

Chimerical

By Mantrid Brizon

Episode 26: Abscond

The group of eight heavily armed and armored hunters follow Kazkhar and his three minions down the road. Without horses, they alternate between a brisk walk and light jogging, maintaining their strength for any battle that may await them in town. Roughly one-third of the way to S'ren-ja, a figure riding a generic looking horse and wearing flowing brown robes and a large brown hood passes by. It is not an unusual sight and none of the twelve pay the horseman any attention. After quite a march, Kazkhar is elated to see his home in the distance, and the hunters seem to grow more anxious.

One repeatedly fondles the handle of his sword, looking for any excuse to draw and use it. His mother was certainly right about them; they are utterly bloodthirsty, and killing a werewolf is just a righteous excuse to quench that thirst. Entering the village of S'ren-ja, Kazkhar takes them directly to the house where Ra'kanishu and his wife live. He and his minions are surprised to see that there are no town guards posted. Though Kazkhar silently wonders where they went, he is thankful that they are gone as he knows

that these hunters would most certainly kill them if they needed to; he wouldn't want their deaths on his conscience.

They climb the stairs and knock on the door, but there is no answer. Looking back at the Redguard warrior and his armored hunters, he shrugs his shoulders.

"And you are sure this is the house?" The Redguard asks.

"Certain. This one has seen him here many times." Kazkhar replies.

The Redguard pushes the Ohmes-Raht aside, nearly throwing him from the top of the steps. He grabs the handle and depresses the latch, finding the door unlocked. Pushing it open slightly, he draws a steel scimitar that hangs from his side. With a hand gesture he readies his warriors, all of whom are Men or Mer, their helmets with full-face visors hiding their identities and even races. The Redguard, who wears little armor and no helmet, shoves the door open with his shoulder while holding his scimitar before him, his band charging in directly behind him.

They're surprised to find an empty home, though glowing coals sit in the stone fireplace. The Redguard sheaths his scimitar as his men glance around the room, an aura of disappointment oozing from them. Kazkhar peeks his head in through the doorway, quickly followed by his three minions. As they look over the room, the Redguard warrior notices a single parchment sitting atop the table beside a

quill and inkwell. The warrior leans over the table and picks up the parchment, using the evening's light that pierces the windows to read the note.

"To whom it may concern,

This one thanks you for not disrupting his home or tracking in mud. Have a nice day.

Sincerely, The Werewolf."

Grumbling, the Redguard crumples the parchment and tosses it into the fireplace where a red ember slowly burns the sheet. He stomps toward the Khajiit at the doorway, snatching Kazkhar by his purple silk shirt.

"Where is the werewolf?!" He demands.

"He should be here! This one does not know where he went!" Kazkhar replies, his voice shaking in fear.

"Well he isn't! That bastard left us a note, so who warned him?!"

"This one doesn't know!" Kazkhar shouts.

Roaring in anger, he pushes Kazkhar down the steps. By now, the townsfolk have noticed the group of battle-hardened warriors and have heard the shouts. They approach the house as Kazkhar lands with a thud in the

hard dirt, keeping some distance as they observe the outsiders. The Redguard stomps down the steps as his hunters follow behind.

“I’ve been told that a werewolf lives among you! An Imperial who was raised by Khajiit and had been your neighbor for many years! Tell me where he is or I swear on the Divines that I will make you regret it!” The Redguard shouts at the gathering crowd.

Standing inside the clan mother’s home, S’tari, Nazahn and Hiska-dar watch from the windows as Ko’adhasa and the entirety of the town guards watch with them. The guards are even in number to the hunters, but none have experienced a true battle and all are afraid.

“Well?! Someone better start talking!”

Stepping forward from the crowd, a nervous M’raym clears his throat. The Cathay looks to the enraged Redguard who narrows his eyes, glaring at him.

“Do you have something to say, cat man?”

“The one you are looking for left earlier in the day with his wife. He didn’t speak to anyone and didn’t tell us where he was going. He had already been banished for being a werewolf; his life was spared only because he protected the village.” M’raym answers.

“That is *not* what I want to hear...” The Redguard growls.

“M’raym apologizes, but he does have the knowledge you seek, nor do any of his neighbors.” M’raym remarks.

Many villagers nod and vocalize their agreement. The Redguard’s eye twitches in frustration.

“B-but this one *did* see a hooded figure ride into town on a horse. It was a Khajiit, though he could not see their face or if it was a man or a woman. They found the Imperial and quickly left.” Batesh speaks up.

M’raym turns his eyes to the older Khajiit, glaring at him. The band all remember seeing the figure passing them on the road only hours earlier. Realizing that they are now too late, the Redguard yells at the sky and draws his scimitar.

“Tell me where he went! Which direction!”

The citizens look to each other and then back at the Redguard before shrugging their shoulders. Without hesitating, the Redguard grabs Kazkhar by the forearm and yanks. Pulling his forearm behind his back, he holds the terrified Ohmes-Raht close to his body and brings the blade of his large sword to the Khajiit’s throat. The villagers look on in terror; some gasping and others looking away. None of them speak. Abaimba pushes through the crowd only to see

her son being held captive by the hunter's leader. Unfortunately, she was ranting and raving within her home and did not see anything of value either.

"Someone must have seen something!" The Redguard grows impatiently.

"We didn't see anything. Most of us were in our homes!" Abaimba cries out.

"And who are you?" He asks.

"This one is the mother of your hostage." She replies.

