

Fate
1x11: "Fortress"

by

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Based on characters by Joss Whedon

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. ENCAMPMENT, THE VALLEY - DAY

NADYA smiles.

She fills the bright blue sky with her brilliance... a fake brilliance with a little too many pearly whites on display. She takes a deep breath.

THE AMULET-KEY is around her neck.

NADYA

I know we seem strange to you. I know the things we've told you seem unbelievable, fantastical...

Behind her, there are mountains. They are only far away enough not to leave her in their shadow. She stands on a raised ridge overlooking a flat valley that extends to the mountains.

NADYA

But trust in me when I tell you that our sole reason for being here is to make the world a better place. A safer place. For everyone.

She gestures with her hands, weaving a story, keeping all attention on her.

NADYA

You've seen what I can do. We've told you about the great battles against creatures that drink blood...

ON DAWN

To the side of Nadya, nods to herself distractedly.

NADYA (O.S.)

The magicks that shake the earth and rip open the sky...

SAMUEL

beside Dawn, folds his hands together, sombre.

NADYA (OS)

The great evils that hide in the shadows until they are ready.

JASON

Stands, devoid of any emotion. His eyes flicker to the side as Nadya steps past him. She shoots him a self-satisfied smile as she looks down at--

AN ENTIRE ARMY

Stretched across a vast area in front of her. TENTS and various objects signifying a massive CAMP dot the horizon.

Nadya grins at them, completely at ease, oozing confidence.

NADYA

These are just a fraction of the things we've conquered. This is what we do... and ladies and gentlemen, we do it well. This world is about to have one less dictator.

She nods at a TALL BARBARIAN, APPESH (30s), in the front of the crowd. He jumps up beside her on the ridge and throws his fist in the air.

APPESH

Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!

The crowd pick up the CHANT. Nadya turns around, walking toward the very edge of the ridge. She looks out toward the mountains. Dawn, Samuel and Jason join her and also stare off into the distance.

DAWN

So you really think we stand a chance?

Nadya considers.

NADYA

No.

SAMUEL

No.

Dawn nods in resigned agreement. Jason stares blankly ahead at--

THE FORTRESS

A mammoth castle-like structure carved out of the mountains across the valley.

OFF THAT AND THE CROWD'S CHANTING

FADE OUT.

END TEASER

ACT I

FADE IN:

INT. CONFERENCE TENT - DAY

Samuel SLAMS his hands down on a spread MAP on a table. Various MAPS and SCROLLS line tables around the circumference. There are GLYPHS painted on the tent linings, with herbs and other ritualistic-looking objects hanging from the frame.

The round, tarped tent has two exits on either side.

SAMUEL

It would be foolish! Wait until I have--

VEGO

There will be no more waiting. It is a healer's game and I do not wish to stomach it further.

The WARRIOR, VEGO, (20s) is of the typical no-neck variety. More muscles than patience. Samuel is really trying to hold onto his. Watching this is APPESH.

SAMUEL

The last challengers are still missing. You cannot face a stronger opponent without knowing--

VEGO

They failed, obviously weaker. I am better. Stronger. It is my right to challenge!

SAMUEL

Is it your right to lead your men to die needlessly? This is foolhardy! Why can't you wait?

FEMALE (O.S.)

Gentleman!

Samuel and Vego turn to face--

MALA, 40s, wearing robes befitting one of serene patience, stands at one of the tent doors.

Past her, outside of the tent, a BELL hangs from a free-standing metal frame.

Mala enters the tent, graceful and calm. There is no anger to her movements or speech.

MALA

I trust I shall not have to remind you that whilst you are here...

(gesturing at the glyphs)

... within walls of the sacred words, the spirit of neutrality will be served.

SAMUEL

(bowing his head)

Apologies Healer.

Mala smiles.

MALA

Do not trouble yourself to conciliate. You still learn our ways, and I have word that your frustration is not without provocation.

(turns to Appesh)

Warrior Appesh, what is this I hear of another warrior clan being allowed to offer challenge? I thought the clans agreed to wait until the offlanders had found better access. Have we not proven how futile a direct challenge to the Ki'Adu is?

APPESH

With respect, Healer Mala, we do not forbid any clan their right to offer challenge. The clans I have conquered will do as we agreed. The others...

(gives a shake of his shoulders)

Unless you would prefer I conquer them all?

Vego growls at Appesh.

MALA

(tired)

Enough. If the warrior majority
concedes the clan their right,
then the healers have no quarrel.

SAMUEL

But-

MALA

(holding up a hand)

If they choose to die, they die.

(waves the warrior

away)

Go with blessings.

Vego nods brusquely and heads out the tent.

MALA

Please do not distress yourself
so. This is the way of it and has
been so for generations. Change
does not occur in a single breath.

APPESH

Change does not occur in a
thousand breaths. That is a fact
we warriors gladly accept.

SAMUEL

Even if it means your deaths.

APPESH

(laughs)

Ahh you speak like a healer,
though your cunning is of a
warrior's. I must go. Speed the
young lion to victory.

(considers)

Or his death. Does it matter?

Appesh leaves the tent. Samuel grits his jaw.

MALA

(waving over the map)

How is progress?

Samuel moves one map and reveals another beneath it.

SAMUEL

It is an interesting task joining
two very different outlooks. I
think there is hope here.

MALA

One cannot ask for more than hope.

SAMUEL

What of freedom and peace?

MALA

If it is the will of the stars.

SAMUEL

It could be the will of all that are here.

Mala simply smiles.

MALA

I thank you and your champion for the gift of hope you bestow, but you should not wish for more than that. If failure is our fate, then we must brace to accept it.

(waving away bad thoughts)

No more of this talk. I will leave you to your work. If it pleases you to save our undeserving world, then I will not take that from you. I will return next you need my counsel.

She nods at him as he bows his head again. Dawn passes Mala on her way into the tent.

DAWN

Hey.

(regards him)

You look tense. Another angry lion versus beautiful butterfly fight?

Samuel shakes his head.

