO WILL BRING THE SHADOW KING AND QUILL TO US?



I WILL FIND BOTH IAGO AND HAMLET. MY MEN GO THROUGH EVERY VILLAGE EVEN AS I LIE HERE—THOUGH, LADY, THE TASK WOULD RUN MORE QUICKLY WERE YOU TO LEND THE BLACK GUARD TO THE CAUSE.

AND TAKE WHAT LITTLE SAFETY MY PEOPLE HAVE FROM YOUR ARMIES AWAY FROM THEM? NO, RICHARD, I WOULD NOT TAKE THAT CHANCE.



MY ARM? DO NOT MAKE SPORT OF ME. THE WATERS OF MY AFFECTION COULD YET BE TAINTED.



I COULD WIELD WILL'S POWER MYSELF, OR FIND ANOTHER WHO WILL ANSWER MY CALL WITHOUT COMPLAINT.



BUT, MY LADY. WE HAVE THE SAME GOAL—TO SEE SHAKESPEARE DEAD AND HIS QUILL LIBERATED. I HAVE SAID YOU WILL RULE AT MY SIDE. DO YOU THINK I HAVE NO AFFECTION FOR THEE?

WE CANNOT ALL BE MASTERS, RICHARD. NOR CAN ALL MASTERS BE TRULY FOLLOWED. WE BE EQUALS OR WE BE ENEMIES.

YOU SPEAK OFTEN OF AFFECTION AND OUR GLORY, RICHARD, BUT I HAVE NO WISH TO STAND MEELY BY YOUR SIDE. MY LATE HUSBAND SHOULD SERVE AS PROOF OF MY TASTE FOR MEN'S GLORIES.

BESIDES, HOW WILL YOU USE WILL'S QUILL? YOUR ARM IS BUILT FOR THE SWORD.

OF COURSE, MY LORD.

AH, LADY, WE SHALL BE EQUALS. BUT YOU WILL LEARN TO APPRECIATE THAT I AM FIRST AMONGST US.

OF COURSE.



YOU TRUST
NO SOUL, DO
YOU?

THERE IS FAR
LESS JOY THAN WHEN
WE WERE WELCOMED,
NERISSA. FAR
FEWER SOULS,
AS WELL.

NEWS OF POOR
SHALLOW'S DEATH
HAS SPREAD. THEY
FEAR SUPPORTING
PRODIGALS MAY BE
THEIR DEATH.

PEOPLE OF
SHREWSBURY...

...I HAVE
A CONFESSION.
I AM HAUNTED BY
A GHOST. HE SEEKS
ME OUT IN THE DEAD OF
NIGHT, AND WHISPERS
INTO MY EAR.

HE REMINDS ME
THAT I WAS ONCE
A SPOILED YOUNG GIRL,
FATED TO BECOME A
WOMAN WHO WOULD TURN
HER HEAD AT THE STORIES
OF A TYRANT'S CRUELTY
TO OTHERS AS LONG
AS MY OWN PLATE
WAS FULL.

I CONFESS
TO YOU THAT
I COULD EASILY
HAVE SUPPORTED
RICHARD.

BUT THEN,
BECAUSE OF
THAT NARROW
VISION, BECAUSE
OF THOSE SELFISH
CONCERNS, I LOST ... I
LOST SOMEONE MORE
PRECIOUS TO ME
THAN GOLD.

AND I
SWORE—I SWORE
TO WILLIAM—THAT
NEVER AGAIN WOULD I
BLIND MYSELF TO THE
WORLD AROUND ME.
THAT WHILE I STOOD,
I WOULD STAND
FOR JUSTICE.



YOU WOULD HAVE US REBEL AGAINST RICHARD AND DIE FOR YOUR PAST? YOUR MISTAKES?



NO, I WOULD HAVE US FIGHT FOR OUR FUTURE. TO DRIVE OUT THE GHOSTS THAT HAUNT US ALL!



BUT RICHARD LEAVES US BE. AYE, HE TAKES US. BUT HIS MEN BURN OTHER VILLAGES, NOT OURS. WHY SHOULD WE TAKE UP ARMS WITH PRODIGALS AND TURN RICHARD'S GAZE OUR WAY?

THOU CLAIMS RICHARD DOES NOT SEE THEE? BUT ALREADY HE STEALS THY COINS. WHAT THEN WHEN HE DESIRES THY LAND?



WHAT SHALL WE DO THEN?

I TELL THEE, FRIEND, THAT YOU MUST FIGHT. RICHARD'S GAZE WILL TURN TO THEE NOT ONLY BECAUSE HE IS GREEDY AND CRUEL, BUT BECAUSE HE BELIEVES IT IS HIS RIGHT TO TAKE WHAT HE WISHES.



I KNOW I AM BUT A YOUNG GIRL, BUT I KNOW THIS: TYRANTS. MUST. BE. STOPPED.



BUT WE ARE BENEATH RICHARD'S NOTICE NOW. LET US PRESS THAT ADVANTAGE.

LET US GATHER WITHOUT HIS KNOWLEDGE, AS WE DO NOW. LET US CHASE AWAY OUR GHOSTS BY GATHERING AS SPIRITS.



SPIRITS OF HOPE, SPIRITS OF ANGER, SPIRITS DESIRING LIFE. BUT WE MUST BE SPIRITS THAT ARE WILLING TO CHOOSE THE LIFE WE DESERVE. RICHARD WILL NOT GIVE IT TO US.



