

Chimerical

Episode 7: Moving On

They march along the road as the land quickly shifts; the grasses are soon covered by ash as the landscape becomes desolate and even more unforgiving. They keep a steady pace as they curve north, moving along the ruins of Nchuleftingth. They plan to wrap around the ruins and walk in a westerly direction, slipping through the hills and returning to the road to Vivec City, just beyond Suran and the plantations surrounding it. Fjorn and Jo'dehki seem to want very little to do with Golden-Hands; she can sense their rather passive hostility. Ra'Kanishu, however, is very gentle, warm, and compassionate.

He finds a large stick on the ground as they walk; a recent branch that had fallen from a nearby tree. The wood is still living, and relatively straight, just over a meter long. He takes the stick, pulling the smaller branches from it. He turns to Golden-Hands and smiles at her, motioning for her to come closer. She walks faster, inching her way towards him. She smiles faintly as she looks over to him.

"I found this for you." Nish begins.

"A stick?" She raises a brow.

“You said you practiced with sticks like they were staves and spears. It’s not done, since I just found it, but I can whittle this into a staff for you.” He explains.

“Thank you.” She gratefully nods.

She returns his Argonian dagger, and Nish carefully begins shaving the outer layers of wood from the branch, carving it into a single straight piece. He shaves slowly as he walks, careful not to damage the stick as he moves over the uneven ground. She watches him, noting the care he takes in preparing her simple weapon; he whittles the wood almost lovingly.

“So, Golden-Hands...” Nish begins.

“Yes?”

“How long have you been in Suran?” He asks.

“My entire life.” She laments.

“I’m sorry. That was supposed to be a subtle hint to tell me your age. It’s not very polite to ask a female outright.” He chuckles.

“Oh...” She smiles. “I’m twenty.”

“Well, you’ll have a lot of years of freedom ahead of you, once we get you out of Vvardenfell.” He adds.

Jo’delhki reaches a hand out, pressing it against Fjorn’s chest as he slows his pace. Fjorn looks down at his hand, then turns his head to Jo’delhki. They allow Nish and Golden-Hands to move slightly ahead of them. Jo’delhki

shifts his eyes to Golden-Hands, before looking back at Fjorn.

“This one does not trust her...” Jo’dehki whispers.

“Neither do I.” Fjorn whispers back.

Fjorn and Jo’dehki slowly catch back up to them, while Nish and Golden-Hands seems to enjoy idle banter. They follow the road as it briefly moves south, before soon curving again and heading west. They pass an old shrine as they walk along the north side of Nchuleftingth. They take a moment to rest. Golden-Hands had long ago returned the remaining food and water that she had stolen from him, but Nish willingly shares with her. She seems almost embarrassed by his generosity. As they rest, he finishes his work on her new staff, presenting the light colored wooden stick to her. She feels it, giving it a gentle bend; the wood is supple and smooth.

While sitting along the road, Nish finds a large piece of obsidian from the hardened lava flows that had run through the land only a few years earlier. He takes the piece and sits beside Golden-Hands.

“Did you want that to be a spear?” He asks her.

“I’m used to a staff, but a spear would be more versatile.” She answers.

He nods and sets the piece of obsidian on his leg. He finds a random stone, using it as a hammer rock.

“Watch your eyes.” He politely warns her.

She turns away as he uses the hammer rock to break several pieces from the obsidian chunk. He collects the pieces and finds a smaller rock to use for chipping and sharpening the obsidian bits, setting the large block aside. Jo’dehki and Fjorn collectively stand. Rested and refreshed, they silently urge the group to continue their walk. Nish pockets the smaller rock and various pieces of unfinished obsidian spearheads.

“I’m sorry. I’ll finish the spearheads the next time we stop.” Nish apologizes to Golden-Hands.

They continue the march west, passing an old ancestral tomb entrance. After barely an hour of walking, the band passes over a small land bridge with short hills on both sides; water sits stagnant in the valleys below. They enter the hills as Fjorn takes out a folded map of Vvardenfell, an item that he had purchased before they boarded the ship to Seyda Neen. He looks at the crudely drawn geography, noting the ruins, land bridge, and their orientation in relation to Red Mountain.

“I think we are just west of Suran. If we head directly south, over or around these hills, we should hit the road to Vivec City.” Fjorn tells them.

They follow Fjorn’s lead as he travels through the southern hills. Golden-Hands seems to struggle, but Nish is quick to help her through, catching her when she slips and pulling her up a steep incline. They stand at the peak of a large, steep hill, overlooking the lands near Suran. Several plantations dot the edges of the city. Golden-Hands seems to tense up as she looks over the horizon.

