

NICK GAUNTLET: PRIVATE KNIGHT

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY OF ACRE, PALESTINE - DAY

A fortified middle eastern port city. The gates open at the approach of two horses.

SUPER: "THE THIRD CRUSADE."

The flags of King Richard of England, King Phillip of France and the Kingdom of Jerusalem hang from the battered ramparts.

NICK (V.O.)

It was August 20 the day I rode through the gates of Acre for the last time as a knight. Eleven-ninety-one Anno Domini. Another helping of chaos and paranoia. They'd been sending boys to that meat grinder in the middle east long as anyone could remember. War was damn near un-winnable, you ask me.

INT. ACRE COURTYARD - DAY

NICK GAUNTLET (30s), an English knight, and MARCAS (20s) his squire, dismount. Marcas holds the horses.

NICK

My thanks, Marcas.

Nick's blood-smeared armor bristles with weaponry and improvised gadgets. His helmet faceplate looks like a primitive gas mask. He's battle-worn, dirty, with a crew cut and stubble.

NICK (V.O.)

A crusader army under King Guy of Jerusalem had squatted outside the port walls in the blazing desert heat going on two years by then.

(MORE)

NICK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I'd arrived with King Richard's army in a fleet of more than a hundred ships, and joined the siege slightly over two months prior. I didn't give a damn about the holy land, I just wanted to render my mandatory service and get back to my wedding before my feudal lord thought better of the arrangement.

Nick passes dozens of chained Saracen prisoners, enters the,

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Nick approaches the dais where KING RICHARD slouches on a makeshift throne.

An aide announces him.

AIDE
Sir Nicholas of Gloucester.

Richard sits up.

RICHARD
Gauntlet! Were your negotiations successful?

Nick removes a sealed letter from his glove, gives it to Richard.

NICK
I'm sorry Your Highness, Saladin has raised the necessary monies and he's willing to pay, but still refuses to surrender the nobles you demanded.

RICHARD
The Saracen dog.

NICK
You ask me, he's trying to bottle us here in the port. Knows we can't advance with hostages in tow.

RICHARD
 He's delayed long enough.
 (to Nick)
 Kill the prisoners. Kill all of
 them, and prepare the men to move.

NICK
 (aghast)
 Your Highness, no!

RICHARD
 What did you say, Gauntlet?

NICK
 Sire, Saladin's been a noble
 opponent, chivalrous in all his
 dealings with us. In truth, I've
 come to admire the man. We can't
 betray the terms of surrender.

RICHARD
 If he doesn't value the men of this
 city, why should we? Teach him not
 to trifle with the armies of
 Christ.

NICK
 But sire, the garrison numbers
 almost three thousand. I can't... I
won't kill all of them.

RICHARD
 This is treason, Gauntlet. Give me
 your sword.

Nick backs away, horrified. Sweat stands out on his face.

NICK (V.O.)
 This from a king I had fought with,
 supped with, defended when ill. But
 that's how it was - crusade changed
 a man. What we saw there unlike any
 European warfare we'd ever
 experienced. That's the only
 apology I can make for Richard.

RICHARD
 Your sword, Gloucester!

Nick springs a catch on his scabbard and his sword leaps into his hand.

A moment's hesitation, but he gives it to Richard.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Sir Nicholas of Gloucester, I
hereby revoke your title, and all
the rights and privileges thereto.
You are no longer knight of this
crusade. Guards,

A gesture from Richard, the guards grab Nick.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

If he cares so much for the heathen
garrison he can share their fate.
Take him and bring me a knight who
will follow my orders.

Richard breaks Nick's sword over his knee. Nick's in shock,
it might as well be his life snapped in two.

EXT. ACRE COURTYARD - DAY

The guards lead Nick along in chains. Marcas, his squire,
follows at a distance.

They open a heavy iron door. They try to push him through,
but Marcas clobbers one with a cast iron pan. CRUNCH. He
drops like a sack of turnips.

NICK

Marcas?

MARCAS

I'm with you, my Lord!

Nick braces a foot against the stone and shoves. The guards
stagger back. Nick, his hands still in irons, trips a switch
and knives spring from his heavy armored gloves and boots. He
whirls and kicks at his captors.

Nick and Marcas overpower the guards and run for the city
gate. Some of the Saracen prisoners get loose, which helps to
provide cover.

EXT. CITY OF ACRE - DAY

Nick and Marcas belt out of the city.

Calls from the ramparts, arrows fly at their heels.

Nick and Marcas dodge them, keep running.

EXT. HILL OVERLOOKING ACRE - DAY

Nick and Marcas pause in the cover of a pile of tumbledown stones to stare in horror at the city.

Even from here, they can hear the screams of the condemned prisoners.

NICK (V.O.)

I couldn't go back to my feudal lord, couldn't marry his daughter now I was a disgraced knight. I lost everything that day. Well, maybe not as much as the garrison at Acre, but still, quite a lot.

MARCAS

What's the plan, Nick?

NICK

There's no plan here. Only madness.

They turn and melt into the wilderness.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

A roadhouse for peasants. Mud and timber walls reverberate with noise. Barmaid CADMIA (30s) serves Nick (now 40s) and Marcas (now 30s) ales.

NICK (V.O.)

It's twelve-oh-eight now. Eleven years later. Richard's dead and John's in charge, not that it's an improvement.

Nick wears a grizzled leather fedora and makeshift necktie tucked into his mail and tunic, stares at a well-oiled steel broadsword above the bar.

NICK

That's how it was. How it's always been.

CADMIA

Take it easy, Nick. I don't want any trouble.

NICK

(tips his hat)

Trouble? You already got that, Tutty, don't look my way.

NICK (V.O.)

In the years since our return Marcas had applied himself and become a successful blacksmith, but I... well, these days my main opponent is my liver.

WARIN (20s), a huge side of local farm boy beef backed by two townies, leans onto the bar by Nick.

WARIN

Might watch what ale-house you loose your tongue in, lowlife. My father fought with our Duke in the crusades.

NICK

(knocks back ale)

Then your father was a fool.

MARCAS

(sees where this is headed)

Well, I have an early shoeing.

He gets up, leaves his ale untouched.

NICK

No Marcas, wait. These serfs lack education.

Marcas holds Nick at arm's length.

MARCAS

I can't keep doing this, Nick. I've moved on, and I have a business to run. You don't want to help, that's fine, but...

NICK

Smithy isn't gonna black itself.

MARCAS

That's right. Come with me, got a new project I want to show you.

NICK

Think I'll stay.

MARCAS

Suit yourself.
(eyes Warin)
Better make it plate.

NICK

(to Warin)

It's been a few years, son, so you may not know. Before the King's Crusade there was the Wendish Crusade, and before that the Siege of Jerusalem. Even then it was more about politics than heretics.

WARIN

I would have done my duty to the king if I'd been of age.

NICK

Give it a year, you'll get your chance. They'll keep going long as they can find fools to follow 'em.

Warin growls.

CADMIA

Oh, Nick.

