

HAIL

An animated tale

by

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TEASER

FADE IN

EXT. BLUE ROSE VILLAGE - CHURCH - GARDEN - DAY

A clock TOLLS from a looming belltower, ECHOING over a jagged rock face. An elegant array of azure flora lie nestled below, barricaded by stone bricks: the BLUE ROSE.

A TALONED HAND grips a single flower, letting its petals and spindly vine GLIMMER unnaturally in the sunlight...before CRUSHING it to dust.

DISEMBODIED VOICE (V.O.)

Faith. Reason. Nature. All will
fall to the Blue Rose.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - EXPANSE - DAY - CONT.

A vast maze of moss-cloaked trees, stretching far into the distance. Sandy mountains mask the skyline, the pulse of unbroken WAVES drifting from beyond. Pure peace. Until-

A blinding blue FLASH. A deafening CRASH! Bluish smoke HURTLES from the mountains, filling the sky. A vicious wind STORMS the forest. Faster! And faster! Until-

A lone figure CRASHES through the treetops. The wind dies. SILENCE. And-

The clouds break, shrouding the land in the bluish mist of-

RAINFALL: pouring all around, SMATTERING through a ceiling of crescent leaves to run down bark. The only sound around.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - CLEARING - DAY

Amidst the soaked green and pebbled mud, a body lies buried under broken branches. Still. Dead to the world. Until-

A GASP spills from its throat, ECHOING through the rain. A white-tan paw grips the forest floor, easing the figure to its shaking feet-

KINN (20s): a striped hyena with urgent FLICKING ears and heterochromic eyes, one emerald, one glimmering blue. His paw CUPS a deep shoulder wound, blood staining his ragged woven shirt. A green *haramaki*, dark cloth trousers and foot wraps save his modesty.

(CONTINUED)

Kinn peers up stunned at his surroundings. He CALLS OUT to the distance-

KINN
Hello?! Help! HELP!

-but only a RASP emerges. He paws at his throat confused-

An emerald ring GLINTS on his finger. Confusion fades to worry.

Kinn stumbles around his resting place, SCRAPING through branches to pull out a stitched SATCHEL. He RUMMAGES through its contents-

A water tankard. A metal compass. A book of sermons. A faith pendant, adorned with a BLUE ROSE. And right at the bottom-

A silver feline locket. Kinn eases it open, revealing-

A photo of him, holding paws with a smiling male aardwolf: CUTA (20s). An identical emerald ring glints on Cuta's paw. Their names are etched in the locket, next to a faint heart.

Relief crosses Kinn's face. Only to fade to pure fear, as he peers urgently around. He CALLS OUT again and again, lips desperately forming 'Cuta!'...still no voice emerges.

Kinn peers up to the white sky barely breaking through. His faith pendant GLINTS. A fierce determination breaks through pricking tears.

Kinn RIPS off his shirt, bandaging his shoulder, BREATHING HARD through the pain. He SLINGS on his satchel, winding the pendant around his free wrist.

Kissing his locket, the hyena folds his paws in silent prayer...and sets off through the rain, compass held close as he disappears among the trees.

A smatter of blue petals float from his resting place, GLIMMERING as they go.

END OF TEASER

(CONTINUED)

FLASHBACK:

INT. BLUE ROSE VILLAGE - CHURCH - NAVE - DAY - CONT.

A soft KNOCKING echoes around the vast space. Upon a wide wooden stage-

A SHADOWED FIGURE wields a mallet, HAMMERING curved wood into a shape.

The mallet SLIPS, SMACKING a splinter into his paw. He RECOILS, wincing to YANK it from the bloodied cut. And yet-

He simply nods, pulling out a vial to DROP something on his palm...the wound CLOTS instantly. He wraps a bandage around it, FLEXES it satisfied...and HAMMERS in the last nail.

A jar of scuttering BLUE BEETLES waits nearby. A paw TIPS some into a bowl. Adds a sprig of lavender. And-

A pestle CRUSHES them to pulp. A thick paintbrush dips in the bluish blood, STREAKING over the wooden shape. Until-

The figure finishes, CLIMBING a makeshift ladder to HANG the shape across the stage's stone backdrop-

A grand wooden BLUE ROSE, beetle blood glimmering gently. The figure retreats, finally revealing-

Kinn: golden-grey fur groomed, ears relaxed...but TWO emerald eyes, shining with pride at his work, brushing sawdust from a simple white shirt and blue cloth trousers. He drops leaves in the jar, sealing it shut to peer guiltily at the spared bugs inside-

KINN

Please forgive me.

-before stowing it away. He rises, peering out over-

Empty wooden pews, flanked by sheer stone walls, adorned with polished blue patterns, the light of dawn glinting through the roof above.