“Which one was yours?” Fjorn asks.

Golden-Hands seems quite depressed at the mere thought of pointing out the plantation of her masters.

“It doesn’t really matter anymore, does it...” Nish quickly and defensively steps in.

They slowly slide down the steep hills. Nish holds onto her as Golden-Hands seems to struggle with the unsteady ground, her digitigrade feet not able to grip the soft earth as well as the other’s plantigrade feet. They reach the bottom of the hills and find a path that looks well-traveled. Fjorn checks the map and looks it over carefully.

“I think this is the road. We just need to follow it.” He confidently tells them.

They follow the path, when suddenly it begins to change. A large mass of water is visible to their left, just south of them. Fjorn seems less sure of himself as he takes out the map, looking it over again. Nish and Jo'dehki recognize a distinct change in the geography; this is not the road that they had traveled to reach Suran from Vivec City. Fjorn squints his eyes as he turns the map several times.

"Uh-oh..." Fjorn mutters.

"This one does not like the sound of that." Jo'dehki remarks.

"No, it's okay! I know where we are now. This is a smaller path, it winds north along this lake and hits the road to Balmora... When we come to the main road, we take a left to walk south, and Seyda Neen will be on our right." Fjorn explains.

"That kind of makes it a safer path, at least for Golden-Hands, doesn't it?" Nish seems to think aloud.

Fjorn puts away the map, now certain of their direction. They walk along the path, being sure not to stray from it. As they turn a sharp corner, staying along the north side of the lake, they spot a figure sitting down in the distance. They quickly approach the figure, who leaps to their feet and quickly approaches them.

"Oh, thank the eight you have come! I've be hoping someone would arrive to help me!" The Dunmer exclaims.

“What seems to be the problem?” Nish asks.

“I’ll explain everything. Come quickly!” He urges the band.

Nish takes a step forward, followed by Golden-Hands. Jo’dehki seems hesitant, as does Fjorn, who reaches out and grabs his two companions, holding them each by a shoulder. They turn back to look at him, and he slowly shakes his head. The Dunmer stops and turns back to them.

“Come quickly! Please!” He pleads.

“What *exactly* is the problem?” Fjorn demands.

“I just... You see... .. Forget it... They aren’t buying it!” The Dunmer turns, calling out to an unseen party.

Several bandits emerge from hiding places around the path; including the Mer who acted as bait, there are nine of them. All are armed with daggers, clubs, cheap axes and swords. None have armor of any kind, beyond thick cloth jerkins, leather bracers and boots. They stand in their path like a biological roadblock.

“Well... Since you were clever enough to spot this trap, we’ll go easy on you. Hand over everything but the clothes on your back, and we will let you pass unharmed.” The bandit leader offers.

“Wait... That one is a female...” Another points to Golden-Hands.

“She’s Khajiit...” The bandit leader remarks in disgust.

“So? There’s only one part I’m interested in... Well, maybe three, if you count each breast.” The bandit laughs.

“You’re sick... .. Alright. Leave her too.” The leader says.

Nish takes off his pack, as though he were surrendering. Fjorn and Jo’dehki don’t make a move, while Golden-Hands seems genuinely worried that they may obey. Nish takes out his special clawed gauntlet, slipping it over his right hand as he charges a fireball. He steps in front of Golden-Hands, who holds her new staff close to her body.

“If you get out of our way right now... We won’t kill every one of you.” Nish grins.

Fjorn chuckles, taking up his shield and drawing his sword. Jo’dehki is less interested in fighting, but takes his bow and draws an arrow regardless; he stands beside his comrades, unwilling to fail them.

“Hah!” The leader laughs. “Just for that... I’ll personally rape her in front of you, and then I’ll cut your throat...”

“Hey...” The other bandit grumbles.

“Sorry, but you’ll have to go second. I can’t even stand those filthy Khajiit, but they need to be punished appropriately... Who knows? Maybe she’ll feel good.” The leader smirks.

He approaches as Nish draws his axe, leaving his sword sheathed. As the men approach, Fjorn steps to the side, as does Jo'dehki; they leave a gap between the two of them as they move into a crescent formation. Golden-Hands stays planted firmly behind Nish. Without warning, Nish fires a powerful fireball at the bandit leader, engulfing him in flames. He drops his weapons and screams, his cloth armor holding the flames as his hair is quickly singed off; he runs around like a decapitated chicken, before dropping dead on the ground. The others briefly panic at the sight, clearly not magic users.