MARCAS

A good night to you all.

Marcas exits.

NICK

Marcas wait--

WARIN

(grabs Nick's shoulder)

I'll teach you to insult my father
you--

Nick whips a collapsible pistol-gripped crossbow from a shoulder holster. It snaps into firing position, arrow tip to Warin's nose.

NICK

Finish that pejorative.

CADMIA

Nick, I said no bows!

NICK

(ignores her)

Go on. I'm Nick Gauntlet, son. Who
are you?

Warin makes a threatening motion.

Nick flinches, pulls the trigger.

The arrow shoots sideways as the crossbow flies apart.

WARIN

(laughs)

Nick looks at the pistol grip in annoyance.

WARIN (CONT'D)

Should take better care of your
livery, squire.

Warin punches Nick in the face.

EXT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Warin and his friends toss Nick into the street, and throw the pieces of his crossbow after him.

Horses tied in the muck outside. A weathered sign reads 'Lady of the Lake.'

Cadmia stands in the doorframe, holds Nicks' leather trench coat. Nick staggers to his feet, ready for more.

CADMIA

Let it go, tough guy. Or I'll tell Sheriff Realgar you've been fighting.

NICK

But Tutty, it was the right thing to do. We gotta stand up for what's right.

CADMIA

Glad to see you're not bitter, that'd be pathetic.

She helps him on with his coat, straightens his tie.

CADMIA (CONT'D)

What are you doing to yourself, Nick? Everybody knows your story, why you're not a knight anymore. But it was eleven years ago. You don't have to take it out on them night after night.

NICK

The world's a disloyal master, Tutty. It'll refuse you what you deserve, punish you even if you do right.

CADMIA

Go home, sleep it off. That's what you're best at.

NICK

How about one for the road?

She gives him a sad look, slams the door.

Nick glares at the horses who eye him, stoical.

NICK (CONT'D)
What're you lookin' at?

EXT. TOWN OF CALOMEL - NIGHT

A small village in the Yorkshire countryside.

Nick staggers into town. A wooden road sign for 'Calomel' points in the direction he's headed.

NICK (V.O.)
Calomel's a crappy little Dukedom
in the East Riding of Yorkshire.
It's a backwater, and that suits me
fine. Since Marcas moved in, it has
the best blacksmith in three
counties, which is all I need.

He splashes through the squalid street to a low rent tower on the bad side of the berg.

INT. NICK'S TOWER - NIGHT

Nick trudges up the crumbling spiral stairs, goes through a door with a stained glass window and a brass plaque that reads, "NICK GAUNTLET: PRIVATE KNIGHT."

In the one-room tower, he passes a globe of the flat world, bound books, especially a copy of the Banu Musa brother's Book of Ingenious Devices, and da Vinci-esque gadgets.

Nick sits behind a wooden writing desk, piles the pieces of his broken crossbow atop it. He opens a drawer and tips the remains of a bottle to his lips, but it's empty.

He looks around the room, considers the mattress hay-pile in the corner, but he's too keyed up. He gathers the bits of his bow, and pounds back down the tower steps.

EXT. SMITHY - NIGHT

Nick trudges up outside a two-story structure, living quarters above the forge and workshop, lined with leaded glass windows.

NICK

(shouts at upper window)

Marcas! Damn thing fell apart again. Are you sure the chu-ke nu is better than the polybolos as a basis for a collapsible bow?

He waits, no answer.

NICK (CONT'D)

Marcas!

NEIGHBOR (O.S.)

Quiet in the street!

NICK

Shut it, you. I need a smithy, not a smart-ass!

While Nick looks for the source of the voice, a cloaked figure runs from the smithy, knocks him aside.

NICK (CONT'D)

Whoa, there!

He gets up, just in time to see an explosion blow out the windows!

Flames and smoke pour out of the stone building.

INT. SMITHY - NIGHT

Nick kicks his way in, finds Marcas blackened and near death amid the flaming debris.

NICK

Marcas!

Nick gathers him up.

Marcas's face is falling apart, he has massive acid burns, and begins to convulse.

NICK (CONT'D)
Marcas! Jesus.

Marcas' eyes drift around and find Nick. Blood gurgles in his lungs.

MARCAS
(faintly)
The head... it was the head...

Marcas dies.

Nick holds him as the smithy burns.

NICK
Aw Marcas, damn it.

He blinks, unable to believe his eyes as he notices a concealed door, half open behind the forge.

EXT. SMITHY - LATER

A bucket line of townsfolk put out the smoldering ruin.

INT. LABORATORY - NIGHT

Torches glare in the smoke.

Beyond the concealed door, Nick stands with SHERIFF Realgar (40s), who covers his face with his arm against the stench.

The sheriff's men kick over braziers, jars, chemical containers.

REALGAR
You never saw this room before?

NICK
Probably never will once your bulls are done with the china.

REALGAR

And the person you ran into?

NICK

Slight, wiry. Smelled funny.
Probably French.

REALGAR

Maybe he was lucky.

(he looks around, coughs)

Looks to me like Marcas was one o'
them amateur alchemists. Lead into
gold sorta thing.

NICK

Amateur?

REALGAR

They stumble on unstable compounds,
I hear.

(off his look)

My boss is one, you know.

NICK

You make it an accident?

REALGAR

Whatta you want me to do, Nick?
It's a small town. I put it out
there's a small Frenchman blowing
up blacksmiths, I got bigger
problems. So yeah, an accident. For
now.

NICK

I never knew Marcas to be mixed up
in all that, and I worked with him.

REALGAR

It's darker than a Moor's ass
tonight. No moon. Have to come back
in the morning after the smoke
clears.

NICK (V.O.)

But he doesn't.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Mourners stand graveside in a claustrophobic, weed-grown cemetery.

NICK (V.O.)

We bury Marcas the next day, only
it isn't much of a funeral because
of the interdict.

BISHOP SALTPETER (50s) stands among a knot of white-robed monks.

He watches the pallbearers lower the casket but makes no move to speak.

NICK (V.O.)

King John refused the Pope's man
for Archbishop of Canterbury, and
the Pope put the whole country on
notice.

Among the crowd are Cadmia and Warin, Sheriff Realgar, and standing apart, LADY ANTIMONY (35) and GALENA (25).

Galena holds a black rose.

NICK (V.O.)

Means no weddings, no baptisms, no
communion, no confession and no
funerals. It's up to us to put our
friends and loved ones in the
ground. Church's closed for
business.

Nick takes a sip from a pewter hip flask. Cadmia pats his shoulder, takes the flask away.

The crowd stands around the grave, unsure how to proceed.

NICK

(to Cadmia)

Idn't right. Somebody oughta say
something. Somebody oughta do
something.

He looks around, no one moves.

NICK (CONT'D)

Fine.

Nick weaves to a nearby monument and hoists himself up.

NICK (CONT'D)

(to crowd)

It's not fair. Marcas was a good man. Clever man. Best blacksmith I ever knew. A regular Tubal Cain. Did things with iron you'd give your ball peen for. He made me this...