Kinn wraps an azure ceremonial robe around himself, marching up nearby stone steps to a waiting rope. Takes a DEEP BREATH. And-

EXT. BLUE ROSE VILLAGE - MOUNTAIN ROADS - DAY

The clock TOLLS from the looming belltower, ECHOING across-

A flurry of vast sandy paths, stretching and winding before dozens of sturdy blue-painted wood-stone huts, humble gardens of luscious lentils, fruit and veg bright among sheer flora-blossomed rock faces. A thin mist clouds the summit above, barely masking the pink dawn sky.

INT. CHURCH - NAVE - DAY

Kinn STRIDES down the aisle to heavy oak doors. An EXCITED CHATTER rumbles behind them. Another DEEP BREATH...and he SWINGS them open to-

A waiting crowd of BLUE ROSE FOLLOWERS: mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, all resplendent in blue-white garb as they pace in happily to the pews, SHAKING Kinn's paw as they go. Several HELPERS light CANDLESTANDS, casting the Church in a soft blue glow.

There are no children.

Kinn LOCKS the doors. He strides up the stage to the wooden pulpit, paws TREMBLING. Gazes out at the humble crowd. A final DEEP BREATH. And his soft regal accent RINGS out-

KINN

Good dawn to the Rose! Good dawn to you, Blue Rose Village!

FOLLOWERS

Good dawn to the Rose! Good dawn to you, Pastor Kinn!

KINN

I pray my call for your early arrival has not struck fear upon you. But a most vital sign has greeted us. A sign of utmost intensity, brought forth by the Blue Rose itself, to meet the eyes of our trusted Elder. A sign...of the imminent Hail.

The followers GASP, MURMURING amongst themselves.

KINN (CONT.)

I trust this may unsettle you. After all, the Elder's visions have indeed grown stronger. Truth be

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KINN (CONT.) (cont'd)
 told, as of late, even I have felt
 the familiar creeping dread of the
 unknown. But I will not let it
 forsake what we promised to uphold:
 the sanctity of the Blue Rose. Be
 they old or young; sacred, solemn
 or scarred; born of Faith, Reason,
 or Nature - ALL abiders are welcome
 to its healing. And it is by that
 promise that our Elder calls now to
 our long-awaited mission: to save
 our Village's own beckoning expanse
 - Iodonus Forest.

Kinn pulls over a great wooden board, shielded by a blue
 sheet. He smoothly RIPS it away, revealing-

A giant MODEL MAP of Iodonus: tiny model huts dotted among
 delicate painted trees and inked rivers, mountains looming
 in the distance.

The followers gaze in AWE, faces brightening-

KINN (CONT.)
 I acknowledge past followers here
 have expressed discontent at theirs
 shirking the idea of forces above
 us. But it is our Elder's greatest
 notion that the sheer beauty of
 their land and humility of their
 Nature-abiding people designates
 them as souls requiring utmost
 preservation from The Hail. And so,
 I impart that our mission begins
 tomorrow!

-the pews CHATTER with excitement-

KINN (CONT.)
 And I guarantee now: as long as we
 have our Faith, our Elder, our
 community, and the Rose, we will
 not let The Hail surpass us!

-the Church erupts with CHEER. Kinn beams, glancing offstage
 to-

A peering WHITE-MASKED AVIAN FIGURE, nodding proudly.

(CONTINUED)

PRESENT:

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - STONE SHELTER FRONT - DAY - CONT.

Kinn limps into a wide clearing. Fresh blood seeps in rivers down his shoulder, dried red matting his soaked bare chest. The *haramaki* around his stomach remains thankfully clean.

The rain's patter suddenly CHANGES. A lighter sound. Kinn's ears FLICK, peering through a mob of foliage at its source-

A polished stone shelter, pillars cracked and crumbled under fallen trees, reduced to ruins. A flat cavernous space rests dry beneath it.

Kinn grips his pendant tight, as heavy limbs DRAG him through sagging undergrowth to crawl inside.

INT. STONE SHELTER - DAY

Kinn COLLAPSES, satchel SPILLING off him. He holds his locket, pained tears spilling as he peers out at the rain enveloping the wood. Almost peaceful.

KINN (V.O.)
Please...forgive me...

His wheezing WEAKENS. His eyes drift shut. The rain SOFTENS...

INT. BLUE ROSE CHURCH - NAVE - DAY - DREAM

Darkness envelops the raised pulpit. Until-

Taloned hands slip from pitch black. One offers a Blue Rose. The other an emerald ring. A LOW VOICE echoes-

DISEMBODIED VOICE (O.S.)
What do you really want?

Two golden eyes SHOOT open. A deathly glare-

DISEMBODIED VOICE (O.S.) (CONT.)
Do you even know?

INT. STONE SHELTER - DAY - PRESENT

BUCKLING. SHUFFLING. PAT PAT PAT.

Kinn stirs, bloodshot eyes lidded in exhaustion. The rain still POURS outside, smattering the stone above his head.

PAT PAT PAT. His ears FLICK, listening intently as-

A scaly hand PATS a thick cloth over his damp fur. Something SEEPS onto his shoulder. Dry white bandages are RIPPED and wound around it.