Jo'dehki begins firing at the men, shooting arrow after arrow. He quickly empties what's left in his quiver. One bandit is struck in the chest and back by several of his deadly missiles. Fjorn roars, dashing at two bandits on his left, his shield held vertical before him. Golden-Hands doesn't stray from the fight, rushing around Nish. As Fjorn slams his shield into a man, knocking him to the ground, Nish slowly approaches, firing several bolts of lightning. The remaining bandits charge in, swarming the four in a wild and unorganized fashion.

Golden-Hands holds her staff across her chest, extending it away from her as she blocks a swing from a bandit's axe. She hooks the beard of their axe, pulling back hard as she steals the weapon from their hands. She spins the staff, slamming it hard against their shin and dropping them to their knees. She spins, her tail pulled close to her body as she smashes the Dunmer thief in the throat with her staff, crushing their larynx.

“Die, cat!” A bandit screams.

She turns and holds up her staff, preparing for a fight as a female Dunmer bandit charges her with a club. She bears her teeth, growling as she clutches her staff tightly. Nish brings down his axe before the bandit, cutting into their wooden club and directing it away from Golden-Hands. The bandit drops the club and quickly draws a dagger, swinging as Nish jumps back. Nish fires a bolt of lightning from his right-hand palm, striking the dagger. The startled bandit drops the blade.

“No weapons for you!” He taunts her.

She quickly collects the club from the ground, now bearing a large gouge, bitten deeply by Nish’s axe. She screams and charges him. She brings down the club, but Nish deflects the blow, swinging his axe in an upward sweeping motion. He hooks the club with the beard of his axe and swings it away from her body. He slashes at her with the claws of his off-hand gauntlet, slashing her throat open. Arterial spray shoots nearly two meters from the wound. Nish kicks her back and the girl falls over. She reaches up, as though for help, but Nish lops her hand off at the wrist.

Jo’dehki struggles with a bandit who tries to bring a dagger to his throat. Nish sees his companion in danger and throws his axe into the man’s back, stunning and severely

injuring them. Jo'dehki pulls his own blade across the bandit's throat before dropping them to the ground.

"Look out!" Golden-Hands yells.

Nish turns his head, seeing a man about to strike with an old sword. He spins, drawing his sword from its sheath. He holds the blade flat, quickly deflecting the strike, before pulling to the left and opening the bandit to attack. He tries to slash with his claws, but the bandit sees it coming. He grabs Nish's wrist and tries to pull his sword across his abdomen. Nish locks his left arm with the bandit's right, holding him in place. Golden-Hands leaps on the bandit's back, pulling her staff hard against their throat.

Nish pushes the bandit away, hooking their blade with his own and disarming the thief. Golden-Hands strangles the bandit with her staff. The bandit struggles to breathe as he spins around, trying to throw her from his back. He slams her into a tree and her grip loosens. Nish slashes his sword casually across the bandit's chest, then again across his abdomen. He cries out in pain as a large gash partially reveals his intestines.

Golden-Hands releases a hand and drops from the bandit's back, quickly cracking the staff against the back of a knee. As he drops to the ground, she spins again, slamming it into their throat. They curl forward, struggling to breathe as she brings the staff down with both hands, smashing it into the back of their neck and cracking several

vertebrae. The paralyzed and possibly dead bandit falls motionless on the ground. Nish stands above the man and thrusts his sword deep into his back, twisting and shifting it to make sure that he is dead.

He turns around, looking for Jo'dehki and Fjorn. To his amusement, Fjorn seems to play with two bandits, who seem afraid to attack the sword and shield bearing Nord. Jo'dehki drags the man who acted as bait, pulling him back to his comrades by the collar of his tunic.

"Fjorn, don't play with your food!" Nish teases.

"Oh, alright." The Nord grins.

He rushes the two remaining bandits, slamming into the man to his left. He pushes him to the ground, while the bandit presses their arms against the wooden barrier, as though they were afraid of being crushed. He leans over him, pressing hard as he thrusts his sword around the rim of his shield and diagonally into the bandit's shoulder. He groans and coughs up blood; Fjorn stands and jabs the sword into his chest. The other bandit, paralyzed by fear, stands like a frightened animal. Fjorn turns to him, and makes a motion with his sword.

"Are you going to fight, or what?" He asks them.