SAMUEL

How can one people be so...

DAWN

Insane?

SAMUEL

(shakes his head)

Stubborn.

Dawn hops onto the edge of the table. She glances at the maps, as Samuel pores over them.

He lifts a writing utensil and makes marks on one of the maps based on the content of the other.

DAWN

Still, you gotta love the simplicity of it. They don't care about gender or race or bad hair. It's just warriors and healers. One or the other. Living side by side in relative peace. Although, that whole "conquer a warrior clan and inherit all the neighbours" tradition is a little weird.

SAMUEL

I do admire the healers' ability to implicitly accept each other and their protectors.

(frowns)

If that's what the warriors are. The healers and warriors see each other as equals, they live beside each other peacefully through choice, they make joint decisions... but they remain strictly in their own encampments, segregated. I've never seen them interact outside of this tent. Yet, when a warrior clan conquers another, the two separate healer clans merge as though they had always been one. It is fascinating. But...

DAWN

Damn stubborn. I know all about that.

Samuel looks up from the map.

SAMUEL

You still haven't spoken to Jason?

DAWN

Oh he's completely avoiding me. I'm sure of it. He's always with Nadya. I haven't been able to get him away from her. I don't exactly want to talk to him in front of her, given the whole... you know. It's not her fault he and Devon were... friends.

(MORE)

DAWN (CONT'D)

I just don't think it's healthy
him bottling up his feelings.
He's gotta be hurting. Confused.
Wanting to find Devon, shake her
around and ask her what the hell
is going on. Or that could be
just me.

SAMUEL

(quiet)
It's not just you.
(bright side)
But, perhaps he is fine. Perhaps
Nadya and he are helping each other.

DAWN

(doubtful)
Maybe.

INT. NADYA'S TENT - DAY

It's a smallish tent, made smaller by Jason and Nadya sitting
opposite each other in very close quarters.

Nadya takes a small pile of dried herbs from a large bundle
beside her, and stuffs them into a CRUDE GLASS BOTTLE full
of MILKY LIQUID.

She hands the bottle to Jason. He carefully screws a stopper
into the top, as she prepares another bottle. He places the
bottle alongside a dozen others.

JASON

So, they finish making the bombs
and he tells her the reason he
volunteered for the mission.

NADYA

He was in love with her?

JASON

He loved her, yeah.
(big grin)
So, of course, he gets the girl.

NADYA

Of course, and they lived happily
ever after.

JASON

No. He dies tragically trying to
save her. Still, she did have his
kid.

Nadya laughs.

NADYA

I never thought of you as the type to highlight that particular point.

JASON

What? Having kids? Nothing wrong with that, as long as you're gonna stick around.

(closing another bottle)

How many more of these do you think we need?

NADYA

I'm not sure. No one really knows where within the fortress this dictator stays or how many warriors he has enslaved.

(referring to the make-shift Molotov cocktails)

These are also untested with foreign ingredients. If Samuel does find a route, they may be little more than diversions.

JASON

Hey! If it's one thing a guy knows how to do, it's how to blow things up. Trust me.

NADYA

(serious)

I do.

He smiles.

NADYA

We do find ourselves in something of a quandary though. Even with your firecrackers and my firepower, how do we get in there, ward off an enemy army, free the oppressed masses, find the missing key, and leave without anyone knowing what we're really here for?

Jason shrugs.

EXT. HEALER CAMP - DAY

The encampment is close-knit and circular, with plenty of open space forming a faux-division line around it. It has a actual border of equally spaced rocks that are adorned with paintings of the same glyphs from the conference tent.

Mala and various other similarly garbed MEN and WOMAN, watch as CHILDREN run around the open spaces between the tents.

DAWN (O.S.)

Mala! Hey!

Dawn stumbles in between the border stones, clumsily carrying a variety of WEAPONS. Mala is perplexed by Dawn's arsenal.

MALA

Dawn... do the warriors know you have stolen from them?

Dawn tries desperately to stop anything from falling.

DAWN

Huh? No. They gave them to me when I said I was going to teach you all self-defense.

("fyi")

You know, they're not really all that encouraging or concerned about your safety.

(excited)

But I am a whizz at staving. So here I am. Round 'em up!

Mala starts to relieve Dawn of some of her burden, by taking and placing the weapons on the ground.

She holds them as though they were diseased and distasteful.

She addresses Dawn in much the same way a patient teacher would try and reason with an attention deficit brat.

MALA

Dawn, we are healers. We do not fight. I believe we settled this yesterday.

DAWN

(putting the last
weapon on the floor)

The warriors said they were leaving all the children with you.

Mala nods.

MALA

Yes. What does that matter?

Dawn hugs her arms and looks across the valley at the fortress.

DAWN

This guy appeared out of nowhere and took over that place without a single warrior ever seeing his face. Everyone that's gone against him has disappeared.

(turns sharply to Mala)

What if the warriors fail?

MALA

Dawn--

DAWN

What if we fail? I've seen wars. I've lived through them. Innocents die just as often as the righteous do.

Dawn bends and lifts up a sword.

DAWN

They aren't always used to kill. They can be a wall too.

Mala looks between Dawn and the children.

DAWN

You can choose when to use a weapon. You can also choose how.

Mala picks up a club. She stares at it, conflicted.

MALA

I choose to protect. But not to hurt.

Dawn smiles.

INT. WARRIOR TENT - DAY

Samuel pushes through heavy tarp. He carries TWO FOLDED-UP MAPS.

The warrior's tent is not adorned with any glyphs or herbs, but WEAPONS and FURS.

APPESH

Ahh. Wiseman Samuel. You cross into our territory. I trust there is glad news.

SAMUEL

Perhaps. Have your scouts returned?

APPESH

No. They are not due until the morning next. Why?

Samuel heads to a cluttered table. He brings the maps up and tries to find some space for them.

Appesh SWIPE objects off the table and onto the floor with a loud CLATTER.

SAMUEL

(taken aback)

Uh. Thank you.

He lays both maps on the table out fully.

