

King's Court (Story Excerpt)



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It was a court night, the king had gathered all his loyal courtiers, knights, clergymen, noblemen & noblewomen from all over the kingdom to discuss the matters of statecraft and more, as it was custom come every winter solstice.

The hall room was brimming with chatter and gossip. This gathering on a winter solstice was no mere coincidence, every king and queen before King Rodrick had done so the same. Seals bound the castle gates to ward off the spirits that would wander the world on this day looking for prey to take back to wherever they came from. However, the seals were mostly ceremonial, and really, the only spirits that were coming to get them were the argonian spirits from across the sea served in intricate ivory. Though an ill-omened day people rarely got taken by spirits, besides the one or two that bandits would take for ransom.

Regardless, the pretorian guarding the king remained ever vigilant, It was an important night. All the chattering turned into muttering as the king stepped from his throne onto the wooden stage in front of him. With a loud and stoic voice, he confirmed to the onlookers that he was indeed dying. Upon hearing the proclamation the court drew silence, it wasn't a well-kept secret — men, women, and children, all could see the now pale dilapidated man, a tilted crown set on a gaunt skull, baggy robes through which you could see bones, he was more robe than man.

“As you all know I have no heir, nor I could ever, but our duty is to the realm and so I have decided to elect one of you to rule in my stead, while I tend to my roses in whatever time I have left”.

A king's proclamation was word on stone, it couldn't be rewritten without grief — A new king would be chosen tonight. An ominous mood now permeated through the halls, It was an inauspicious night and a time of uncertainty was upon them.

The eligible men lined up in front of the king, kneeling. He passed each, inspecting them as a formality, having already chosen his heir to be a fortnight ago. But as he walked to wreath the chosen candidate — the golden orange torches of the halls suddenly turned dark, felling each person in the room with cold darkness. Winds blew open the large gates of the courtroom open, and the pale light of the moon decorated the floor of the hall. A silhouetted figure on a horse now stood at its front. The audience stared at it in silence as it slowly trotted toward the stage. The figure sat with its legs crossed on a degraded and moldy saddle, a wicked beast with rusted armour covering what looked like an awful and charred ashy skin. Saddled on a horse the beast smiled down at the dying king with a toothy grin from ear to ear and with eyes as yellow as a dark sun. The head praetorian called for swords and surrounded the beast. It got down from the horse, unshaken by the sharp tips of the swords and moved through onto the stage and faced the head praetorian.

"It's okay Lambert" the king assured his guard.

"What are you, why are you here?" the king asked. The beast spoke in a muffled yet rhythmic metallic tone — "I AM THE HERALD OF THE NIGHT" he gestured at the sky behind. With the same grin and stare, he looked into the white eyes of the gaunt king and rendered a bitter melody

"A MESSAGE TO THE CORPSE EMPEROR:
DAYS ARE FEW,
NIGHTS HAVE TAKEN OVER,
WINTERS HAVE COME,
AND NOW THE SHADOWS DANCE WITH DRUMS,
WHITE AT EVERY SIGHT,
NUMB AT EVERY THOUGHT,
DEAD CALL FOR THE WEAK,
AND FIRE WILL BE THE ONLY REPRIEVE,
LISTEN TO SINSONGS,
AND BIDE YOUR TIME,
BUT,
WHEN THE NEW LIGHT RISES,
BE GUILE,
MAR VERDICTS OLD,
FOR THE OLD DROWNED "

"state clearly what you want or leave" the king boldly remarked.

There was no answer and as the goblin bard had come so had it left.

No one followed it. When the torches were lit again, no one spoke, everyone sat at their seats as quiet as with a mummer's fast. They left in a procession leaving the king to his device.

That night he would dream of it again, and this time it was him riding the horse into the court, being watched by strange mists on either side, he walked up to the throne, now laden with a corpse and a crown set on it. A rot set everywhere, mold and fungus growing on wooden and iron edges, except for the crown which shined with its golden glow as dark as the shades of a dark sun.