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Word Count: 1498 Words

King Zoltan The First, I Guess

From the dunes of the southern deserts to the white peaks of the northern mountains, endless war ravaged the six kingdoms. Despite the perpetual chaos and uncertain future, one thing was always certain: these lands were not for the weak and simple, such as Zoltan who sold cabbages.

Later, Zoltan walked home, pulling an empty cart. He didn't sell out, his cabbages were all stolen. Despite his already bad day, he could not go home because his house was on fire. His wife left him immediately after, she was also holding a torch, which Zoltan thought was a strange thing to do in the middle of the day.

Zoltan reflected upon how things only happened to him. He envied the kings. All cared and worshipped them and they had the freedom to do what they liked, unlike Zoltan, whose fate was determined by cabbage thieves and his ex-wife. Zoltan looked upon the tiny pile of ashes of his house. Perhaps, he realised, it was time to start anew, become a warlord or a king, he was sure he could do it. He would have to buy his weapon from another city since one day the local blacksmith asked him 'what's up' and he said 'good' on reflex and never talked to him again.

He walked the stone roads to Schwadia, his old home further and further out of sight. Birds were singing, flowers were blooming, a caravan was approaching and a group of bandits was rushing out of the woods. *Wait a second*, Zoltan thought, *what was the last one?*

The guards were holding off the bandits but they were severely outnumbered. Zoltan was about to run, but realised it was an opportunity. He would stop the bandits and begin the path of a hero, the road to kingship.

"Hey!" Zoltan shouted, all present turning to look. "That's illegal!"

There was a brief pause, during which Zoltan thought his plan had worked. He was proven wrong when all bandits abandoned the caravan and charged him.

Zoltan ran away.

He ran as fast as he could but the mountainous lands were treacherous. Before long, Zoltan found himself at the edge of a cliff, surrounded. People say an animal is most dangerous cornered, but Zoltan was an exception. He screamed. The bandits went for the killing blow but his scream was so high pitched it shook the stones and the ensuing landslide wiped out all the bandits. Luckily, Zoltan was skinny enough all the rocks missed him.

The caravan guards caught up, stopping in their tracks at the scene of the carnage. All were speechless but one, a woman who arrived a little later.

“I heard your battle cry from inside the carriage,” she smiled. “A hero of Schwadia hmm? The gods sent you at a good time.”

“Princess Agnes,” the guards kneeled. Zoltan wasn’t sure what he was supposed to do so he kneeled as well.

“Pledging yourself into my service already? Very well,” she began walking back. “You may accompany us back to the capital.”

Zoltan had no clue what she meant but was too shy to say ‘no.’

Later, Schwadian Royal Palace

“This man saved me, *father*.”

The royal court was silent, unnaturally so, void of even the shifting of feet. One, if listening closely, may even hear Zoltan about to piss himself.

His Majesty, Bobby III.5 walked down the aisle, his boots breaking the silence. All stepped back but Zoltan, who stood firm for his legs were asleep.

The story of Zoltan had already reached all nobles and soldiers, the story of one man who took out a bandit gang the kingdom has been fighting for months, the story of one man

who challenged all efforts and abilities of the king. The king extended a hand with a royal ring on each finger, which, upon closer inspection were actually iron painted gold.

Zoltan tried to remember what he was supposed to do when the king gave you his hand but remembered he never knew in the first place.

He shook his hand.

Gasps ran throughout the room.

Zoltan entertained the idea he did not do what he was supposed to.

“Guards, take this man away!” He realised he was right.

Naturally, he tried to defuse the tension with smalltalk.

“Are those rings even real gold?”

“Guards, execute this man immediately!”

Alas, it did not work.

Two guards drew their swords and rushed Zoltan. He tried to run but forgot his legs were asleep and fell. The guards tripped over him and impaled each other. Most were uncertain about executing Zoltan, but they were sure now. The rest of the guards knew not whether Zoltan was under divine protection or if his martial prowess rendered him invincible, they only knew they dared not challenge the man.

“You cannot kill this man, father. The gods dictate his place here, all present bear witness.”

Murmurs across the room told Zoltan the people were agreeing, even the king seemed affected. Zoltan thought perhaps he was not in trouble.

That night Zoltan watched the moon rise from the dungeon. He left his burned down home in search of freedom but he did not even get to taste a pittance of it. And now even his freedom was gone. Zoltan sighed, all he wanted was to be king, to have people care about him, he didn't know it would be hard.

“Zoltan!”

“Eh?”

“What are you doing? I’ve been calling your name this whole time,” Princess Agnes opened the cell door. “Doesn’t matter, my father had forgotten our honourable ways and we have tolerated his rule for too long. The people see that now, the generals and lords are gathering to take the throne as we speak.”

“You are the god-sent hero we desperately need at this time of strife, will you join us in bringing Schwadia back to glory?”

She extended a hand.

Zoltan thought for a while and shook it.

The next day, the battle began. Generals, seasoned warriors and Zoltan stormed the city. Zoltan was unarmed because the quartermaster asked ‘what’s up’ and Zoltan replied ‘good’ on reflex and left.

Though Zoltan dreamed of being a warrior, he had never seen a battle. He realised battles were scary and he might get hurt. Amongst the flying arrows and clashing of steel, Zoltan ran for cover. He opened the closest door he could find and ran inside and shut it behind him.

“You!”

Turns out it was the royal court.

“You made me look like a fool! You turned my people against me! Now you try to take my kingdom?” The king drew his sword. “You will not have my crown so easily!”

“Ahhh!” The king screamed.

“Ahhh!” Zoltan screamed as well, but for a different reason.

Zoltan ran and the king gave chase. He burst into the toilets and slammed the door behind him. There was multiple bangs on the door. It was impolite to not answer a door when

someone was knocking so he opened it. The king was already mid-charge and rushed through the now open door and fell into the toilet, dying immediately.

As Zoltan was trying to figure out what was going on, the doors to the royal court opened to Princess Agnes and her entourage.

“Single-combat, glorious. It appears the gods have decided the fate of our nation.” She grabbed Zoltan. “Come, we must prepare the ceremony.”

Zoltan didn’t know she meant, but hoped he could leave after.

That afternoon, Zoltan was married to Princess Agnes. He was too shy to say no.

Later, Zoltan was coronated and declared King of Schwadia. He was, once again, too shy to say no.

As night fell, Zoltan sat in the royal bedroom. He set out for power and people’s attention so he may have freedom but everything so far, from the dungeons to the battle, was out of his control. He closed his eyes, wondering if he’ll ever become king. He opened his eyes. Zoltan remembered he was already king. He realised the entire kingdom cared about him now, he was certainly free to do what he liked now.

“Zoltan,” Queen Agnes walked in. “Tomorrow, we must visit the villages and begin to gather recruits. Our forces have been weakened and we must rise before sunrise to make it in time.”

“Um,” Zoltan said. “I was thinking maybe I could take a walk.”

“How dare you? You are king now, our people are depending on you and you want to shirk your responsibilities to take a walk?” She crossed her arms. “I don’t think I want you on my bed today.”

As Zoltan fell asleep on the royal carpet with the word ‘welcome’ on it, he thought back to when he was a cabbage seller and how he could at decide when to wake and where to go but now he couldn’t even decide where to sleep. Perhaps, he thought, he had more

freedom when no one knew who he was. Enlightened, he resolved to leave the palace come morning and return to a life of simplicity, of true freedom. He was assassinated later that evening.