APPESH

So what is this?

SAMUEL

Most obviously, this is the map of the area you provided.

(points)

And this is the map of the area the healers provided.

APPESH

What help can their map be? Plants and herbs. We wish to fight a war not grow a garden.

SAMUEL

I know. Separate, each maps point out game for hunting, shelters, herbal remedies, poisons, food, water and so on. But viewed as one, they seem to indicate something promising.

APPESH

Show me.

Samuel follows trails with his finger on one of the maps as he explains.

SAMUEL

See these clusters of plants here? They are also found here, on the other side of the mountain. Nowhere else. Now, the healers tell me the seeds of these plants are not dispersed by wind, but rather by larger animals walking past. Your map doesn't indicate any animal trails in this region, but the way these two plant regions are clustered tells me that there should be a common path between the two areas.

Samuel straightens.

SAMUEL

I believe if you concentrate your search along the cliff closest to those plants, you will find a network of caves. If your people are correct about a secret entrance into the fortress, those caves would be the ideal place for it.

Appesh stares at the map for a moment, deep in thought. Quite unexpectedly, he LAUGHS.

Samuel jumps as Appesh slaps him on the back.

APPESH

I don't quite believe the story of your champion's power, but you... you earn your keep! Come. It is almost time to eat. Let the warriors' show you what real food is. I'm sure those healers have been feeding you nothing but grass.

SAMUEL

Oh no, it's really fine--

Appesh puts an arm around Samuel's shoulder and steers him out the tent, ignoring Samuel's polite decline.

APPESH

Yes, first proper food. Then a proper bed! Warriors know hospitality too. So do our women.

Appesh laughs heartily at Samuel's discomfort. Samuel is too flustered to do anything about it.

EXT. HEALER CAMP - NIGHT

Jason and Nadya walk side by side through a forest of tents. Their trail is lit by interestingly adorned lanterns. Joyous group music filters through a well lit area behind them.

Jason looks back toward the light.

JASON

These healers might not enjoy a good slab of Texan beef, but they sure know how to entertain.

The tents thin out as they reach the end of the camp. Nadya hugs herself as she looks across at the fortress. It is a light in the darkness; it's walls are ghostly lit up from within.

JASON

Worried?

NADYA

Sometimes.

JASON

It'll be okay.

NADYA

How do you know?

JASON

I know you'll make it that way.

She smiles and turns away from the fortress to face him.

NADYA

I think I like keeping you close.

JASON

I guess you're in luck then.

Nadya moves closer to him.

NADYA

Oh really?

JASON

Yeah. It's uncanny. I just don't feel like being anywhere else.

She smiles widely, matches his grin. They move in for the kiss--

A HORN BLOWS in the distance from the fortress.

They both turn and watch as something that is unmistakably a HIGHLY UNSTABLE PORTAL opens near the foot of the fortress.

There is a massive RUMBLING.

ANOTHER UNSTABLE PORTAL opens nearer the camp, but still within the valley below. The GROUND around the portal RESHAPES as though two places existed at once.

SOMEONE SCREAMS NEARBY

Nadya and Jason stare in horror as the light of the portal shows the reason.

VEGO lies DEAD and DEFORMED near the portal. The entire valley is scattered with the UNCLEAR SHAPES of dead warriors.

THE PORTALS CLOSE.

The camp is completely silent. Nothing stirs at all. The bodies in the dark can barely be seen now. Nadya stares into the valley as though she can still see them.

OFF NADYA'S SHOCK

FADE OUT.

END ACT I

ACT II

FADE IN:

INT. NADYA'S TENT - DAY

Nadya sleeps on her cot, hugging her pillow to her face. The covers are very crumpled; it has not been a good night.

She wakes abruptly and quickly sits up, breathing heavily.

Jason lifts the flap of the tent and enters with a primitive CUP of something hot. He is wearing the same clothes from the night before and has an air of scruffiness to him.

JASON

Damn. I was hoping you'd have gotten more sleep.

(holds the cup higher)

But I wasn't counting on it.

He hands her the cup.

JASON

It's the closest thing the healers have to strong tea.

Nadya takes the cup with both hands and hunches over it.

NADYA

Thank you.

He watches her take a small sip.

JASON

You feeling a little better yet?

Nadya gives a small laugh, and shakes her head.

JASON

Okay, so the bad guy knows how to use the key he has. It's not the first time getting a key has been tricky. We'll just find a new way.

NADYA

It's not that simple this time. I knew that it was possible to use a key to relocate objects and places, but this was a weapon. A weapon he knows how to use.

(quietly, almost to herself)

I thought only the master keys could be that destructive.

JASON

We do have an advantage here. You.

Nadya tries to smile.

NADYA

It's not enough.

With a sharp shake of her head, she dumps the cup off to the side and gets out of bed. She goes toward her day clothes and begins to put them over her sleep-ware.

NADYA

I need to leave.

JASON

Where are we going?

NADYA

Not we. Me. I need you to tell the others to make the warriors wait for my return.

JASON

Wh--

She gives him a quick kiss on the cheek.

NADYA

I need to go back and get something to make me stronger.

JASON

I should be with you. Will we bring the other keys here?

NADYA

No. I've worked too hard to put them at risk. I'll be back soon. I promise.

Jason folds his arms and nods.

The glow of a PORTAL lights his face for a moment then disappears.

He turns and lifts the flap of the tent as he exits.

INT. CONFERENCE TENT - DAY

Dawn sits on a chair, fidgety. She jumps out of her seat as someone enters the tent. Samuel.

DAWN

Are you okay?

SAMUEL

The warriors wouldn't let me leave their camp. They are all armed and on vigil. They won't tell me why.

DAWN

You know those warriors that left to declare a challenge?

(off his nod)

Well they came back. In pieces. Literal pieces. The keys did it.

SAMUEL

Keys?

DAWN

There are two. I felt them.

(remembering)

I think there was something wrong with the timing. It felt like-like there was a time and a place that didn't get put together properly. It might have been an accident once, but he's doing it on purpose now.

