

Chimerical

Episode 5: Fortuitous Date

As they round a corner, they see an entrance to an ancestral tomb. The entrance is ajar and several Nix hounds roam near the door. Jo'dehki takes out his old wooden bow from over his back, drawing an arrow. Fjorn draws his sword and fastens his shield to his left arm, while Nish draws his own sword. Jo'dehki glances at Nish's sword, admiring it for a moment. Nish notices, looking over to Jo'dehki.

"You like Khajiiti weapons?" Jo'dehki asks.

"You expected anything less? It's my favorite style. The Argonian dagger is a useful tool, with its forward curve, but nothing beats the sleek, sharp lines of Khajiiti axes and blades." Nish replies.

"Our kind do craft beautiful weapons, don't we?" Jo'dehki says.

"Jat, zira... Ahziss darr?" Nish raises an eyebrow.

"Jer vara ifu ahziss." Jo'dehki replies.

Nish seems surprised, silently chuckling as he pats Jo'dehki on his shoulder.

"Hey... Non-Khajiit speaker here." Fjorn complains.

“Isoali rak, liter.” Nish replies. “Alright. Let’s kill some Nix hounds!”

“Finally!” Fjorn stands tall.

He lets out a roar and smacks the flat side of his sword-blade against his shield boss, while Jo’dehki takes aim. Nish charges his right hand with a fireball, his sword held tightly in his left hand. The Nix hounds take notice and turn, quickly rushing the warriors. Nish throws the fireball at a Nix hound, while Jo’dehki lets loose an arrow at the same hound, striking it in the head and felling it like a heavy tree. Fjorn rushes two other hounds, which leap at him.

He brings up his shield as a Nix slams into it, knocking him back. The other tries to rush around him, slashing at his leg. He spins and lops off the slashing arm, causing the Nix to cry out in pain. It falls back as he slams the other Nix in the head with the rim of his shield. He bumps it with the shield boss, knocking it back. He jabs his sword over the rim of his shield, sticking the Nix in its left shoulder. The three-armed Nix lunges at Fjorn, but Jo’dehki fires another arrow, striking it in the shoulder and stunning it. Nish rushes in, slashing at the Nix’s head, as it is too close to Fjorn to risk firing any form of destruction magic.

He drives his sword deep into the neck of the Nix, the blade hanging up on the spinal column. The Nix slumps dead on the ground, pulling Nish down as he struggles to retrieve his sword from the carcass. Fjorn sticks and slashes at the remaining Nix, quickly slaying the creature as it tries to flee into the ancestral tomb. Nish finally pulls his

sword from the body, stumbling back as he does. Jo'dehki walks up, placing another arrow against the string of his bow, and lining it up in preparation.

"Three down..." Jo'dehki speaks.

"The God's know how many more to go." Fjorn quips.

They stand before the ancestral tomb, poised to enter. Nish removes his pack and retrieves a single gauntlet from within. He slips the brown leather glove over his right hand, the five fingertips adorned with two-inch long, razor sharp claws, not dissimilar from a Khajiit's. Nish puts his pack back on and charges his right palm with another fireball, looking over the gauntlet; Jo'dehki seems quite intrigued by it.

"I wasn't lucky enough to be born with my own, so I made some. Off-hand only." Nish briefly explains.

"Very clever." Jo'dehki grins.

Taking the lead, Fjorn rushes into the tomb, barreling down the stairs with his shield held close to his chest. At the base of the stairs stands a Nix hound. It turns and shrieks as Fjorn slams into it, the full weight of his large Nord form behind the black and blue shield. It falls over as he pushes the Nix back, jabbing his sword over the rim of the shield several times, swiftly killing the beast. His companions struggle to keep up as Fjorn charges into the

tomb. Jo'dehki fires an arrow into the head of a Nix, while Nish throws several fireballs at other distant Nix hounds.

Fjorn runs at them, getting in Nish's line of fire and forcing him to resort to melee combat. Jo'dehki sidesteps while Nish moves in the opposite direction, forming a semi-circle around the few hounds in the main chamber. Fjorn hacks, slashes and jabs at the hounds as they incircle him. He swings his shield, slamming the boss and rim into their bodies as he tries to force them back. Jo'dehki fires arrow after arrow, while Nish stands by Fjorn, slashing with his own combination of sword and axe.