Nick pulls out the broken crossbow.

NICK (CONT'D)

It's not working right now, but that's not the point. What was I saying? Oh, yeah.

Nick puts it back in his coat.

The crowd grumbles.

NICK (CONT'D)

He deserves more than this. He deserves a real eulogy, and I can't give him that. But I can give him justice—and I will—because Marcas was murdered!

WOMAN IN CROWD

No!

NICK

Yes, he was. And I'm going to find out by whom. I've got experience in these things. I'll find who's responsible, swear to God.

Nick makes the sign of the cross, spits on the ground, and glares at them all, especially Bishop Saltpeter.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Nick canvasses the town.

NICK (V.O.)
I ask at every door if anyone saw
or knew anything about what
happened to Marcas.

A peasant shuts the door in his face.

NICK (V.O.)
I get the usual responses to a man
like me: hostility, resistance,
ignorance and ridicule.

He hands another peasant a little parchment roll.

NICK
Find me at this address if you
change your mind.

The peasant shuts the door in his face.

Then opens it, takes the parchment, throws it on the ground,
shuts the door again.

NICK (V.O.)
In short, it's the kind of day
after which a man needs a drink. I
have a lot of those.

EXT. NICK'S TOWER - NIGHT

Nick staggers home.

Two cloaked female figures follow him.

He trudges up the stairs, acts casual.

INT. NICK'S TOWER - NIGHT

He cranks the gear on wooden window louvers, looks out the
window, sees the two women enter the tower.

Nick pushes a button on his desk. A spring-loaded contraption strikes flint against steel and lights his oil lamp.

He hangs his coat and hat on a hat-stand between the lamp and the door to cast a Nick Gauntlet-shaped silhouette in the door's lead glass window, then stands against the wall out of sight.

A knock on the door.

NICK
(shouts)
What?

Outside, the women see what looks like Nick's silhouette in the doorway.

ANTIMONY
The sign on the door says 'private knight.'

Nick recognizes a woman's voice.

NICK
Yeah, as in 'go away.'

ANTIMONY
Thought you were some kind of man for hire. I can pay.

Nick opens the door to Lady Antimony and Galena, their hoods thrown back now, but cagey all the same.

NICK
The sign... Marcos's idea of a joke. You were at the funeral.

ANTIMONY
So were you.

NICK
(rubs his eyes)
Made a bit of a scene, fair to say.

ANTIMONY
I'm Lady Antimony of Calomel.

NICK
Duke's wife. Either I'm coming up
in the world or you're going down.

ANTIMONY
(off Nick's look)
You said you have experience.

NICK
Something you wanna tell me?

ANTIMONY
My maid does, don't you Galena?

Antimony drags Galena front and center. She looks from Nick
to Antimony, cowed.

NICK
(to Galena)
It's okay.

GALENA
I was in confession, sir. I
overheard Bishop Saltpeter talking
to one of his men. He told them--
(looks to Antimony)

ANTIMONY
Go on.

GALENA
'We have to stop the alchemist,' he
said.

NICK
And then what happened?

She tugs at her skirt.

GALENA
I followed him, sir, far as the
smithy. And then I ran to tell my
lady.

NICK
So?

ANTIMONY

So a church agent was the last known person to see Marcas alive. Don't you find that interesting?

NICK

Guess you should come in.

They enter.

Nick moves the hat-stand, flops into a wooden chair to face Antimony and Galena.

ANTIMONY

(examines Nick's devices)
Did you invent all these?

NICK

Marcas helped.

Antimony spins a small metal part on one.

ANTIMONY

Curious.

Nick puts his feet on the rough-hewn table and rolls a cigarette.

NICK

I'm a curious guy, but why are you telling me this?

ANTIMONY

Because, like you, I believe it was not an accident. It may even have been a church hit. And if you're looking into it, I can make it worth your while to keep me informed.

Nick leans back in his chair.

NICK

What's your interest?

ANTIMONY

Never mind that. Will you do it?

NICK

The Duke keeps you in cosmetics,
doesn't he? Paints, dyes, that sort
of thing?

ANTIMONY

So?

Nick leans forward.

NICK

Make 'em himself?

ANTIMONY

Everyone knows what my husband is.
That's not the point.

NICK

Just like to get everything up
front. Well, if the Duke's really
an alchemist, my fee shouldn't be a
problem. I get three ducats or six
chickens a day, plus expenses. I
prefer the ducats.

ANTIMONY

Bit steep, aren't you?

NICK

The code says I have to serve
ladies with chastity, not charity.

ANTIMONY

What code is that? Surely not the
knight's--

NICK

Old habits.

ANTIMONY

My Lord has all the gold, or says
he does. But I have something else
that might interest you, if my
sources are correct.

With a look from Antimony, Galena takes a flagon from her
blouse, sets it on the desk. Nick uncorks it, sniffs.

ANTIMONY (CONT'D)

Aqua Vitae.

NICK

Water of life?

GALENA

It's a good year.

NICK

(puts cork back)

You think so.

He sets it aside. Stares at them.

NICK (CONT'D)

I'll find the killer, bring him to justice. You wanna keep me in brandy wine for doing it, that's your look-out.

ANTIMONY

Is that a vow, Knight?

NICK

It's a deal, anyway. You wanna be careful with vows.

ANTIMONY

Tell me about it.

NICK

Now if you ladies will excuse me, I've got a date with a pile of straw.

He nods at the hay in the corner. The women get up, go to the door.

ANTIMONY

At least we left something to keep you warm.

NICK

It's cold comfort, Lady, let's not mince words.

ANTIMONY

As you wish.

Nick staggers by his desk, grabs the bottle.

NICK

Oh, one other thing.

The two ladies pause at the door, turn.

NICK (CONT'D)

How did you go to confession, what with the interdict?

Galena blinks.

GALENA

It was September twenty-ninth.

(off his look)

The feast of St. Michael, for the settling of accounts. The bishop still has to hear confession on the holy days of obligation.

NICK

Oh. 'Course. Guess it pays to know your church calendar.

They exit.

He sits on the straw, uncorks the bottle.

NICK (V.O.)

Marcas said it was the head, but the head of what? The town? The guard? The local parish, or one of its members?

He takes a long pull.

NICK (V.O.)

It's hard to believe, Marcas made it through the siege of Acre, now he's dead. Roasted like a Michaelmas goose. Marcas must've owed one hell of a debt. But to whom?

INT. SMITHY - DAY

Sheriff Realgar clammers into the ruin, the timbers reduced to glistening, brittle charcoal, finds Nick at the remains of the workbench.

He's trying to fix his crossbow.

REALGAR

Neighbors told me you were prowling around in here.

NICK

There oughta be a law.

REALGAR

Nick, this isn't gonna go hard, is it?

NICK

Hard as it needs to. He was my friend, Realgar. My partner. Besides, I thought you were going to come back yesterday.

REALGAR

(off his look)

I trust you didn't move anything.