Sticky footsteps PATTERN across the shelter floor. Kinn opens his eyes fully, peering closer at-

A small squatting reptile, RUMMAGING through his belongings. They pull out his tankard, turning back-

Kinn SHUTS his eyes tight. FOOTSTEPS. A hand lifts his chin, dripping water over parched lips. Curious fingers brush the locket around his neck...and grip to open it. Just as-

Kinn JOLTS up, SMACKING their arm away. The figure LEAPS back startled, SNATCHING their own hidden blue satchel to SCRAMBLE out the shelter.

Kinn eases up, WINCING as he crawls from the shadows after them-

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - STONE SHELTER FRONT - DAY

Kinn eases out, BREATHING HARD, peering agitated around the clearing. No sight of the figure. Until-

Something THUMPS against a nearby tree. A tail FLICKERS and FADES, struggling to match its mossy colour.

Kinn creeps over, pretending to peer around it...and GRABS an arm, DRAGGING the figure from hiding. Rain SPLASHES their form, finally revealing-

KHAMY (10): a chameleon, thin shirt and trousers torn and damp, a blue *haramaki* intact beneath. Cuts and bruises smatter his sea-blue scales, tail curled under webbish feet.

Kinn lets go, sending Khamy to SMACK the ground. Innocent azure eyes stare up, wide with frightful tears as he cowers, thin lips forming-

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

I'm sorry! Please don't hurt me!

-but only a RASP emerges.

Kinn softens, face filling with regret as he SIGNS-

KINN

You've lost your voice too?

Khamy calms, nodding surprised. The pair peer at each other:
'Can I trust you?'

The rain FALLS HARDER. Kinn turns for the stone shelter, offering an apologetic paw. Khamy dithers...and takes it, lifted to his feet to follow.

INT. STONE SHELTER - DAY

Kinn shares his tankard. Khamy hesitates. Kinn DRINKS first, SWALLOWING to confirm: 'It's not poisoned.'

The reptile reluctantly accepts, as the pair SIGN together-

KHAMY

Thank you Sir. This is yours right?
I was going to throw it away but-

He holds out Kinn's blood-stained shirt-bandage. The hyena takes the garment, running it fondly through his paws-

KINN

Good thing you didn't. It's my favourite. Why were you looking at my locket?

KHAMY

I've never seen one before. It's pretty. I wasn't stealing it though! I never would Sir!

KINN

Hmm. Very well. I forgive you young, er...what is your name?

KHAMY

I'm not supposed to tell strangers.

KINN

That's fair. Well my name is Kinn. Just so you know. And I'm sorry I grabbed you like that.

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

It's OK. I'm sorry I scared you.
Here-

Khamy fishes in his own satchel for a treat: sweet rice crackers and beetles.

Kinn's stomach GROWLS. He reluctantly takes a bug...and BITES IT, GRIMACING through the CRUNCH. Khamy shares a knowing grin-

KHAMY

Acquired taste?

Kinn NODS. He peers at his bandaged shoulder, a grateful smile emerging-

KINN

Bless you. How did you do it?

Khamy SHRUGS, retrieving a bottle: IODINE SAP.

KHAMY

My mother is a healer. I just watch and copy her. Though I'm not supposed to take these. Don't tell.

KINN

Patient's promise. But why? Like you said, I'm a stranger.

KHAMY

I'd want someone to help me if I was hurt. Especially in a big place like this. And especially today. Because of-

His hands pause mid-sign. Kinn's smile vanishes. His paws SIGN for him-

KINN

Because of The Hail.

Khamy nods, eyes wide in wonder-

KHAMY

I thought it was just a story. But I guess if YOU believe it too-?

KINN

With all my faith. No story could make a storm like that. Were you caught in it?

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

I think so. There was a bang. The biggest I've ever heard. A great wind blew me away, right over the Forest, until I fell in the trees. I climbed down once it stopped. But I don't recognise these parts. I'm not allowed to go too far. Did The Hail bring you here too?

KINN

Yes. It was only a matter of time, given the sermons: '40 days to herd. 7 days to perish.' Never thought I'd witness it though. Or be dragged from home in its wake.

KHAMY

Oh, you don't live here?

KINN

No. Someone I care for very much comes from here. But they were going to live with me in Blue Rose Village.

KHAMY

Along the mountains?! I've always wondered what it'd be like to live there. You must feel so lucky.

KINN

Not now I don't. The Hail tore us apart. I don't even know if they survived. I simply have to find them. Only I don't know the way?

Khamy BEAMS. He LEAPS up, beckoning Kinn to a dry corner to open a thick scrapbook, revealing-

An intricate MAP, inked in black, blue and green on parchment. Kinn gazes astonished at the detail.

KINN (CONT.)

You made this?!

KHAMY

My father is a tracker. I'm not supposed to read his books without asking, so I snuck one to draw the district: Iodonus Forest here, Blue Rose Village right up there, and the Border Roads between them, to the Sea Beyond.