Fjorn swings hard as a Nix leaps at him, slashing its throat open. It struggles as it drops to the ground. Nish swings a sword up and across the neck of another hound, before slamming the edge of his Khajiit axe into its skull. Jo'dehki soon charges in with his own Khajiit style iron dagger, leaping onto the back of a Nix hound and jamming his blade deep into the back of its neck, severing its spine. After several more minutes of brutal combat, the remaining hounds lie dead or dying. Nish is quick to execute them with purple-blue bolts of lightning fired from his palm.

They look around the tomb, seeing several more passages, however, two of the three are blocked by still sealed doors. Nish notices Fjorn bleeding from several wounds on his arms and legs. The blood is slowly beginning to pool at his feet.

**“You should stop and rest; treat your wounds, Fjorn.”
Nish urges him.**

“I’ll be fine.” Fjorn grunts.

**Nish shakes his head in frustration, then turns to
Jo’dehki.**

**“And that’s why he is a healer and an apothecary.” He
comments, pointing his axe to Fjorn.**

**They approach the third doorway, which is ajar, gazing
into the passageway hidden behind it. A singular hall leads
to a main burial vault, with only one hound inside. Fjorn
pushes past Nish before he can fire any spells at the
creature, roaring loudly as the Nix charges him. They collide
with a loud crash as the Nix reaches over the shield,
slashing at Fjorn and slicing into his right shoulder. He cries
out in pain as his comrades come to his aid. Jo’dehki tackles
the beast, slamming it into the wall and pinning it briefly,
allowing Nish to jam the tip of his sword into its throat.**

**It struggles as he brings down his axe, cracking its
skull as its body falls limp. Jo’dehki backs off, dropping the
carcass to the ground. Fjorn falls over, landing on a knee as
he uses his shield to steady himself. Nish and Jo’dehki
return to Fjorn, who urges them to clear the vault and
complete the job. Jo’dehki offers to stay with him while Nish
finishes the job, but Fjorn refuses. They help Fjorn against
a wall, setting his sword and shield aside as he takes a
potion from a pouch that will increase his strength.**

Fjorn charges both palms with gleaming yellow-white light, sweeping his hands over his wounds as he slowly heals himself. Nish and Jo'dehki walk down the hall, their weapons at the ready. As Jo'dehki pushes open the door, already cracked slightly, a hound leaps out, pouncing onto Nish. He falls back and rolls, tucking a knee underneath the hound's abdomen and throwing it off him. It rolls down the hall, quickly regaining its balance, but it's too late; Nish throws his axe at the hound, slamming it into its shoulder, before throwing a bolt of lightning at it.

Inside the vault, Nish and Jo'dehki find absolutely nothing; all of the hounds have been slain. Returning to the passageway, Nish retrieves his axe from the shoulder of the carcass, while Jo'dehki helps Fjorn to his feet. He has treated most of his major wounds, but a few smaller cuts remain. He takes a moment to regain his energy, before continuing to heal himself, seated in front of the ancestral tomb. Once he is full recovered, the trio return to Suran. It is early evening as they enter the city.

There, Fjorn finds the family who hired him at their home, politely knocking on their front door. They answer, grateful for Fjorn's return. They thank him profusely and pay him with a sack full of coins. Taking their leave, they return to the inn for supper, counting and divvyng the drakes amongst them.

"So, will we stay here again, tonight?" Jo'dehki asks.

“I was thinking we could head for Molag Mar. If we get caught in the dark, we can just camp out underneath the stars. A sufficient fire should keep the wildlife at bay.” Nish suggests.

“That actually sounds like fun.” Fjorn chirps.

“Not quite this one’s style, but no matter.” Jo’dehki shrugs.

“Let’s head out as soon as we are done eating.” Fjorn adds.

After taking their time to finish their meals, they leave the inn and return to the road to Molag Mar. They walk at least as far as the ancestral tomb, before twilight catches up to them. They walk just a bit further, to stay away from any scavengers who may desire to eat the Nix hound corpses that lie in front of the cleared tomb. They make a camp, building a fire and setting out their bedrolls.

“I so enjoy sleeping underneath the stars, but it was more fun back home in Reaper’s March.” Nish seems to think aloud.

“Were you always so adventurous?” Jo’dehki asks.