NICK

Look for yourself.
(holds up a piece of the crossbow)
I'll just be a minute.

Realgar sighs, glances around. A golden gleam catches his eye.

REALGAR

Huh.

He bends close to the wall, inspects the small brass cogs stuck in it.

REALGAR (CONT'D)

Gears. Half buried in the wall from the force of the blast, I'd say.

Realgar takes out his belt knife, digs at it.

Nick doesn't look up.

NICK
Know what that means?

REALGAR
Coulda been on the workbench when--

NICK
No, it wasn't an unstable compound.
It was a device. How about those
scraps of paper, any kind of
writing you recognize?

Realgar notices the burned bits of parchment Nick means,
picks some up.

They're covered in strange, archaic script.

REALGAR
Some are alchemical symbols, but
the rest... does it matter?

NICK
The man could barely read. Didn't
need to, job like his.

REALGAR
Who'd want to kill an alchemist?

NICK
Well, the usual motivators are
gold, power and l'amour. Alchemists
supposedly possess the secret to
all three, so that narrows the list
of suspects to pretty much everyone
in town.

REALGAR
And you've been asking around.

Nick concentrates on his crossbow.

NICK
Marcas was well-liked, but he was
never suspected of alchemy. Not
smart enough.

REALGAR

Been meaning to talk to you about that. I'm trying to run an investigation here, and this isn't helping.

He tosses a cigarette-sized roll of parchment on the table.

NICK

Practically raining parchment.

REALGAR

This one's got your name on it. Says to contact you. People are uneasy. The Duke has me cracking down until the villain's caught. Search the barns, empty the streets, that sort of thing. They can't read this, but they know it means trouble. That makes it my problem.

NICK

People aren't stupid. Wind blows their door down, they know which way it came in. Who'd kill an alchemist? My money's on another alchemist.

Realgar shakes his head, shushes him.

REALGAR

God your mouth, Nick. He's looking for a scapegoat. I don't need to find any more of those.

(indicates parchment)

Nick holds the partly re-assembled crossbow together as he adjusts the tension.

REALGAR (CONT'D)

Maybe you should help me instead of lone wolfing it all the time.

Snap! The crossbow flies apart, traps Nick's fingers.

NICK

(kicks the table)

Damn it!

He shoves the pieces of the crossbow aside, and picks up a singed short blade.

REALGAR

You're a civilian now, Nick. You know I can't let you bear an arm.

NICK

It's not a sword. It's a Baselard, also known as a Swiss dagger.

(demonstrates)

It's got a narrow tang, no cross guard, and a blade under fourteen inches.

REALGAR

Barely.

Nick wedges it in his shoulder holster.

NICK

We're not going to quibble about length, are we?

REALGAR

Some men don't need to.

Nick gives him a lopsided smile.

REALGAR (CONT'D)

I don't think it was the Duke. It doesn't fit.

(holds up paper scraps)

Come talk to him, you'll see.

EXT. CASTLE - DAY

Nick and Realgar approach the gates.

It's a common medieval keep - timber construction painted to resemble stone.

The guards, ALERIC and BORIN (20s) cross their halberds.

BORIN
 (to Realgar)
 The Duke order a new dog?

ALERIC
 Likes to experiment on 'em, you
 know.

REALGAR
 Easy boys, Nick's with me.

The guards relent, let them pass.

Nick leans in close to Borin.

NICK
 Used to serve a castle, bigger'n
 this one. My specialty was hanging
 pikes like you from the ramparts.

Realgar pulls Nick away.

REALGAR
 Come on, Nick.

BORIN
 Heel, boy.

Nick struggles against Realgar's grip.

NICK
 By their ankles!

ALERIC
 (barks)

INT. BANQUET HALL - DAY

Nick and Realgar enter the great hall, all stone columns and velvet drapes, where DUKE CLISSOLD OF CALOMEL (60s) supervises the preparations for a banquet. A pack of Mastiffs snooze scattered about. Calomel brandishes a cane.

CALOMEL
 (to servants)
 The high table must be set with
 care, to frame the subtleties
 between courses.
 (MORE)

CALOMEL (CONT'D)

The lower part of the hall can be
four to a mess, but ensure there is
enough venison and frumenty for the
whole household.

Servants scurry to meet his demands.

REALGAR

Your Lordship, this is Nick
Gauntlet, the man I told you about.

CALOMEL

Mmm, yes.

(to Nick)

To whom do you owe fealty?

NICK

Like to feel it out as I go.

CALOMEL

I heard you broke your oath,
deserted the holy crusade. Now you
wash up here.

NICK

Hard not to do more harm than good
in Palestine. Ask any crusader.

Calomel inspects some linen a servant has brought, dismisses
him.

CALOMEL

I went on crusade, you know. When I
was younger. My brothers and I knew
our duty.

NICK

Then you know it's not for granted
a knight'll be a good person.
There's no test, King just tamps a
sword on his shoulder. Lot of times
he's just a thug in an expensive
suit of armor.

CALOMEL

The knight or the king?

NICK

I was a conscientious objector. You got an objection to that?

CALOMEL

I seek purification and truth by distillation, synthesis, and transmutation. I don't let emotions and base matters cloud my observations.

(to servant)

My dish is to be heaped up, with delicacies, so I may give to all at high table.

NICK

Maybe you can give us something, then.

(gestures to Realgar)

You recognize this gear?

Realgar hands him scraps of paper they found in the smithy. The Duke slips on a pair of homemade spectacles, inspects them.

CALOMEL

(looks up at Nick)

Where did you find these?

NICK

Secret chamber at the smithy. You read 'em?

The duke recognizes them, but shakes his head.

CALOMEL

No, I... they're not alchemical equations, if that's what you mean. They look like notes, scrawled in haste you see. But I don't know the forms.

NICK

What about the clockwork?

Realgar hands it over. The Duke sits in a throne-like chair, inspects it.

CALOMEL

Brass, an alloy of copper and zinc.
 (looks closer)
 Some stress cracking, probably from
 exposure to ammonia.
 (hands it back)
 Fine work.

NICK

Wasn't anything like it in the
 smithy, says to me he made it to
 order. But what client in this town
 would need a fine-tooled brass
 gear?

CALOMEL

What are you implying?

NICK

That with all your knowledge and
 methods, you can cast more light on
 this mystery than you have.

CALOMEL

I'm a busy man, sir, very busy. I
 have nobles from three townships
 arriving to feast in--

NICK

A man's death, your Lordship,
 demands more than superficial
 observation. So distill me some
 truth.

The Duke climbs out of his chair.

CALOMEL

You're a very persistent malady,
 Master Gauntlet.

NICK

So they tell me.

CALOMEL

I'll introduce you to my assistant.
 She can perform some tests, perhaps
 tell you a bit more.

NICK
(gestures "after you")
Fine.

Calomel leads them to a heavy tapestry.

CALOMEL
Don't expect too much. Alchemy is a delicate craft. Pursuit of the infinite will always be part science, part religion.

Nick folds the scraps of parchment and tucks them in his coat pocket.