SAMUEL

He could decimate this entire camp without coming anywhere near it.

DAWN

I don't think so. It felt like he had to be close to his targets to get rid of them. I also, kinda, keep feeling the keys now.

SAMUEL

In what way?

DAWN

Like he's practising. Last night taught him something and now he's getting better at it. It's all I can feel.

(grumps)

It's making me antsy.

SAMUEL

(staring out the other exit of the tent)

Even from such a distance. Dawn, your connection to the keys is growing stronger isn't it?

DAWN

I think so.

(helpless)

But I don't know what I can do about it. My experiments have been limited, and so far, one-time deals. Nadya is still the real power here, but I think she's not feeling it now. She saw it happen.

SAMUEL

Have you spoken to her?

Dawn shakes her head.

SAMUEL

Perhaps I should.

JASON (O.S.)

You'll have to wait.

Dawn and Samuel faces Jason. He's tired.

JASON

She's gone back home to get something to help her get that key.

DAWN

If you're still here, then I guess it's not the other keys. What is it?

Jason shakes his head and shrugs.

JASON

She didn't say. Just that it would make her stronger.

Jason rubs his temple.

SAMUEL

Did she say when she'd be back?

JASON

No. She just promised she'd be back. We have to stop the warriors from going after the bad guy.

(stares off)

Where is everyone?

DAWN

The healers are burying the dead. Are you okay?

JASON

Yeah, why?

DAWN

I don't know. You just seem a little... off. Did you get any sleep?

JASON

(thinks about it)

No. I stayed up and made sure Nadya was okay. She wasn't happy.

Dawn watches him closely.

DAWN

Well, yeah. No one would be after seeing that. How do you feel about it?

JASON

(shrugs)

I don't know. I haven't really thought about it. I... I think I'll go sleep.

He turns around without looking at them and walks straight out, not even bothering to lift or duck the tent flaps.

DAWN

Ookay. Does he seem normal to you?

SAMUEL

Well, he said he had not slept. It is probably the night's excitement catching up.

Dawn stares out the door.

DAWN
There's something--

APPESH (O.S.)
(shouting)
I will not let this rest! This is
an affront! A direct challenge!
And your solution is as worse.

Dawn and Samuel look at each other.

DAWN
Now what?

EXT. CONFERENCE TENT - DAY

Appesh and Mala walk towards the bell stand. The warrior and healer camps are each far enough way to be unintrusive neighbours to the tent.

Curious healers and warriors passing by watch Mala and Appesh in car-crash fascination.

MALA
Quiet your tone. We will not
discuss these matters outside the
sacred word and we will not meet
in anger within it.

Appesh stops next to the bell.

APPESH
Perhaps it is time for our people
to change. Perhaps it is time the
healers stop hiding behind
peaceful lies.

MALA
What do you mean?

APPESH
A disguise for cowardice is what
your words are.

SAMUEL
Warrior Appesh!

Samuel exits the tent. Dawn stands at the door, worried.

SAMUEL

(glances at the
onlookers)

This is neither the place nor the
time to fracture your people with
thoughtless accusation. Step
inside and let strategy overcome
emotion.

Samuel stares down Appesh. Appesh also notices the watchers
and concedes.

APPESH

Apologies Healer Mala and to you
Wiseman Samuel.

He moves past Samuel and Dawn to enter the tent. Mala follows.

INT. CONFERENCE TENT - SAME

Appesh waits as the others enter. Samuel drops the tent door,
for more privacy.

SAMUEL

Now let us resolve this argument.
Did you both not agree to wait
for us? What has changed?

APPESH

(disbelieving)

Have you not seen what the ki'Adu
did? It must not go unchallenged!
And she! She thinks we must all
surrender unconditionally.

MALA

It is the only course. Such power
can not be stood against.

Samuel watches them, almost bored in his regard.

APPESH

You would have our people crawl
on their knees like cattle.

MALA

How many more of us must disappear?
How many clans wiped away? We are
all that is left. Rather enslaved
than obliterated. The ki'Adu's
terms were fair.

APPESH

Complete obedience! He, sole ruler,
of all warrior clans. Half of our
livestock and harvests to him?
Never!

SAMUEL

Enough!

He stands between them. Dawn watches with held breath.

SAMUEL

(dangerously firm)
You will not alter the agreement.
You will wait until we are ready.

He cuts off their protests with a curt shake of his head.

SAMUEL

(pointing at Mala)
Slavery is an efficient way to
lose your higher beliefs. You do
not know it. Pray you never do.
(pointing at Appesh)
You have no strategy. You know
how to battle amongst equals, but
you have no idea how to engage a
stronger opponent. You will lose.

Only Mala is silenced by him.

APPESH

I will not lose. If I take all
the warrior clans under my command,
a full scale assault will render
his trickery obsolete.

DAWN

It won't.

Samuel steps aside for Dawn to take the floor.

DAWN

That power you saw, that was just
a teaser. Do you know how bad it
can get? You haven't heard about
walls between realities crumbling.
Dimensions bleeding into one
another. The universe tumbling
into chaos. Everything dark.
Forever. I've been up close and
personal to someone trying to use
that power.

(MORE)

DAWN (CONT'D)

Only death stops it, in this case,
it'll be your entire people. Do
what Samuel says. We'll fix this.

APPESH

So we simply wait for your
champion?

(off their looks)

Where is she now? Why is she not
here?

SAMUEL

She prepares.

Appesh shakes his head, and leaves the tent. Samuel and Dawn
glance at each other, fearing the worst.

INT. CHEN'S HERB EMPORIUM - NIGHT

A BELL above a door JINGLES as the door opens and shuts.

MISTER CHEN

(cheery)

Chen's herb emporium. No herb too
rare. No spell too small. How can
I... oh no.

(upset)

It's you.

(quickly)

Whatever you want, I don't have it.

CHEN, 70s, Asian, emerges from a backroom to stand amongst
rows of herbs and interesting looking things. It's a fully
stocked herbal shop, more mystical than edible.