(CONTINUED)

Khamy's finger circles a hut-like symbol in the mountains, dragging his finger neatly across the map-

KHAMY (CONT.)

My parents told me if there's ever any danger, I should make my way to this shelter to hide. If we follow the paths West, and climb the Forest floor toward the mountains, that will take us to the shelter AND your Village. That is, if you WANT to come with me?

KINN

Won't it strife you? Taking a stranger?

KHAMY

If you smelled like danger. But you don't. Besides, we only have 7 days before The Hail takes our voices forever. And you may need help while your shoulder's healing?

Kinn dithers...and SIGNS-

KINN

Bless you little one. You have a deal.

Khamy BEAMS, closing his book to TAP the name on the cover-

KHAMY

My name's Khamy. Nice to meet you Kinn.

He eagerly SHAKES Kinn's paw. The hyena manages a hopeful smile.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - STONE SHELTER FRONT - DAY

Khamy SLIPS out from the shelter, head held high, basking in the rain. Kinn CRAWLS out after him, satchel and locket held close, peering inquisitively as the chameleon SIGNS-

KHAMY

We've never had anything like this! Now come on, we've got a long way to go!

The reptile HOPS off happily through puddles, sticky feet SPLASHING and SQUELCHING to a shrouded clearing ahead. Kinn takes a DEEP BREATH...and strides after him. Thin white light breaks through above, GLINTING over him.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - DEEP WOODS - DAY

The rain falls steady. Bare paths streak a trail among the towering trees, remnants of rock broken beneath them.

Kinn and Khamy stroll side by side. The hyena SHAKES wet from his fur, feet faltering as he SIGNS-

KINN

May we rest a while?

The pair perch on a tall mound, shielded under a vast Giant Rhubarb plant to open their tankards.

A thin river DRIPS from each. The pair SIGN-

KINN (CONT.)

Oh dear. We could catch the rain?

KHAMY

I tried before. It tastes strange.
Best find another source.

Khamy UNROLLS his map, TAPPING at a blue circle-

KHAMY (CONT.)

Ah-ha! The Great Pool. A stone wall surrounds it to stop contamination. Just a little further and we can collect more water there.

Kinn TAPS a black-barred symbol intrigued-

KINN

What is this place?

KHAMY

The Low Holds. Where bad people go.
Until they want to be good again.

Kinn stifles a GULP. He cups a paw over his stomach. Khamy raises an eyebrow. Kinn releases his paw, looking away.

Khamy tucks away his map, peering at Kinn's Blue Rose pendant-

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY (CONT.)

What is that anyway? Jewellery?

KINN

My pendant. It shows I abide by Faith: the Blue Rose Church. You must know of it?

KHAMY

A little. You abide by a flower?

Kinn gives a RASPING CHUCKLE-

KINN

My community. I abide by them all. As they abide by me. Like a big loving family.

KHAMY

Why do you need jewellery to show you love your family?

Kinn blinks flummoxed. Khamy points to his ring and locket-

KHAMY (CONT.)

What about those? Do they show you love them too?

Kinn brushes the treasures around his paw and neck-

KINN

They show love to one person.

KHAMY

'The someone you care for very much'? Like a friend? Or a husband?

Kinn DOUBLE-TAKES, eyes wide-

KINN

H-How did you-?

KHAMY

You have a Nature scent on you, like my parents. But not a girl's scent. It's sweeter, more caring. I thought it was obvious. Hey, are you blushing?

KINN

The rain falls heavier. Let us move on, little one.

He clambers off to STRIDE on, BLUSHING as he goes. Khamy puts out a hand confused. The rain falls just like before.

LATER

The hyena and chameleon trek the winding paths. The rain PATTERS peacefully all around, the ceiling of leaves breaking to SPIRAL and FLUTTER down.

An ivory-white dragonfly ZOOMS from a prickly shrub, DARTING across their path. Khamy CLINGS to Kinn astonished. The boy BLUSHES sheepish. The hyena smiles fondly, letting him lead on as they SIGN-

KHAMY

I'm sorry. If I embarrassed you before.

KINN

It's alright. I'm just not used to talking about my love. Not like Nature abiders.

KHAMY

What's his name? Your husband.

KINN

Cuta. But he's not exactly my husband.

KHAMY

Will he be?

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. IODONIUS FOREST - HUT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the dim light of dusk, Cuta's white paw reaches for Kinn's-

PRESENT:

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - DEEP WOODS - DAY

Kinn's smile wavers, an odd fear in his eyes-

KINN

I'd prefer not to talk about it, little one.

Khamy WILTS. Kinn softens-

(CONTINUED)

KINN

So...have you lived in Iodonius all your life?

Khamy blinks stunned. Like no-one's ever asked him before-

KHAMY

Yes Sir. Well, until today. I came to your Village for the first time, just before The Hail. Not that I was supposed to be there.

KINN

If I may guess: your parents?