“No. While I enjoyed sleeping outside on still nights, I loved staying close to home. My father, Nazahn, would always rely on me to bring back my brother, who was far more adventurous then. When Hiska-dar would go missing, I’d have to scour the nearby plains to find him. As we grew older, he’d stray farther, until I was walking half a day to collect him. Eventually, Hiska-dar calmed down, but by then I was used to it; I started wandering off on my own. Father

always said that the thirst for adventure was like a virus; if you don't kill it quick enough, it takes you over. I suppose he spoke from experience." Nish explains.

"A very wise Khajiit." Jo'dehki says. "And what about you?" He turns to Fjorn.

"Eh... I grew up in a typical village in Skyrim. The youngest son of nearly a dozen children, all of whom survived to adulthood; quite a feat, all things considered. Unfortunately for me, I grew up sickly... Weak. My brothers and even my sisters were all stronger than me. I spent years training; always pushing myself to prove that I was as good as them. I taught myself restoration magic from a few old tomes in the village, and I spent time with our healer, having her teach me alchemy; those skills kept me alive through my own personal trials, like the wolves' den in Cyrodiil."

"So, this is just a test of your abilities? A right of passage?" Jo'dehki seems perplexed.

"Something like that." Fjorn answers.

"What happens when you feel you have proven yourself?" Jo'dehki presses.

"I suppose I go home. I can hang my trophies and start a family." Fjorn replies, lying down on his bedroll.

"And if you don't?" Jo'dehki wonders.

Fjorn turns his head, looking over to the newcomer. The look on his face answers his question; Fjorn is prepared to spend his entire life on the road if need be.

“You ask a lot of questions, Jo’dehki; why not answer your own?” Nish poses.

“This one’s story? That is a very bland tale.”

“This one... /doubt that.” Nish remarks.

“Still struggling with that?” Fjorn snickers.

“Every time I open my mouth. Twenty-two years of saying it every day; it’s just how I think.” Nish answers.

“This one lived in a small village in Reaper’s March until he could no longer stay. There were various...

Misunderstandings, that forced him to leave. This one went from place to place, learning the skills necessary to keep him alive, and even prosper. This one never lived above his means, though; he only needs enough to pay for a soft bed, hot food, and occasionally the company of a woman.”

Jo’dehki grins.

“But why stray so far from home?” Nish raises an eyebrow.

“This one has little cause to return; nothing waits for him at home. Only bad memories remain there... The farther away from Elsweyr, the better...” Jo’dehki retorts.

Nish shrugs his shoulders, gazing up at the darkening sky. The group grows quiet as Fjorn and Nish both quickly become comfortable, falling asleep in their bedrolls. Jo’dehki lies awake, struggling to sleep; he isn’t quite so comfortable in the great outdoors. It’s clear to him that his companions have spent a considerable amount of time living in the rugged wilderness. As uncomfortable as he is, he wants to prove himself to the men, and remain in their company.

As darkness envelops the land, he adds a few more logs to the dwindling fire. Though he is tired, the Khajiit simply cannot become comfortable enough to rest. As the fire consumes the fresh wood, it roars to life, crackling as it grows stronger. Something catches his attention from the corner of his eye; movement in the shadows near Nish. He springs to his feet, drawing his dagger. A figure lunges at Nish, startling the Imperial as it quickly clutches his throat. Having looked directly at the fire when placing the logs, Jo'dehki had destroyed his night vision; had he not, he would've seen the being creeping up on them.

Nish chokes as he tries to call out, five sharp spikes digging into the flesh of his throat. Jo'dehki kicks Fjorn's side, rousing him from his sleep as the being takes Nish hostage, pulling him up from his bedroll. A clawed hand reaches out, taking Nish's Argonian dagger and placing it at his throat, just beneath his chin. The fire illuminates a Khajiit female, an escaped slave with shackles still locked tightly around her wrists and ankles. She pulls the blade hard against Nish's throat. She leans closer, her snout resting beside the Imperial's face. He can feel her warm breath as she growls at his two comrades.

"Alright... We can work something out. No need for unnecessary bloodshed." Nish says, his hands raised in surrender.

The Khajiit girl clenches his throat, blood trickling down his neck. Nish shudders at the sensation.

"I only need some of your supplies... Enough to get far away from here..." She begins.