NICK
I'm not a man of faith, but I keep an open mind.

Calomel parts the tapestry to reveal a circular stone staircase, gestures Nick through.

CALOMEL
Behind every veil is a reality we choose most often to ignore. Peek behind the veil, you may find more than your mind is capable of.

NICK
I'll take that chance.

Nick steps through.

INT. CALOMEL'S LABORATORY - DAY

They descend the stone staircase into a cluttered dungeon: tubs, baths, cellars and vats, tanks and furnaces, vessels and stores, spiral condensers and a giant iron cauldron.

The room's almost as big as the great hall, and extends under the courtyard all the way to the outer battlements. It's a mad scientist's lair, medieval style, where Galena minds the Duke's bubbling, steaming experiments.

CALOMEL
(introduces her)
My assistant, Galena. Raised in a
convent before she came to live
with me. Not the ablest of pupils,
but she's coming along.

Galena gives Nick a warning look.

NICK
(gets it)
Nice to meet you.

Nick lays his glove on the table, displays the gears in its
palm.

Calomel picks one up.

CALOMEL
Galena, how do we determine the
composition of brass?
(hands it to her)

GALENA
Dissolve in a solution of Aqua
Fortis and examine the resulting
color, my Lord.

CALOMEL
Very good.
(gestures to the gears)
Proceed.

Calomel moves upstage to speak with Realgar.

Nick watches Galena put the tiny gear in a vial and measures
a portion of acid into it.

GALENA
Don't breathe the fumes.

The acid hisses and turns a light blue.

GALENA (CONT'D)
(whispers)
Alchemy is about more than mixing
chemicals. It's part philosophy,
part analogy.
(MORE)

GALENA (CONT'D)

Its processes are circumscribed in metaphor, recording not just how to mix exploding powder, but to achieve the betterment of self.

NICK

You don't strike me as an unable pupil.

She gives me a wan smile.

GALENA

Every element has its place in the order, and I'm a common one. But I play my part.

Nick blinks, examines a pocket-sized copy of the JABIRIAN CORPUS - an alchemy text - and stashes it in his coat.

Galena lifts the vial with metal tongs, takes it to the fire to examine its color, and almost drops it in.

Calomel leaps past Nick, snatches the vial, and strikes Galena with his cane in one swift motion.

CALOMEL

Not like that, foolish girl!

Galena covers her head.

GALENA

I'm sorry, my Lord!

Nick raises an eyebrow, Calomel's spryer than he looks. Calomel holds the vial up to the firelight.

CALOMEL

Hmm, fascinating.
(glares at Galena)
What do you see?

GALENA

A high percentage of zinc and base metals. It's an unusual alloy, but not unheard of.

CALOMEL

And not easily arrived at. It
requires co-melting of a kind known
only in the east.

Nick leans on the table.

NICK

(eyes Calomel)

Or by those who've traveled there.
Perhaps in the crusades. Lotta
Alchemy came from the east, didn't
it, Duke?

GALENA

This alloy was also known in
ancient Greece, for the
construction of spheres.

NICK

But why would Marcas hide an orrery
or an astrolabe? They're no secret.

REALGAR

Is it possible he was working on
something more exotic?

Calomel share a look with Galena.

CALOMEL

(studies the clockwork)

A Brazen Head. Or an attempt at
one, at least.

Calomel pages through his manuscripts and hermetic
illustrations.

NICK

Brazen who?

GALENA

Head. It's a sacred alchemical
goal, one of them. A prophetic
device.

Calomel shows them a drawing of a brass clockwork skull.

CALOMEL
Based on the designs of Archimedes.
It can compute the answer to any
conundrum you set it.

NICK
Use one of those now, couldn't we?

CALOMEL
What do you mean?

NICK
Maybe you were threatened by Marcas
achieving what you couldn't. Maybe
you killed him for it.

REALGAR
Nick, please--

Calomel stuffs his drawings away.

CALOMEL
Alchemy is a cumulative art. We're
feared by peasants and persecuted
by the church. It would be folly
for us to prey on each other.

GALENA
Besides, if a Brazen Head were
possible, my lord would have made
one.

CALOMEL
Indeed. Now, that's really all the
time I have today. I trust you can
see yourselves out, Sheriff?

They exit, Nick deliberately leaves his glove on the table.

INT. CASTLE CORRIDOR - DAY

Nick and Realgar head down the hall.

REALGAR
Proper respect isn't something
you're capable of, is it?

NICK

Don't know, never tried.

ANTIMONY (O.S.)

Good day, Knight.

Nick turns to see her descend a grand staircase.

She beckons Nick over.

REALGAR

This I don't need. Stay out of
trouble, Nick. I'm late for
inspection of the guard.

Realgar stalks off.

Antimony leans back against a pillar, revealing her leg, and
a flagon held at waist level, beneath her robe.

ANTIMONY

See anything you want?

NICK

That my per diem?

ANTIMONY

(shouts)

Galena!

INT. ANTIMONY'S BOUDOIR - DAY

Antimony ushers Nick into a room bedecked with copper mirrors
and portraits of herself.

She stands before an especially large one, takes a sip from
the flagon, lets Nick smell it.

ANTIMONY

It's good.

NICK

(grabs it from her)

I'll be the judge of that.

He takes a short pull, wheezes.

ANTIMONY
(snatches it back)
Not all at once.

Galena enters, see the two of them. A flash of something - jealousy? - crosses her face.

ANTIMONY (CONT'D)
(to Galena)
Prepare my hot box.

NICK
Excuse me?

GALENA
The fire is already stoked, my Lady.

Nick scratches his chin.

NICK
Um...

ANTIMONY
A place where we can talk in private.

She takes off her robe, reveals a skimpy medieval negligee, gets into her boudoir's built-in sauna. Nick follows, but she holds up a hand.

ANTIMONY (CONT'D)
If you want to follow me into the dragon's lair, Knight, you'll have to remove your tunic.

Nick hesitates.

ANTIMONY (CONT'D)
You have to serve a lady, that's what your chivalric code says, isn't it?

Nick pulls off his tunic, willing to see where this leads, but pretty sure he'll regret it.

NICK

You know the word "chivalry's"
based on the French for "horse."
Only one part of a horse you
generally call a person.

Antimony admires his physique.

ANTIMONY

You think you could love me,
Knight?

She pulls at his belt. Nick ducks into the heat chamber.

NICK

Wouldn't dream of loving a woman I
couldn't marry.

ANTIMONY

Marriage is no excuse for not
loving. No one should be deprived
of love without the best of
reasons. Don't you want to rescue
me?

She pours a bit of the Aqua Vitae on the rocks, and it
steams.

NICK

I need another drink.

She teases Nick with the flagon.

He takes it, drinks. Antimony shuts the door behind him,
leans against it.

ANTIMONY

Clissold-- my husband-- invented
this. It's heated by the furnaces
below.

(indicates sauna)

I believe he thought heat could
purify him, or transmute him into a
dragon, or some such nonsense.