KHAMY

Uh-huh. They don't understand. They think it's safer staying here.

KINN

Even with all the trees? Surely you get lost in Nature?

KHAMY

Not if you know your way. You've not been in these parts before?

KINN

Never this deep. My Elder doesn't believe in straying too far. In case we lose our way. It shames us.

KHAMY

Well it's a bit late for that! Besides, it's not your fault you're lost. It's The Hail's fault. Blame The Hail! Naughty Hail!

Khamy LAUGHS SILENTLY. An odd guilt flickers over Kinn's face. Just as-

The reptile halts. He SNIFFS the air. His face lights up, SPRINTING up an embankment to peer over an unseen edge.

KHAMY (CONT.)

Finally!

Kinn CLAMBERS UP, joining him at the top. His eyes go wide. He can only stare awed at-

EXT. THE GRAND POOL - DAY

A vast shimmering clear POOL in the clearing, stone bricks ringing its edge. A great veranda of marble and thick roots shields it from above, rain flowing down in rivlets to bright blooming flowers below.

KINN

It's...it's beautiful.

KHAMY

And ripe with clean water. Come on!

The chameleon DASHES down the embankment, tankard in hand.

Kinn eases down, paws SQUELCHING in moss as he surveys the lush greenery. He shuts his eyes, letting the steady sound of RAINFALL wash over him.

SCRAPE! SCRAPE! SCRAPE! Kinn double-takes, peering confused at an alcove nearby.

INT. ALCOVE - DAY

Kinn steps through the opening. He stops dead, staring stunned at-

ZEN (30s): an elk, crimson-white fur matted with dried blood above a torn jumpsuit, teeth gritted as he TUGS hard at his thick muscled leg trapped beneath a towering oak.

His coarse antlers SCRAPE against the bark, struggling for purchase. But no luck.

Zen SINKS to the dirt, built bare chest PANTING in steaming breaths. Sad red eyes meet Kinn's, urging help.

The hyena RUSHES over, kneeling at the oak. A kind smile: 'Don't worry, I can help you.' He GRIPS the root tight. Steadies his flexing arms. And-

Zen's sadness vanishes. A hand slips behind his back. And-

SLASH! Kinn JUMPS in fright, dodging a carved makeshift blade. Just as Zen's free leg SHOOTs out, SMACKING him to the forest floor to SPLASH face-first in a rain-soaked puddle. Something blue GLIMMERS within.

The hyena GULPS water, SPLUTTERING dazed. The elk has risen, trapped leg suddenly free. A simple trick. Kinn SCRAMBLES to get up. Too late as-

(CONTINUED)

Zen LEAPS over, PINNING him down. Vines SNAP from shrubbery, WRAPPING around Kinn's wrists, blade held to his throat. Trapped.

Zen RIFLES through Kinn's satchel, TOSSING aside his tankard and sermons to pocket the compass.

He lifts Kinn up, slipping off his ring. He SCOFFS at his pendant...but GRIPS the locket intrigued. Kinn STRUGGLES-

No luck, as Zen simply RIPS it from his neck. He opens it. He blinks surprised at the photo. A moment of concern. Guilt. Then stoic resolve, as he pockets the treasure.

Kinn SAGS, RASPING throat CRYING-

KINN

No, please! You can't take that!
Khamy! Khamy!

Zen double-takes. He touches his own throat, following Kinn's eyeline. His ears FLICK-

Sticky FOOTSTEPS tread nearby. The elk rises, MARCHING for the clearing.

EXT. THE GRAND POOL - DAY

Khamy SCOTS around the shimmering pool, gazing at his reflection in the RIPPLING surface. He GRIPS a patch of flowering moss determined, as-

His scales FLICKER, struggling to match the green...no luck.

Khamy SIGHS, SCOOPING water in his tankard to tread sadly away. Just as-

HEAVY FOOTSTEPS approach. A great horned shadow LOOMS around the corner. Khamy stops dead, SNIFFING. His face twists in alarm, head WHIPPING for cover. Until-

Zen STALKS into the vicinity, rugged form meeting...no-one.

He TRUDGES around the pool, peering confused at the forming RIPPLES. Suspicious eyes scan for life.

Khamy peeks out over a rock, watching closely. He eyes the alcove nearby...and DASHES up silently behind a tree, scales FLICKERING against the bark.

Khamy checks again...and DASHES to another tree. The alcove is within reach. He grins, checking once more. And-

(CONTINUED)

The vicinity is empty.

Khamy steadies his feet. Grips the furry bark behind him. And...freezes. He GULPS, slowly turning to stare up at-

Zen's towering form, blood-red eyes piercing his soul.

Khamy TRIPS back shocked, SMACKING into muddy moss to SCRAMBLE away. Zen is too quick, HURLING a looped vine around his tail, YANKING him back bit by bit.