Her speech patterns are noticeably different from other Khajiit; she sounds more like a Dunmer, or an Imperial.

"I don't want to have to hurt him." She continues.

"Oh good! Please don't." Nish remarks.

"If you do, this one will make you regret it." Jo'dehki warns.

"Put down the knife." Fjorn growls.

"That isn't going to happen..." She replies sternly.

She slowly rises from her kneeling position, pulling at Nish with her hand, as well as the blade of his own dagger. He complies. She stands behind him, turning as Fjorn and Jo'dehki prepare to take up positions on either side of her. Suddenly, Nish begins to chuckle, looking up at the night sky.

"Oh, the gods do have a sense of humor, don't they?" He laughs.

"Be silent!" She snarls.

"It just had to be me, and you had to be a Khajiit." He continues, smiling at the sheer irony.

“What did I just say?!” She exclaims, pulling Nish closer.

He feels her bosom pressing against his mid-back as she tries to dominate him. He turns his head slightly, shifting his eyes to glance at the face of the humanoid feline who holds him hostage. To his surprise, he had seen this girl before; carrying heavy wooden baskets for a well-to-do Dunmer, the morning after they had arrived in Suran.

“Oh... An roj vaba serush.” Nish grins.

Jo’dehki chuckles and gently shakes his head.

“What?” She seems confused.

Nish’s eyebrows raise in surprise.

“Saj jer kor kaaka ahziss va pur?” Nish asks.

She raises a brow, as though she cannot comprehend him.

“Nish... For the last damn time, stop speaking Khajiit! You’re leaving me out!” Fjorn yells in frustration.

“Apparently you aren’t the only one.” Nish murmurs.

**“A Khajiit who cannot speak her native tongue?”
Jo’dehki says in disbelief.**

**“I was raised here... Ta’agra was forbidden on the
plantation... I’ve never heard it before now...” The girl
laments.**

**“I see... Well, I merely commented on how attractive you
are.” Nish explains.**

“What?!” She asks in shock.

“I believe you heard me.” Nish grins.

**She bears her sharp teeth, growling at him as she pulls
the knife closer to his throat. She cuts a layer of skin, a tiny
trickle of blood running down and past his Adam’s apple.
Fjorn takes a step closer, his fingers shifting as he grips
the handle of his sword. She takes a step back, pulling Nish
even closer.**

**“Ngh...” He grunts in pain. “You know, if you wanted to
touch me, you didn’t need a knife to do it.”**

“Shut up!” She yells in his ear, causing him great pain.

“This is serious, Nish!” Fjorn barks.

**“Yes. Please do not make her angry, my friend.”
Jo’dehki adds.**

**“Just lightening the mood. We’re all up in arms, so to
speak! So... What’s your name, pretty-eyes? Gods... I hope
that isn’t it.” He quietly chuckles.**

**“... Golden-Hands... My masters call me Golden-Hands.”
She answers.**

“That’s not a very fitting name...”

“It’s because I work so hard, and earn so much for my masters.” She explains.

“I liked my name for you better.” Nish comments.

“Do you ever stop talking?” Golden-Hands asks.

“You get used to him.” Fjorn remarks.

“I’d rather not...” She grumbles.

Jo’dehki slowly sheaths his dagger, taking up his bow instead. He holds an arrow in his firing hand. She steps back, pulling the knife even tighter. Blood now runs along his throat from a sizable cut.

“Stay back! I’ll kill him! I mean it!” She yells.

“Ow! Not so loud.” He says to her. “Stay back, you two! I’m serious!” He barks at his companions.

They stop in their tracks, but keep their hands on their weapons, glaring at the girl.

“Miss? Golden-Hands? You’re escaping, aren’t you? I don’t blame you. It pains me to see any Khajiit enslaved... But stop and think for a moment...” Nish begins.

“About what?” She asks.

“You want to be free, but where will you go once you get away from Suran? To another city? Into the ashlands? Will you leave Vvardenfell? I get the impression you haven’t

ever been very far from this place. How will you find your way? Will you barter passage off this island to mainland of Tamriel? How would you pay for transport? How do you even expect to remove your shackles?" Nish continues.

Her hand that grips his throat slowly loosens, while the blade eases away from his neck.