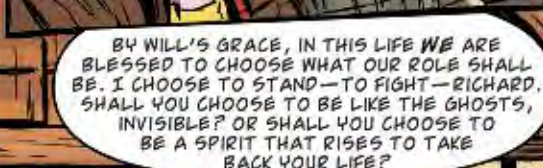
I TELL THEE THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE. IN EVERY CITY, IN EVERY VILLAGE I VISIT I HAVE FOUND OTHER SPIRITS—SPIRITS WHO DESIRE TO BE FREE, SPIRITS WHO ARE WILLING TO FIGHT.



TOGETHER WE NUMBER MORE—FAR MORE—THAN RICHARD CAN IMAGINE. YET FOOLISHLY HE STILL DOES NOT SEE THIS SPIRIT.



YOU ASK ME WHY WE SHOULD FIGHT? I HAVE TOLD THEE. TYRANTS WILL NOT STOP THEMSELVES.



BY WILL'S GRACE, IN THIS LIFE WE ARE BLESSED TO CHOOSE WHAT OUR ROLE SHALL BE. I CHOOSE TO STAND—TO FIGHT—RICHARD. SHALL YOU CHOOSE TO BE LIKE THE GHOSTS, INVISIBLE? OR SHALL YOU CHOOSE TO BE A SPIRIT THAT RISES TO TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE?



FOR SHREWSBURY!

TO ARMS!
TO ARMS!
RICHARD,
YOU BASTARD!



SO WHICH SHALL IT BE? SHALL YOU
REMAIN DEAD? COLD? LIFELESS?
WAITING FOR RICHARD TO STRIKE?
OR SHALL WE CHOOSE TO
FINALLY LIVE?



WE SHALL
FIND ADVENTURE,
DEMETRIUS! WE SHALL
FIGHT FOR FREEDOM!



I MUST TELL
EVERYONE!
THE REBELLION
HAS COME!



FINALLY...
FINALLY...



FOR JULIET!
FOR WILL!
DOWN WITH
RICHARD!



QUITE A
WOMAN, EH,
BOY?





IT SEEMS AS IF I
HAVE DISCOVERED A
WHOLE NEST OF
PRODIGALS.



DRAW THE
RABBITS OUT OF
THEIR WARREN AND
FIND OUT WHO LED
THIS LITTLE
GATHERING.

WE MUST FLEE, LADY.
YOU DO THESE PEOPLE
NO FAVOUR BY BEING
DISCOVERED. IN FACT,
FLIGHT IS THE
GREATEST BOON
YOU CAN GRANT
THEM.

RICHARD
WOULD BURN
THEIR VILLAGE
TO THE GROUND
IF HE KNEW
THESE PEOPLE
SHELTERED
THEE.

IF WE
RUN THEN ALL
I SAID HERE
TODAY WAS
A LIE.

THEN
LIE, BUT
LIVE.



UTTER ONE
WORD AND IT
SHALL BE THY
LAST.



NO!
LEAVE ME
BE! HELP!
HELP!

STAY STEADY,
WENCH. MY FELLOWS
WILL HAVE THEIR TURN
IN THE SADDLE.









FOR
WILL!

FOR
WILL!

FOR
WILL!

FOR
WILL!

FOR
WILL!

FOR
WILL!









BONUS **GALLERY**

*Featuring artwork from
the series as well as the
exclusive story:*

"Et tu, Hecate?"

WRITTEN BY

*Owen K. Craig
and
Curtis Westman*

ART BY

J. Bone



THE PAST. ROME.

"BRUTUS, YOU ARE AN
HONOURABLE MAN..."



...BUT YOUR
HONOUR IS A
HINDRANCE TO
WHAT MUST BE
DONE.

CASSIUS,
PLEASE. HE IS
MY FRIEND.

THAT CHANGES
NOTHING.



ROME HAD
BRANDED ME A
TRAITOR, AND CAESAR
PARDONED ME OUT OF
LOYALTY. THAT MAN
DESERVES THE SAME
LOYALTY. THAT MAN
WOULD NOT
DISSOLVE THE
SENATE.



HE IS NOT THAT
MAN ANYMORE. HE HAS
GROWN FAT WITH WEALTH
AND SICK WITH POWER.
FOR TOO LONG I HAVE
WATCHED THIS AND
DONE NOTHING.

NO
MORE!



THINK OF WHAT
COULD BE DONE
WITH THAT POWER
IN DIFFERENT
HANDS. IN OUR
HANDS.



ENOUGH! I
WILL HAVE NO
PART IN YOUR
GREED.







...THOUGH SHAKESPEARE
PLACES FAITH IN ALL THEIR
VIRTUES, I WILL SHOW THAT
FAITH TO BE MISPLACED.

DESPITE THEIR EFFORTS,
VIRTUE CANNOT FOREVER
MASK THE CHAOS WITHIN.



FOR ANYONE CAN BE
CORRUPTED. EVEN
THE NOBLEST OF MEN.



WHETHER SPURRED BY
JEALOUSY OR BY WEAKNESS...



...ALL ARE GUILTY.



AND SHAKESPEARE SHALL BE
SHAMED, AS ALL WILL SEE THE
FLAWS HIS CHILDREN BEAR.



FOR GODS CANNOT
EMERGE
UNCHALLENGED.
AND HE IS OF THE
PROUDEST SORT.

A NEW GOD.

A WEAK GOD.



"IT IS DONE..."

...SHAKESPEARE SHALL DIE AT HAMLET'S HANDS.

THE END.









Cover #1B by Andy Belanger