Khamy SCRABBLES in the mud, failing to cling on, as Zen LIFTS him to hang in mid-air. The elk SMIRKS triumphant, reaching for the reptile's satchel. Until-

Khamy's fist SMACKS out, SPRAYING wet mud. The elk RASPS blinded, DROPPING the vine to SCRUB his eyes clean.

Khamy SLIPS his tail free, SPRINTING for the alcove. Zen GLOWERS after him. He unsheaths his blade.

INT. ALCOVE - DAY

Kinn rocks back and forth, FLIPPING on his front. His feet SCRAPE in the leaves below, struggling to stand. Just as-

CLAP! Kinn freezes. Hazy lidded eyes travel up to meet-

Two shadowed HYENAS: one male, one female. Glowing white eyes bore into him. The female CLAPS in prayer. The male grips a cane.

Kinn gazes terrified. His lips form a single silent word: 'No.'

CLAP! The male swings his cane high. CLAP! Kinn SHUTS his eyes. And-

SILENCE. He risks a peek. Only a GASPING Khamy stoops before him, hurriedly untying his wrists, helping him to his feet to SIGN-

KHAMY

Are you OK Sir?!

KINN

Did you see them? Those people?
They stared so viciously!

KHAMY

What people? It's just me. Although
that elk-

(CONTINUED)

Kinn HUGS him tight, eyes watering. Khamy blinks stunned, gently returning it. Only to stop dismayed-

KHAMY (CONT.)

Oh no, our water!

KINN

We can find more, little one! But now we must flee before-

Zen CRASHES into the alcove, KNOCKING the pair down. His knife hovers at Khamy's throat, SNATCHING his satchel to empty its contents: his tankard and scrapbook. The elk GRUNTS satisfied. His hoofish hand SIGNS-

ZEN

Don't fight. Don't follow.

- before MARCHING away with his bounty.

Khamy stares after him, tearing up. Kinn's disbelief fades away. His eyes glow with danger.

EXT. THE GRAND POOL - DAY

Zen studies Khamy's map, tracing the path to Blue Rose Village, hovering over a symbol: the Low Holds. Guilt returns to his eyes.

He FOLDS the map in his waistband, chest FLEXING to CRACK his back. Fingers MASSAGE a deep scar in the muscle. As if lost in thought.

RAPID FOOTSTEPS. Zen freezes. Guilt turns to readiness. He WHIPS out his knife. Just as-

Kinn LEAPS on his shoulders, lean limbs WRAPPING on for dear life. Zen HUFFS in effort, dropping his knife and Khamy's tankard as he SPINS around the pool's edge.

Khamy DASHES out, gazing awed at the struggle. Until-

Zen TRIPS back. His calf SMACKS the pool's edge. And-

INT. GRAND POOL - UNDERWATER - DAY

The men CRASH through the surface, DRAGGING each other into the blue.

Kinn SNAGS Zen's waistband, gripping the map in his toes-

(CONTINUED)

Zen GRABS his leg, DRAGGING him up to CHOKE him. Kinn BEATS against him to no avail. He eyes Zen's snout. And-

He GRIPS it hard, claws DIGGING into flesh. Zen's eyes go wide, grip TIGHTENING to win out. Until-

He lets go pained, PUSHING away to SWIM up for air. His pockets open, Kinn's treasures FLOATING down-

Kinn FLAILS, catching the compass and ring. His locket SLIPS past. He glances to the surface...and KICKS up, SWIMMING down after it. Closer. And closer. Until-

His paw GRIPS the locket safe. Kinn smiles relieved, turning for the surface-

His foot SNAGS a reed, trapping him in place. He KICKS out desperately. Bubbles break through his lips. One last TUG-

The reed SNAPS. Kinn floats sluggish. The surface seems miles away now. His eyes FLICKER shut. Just as-

A scaly blue form CRASHES through above...

EXT. THE GRAND POOL - DAY

Khamy BREAKS the surface, GASPING for air, Kinn's scruff gripped tight. The reptile SWIMS to the edge, HEAVING himself out to DRAG the hyena onto the moss.

Kinn SPLUTTERS awake, SAGGING on his back, a paw rising to his PANTING soaked chest-

He opens his eyes fully, gazing stunned at the ring and locket wound around his fingers. Just above: a dripping wet Khamy gazes relieved. They SIGN-

KHAMY

Kinn! How do you feel?

KINN

Like I should be saving your life more. I'll run out of blessings at this rate.

KHAMY

That's not funny! You could've drowned! And all for treasure!

KINN

Alright alright! I'm sorry. I shame myself. It just means too much to lose. At least your map is safe?

(CONTINUED)

Khamy fidgets ashamed. He unrolls his map-
 Ink runs in rivers down the parchment. An illegible mural.

KHAMY

I'm sorry Sir. I got it back from
 the elk, but it was already soaked.

KINN

The elk! Where is he?!

Khamy points to Zen nearby, HEAVING on his knees, snout
 bloodied. Kinn LURCHES up, glaring down as they SIGN-

KINN (CONT.)