His eyes grow larger and wander to a wooden surface as
various VIALS are slowly placed there, one by one, as though
a tease.

MISTER CHEN

Are those Rargar potions?

DEVON moves her hand away from half a dozen potions that she
has left on the end of a wooden desk that HOLDS THE CASH
REGISTER. Her other arm is still in a CAST.

Chen eyes the potions greedily.

MISTER CHEN

There hasn't been a Rargar potion
in this dimension for...

DEVON

Four years. Guess that makes them
really rare.

Chen licks his lips.

MISTER CHEN

(abruptly serious)

What do you want?

Devon slides a piece of paper over the table. Chen lifts it
and reads.

MISTER CHEN

You never ask for much, huh? You
know how hard this is to find.

DEVON

That's why I came to you.

Chen ponders it.

DEVON

This place looks good. Better.

MISTER CHEN

(conversationally)

Oh yes. The insurance paid out
much more than I expected. We
fixed up--

(catches himself)

No. I'm not doing this. Why you'd
even come back here? You're
trouble and I don't need the
headaches. You're on your own.
Find someone else!

DEVON

Okay then.

With slow ease she positions her bag on the table so that
Chen can see that it is FULL OF POTIONS, and she slowly
replaces the vials she took out. Chen watches this, pure
torture.

MISTER CHEN

Wait!

Devon stops. She holds a vial midair. He approaches her and
puts his hand out. She hands him the vial.

MISTER CHEN
 (inspecting the vials)
 Fog of the clouded mind. Death's
 bane. Essence of Amorrhha. Very
 rare. Are you sure you want to do
 this?

Devon nods.

MISTER CHEN
 It will take a while to find them.

DEVON
 I still have time.

Chen sighs heavily; this is not an easy choice for him. Devon places a fair amount of vials on the table; half of what her bag holds.

DEVON
 That should cover it.

He mentally counts the vials; more than satisfied.

MISTER CHEN
 Twice over.

DEVON
 Good.
 (hoisting her lighter
 bag off the counter)
 You still have my room?

Chen glares at her, relents and heads around the counter. He tosses her a set of KEYS.

MISTER CHEN
 Yes, your old room is free.

Devon nods and heads toward the back room.

MISTER CHEN
 Payne...

She looks at him.

MISTER CHEN
 This new game you're playing.
 It's dangerous.

DEVON
 It's what I know.

She enters the back room and up some stairs. Chen watches her go, almost sad.

FADE OUT.

END ACT II

ACT III

FADE IN:

INT. JASON'S TENT - DAY

Jason sleeps fitfully. His eyes blinker open for a minute, before he jumps up, clutching his covers to his chest.

JASON

Dawn?!

Dawn sits on a small stool across from him.

DAWN

(unconcerned)

Yeah?

JASON

What are you doing here?

DAWN

I'm avoiding everyone out there.
Things are tense.

JASON

Yeah. But why here?

DAWN

We need to talk.

JASON

Couldn't it wait?

DAWN

'Fraid not.

JASON

Fine. Let's have it then.

DAWN

Devon.

Jason shrugs in question.

DAWN

Oh please. You are nowhere near
good enough to switch off your
emotions like that.

JASON

I honestly have no idea what you're talking about.

Dawn just isn't buying it.

DAWN

Who are you? Did you fall and bump your head? Come on, Jason. What did I tell you about repressing feelings? Bad, bad, bad idea. We have to talk about this.

JASON

Dawn, there's nothing to talk about.

DAWN

Devon jumped out of a window with no logical explanation! That's newsworthy and you're acting like she never existed. You haven't even tried to look for her.

JASON

Why would I want to? She's obviously got a hidden agenda and we're better off without her. In fact, I hope we never see her again. She's already attacked one of us and is probably unstable and dangerous.

Dawn can't believe what she's hearing.

DAWN

Wha--

JASON

Dawn. I think you're the one who needs to deal with this. I'm fine. I don't even know why you'd think I wouldn't be.

(lying down)

Now I'd like to get some sleep. Nadya will be back soon and she's my only concern.

OFF Dawn's disbelief.

INT. CONFERENCE TENT - DAY

Samuel leans over the table, finger poised over maps again, as he discusses the map with another older warrior, TAVALT.

Appesh barrels into the tent.

APPESH

Where is she? Where is your
beloved champion?

Samuel straightens in his own time. Tavalt folds his arms
and stares at Appesh.

SAMUEL

(calm)

Is there a particular reason you
are looking for her now?

APPESH

Do not play games with me! She
has not been seen in over a day,
nor did anyone witness her leave.
Is this your great defender? A
coward who sneaks away and leaves
useless old men in her stead?

SAMUEL

She prepares.

APPESH

(narrow eyes)

Prepares! Shall she prepare until
we rot of old age. A cunning plan
to be sure.

(narrows eyes)

Or is it more? Division? Chaos?
Deception? What are you doing
here Tavalt?

TAVALT

Stop seeing serpents where there
are none. It is my right to know
the strategies discussed here. My
clans are in the same peril as
yours should we fail.

APPESH

We will not fail and I will wait
no longer. My clans will rid our
people of the ki'Adu. With or
without yours.

He moves to make a bold exit; but it is blocked.

NADYA (O.S.)

In what way would you prefer your
people die?

Nadya strides into the room, confident and almost regal. Appesh does not frighten her. She carries a BAG.

NADYA

Would you like their insides
strewn across their children's
beds? Their bodies split and
trapped in places where there can
be no peace and only pain?

She places the bag on the table and smiles at Samuel.

APPESH

Is this your threat?

NADYA

I don't need to make threats. You
are doing a fine enough job
killing your people.

APPESH

I am saving them.

She approaches him, completely fearless.

NADYA

How many of your people have
actually seen him?
(off his look)
Not a single one. And do you know
why? Because he is not an idiot.
He doesn't need a sword or an
army. He has power. Power you
have no comprehension of. He
merely thinks of your blood
running through the fields and
his will makes it so.