"I don't want to hurt you. On the contrary. I doubt you remember me, but only yesterday I saw you across the square. I was watching you from the door of the inn. You carried a heavy burden for your master; he happily whistled a tune while you suffered... You don't deserve that life. I don't think anyone does."

"Just... Stop... Stop talking..." She demands in a melancholy voice.

"You won't get far on your own... You can't. Let me help you." Nish says softly.

His palms glow a faint teal color as he holds them up. He concentrates on the shackles that bind her wrists, unlocking the simple locks. They fall from her wrists, startling her as they plop onto the dirt by her digitigrade feet. She lowers the knife, releases his throat, and jumps back. Nish places a hand over his throat. Fjorn and Jo'dehki quickly move in, but Nish raises his free hand.

"Stop! Don't hurt her!" He pleads. "I'll help you escape, if you let me." He turns to her.

“Nish...” Fjorn grumbles.

“Be quiet...” Nish retorts.

“This one agrees with Fjorn. He does not believe this to be a wise decision.” Jo’dehki adds.

“Please. I’m not your enemy.” Nish pleads with her.

“... No... I can’t trust you. I can’t trust anyone...” She shakes her head, taking a step back.

“Alright... Then keep my dagger, and whatever else you took. We won’t stop you, or try to come after you.”

“Nish!” Fjorn gasps.

“What are you doing?!” Jo’dehki exclaims.

“Dov pur an mavos ahziss ete!” Nish snaps.

Jo’dehki sighs and lowers his bow, dropping the arrow onto the ground. Fjorn sees this and lowers his sword, slowly sheathing it. Nish rests his hands at his sides, taking a step back. The girl looks at the three, who seem to yield to her. She holds Nish’s dagger close, keeping the point aimed in his direction, though she holds it below her breasts. Nish looks down and kicks the sheath to his dagger over to her.

“Without that you can’t carry it very safely, and you might bump the blade, damaging the edge.” He says to her.

She squats down, taking the sheath. Nish takes a few more steps back. He looks over her form, half admiringly and half dolefully. She is a young-adult, Suthay-Raht

female, with tawny fur dotted with black spots. Her mouth and chin have lighter colored fur than the rest of her body. The hair on her head nearly matches her tawny fur, and is roughly shoulder length, brushed back and braided at the edges; the braids seem to be pulled back and locked together, as though to hold her hair back and keep it from falling before her face. Her eyes are a brilliant green, almost aquamarine in color. She has two piercings on the outer edges of both of her tall, feline ears, and in her nose is a single small septum piercing; the brass crescent dangles only a few centimeters above her upper lip. The rings in her ears are also made of brass.

“Do you need any other supplies? Food and water?” He asks.

“I believe I have what I need. At least to get far away from here.” She replies.

“If you’re sure you don’t want our help...”

“I don’t.” She narrows her eyes at him.

“Then I wish you the best of luck... Sincerely.” He sighs.

She steps backward into the shadows, clutching a small satchel of dried food, Nish’s dagger and sheath, and a water-skin. In the distance, they can hear her footpads as she darts away. Nish turns and sits down on his bedroll. He looks quite upset.

“This one is sorry that she stole your things.” Jo’dehki says softly.

“Oh, it’s fine. She didn’t get the gold anyway; I’m still wearing it...” Nish replies.

“Then what troubles you?” Jo’dehki asks, confused.

“I really do hope that she escapes, but without our help I fear that she’ll be back in chains in a matter of days. She didn’t even stay long enough for me to unlock the shackles on her ankles.” Nish replies.

“Quite the generous type, aren’t you?” Jo’dehki chuckles.

“Hah! If she wasn’t covered in fur, that would have gone *very* differently.” Fjorn remarks.

“Is this true?” Jo’dehki asks.

Nish shrugs his shoulders.

“I’ll admit to a very mild personal bias.” He grins.

Fjorn leans in, the tips of his index and middle fingers glowing. He brushes them over the claw marks and superficial slash on Nish’s neck, quickly healing them. He passes him a cloth to wipe off the blood. Their ordeal finally over, the three lie back down to sleep. Fjorn returns to his slumber in a matter of minutes. As the Nord begins to snore, Jo’dehki turns his head to Nish. He stares up at the stars, a sorrowful look on his face. That night, neither of them collect much sleep.