"Good! ... Where did they go?"

"If this one knew that, she would tell you! Do you not think that she wants her son to be safe?!" She angrily exclaims.

"I believe you do... But that's not enough."

With a sinister grin, the Redguard draws the blade of his sword across Kazkhar's neck. The Ohmes-Raht gasps and gurgles as arterial spray shoots out. Abaimba screams and falls down to her knees at the sight of her only son's imminent death. Pushing him over, the Redguard looks casually down at the man as he lands with a thud in the dirt. The entire village looks on in horror. Dahlni witnesses the murder from the background and immediately heaves, vomiting up her breakfast just before her feet. Though the beautiful Ohmes-Raht girl had never liked Kazkhar, far more interested in Ra'kanishu instead, she has never witnessed such brutality and gore.

“We do not know anything!” A voice says from the crowd.

Villagers move aside to allow old man Vasdar to pass. Walking with a cane, the old Suthay-Raht walks feebly toward the Redguard. Standing only a few meters away, he shows no fear as he looks to the murderous hunter.

“Harming and killing innocents won’t accomplish anything.” Vasdar says calmly.

“Perhaps you are right, old man... But it certainly makes us feel better!” The Redguard chuckles.

Without saying a word or making any gestures, one of the hunters steps up to Vasdar and jams his iron short sword into his stomach at an upward angle, rupturing his heart. With a callous shove, the helmeted assailant drops the elder to the ground, waving his sword and throwing droplets of blood from the blade. Many villagers scream at the sight and some begin to weep loudly for the loss of a beloved neighbor and elder. Looking over the crowd, the Redguard realizes that they truly know nothing. With a wave of his hand, his men gather around.

“Well, the road only leads two ways, and he didn’t pass us. He can’t be too far.” The Redguard says to his band.

He begins to march, purposefully stepping over Kazkhar’s corpse. His men follow him as he marches out of

town, never once looking down at the bodies or paying any attention to the distraught villagers. Abaimba crawls past Vasdar's body and toward her son.

"What has Abaimba done?" She thinks quietly aloud, tears streaming down her face.

Looking to the horizon, Tsanavi holds her husband's hand tightly as they march through the wilderness, having fled south and away from the road. She takes a deep breath, smelling the sweet air before releasing it in the form of a pleased sigh. Though she might miss her home, she is glad to be traveling with her lover this time around. Nish looks over to her, smiling at the little Suthay. As she glances back, their eyes lock and he gives her hand an assuring squeeze. Walking only a meter to their right is Jo'dehki and Jadhi. Their arms brush from the close proximity and her fingertips tease his palm, inching their way into his grasp. Looking to her, Jo'dehki smiles and takes her hand.

As the sun dips beyond the horizon the group makes camp for the night. Tsanavi and Jadhi prepare a meal for the four as Nish and Jo'dehki set up simple tents to shield them from the wind. Sitting around a small fire, kept low and surrounded by tall stones to make it more difficult to see in the distance, the group eats a dinner of dried salmon meat and diced leeks, boiled in a portable brass cooking pot.

“Was it really necessary to leave that letter?” Jo’dehki asks.

“This one certainly hopes so.” Nish chuckles.

“Tsanavi would have loved to see the looks on their faces when they read it.” She remarks.

“Out of curiosity, where exactly are we going?” Jadhi asks.

“That is a good question.” Jo’dehki replies.

“Ra’kanishu has a few old friends in Malabal Tor who will help us flee. They owe this one several favors.” Nish begins.

“But where will we go then?” Tsanavi asks.

“Where would you like to go?” Nish poses.

The women look between each other, then to their men.

“Well, this one likes the warmth.” Jadhi answers.

“A place with warm sand, yes?” Tsanavi adds.

Nish and Jo’dehki look to each other for a moment.

“Hew’s Bane?” They suggest simultaneously.

“Is it nice?” Jadhi asks.

“It is tropical on the coast but a sandy desert inland. This one enjoyed his time there.” Jo’dehki answers.

“It would make an excellent home.” Nish agrees.

“But we have little money. We could not stay to sell the home, and we certainly can’t return anytime soon.” Tsanavi points out.

With a little smile, Nish reaches into his pack and retrieves a scroll case. Opening it, he carefully removes a thick roll of parchment.

“What’s that?” Jadhi asks.

“This one was learning many spells before he returned home. It became too difficult to study after he met Jo’dehki.” Nish begins, glancing over to the Cathay-Raht.

“That will happen.” Jo’dehki grins.

“One spell forms a portal. When Ra’kanishu masters it, we may one day return to our parent’s home to collect the drakes after they sell the house and other belongings.” He explains.

“Jadhi misses them already...” She murmurs.

Jo’dehki’s grin fades and he scoots closer to her. He rests a hand on her back, drawing her attention. She turns to face him and grins faintly, but it appears feigned. His heart weighs heavy as he wonders if she regrets leaving with him.

“There... There is still time. Jo’dehki can take you home.” He sheepishly offers.

“Why would this one ever want to do such a thing? She is happy here with you!” Jadhi exclaims.

“But you miss your parents.” He says.

“Of course, but it doesn’t mean that Jadhi wants to leave you behind... She needs you, Jo’dehki.”

His heart racing, he leans in and the pair share a kiss. Ra’kanishu and Tsanavi can’t help but feel as though they are intruding.

“We need our own house when we arrive in Hew’s Bane.” She whispers to her husband.

“Agreed.” He nods.