The bandit drops his weapons and turns, dashing away in sheer terror. Fjorn chuckles as he wipes the blood from

his blade, quickly sheathing his sword. As they run, Nish watches them flee. He holds out his gloved hand and blasts a powerful bolt of purple-blue lightning, striking them in the back. The bandit shrieks like a banshee, falling over into a puddle of oozing mud. Nish walks past Golden-Hands, who watches in awe. Jo'dehki drops the unarmed man to his knees, surrounded by the bodies of his friends.

"What of this one?" Jo'dehki asks.

"Please, they made me do it! Please!" The man begs.

"I hate rapists..." Nish murmurs.

He holds out his sword, turning the blade to face the man. As he walks by, he casually runs the blade along the man's throat, slicing it open. He quickly begins choking on his own blood, coughing up a thin crimson stream that runs down the side of his mouth. Jo'dehki shrugs his shoulders and releases the Dunmer. He falls forward, holding his throat. Jo'dehki takes his dagger and turns it over in his hands, the blade running along his forearm. He rests a knee on the Dunmer's back and plunges his dagger into him, aiming for his heart. He doesn't miss, striking the fist-sized organ and instantly ending his suffering.

Nish grabs the final survivor of the battle, pulling them from the slimy earth; he is barely conscious. Nish grabs his chin, squeezing tightly as the claws of his gauntlet dig into the flesh. Jo'dehki turns back to see Nish as he seems to whisper something to the man, before placing his sword at his throat.

“No. Let this one finish it.” He speaks up.

Nish turns back and looks at him curiously. Jo’dehki approaches, standing beside the Imperial. He stands up, dropping the bandit onto the ground. He walks away, returning to Golden-Hands, who stares in awe. Jo’dehki kneels, swinging a leg over their back as he straddles the half-dead thief. He grabs their hair tightly, pulling back and revealing their neck. He places the blade of his dagger against the Dunmer’s flesh.

“Sallidith, fiba’i renrij.” Jo’dehki murmurs.

He pulls the blade hard, drawing it from left to right. Arterial spray flies over a meter away from their body, gushing out in quick jets as their heart beats. Jo’dehki coldly drops their body.

“You really know how to handle yourself.” Nish smiles at Golden-Hands.

“Y-yes... I-I do.” She stammers.

Jo’dehki stands from the corpse and sheaths his dagger. Nish sheaths his sword, before collecting his axe from the back of a fallen bandit.

“Are you alright?” He asks her softly.

“Yes...” She murmurs. “That was... Amazing... You were amazing.” She gushes.

“You weren’t too bad yourself. I liked watching you with that staff.” Nish replies.

“You’re too kind.” She smiles warmly.

“I think I’ve heard that somewhere before.” Nish glances over at Fjorn.

“Kind, a skilled fighter... Handsome.” She continues.

“Okay, now you’re lying.” He chuckles.

“I would never lie to such a... Capable man.” She coos.

Nish and Golden-Hands gaze at each other, while Fjorn and Jo’dehki glance at the two, before turning to each other, a worried look on both of their faces.

“Golden-Hands...” Nish begins.

“Yes?” She steps closer.

“Golden-Hands isn’t a very fitting name for you. It’s a slave name. Would you mind if I stopped using it? It’s alright if you don’t.” He asks her.

“No, I don’t mind. I... I never liked Golden-Hands. The young master gave it to me... I... He...” Her bottom lip gently trembles.

Nish steps up to her, gently wrapping his arms around the young Khajiiti woman. He holds her, trying to comfort her as she sighs. She slips her arms around his torso, resting

them on his shoulder blades. She places her head against his chest, her snout running underneath his chin.

“I’m sorry, Veera. That’s all over now, and it’s going to be alright.” He whispers sweetly into her ear.

“Veera?” She looks up to him.

“Do you like it?” He asks her.

She nods and smiles, showing her sharp teeth.

“We’d better keep walking to Seyda Neen. It’d be best if we could leave Vvardenfell before nightfall.” He says to her.

She nods again, and turns to follow the road. Nish drapes an arm over her shoulders, looking around for Jo’dehki and Fjorn. Jo’dehki is watching the two of them, as he had been for some time. Fjorn, however, has been checking the bodies for valuables, and has just begun searching the last corpse. They continue their hike, walking along the path to the west, towards the main road between Seyda Neen and Balmora. Veera looks over to Nish, smiling up at him. Her tail sways rather happily as she leans into him. He looks back, smiling at her. His hand gently squeezes her upper arm.