Are you proud of yourself?! Where's
 your dignity?! If you need help,
 you should ask for it. Not pry it
 from the hands of the innocent!

ZEN

Oh sure. You're real innocent.

KINN

I beg your pardon?! Have you no
 shame?! Where's your faith in-?!

ZEN

Save it Stripes! Don't forget I've
 got my-

Zen stops, PATTING his waistband. Just as Khamy TROTS over,
 holding up his makeshift blade. The elk stares dumbstruck-

ZEN (CONT.)

Hey! Give it back!

Kinn takes the blade, inspecting it disgusted.

KINN

To think you would even use this.
 It's vile.

ZEN

Can you blame me? It's survival.
 Don't know who you'll find in here.

Khamy peers closer at Zen's torn jumpsuit. A black-barred
 symbol is stitched into the leg. He SIGNS surprised-

KHAMY

Wait. I know that symbol. That's a
 Low Holds uniform!

(CONTINUED)

Panic flashes in Zen's eyes-

KHAMY (CONT.)

You're a Guard, aren't you?! Is that why you tried to take my map? You're lost too?

The elk FREEZES. His brow furrows. And-

ZEN

Yeah. Lost.

KINN

A Guard? Why not just tell us that?

ZEN

So you don't jump and kill me.

KINN

Kill you?! He's a child and I'm a pastor! It doesn't make sense!

KHAMY

Actually Sir, it does. Some folk don't like the Guards. Especially if they've been to the Low Holds. Maybe he was attacked before today?

Zen FLINCHES-

ZEN

Well exactly. Resentment does funny things to people.

KINN

Well that doesn't explain why you took my ring. Or my locket!

ZEN

For bargaining! Like I said: it's survival.

KHAMY

Well if you're lost, maybe we could show you the way out? We're heading for the mountains, to find the Blue Rose Village.

ZEN

Ha! Like I'd go there. Nothing but preachers and no-hoppers.

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

But what about The Hail?

ZEN

That empty myth? Please. Got my own path.

KINN

A path so clear you needed to steal a map to follow it? A map you've now RUINED?

Zen glares: 'smart-ass'.

KHAMY

Please Sir, don't blame him. I should have drawn it with lead, not ink. Then I could still guide you.

KINN

But surely you still know the way? You do live here after all.

KHAMY

But I haven't seen ALL of here. I only know a few landmarks. If I'd seen more, I would know where we're going. I'm so stupid!

Khamy bows his head, tears spilling. Kinn softens, kneeling down-

KINN

Hey. It's not your fault. I have every faith we'll find our way out. Here, take this. Now: what can you remember?

Kinn hands Khamy his compass. The reptile wipes his eyes, peering up through the rain at the white sky.

KHAMY

I can't tell where the Sun is. But it sets behind the mountains in the West. So if North is this way...we have to go that way!

He points back to the alcove.

KINN

See? Nature shines on you today, little Khamy. You can lead the way!

(CONTINUED)

Kinn gathers up their satchels. Khamy gazes at Zen, still kneeling at the pool, blood still seeping.

KHAMY
What about him?

KINN
I don't believe he'd value our company.

Khamy dithers...and TIPTOES over. Zen glances suspicious-

ZEN
What?

Khamy SMEARS blue sap over Zen's snout. The elk WINCES, giving him a dirty look. Until-

The scratches CLOT. Zen feels his face surprised. Just as Khamy rests some rice crackers and beetles in his hand.

KHAMY
In case you get hungry Sir.

He treads off after Kinn. Zen gazes conflicted...and rises, STAMPING his foot for attention to SIGN-

ZEN
How far is the way out?

KHAMY
A few days travel. But shorter with shortcuts!

ZEN
Fine. But I ain't sticking close. Not in the mood for making friends.

KHAMY
Can he come Kinn? Please? He just needs help. Like you did. And he IS a Guard.

Kinn dithers. The wistful reptile holds his breath. And-

KINN
Very well. But I expect good morals. No more threats.

ZEN
What makes you think I'll obey, Stripes?

(CONTINUED)

KINN

Because I'm keeping your blade for
now. I'll return it once we're out.
Truce?

Kinn TUCKS Zen's blade away, holding out a paw. The elk
GLOWERS...and SHAKES it. Khamy joins in, SHAKING vigorously-

KHAMY

Great! Now come on. It'll be
getting dark soon, I'm sure!

KINN

Hang on! Perhaps we'll allow our
Guard to go first?

ZEN

Smart. Don't know what I might do.

KHAMY

Oh! My name's Khamy by the way. And
this is Kinn. What's yours?

Zen CRUNCHES his crackers and bugs, TRUDGING for the alcove.
Khamy SHRUGS, taking a cautious Kinn's forearm to lead them
away from the shimmering pool.

Moments too late to see the blue petals floating down behind
them, GLIMMERING as they go, to settle on the forest floor.