NICK

He got the hot part right. Thing
makes me dizzy.

Another, longer pull. It's beginning to work, he's burning up inside and out.

ANTIMONY

I just like the way it feels.

Antimony takes the bottle back, drinks too.

ANTIMONY (CONT'D)

How are you coming with my proposal? Uncovered anything interesting?

NICK

Still working out the kinks. I think your husband did it.

ANTIMONY

Bit of a stretch.

NICK

Long shot's better than none.

Nick takes another drink, sweats.

She watches him.

ANTIMONY

You should be ashamed, giving my husband a hard time.

NICK

I'm not the only one. Duke's a figurehead. Everybody abuses him for their own purposes.

ANTIMONY

Is that so?

Something in her look makes him crazy. On impulse, he kisses her.

She returns the kiss at first, then breaks it off.

ANTIMONY (CONT'D)

What about the church, Sir Knight?

NICK
They're not here right now.

ANTIMONY
I mean the information my maid
supplied. Have you found out what
it means?

NICK
One thing at a time.

ANTIMONY
What happened to chastity?

NICK
Huh?

ANTIMONY
Your code.

NICK
Forget the code.

They kiss some more, she breaks it off.

ANTIMONY
This is foolhardy, Knight. I'm no
object to quest after.

NICK
(whispers in her ear)
Every search ends somewhere. I'd be
a fool to give up when conquest's
within my grasp.

Kisses her again, deeper, hungry. It's been a long time.

She breaks it off.

ANTIMONY
I'll call the guards. Then we'll
see who conquers whom.

She pours the rest of the bottle on the rocks.

ANTIMONY (CONT'D)
Quit fooling around. Not another
drop until you bring the bishop to
justice.

NICK
Lady, you are toxic.

ANTIMONY
(pushes him away)
Poison is at times the price of
beauty.

She pushes him away with an inscrutable smile. Nick staggers out of the sauna in a cloud of steam, picks up his clothes. He slips them back on over the sweat.

NICK
Have it your way. Guess you usually
do.

ANTIMONY
Give my regards to the Bishop.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Nick threads the wooded path towards a rustic chapel in the Norman style - sloped towers with witch-hat tops.

NICK (V.O.)
It isn't the first time I've been
to church on account of a lady, and
it never ends well. But the
church's involved, or the lady and
her maid are going out of their way
to make me think it is. Either
way's worth a look.

GALLIUM BISMUTH (30's), a man in black armor, stops Nick at the church door.

BISMUTH
Where d'you think you're going?

An accent so thick it sounds put on. Nick observes Bismuth's crossbow and tarnished great helm that obscures his face.

NICK
I'm on to see the bishop.

BISMUTH

They got an interdict going.
Church's closed.

NICK

I'm not here on religious business.
Though some righteous indignation
may be involved.

BISMUTH

Don't matter. Bishop Saltpeter
won't see anyone. 'Specially you.

NICK

And you are?

BISMUTH

Sir Gallium Bismuth. You've heard
of me.

NICK

The Black Knight of Wismuth?

Nick tries not to laugh, but not too hard.

NICK (V.O.)

He's not really a knight, o'
course. Just another mercenary like
me - hired muscle. Can't see his
face with that big black tankard on
his head, but I don't like the look
of him all the same.

NICK

Didn't they get you for dodging
scutage?

BISMUTH

Whatage?

NICK

Tax evasion.

Bismuth points his crossbow at Nick's heart.

BISMUTH

That's a scurrilous lie, which I
will gladly prove in trial by
combat.

NICK

Pretty words for a ploc with no sword.

BISMUTH

Don't need a sword to best a bum like you.

NICK

Fine. More'n one way to scale a tower.

Nick shoves his hands in his pockets and lopes away.

EXT. CHURCH - LATER

Nick climbs an ivy-covered buttress, teeters along the rib vaulted timbers, and lets himself in through a high window.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Nick climbs down the steep wall.

NICK (V.O.)

Not really sure what I'll find inside, apart from the usual spoils of selling prayers. Despite what they'd have you believe, the clergy are just regular puds; Romans trying to hang on to the last of their relevance, replacing the loss of political power with spirituality. The question is, what does a bishop do with his time when there's no sermon to prepare?

Nick falls behind the altar with a crunch.

The black knight stands behind him.

BISMUTH

Knew you'd circle round t' back. Time for that trial. Gonna enjoy knocking your teeth out.

Nick stands gingerly.

They circle each other.

NICK
 (draws his short sword)
 You wanna surrender, now's the
 time.

They lunge at each other. Nick goes for the joints, the weak parts of his armor, but Bismuth knocks Nick off his feet and into the altar.

Bismuth fires his crossbow, the arrow barely misses Nick's face, and lodges through the altar-cloth and into the carved wooden altar.

Nick tears the alter-cloth away from the arrow and throws it over Bismuth's head as he tries to reload.

BISMUTH
 Agh!

Nick swings the short sword, but it clangs off Bismuth's armor.

NICK (V.O.)
 Armor's handy, sure, but it isn't
 what makes a knight. Without it I
 have speed, savvy--

Bismuth hits Nick in the face with a metal fist.

NICK (V.O.)
 Come to think of it, the armor
might be a key ingredient.

Bismuth lashes out with a foot, and Nick sprawls out into the pews.

BISMUTH
 Bad form! You're rusty, Gauntlet. I
 heard you used to be good.

NICK
 We all have our crosses to bear.

He scrambles up and swings again, but Bismuth steps aside and the short sword lodges in a pew back.

Bismuth punches Nick in the face again. Nick spits blood.

NICK (CONT'D)

Upshot is, now I've broken in
you'll have to take me to the
bishop.

Bismuth advances, crossbow ready.

BISMUTH

Yeah, but I'll have to subdue you.
That's the fun part.

NICK

Not if I subdue you first.

Nick staggers back and falls.

Bismuth takes aim.

BISMUTH

Goodbye, Gauntlet.

Nick does a backwards somersault, kicks the crossbow out of Bismuth's hands, rolls to a crouch, catches it and fires!

The arrow ricochets off a large gold cross Bismuth holds in front of his chest.

Nick's eyes go wide.

BISMUTH (CONT'D)

T' Lord's my shield.

Wham! Bismuth hits Nick with the cross. Nick's too dazed to defend himself, Bismuth hits him again.

And again.

Nick curls in a ball on the floor.

Bismuth adjusts his grip and winds up for a powerful drive.

BISMUTH (CONT'D)

The Bishop will hear your
confession now.

He swings away - crunch!

INT. CLOISTER - DAY

Bismuth kicks Nick, and he wakes up.

NICK

What the... oh, right.

He's tied, hanging by his arms from rope slung over the rafter in the Bishop's study.

Nick works his jaw, feels for loose teeth with his tongue.

The Bishop watches him from across the room.

NICK (CONT'D)

Bishop Saltpeter.

SALTPETER

Sorry for the rough handling, my son. We're forced to employ undesirables in a time of interdict. People get ideas we're a soft target.