She elegantly moves away from him and points toward the door.

NADYA

But by all means, take your
ineffectual little army and die
the same death as the others.
You're just in my way.

Appesh glares at everyone and stalks out.

TAVALT

(to Samuel)
I will ready my forces.

SAMUEL

Thank you.

Tavalt nods and leaves.

SAMUEL

Welcome back. I take it your trip was successful?

NADYA

Yes, the time difference between the two dimensions was advantageous.

SAMUEL

Jason said you were retrieving something that would help. Something that would make you stronger.

Instead of relief, Samuel grows concerned.

NADYA

Yes. I'm ready now.

She lifts her bag to go. Samuel touches her hand; fatherly.

SAMUEL

Nadya. I don't know any method to increase a witch's power other than taking or borrowing it from somewhere else. Are you quite sure you know what you're doing?

NADYA

(she squeezes his hand)
Samuel, it's all right. Take comfort in the knowledge that you don't know everything.
(heading out the door)
Let me know when they've found that elusive way in.

OFF Samuel's confusion and worry; was that an insult?

EXT. HEALER CAMP - DAY

HEALERS wonder off. Dawn sheathes a sword. Her mind is troubled and elsewhere.

Mala approaches, amused.

MALA

I shall hazard a guess, but something is bothering you.

Dawn distractedly looks toward her.

DAWN

Sorry. I guess I'm just a little tensed.

MALA

Hmm. We could not sense that. Not even when you were smiting the foul and villainous wood that is currently under our stew pots.

Dawn blinks in confusion.

DAWN

I wasn't smiting...
 (off Mala's look)
 Okay, maybe I was a little. But hey, now you know how to treat misbehaving trees.
 (gives a little laugh)
 I guess I ruined that lesson huh?

MALA

These lessons of yours have never been for us. Would you like me to counsel?

DAWN

("everything's hunky-dory")
 Oh. No. It's really ok...
 (pissed off)
 How can a perfectly sane person turn into a complete jerk overnight?

Mala smiles and takes the sheathed sword off Dawn. She places it on the ground.

MALA

Come with me.

She leads Dawn through tents and people to the edge of the overhang. She points across at the fortress.

MALA

Have you not wondered why the ki'Adu took that fortress without us noticing? Or why my people are split so wholly down the middle?

DAWN

Well, yeah, but I figured it was rude to ask.

Mala smiles and stares out at the fortress.

MALA

Many generations ago, all of my people were bloodthirsty savages. We plundered everything in our lands and then moved out to conquer more.

Mala moves to a rock that protrudes above the overhang and sits down.

MALA

(pointing)

That fortress was built by a people we have no name for. They welcomed us into their home with open heart and we plunged a blade into it. No man, woman or child was spared. Perhaps if some had lived we would be different.

Mala stares toward the horizon sadly.

DAWN

What changed?

MALA

We walked through foreign hallways; saw beautiful images on walls and canvas that could never be recreated; heard instruments that could play wondrous sounds but we would never hear them; and opened lengthy books we could not read. We destroyed an entire world... because we could.

Dawn sits down beside her.

DAWN

So, half of you decided not to kill anymore.

MALA

We were so ashamed. We never graced those halls again. Some became healers. The others vowed only to fight amongst themselves. We stay together because we do not wish to see each other as strangers. The children coexist as one and

(MORE)

MALA (CONT'D)

when they are of the right age,
they choose their path. We know
well the price of following our
natures. Sometimes we must change
to suit events we cannot control.

(nods at the fortress)

The ki'Adu simply wishes us to
become his servants.

She turns to Dawn.

MALA

(almost pleading)

Would it truly be so bad if it
meant we could live in a peace
without losing what we have worked
for?

DAWN

I can't tell you what's right for
your people, but there is
something you should know before
you decide slavery is the way to go.

MALA

What?

DAWN

He has the power to move through
worlds. Your people are strong
warriors who wouldn't mind a real
fight. Maybe all the warriors who
have disappeared chose to leave.

MALA

You're saying...

DAWN

Your ki'Adu might be recruiting
an army. To conquer other worlds.

Mala clasps her hands tightly; disturbed.

INT. JASON'S TENT - DAY

Jason finishes getting dressed.

Nadya enters the tent.

JASON

Oh hey. Welcome back.

NADYA

You're heading somewhere?

JASON

Yeah. Been a little under the weather, I think. Just want to see if anyone needs my help.

NADYA

I'd rather you stayed right here.

JASON

I...
(stares at her)
Yeah.

He sits down on the bed. She sits down beside him.

NADYA

Isn't that better?

JASON

I think I should be somewhere.

NADYA

No, you don't. Until they find a way in, there's nothing to do.

JASON

Something could go wrong.

NADYA

Nothing will go wrong. Trust me.

Jason simply nods.

INT. FORTRESS, THRONE ROOM - DAY

The room is open and lavish. In the centre, a massive THRONE covered in rich furs. The elusive KI'ADU (forties), a skinny menace, lies across the chair lazily. Resting against the chair, grasped in his hand, is a STAFF with TWIN, GOLD DRAGON-HEADS at the pinnacle - the twin keys.

The ki'adu regards someone opposite him.

KI'ADU

A witch?
(laughs)
They think a witch has power over me.

He tips the keys toward him and kisses one dragon on its forehead.

KI'ADU
Perhaps it's time I show your
people what real power is.

He smiles at--

APPESH

Who bows in servitude.

FADE OUT.

END ACT III

ACT IV

FADE IN:

INT. CONFERENCE TENT - NIGHT

Dawn lounges on a chair, examining her nails.

DAWN

That's one thing about wars. It's
a whole lot of waiting, waiting,
waiting.

(biting a nail)

Do you think we'll find a way in
tomorrow?

Samuel and Tavalt stand together.

SAMUEL

I was sure the scouts would have
found access already. Has anyone
seen Appesh?

Dawn shuts her eyes; as if sensing something trying to gain
attention in her mind.

TAVALT (O.S.)