The rain FALLS HARDER, washing them away downstream.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - DEEP WOODS - DAY

MONTAGE:

- The rain falls steady. The trio tread the spiralling
paths, winding past numerous trees, shrubs, and giant
flowering plants.

- The trio CLAMBER over crumbled stone and marble shelters.

- Khamy gazes forlorn at woven clothes and keepsakes lying
lost. Kinn holds him close as they pass. Zen SCAVENGES
without a care.

- END MONTAGE.

INT. IODONIUS FOREST - SHORT CLIFF - DAY - CONT.

The rain falls HARDER. Daylight fades fast. The trio trudge on, tired limbs faltering in the wet. Until-

Zen HALTS, a strong arm blocking their path. Kinn and Khamy follow his gaze, staring up awed at-

A great wooden shelter set in the cliff, shielded by vines.

KINN

What is that?

KHAMY

A sleep shelter! They're nestled throughout the Forest, for travellers needing somewhere to stay the night. It looks empty?

INT. IODONIUS FOREST - SLEEP SHELTER - DAY

A wide calm space of clean planked wood. Thick cotton blankets and stitched pillows line the floor. Drywood sits piled by a fireplace. A wide bare window lights the space.

The window PUSHES up, spilling raindrops. Khamy CLAMBERS in, sticky limbs SLAPPING the wall to BOUNCE on the blankets.

Kinn follows, HISSING with effort on the ledge. Just as-

Zen's strong hand SHOVES him down to CRASH in a heap. The hyena SIGNS sarcastically-

KINN

Bless you.

The elk SMIRKS, easily HAULING himself inside, SHUTTING the window after them.

INT. SLEEP SHELTER - NIGHT

Rainfall HAMMERS softly above. Kinn and Khamy fold their damp clothes, placing them by the now-SIZZLING fireplace. Zen remains in his open jumpsuit. They SIGN-

KINN

Don't you want to dry yours?

ZEN

No way I'm getting naked in here.

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

But we won't be. We're in our coverings?

He motions to his and Kinn's undergarments: dark cotton *subligaculum*, like breechcloth shorts.

KHAMY (CONT.)

Besides, you might get cold if you stay-

ZEN

I said NO.

The elk HOISTS himself high to the ledge, SHAKING his head annoyed.

KINN

Well, at least we offered. How is everything so cosy here?

KHAMY

Iodonius Folk take turns cleaning and stocking the shelters. It's tradition.

Khamy crawls under the blankets, SIGHING content in the warmth. His scales FLICKER to match the cloth...to no avail.

KINN

Does that always happen?

KHAMY

Yeah. I've never been good at changing. But I'm trying to get better. For my parents.

Kinn FLINCHES, that same fear flashing briefly in his eyes. The reptile fidgets embarrassed, SIGNING curiously-

KHAMY (CONT.)

Why can't we speak now?

KINN

I'm not sure. My Elder told how those who lay beneath The Hail would lose their voices to Nature.

Zen HUFFS, rolling his eyes. Kinn ignores him-

KINN (CONT.)

Perhaps there's something coming from the sky, taking our voices from us?

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

You mean, in the rain?

KINN

I was thinking more ABOVE the rain.

KHAMY

'Above'? I didn't think there was an above. No-one in Iodonius says anything like that.

Kinn's ears droop confused-

KINN

Then what do you believe is up there?

KHAMY

The stars. Miles of them. And maybe more worlds. With people like us.

KINN

Hmm. A nice thought. Strange. But nice.

KHAMY

So, whatever took our voices...you don't think it came from below?

KINN

I cannot see how. But come now, time to rest. We've a long way to go.

KHAMY

You think we can make it, Sir? Before the 7th day?

KINN

With all my faith, little one.

Khamy manages a smile, huddling down, eyes slowly shutting.

Kinn glances up at Zen, perched at the window, strong back HEAVING quietly. He TAPS his foot, SIGNING-

KINN (CONT.)

I'm sorry. For hurting you. I shame myself. There's plenty of room?

Zen turns away, peering out at the rain. Kinn SIGHS, settling down beside Khamy, resting the elk's blade under his pillow. He gazes sadly at Zen's scarred back, running a paw over his stomach fur, where-

(CONTINUED)

His own deep pink scar lies faded in the skin.

He quickly brushes the fur down, folding his paws in PRAYER, gazing torn between his Blue Rose bracelet and silver locket. He KISSES both. Bloodshot eyes soon drift shut. Fast asleep.

Khamy's eye PEEKS open. He checks Zen isn't looking. And-

The reptile slips a vial from his waistband. A spindly azure vine GLIMMERS within, suspended in bluish liquid.

He retrieves the iodine sap from under his pillow, holding the liquids side-by-side...they're identical.

Khamy CUPS the vial, a strange guilt crossing his face.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - EXPANSE - NIGHT

Beyond the shelter, the rain casts a blanket over the land, trees stretching for miles to the mountains far away.

High on the ceiling of leaves, droplets collect in puddles. And within-

Something blue GLIMMERS.

END OF PILOT