Bismuth approaches with a glowing red poker from the fireplace.

NICK

You miss the mark, but not by much. That's not why I'm here.

SALTPETER

Why did you break into the church?

NICK

I'll ask the questions.

Saltpeter laughs.

SALTPETER

You're not in nearly as much distress as I'd expect. Do you know something I don't?

NICK

Probably, but mostly it's just that
Aqua Vitae's a powerful anesthetic.

Saltpeter strokes his chin.

SALTPETER

Perhaps we should resume when
you've sobered up a bit.

NICK

Why wait? It'll hurt enough
eventually.

SALTPETER

Your disrespect of my office must
be discouraged by the strongest
possible methods.

He nods to Bismuth, Bismuth grins.

SALTPETER (CONT'D)

You know what I want, so just say
whatever you feel.

Bismuth burns Nick with the poker.

Nick screams.

He recovers, out of breath, laughs again.

NICK

Some days you flog the bishop, some
days the bishop flogs you.

The bishop and the mercenary aren't amused.

NICK (CONT'D)

I have it that even in an
interdict, you still hear
confession on holy days.

SALTPETER

Of course. I'll make an exception
and hear yours if you like.

NICK

So that's what you were doing on
Michaelmas?

SALTPETER

It's what I will do. I belong to the Cistercian order, my son.

(indicates his white robe)

We celebrate Michaelmas according to the old calendar, which will not be until the eleventh of October.

NICK

That's news. So where were you two nights ago?

SALTPETER

At the Beverly Minster. It was a meeting of church officials convened by the archbishop of York. I have witnesses. Surely you tire of this.

NICK (V.O.)

He means the town of Beverly, a monastery where criminals in fear of their life can find sanctuary, if they make it across the border. Easy enough to verify.

Bismuth burns Nick again. Nick gasps.

NICK

(nods at Bismuth)

So you weren't here telling this pewter-head to stop the alchemist?

SALTPETER

I'm not sorry to see an alchemist come to grief. It's no secret I've tried to have the Duke excommunicated for years, but he's always stopped short of outright heresy.

NICK

And you don't consider killing him or his followers a solution to that problem?

SALTPETER

Two wrongs don't make a right, my son. Confess. I'll take an eye next.

Bismuth burns Nick again. It just makes him meaner.

NICK

Equation don't balance 'till you know who did what when, and who knew about it.

SALTPETER

Excuse me?

He holds up a hand to stop Bismuth, who looks disappointed.

NICK

How many wrongs it takes to right it. S'where his wife said you were.

Saltpeter leers.

SALTPETER

The Duke's wife is a lying whore, I though that was abundantly clear. You wouldn't believe what she was willing to offer in exchange for reduced penance.

NICK

Bet I would.

SALTPETER

You're here about the blacksmith.

NICK

I made a promise.

SALTPETER

And a knight's good as his word.

Bismuth shifts, restless.

SALTPETER (CONT'D)

(to Bismuth)

It's okay, son.

NICK

Cistercians are ascetics. Seems someone like an alchemist pursuing human perfection through learning and chemical means rather than prayer would be a particular threat to you.

SALTPETER

It must be convenient, not believing in anything.

NICK

Sure, I believe in something. I have a code.

Saltpeter raises an eyebrow.

NICK (CONT'D)

(recites)

Your master obey with bravery. The weak defend with valor. Your name protect with honor. A lady serve with chastity.

SALTPETER

You live by those words?

NICK

Well, it's a code. Haven't really deciphered it yet. Always had trouble with the 'chastity' part. Gather you have, too.

Saltpeter paces the room.

SALTPETER

We Cistercians are not conservative to the point of foolishness. We've instituted advances in water power, metallurgy... farming techniques unheard of a century ago...

Saltpeter takes the charred scraps of paper from the table.

SALTPETER (CONT'D)

We foster scholarship and learning wherever we found an abbey.

NICK

Good for you. Bet you're still against anything you can't control. Most folks are.

SALTPETER

God is in control, it is the lot of man to obey his commands and those of his chosen servants.

NICK

(nods at the paper scraps)
Well if you're so learned, perhaps you can tell me what those mean.

He looks at the tattered fragments, then at Nick.

SALTPETER

These are Tironian notes.

NICK

Come again?

SALTPETER

A kind of shorthand, developed by Marcus Tullius Tiro, scribe of the poet Cicero in antiquity. They were taught in monasteries until a few years ago.

(demonstrates)

Look, each of the symbols stands for a word. There are thousands of them.

NICK

You can read those?

SALTPETER

It's fragmentary, of course. But they seem part of a recipe, or a set of instructions. Probably dictated and taken down by a secretary. This looks quite dangerous.

NICK

Trust a clergyman to recognize a dangerous form of dictation.

Saltpeter waggles a finger at Nick.

SALTPETER

Clever. Independent. A certain disrespect for temporal authority. I could use a man like you. You know we've been preaching crusade, but the people lack conviction.

NICK

I wonder why. Byzantium has been sacked. What else could the western church want?

SALTPETER

There's much yet to do. The heretical Albigensians of Occitania to begin with. As we speak a holy army marches against Languedoc.

NICK

'Cause the people there don't subscribe to your sacraments? Cathars taken to a different understanding of the holy mysteries?

SALTPETER

I've been to Béziers as a Papal Legate. They're barbarians. An archdeacon was killed just this year by their intrigue.

Nick twists from his ropes.

NICK

Shame.

SALTPETER

And mark my words, before long another papal bull will call for the re-conquest of Jerusalem.

NICK

I was telling someone as much the other day.

SALTPETER

So consider before you reject my offer, a successful crusade could go a long way to restoring your social status, Sir Nicholas of Gloucester.

NICK

If you know who I am, then you know I was with King Richard's army at Acre. You know what he did to the prisoners there, despite his terms with Saladin.

SALTPETER

A promise to a heathen is no promise at all.

Nick gets as close as he can despite the restraints.

NICK

You weren't there. We sacked Christian towns, too. I saw men of God knee-deep in Christian blood. I saw monks slaughter children like animals, looking for swallowed jewels. 'Kill them all,' they told us, 'the Lord will recognize his own.' If that's social status, I don't want it. I tried to do service for God and country, but what if my king's the monster I was meant to fight?

The Bishop takes a step back.

SALTPETER

I've done things in the service of the church I'm not proud of, son, but God will forgive me. These alchemists, however... the Duke, your friend Marcas...

(MORE)

SALTPETER (CONT'D)
commit mortal arrogance before God
and deserve damnation. As does the
blacksmith's killer. You cannot
achieve perfection apart from God.

NICK
Or indulgence would be money
wasted.

Salt peter crumples the parchment.

SALTPETER
You can abandon the church, my son,
but the church will never abandon
you.

NICK
Except in case of an interdict. Am
I a prisoner here, or what?

Salt peter drops the balls of parchment into the fire.

SALTPETER
No, you can go. You clearly weren't
trying to steal anything. And you
must know by now I am above
suspicion. I suppose there's no
harm in letting you go.