No. Perhaps he is licking his
wounds. No warrior likes to be
bested by someone they've yet to
see the colours of. I'm sure--

DAWN

(eyes open)

They're coming.

Dawn jumps up and races to the front of the tent. Samuel
rushes after her.

EXT. CONFERENCE TENT - NIGHT

The fires are lit along the encampment. Dawn reaches the
bell and RINGS it repeatedly.

SAMUEL

Dawn?

DAWN

They're coming!

Various healers and warriors run into the area, confused.

Dawn sprints around the tent and reaches the overhang, just in time to see--

EXT. ENCAMPMENT, THE VALLEY - NIGHT

The VALLEY SHIFTS and RISES, MISTED OVER BY AN ELECTRIC ENERGY similar in colour and motion to the portals.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT, THE PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

Samuel joins Dawn, as do Tavalt, Mala and crowds of others.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - SAME

Jason and Nadya push their way out and through the crowds of onlookers.

They reach the overhang.

EXT. PLAINS - SAME

The ground of the plains settle.

Dawn watches fearfully as--

MULTIPLE, MASSIVE HALF-PORTALS OPEN above the plains, blindingly bright. People shield their eyes as the intensity grows.

The light nearest them fades.

But the field is lit by another light.

Torch fire.

AN ARMY of WARRIORS STAND in formation across the plains.

Appesh is in the fore.

PORTALS continue to TELEPORT more and more WARRIORS onto the battlefield.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - SAME

WHISPERS filter through from the back of the camp.

Dawn frowns as she notices this. She turns around. The entire camp, warriors and healers alike - stand unmoving in utter shock.

Dawn shoves the nearest warrior and then does the same to others nearby.

DAWN
Move it! Go go go!

Her movements waken them up. Dawn glances around the people wildly, looking for someone, then pushing through the crowds away from the scene.

Tavalt stares at Appesh.

TAVALT
Appesh has betrayed us.

He regards some of the warriors that aren't moving at all.

TAVALT
His clans..

SAMUEL
Then do you not assume command of them all?

Tavalt blinks; he does.

SAMUEL
I believe in this instance, we switch to plan B.

TAVALT
Is plan B the events of which you spoke of earlier?

SAMUEL
Yes.

TAVALT
I believe I will need your help.

Samuel smiles.

SAMUEL
(yelling at the nearest warriors)
Fall into line!

EXT. ENCAMPMENT, CROWDED SECTION - NIGHT

Dawn races up to Nadya and Jason.

DAWN
Change of plan.

NADYA
Change of plan.

DAWN
Wait. We actually have a plan?

Nadya hefts her bag for Dawn to see. She gives a very self-satisfied smile.

NADYA

Oh yes.

JASON

All right let's get to--

Nadya kisses him on the cheek fondly. Dawn tries to hide her grimace.

NADYA

You stay out of harm's way.

(to both of them)

Get Samuel to their neutral place afterwards. We're going to have to make a hasty retreat.

Nadya races off with her bag. Jason stands in limbo.

DAWN

Yeah right. Come on.

She grabs Jason's hand spurring him into action.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT, OPEN SECTION - NIGHT

Tavalt mounts a horse-like CREATURE. He races off down the encampment lines.

Samuel moves in front of a formation of warriors in front of him.

SAMUEL

You know your roles! You will follow them! Not for the blood-cry or the penetrating wound, but for the cries of those who do not deserve to fall before your blade. You fight for this world and the fate of others. Free will!

WARRIORS

Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!

Samuel is momentarily distracted by--

NADYA entering the conference tent, looking around her as she does.

Samuel mindfully ignores her and gets his head back in the game.

LIGHTS still flash on the battlefield.

INT. CONFERENCE TENT - SAME

Nadya rushes to the table and places the bag on it.

There are at least half a dozen egg-shaped STONES within it, each with what appears to be a MOVING FIRE inside.

She pulls two out of the bag. The stones are black around the edges, as though they could have once been onyx that came too close to fire and trapped it alive inside the glass prism it created.

Nadya holds each stone in her hand and closes her eyes.

NADYA
 (starting to chant;
 latin)
 [Shadows of soul...]

EXT. HEALER CAMP - NIGHT

Dawn and Jason hand out the FIREBOMBS that he and Nadya were making earlier to very reluctant HEALERS.

All the CHILDREN are huddled in various tents, peeking out.

DAWN
 Look! They're not going to hurt
 anyone. They're just going to
 keep them back.
 (dubious glance to
 Jason)
 We'll be the ones fighting.

HEALER
 Violence begets violence.

JASON
 Being a useless lump begets dead
 kids. Take the damn things and
 think about them!

He shoves a bomb into the healer's hand and turns away. The horizon toward the plains is still SPARKING.

JASON
 How long is this gonna take?

DAWN
 You want it to speed up?

JASON

I want there to be a smaller army
than I'm imagining. We're way out
of our league.

Dawn doesn't disagree.

MARCHING FOOTSTEPS to the side draws their attention.

A PLATOON OF WARRIORS dutifully surround the encampment and stand guard. A few enter the encampment and stand among the healers in front of the tents.

HEALER

What is this? Warriors do not
protect Healers.

WARRIOR

Wiseman Samuel gave us new orders
this morning. We are to protect
all of our people.

HEALER

(bows head)
Thank you.

A HORN BLOWS.

Dawn and Jason look at each other; then at the warriors.

DAWN

Guess you don't need--

JASON

Us anymore. Come on.

He and Dawn race off.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

Samuel has not flinched. He watches the horizon intently.

PLAINS

With a FINAL FLASH, the ki'Adu appears in the front of now MASSIVE ARMY.

He rides a HELLBEAST of some kind and wields the TWIN-KEY STAFF before him.

ENCAMPMENT

HEALERS are the only ones looking down at the army; in awe and fear.

Mala does not take her eyes off either the ki'Adu or Appesh.

The HORN BLOWS again.

All armies and healers descend into SILENCE.

PLAINS

KI'ADU

So where is my challenger? This
glorious bastion of power brought
to make me quiver?

(smiles)

My gut is firm. I've heard she...
shakes.

PLAINS

Dawn and Jason arrive; eyes search through the crowds near
them.

NADYA (O.S.)

I am here.

Jason points, and he and Dawn head toward--

NADYA

steps out of the other side of the conference tent.
Confidence has bolstered her appearance. Unarmed and
unequipped with any stones; the KEY-AMULET shimmers.

She has both a graceful and dominant gait as she walks to
the highest part of the overhand. She looks down at the ki'ADU.

NADYA

You are much smaller than I
imagined.

The ki'Adu laughs.

KI'ADU

Has it been so long since I've
faced a hero? Witless banter never
ceases my amusement. Will I still
laugh when your pretty little
hide is sprawled backward before me?

He swings the staff before him.

THE DRAGON EYES LIGHT UP and the energies of an oblong,
unstable portal stretch out toward her.

Nadya's eyes are ALREADY BLACK.

FRONDS OF LIGHTING curl from her hands and meet the portal.
The two energies connect and IMplode.

Nadya's power is still building.

LIGHTING SLOWLY CREEPS UP THE SKY surrounding her, like
cracks appearing in a wall.

FRISIONS of ELECTRICITY JUMP between each branch.

Her hands are barely visible through the haze of electric
clouds.

Her magicks are awesome and much more intense than any she
has ever shown.

The ki'adu fires another volley of unstable portal power at
her and she retaliates.

It become an electric light-show that scares the crap out of
everyone watching.

Except--

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - SAME

Samuel sees the display. He lifts his arm.

SAMUEL

Now!

The warriors behind him STREAM FORWARD around Samuel.

EXT. CONFERENCE TENT - SAME

Jason and Dawn stop and stare at the headlights that are
angry warriors coming toward them.

JASON

Oh shi--

Dawn YANKS him into the tent.

The warriors run past the tent AVOIDING the sacred symbols
around it.

EXT. PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

Healers run out of the way as the warriors charge past Nadya.
It's enough of a distraction to stop the ki'adu's onslaught
momentarily.

The warriors charge straight down onto the plains. The
awaiting armies and the ki'adu are confused for a split-second.

KI'ADU
What is this? Engage!

The enemy army converges on the warriors, but they keep going, cutting straight through the army as though there is a grander plan.

Nadya is quick on the update. She directs her magicks away from the ki'adu and towards the enemy army - helping the warriors make their way through. The reason--

On either side of the enemy army, the REST OF THE WARRIORS led by Tavalt and another general, surround each side of the plain; essentially cutting the enemy army into two separate groups that are being attacked from all sides.

The ki'adu laughs uncontrollably.

KI'ADU
Do you think I care about your
strategies? Do you think they
make a difference?
(dead serious)
I will show you real power, witch.

TENT

Dawn clasps her head in pain. Jason grabs her shoulder.

JASON
What is it?

DAWN
(looking up)
Oh god, she's not strong enough.

PLAINS

The battle wages on.

Nadya is helping the warriors, but also attacking the ki'adu.

The power of the twin-dragons are keeping her magicks at bay; their EYES ARE GROWING BRIGHTER.

The key energy pushes outward, forcing Nadya's lightning away. She withdraws her magicks from helping the warriors and concentrates fully on the ki'adu and the keys.

She YELPS and recoils as the key's power pushes sharply against hers, breaching her defenses. She concentrates harder, really straining.

They head toward the door and see the ki'Adu fighting off warriors with the staff. He falls off his hellbeast.

JASON

You stopped it! Is it gonna stay off?

DAWN

For a little while.

Jason smirks. Dawn smiles and points at his face.

DAWN

Now that's more like the Jason I know.

EXT. PLAINS - NIGHT

Jason and Dawn race out of the tent at full speed.

Jason grabs a sword from a fallen warrior and uses it to defend Dawn, as they steadily dodge and twist around warriors and enemy warriors to get to the ki'adu.

Nadya sees.

NADYA

(whispers)

Jason.

Tired as she is, she renews her fighting against the enemy; covering their route.

INT. CONFERENCE TENT - SAME

Samuel enters and walks over to Nadya's bag. He looks inside and sees the stones, but he is confused; they shed no light on the mystery.

Shaking his head at himself, he moves away from the table. But stops when he sees--

TWO PILES OF SILVERY DUST on the ground.

He crouches down and runs his finger along the dust, staring at its silvery glint on his skin. It offers no answers; only more confusion, as though its something he should know.

EXT. PLAINS

Dawn grabs the staff from the ki'adu. He keeps his hold on it until Jason elbows him in the face. They turn and run as soon as they have it; back toward Nadya.

She sees them coming.

NADYA
Time to go!

She runs into the tent. The LIGHT OF A PORTAL OPENS WITHIN.

EXT. CONFERENCE TENT - SAME

Jason and Dawn look back before they enter the tent. Just in time to see--

MALA

stabs Appesh with a short sword.

There is a triumphant, almost satisfied look on her face.

DAWN

is aghast.

NADYA (O.S.)
Jason! Move!

He jerks forward, but stops.

JASON
Dawn?

DAWN
(very sober)
The keys really do destroy worlds,
don't they?

He watches for a moment, sharing in her melancholy, as warriors and healers become virtually indistinguishable; both groups lost in the bloodthirst - killing former neighbours and friends.

OFF JASON

EXT. CHEN'S HERB EMPORIUM - NIGHT

FESTIVE PAPER DRAGONS are paraded down the street in some sort of festival.

There are fireworks and happy people. The crowds are predominantly CHINESE.

The architecture shows that this is CHINA TOWN.

EXT. CHEN'S HERB EMPORIUM, UPSTAIRS APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Devon sits on the window ledge, ignoring the parade.

She stares at something in her hand--

A VIAL OF SWIRLING MULTI-GREEN LIQUID.

She holds the vial to her chest, resolute.

She leans her head on the window and stares at the happiness outside. The window reflects her sadness.

FADE OUT.

END SHOW