BISMUTH
But, your holiness--

SALTPETER
Cut him down.

Bismuth cuts the ropes, and Nick drops to the floor.

He gets up, crosses to where Bismuth stands by the door.

Nick looks at the bishop with a bloody smile, and punches
Bismuth in the face mask.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Nick trudges down the street.

NICK (V.O.)

After that, Saltpeter started quoting me scripture. Be slow to anger, knock and the door will be opened. Truth'll set you free, sure. But whose truth? I hate him, no question. He's guilty of everything I expected: pride, war mongering, extortion, greed, lust. Everything except the murder of Marcas.

As he turns a corner, Nick runs into Realgar's men.

SOLDIER

You have to come with us, Nick.

He starts to go back the other way, but they encircle him.

NICK

Fair enough.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Realgar paces his office.

Nick stands by the window.

REALGAR

What did I tell you, Nick?

NICK

You've told me a lot of things, it's hard to keep track.

REALGAR

I just heard that you broke into the parish church, and they had to chastise you.

NICK

Some days you flog the bishop--

REALGAR

It isn't funny, Nick.

NICK

The bishop's muscle refused me a meeting. I had to insist.

REALGAR

I can't have you gong about things this way. This isn't a siege. You can't just batter your way--

Nick turns to face him.

NICK

The guy's dirty, Sheriff. We all know it. I just don't think he's involved. Not this time.

REALGAR

He's not the only one. I've tolerated you in my burg because I know you're an okay churl. You serve a purpose. But if you make things hard for me, if you back me against a battlement, I'll have to serve this.

He tosses a sheaf of parchment across the table.

It's a wanted poster with Nick's picture.

NICK

Good likeness. Where'd you get it?

REALGAR

Bishop's man gave it to me.

NICK

Old news, but still true. No statute of limitations on injuries to a king's ego, or his brother's. Some people, it's a crime whether you do what they want you to or not.

REALGAR

I'm not asking you to do anything, Nick. We'll settle accounts for Marcas. Don't make me come after you as well.

NICK

Not sure that's a promise I can
make.

They stare each other down.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Nick exits the Sheriff's office to find Antimony waiting
outside.

He pulls her into a dark alley thick with English fog. It's
like a tunnel with the castle clock framed in the BG.

NICK

You don't want to be seen with me
right now. Had my hand in one too
many hornet's nests.

NICK (V.O.)

She doesn't flinch, just looks at
me with those eyes like lodestones.
She's a crude compass I'm sure'll
steer me wrong.

He stares at her a moment, then kisses her.

She pries her mouth from his, inspects his bruises.

ANTIMONY

Your standard's come unraveled,
Knight.

She touches his face, Nick hisses, nurses the wound.

NICK

There're two kinds of people in
this world. Those who see a thread,
want to pull it and damn what
happens.

Nick kisses her again.

She breaks it off.

ANTIMONY

And the other kind?

NICK

Can't think of 'em. Everyone wants
to pull the thread.

They make out in the alley.

ANTIMONY

I'm sorry I sent you after
Saltpeter. I lied to you, Nick.

NICK

I didn't exactly believe your
story. I believed your Aqua Vitae.

ANTIMONY

But I almost got you killed, and
you're more valuable to me alive.
I've never had a knight before.

NICK (V.O.)

I know Antimony's just another
intoxicant to distract me, but as
my hands traveled the usual pilgrim
route to worship at the holy
shrine, I met some unexpected iron
works.

Nick stops in confusion.

NICK

You got a chastity belt?

ANTIMONY

That's why I don't want to lose
you, Nick.

(indicates the belt)

You're the only man in town clever
enough to deal with this particular
obstacle.

NICK

Not sure I know how.

BISMUTH (O.S.)

'Course you do.

Bismuth steps into the alley with some backup thugs.

BISMUTH (CONT'D)

You wouldn't want to disservice a lady.

Nick steps in front Antimony, draws his short sword. He glares, squints through the fog.

NICK

That you, Bismuth? Bishop's altar boy looking for another way to get the scepter?

BISMUTH

What we don't confess won't hurt us. Got a message for you - back off the alchemist or you'll end up like Marcas.

Antimony puts a hand on Nick's shoulder.

ANTIMONY

You still excel at arms, don't you, knight?

NICK

My arms are fine. It's the rest of me's a bit tarnished.

ANTIMONY

Good. I'll leave you to it. I have a banquet to attend.

She bolts out the end of the alley.

The thugs part to let her go, and turn on Nick.

NICK

(to Bismuth)

You're working for the alchemist now? Thought the Bishop wanted him stopped!

BISMUTH

He does, but we don't mind taking pagan money to rough you up a bit. Bishop pays good, but not that good.

NICK

You haven't met him then? The alchemist.

BISMUTH

Why d'you ask?

NICK

No reason.

(indicates short sword)

Shall we?

Nick puts up a brave fight, but he's outnumbered.

He dodges and evades as long as he can, but eventually they catch him and pummel him senseless.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Nick comes to in a pile of garbage and sees Galena.

NICK (V.O.)

Hands on the clock're advanced a ways when I come to, wondering where I went wrong. The fog is thicker and darker than ever. I feel like garbage and smell like garbage, so I'm not surprised to discover I'm lying in garbage. I am surprised to see Antimony's maid Galena looking down at me.

She helps him sit up.

NICK

What are you doing here?

GALENA

I was headed to the market before it closed. Ingredients for a special dessert at the banquet. Flambé's my specialty.

NICK

That so? French dish, right?

EXT. TOWN MARKET - CONTINUOUS

Galena and Nick head down the high street to a square by the castle's inner battlement.

GALENA

I'm glad you're not dead.

NICK

Not sure that's how you'd best describe me.

Galena finds a fruit stall, selects wild pears and red currants.

GALENA

We have stores of honeyed water and spirits at the castle, but the secret to a good flambe is fresh fruit.

Nick nods, winces. Galena notes his discomfort.

GALENA (CONT'D)

You sure you should continue with the case? If it's going to take this kind of toll, I mean.

NICK

(abstractly)
What toll?

GALENA

More than the damage a few bottles of Aqua Vitae can do. Perhaps you should let Marcas rest before you're killed as well.

NICK

Marcas was the best ironmonger I ever knew, and the best friend.

GALENA

(nods, looks at fruit)
Philosophically, iron represents a
need to temper primal urges, and at
the same time embrace the fire
within.

NICK

You don't say.

He turns on the charm, garbage and all.

NICK (CONT'D)

What would I have to do to take a
pretty maid in waiting to the
banquet?

Galena laughs, blushes, links her arm in his.

NICK (V.O.)

Poor kid. Her heart was in the
right place, I think. I pulled
myself together, walked her back to
the castle. After all, I still had
a dagger in the cloak room.

Nick carries her basket for her, back down the high street to
the town's inner gate.

EXT. CASTLE -NIGHT

At the gate, the guards - Aleric and Borin - stop Nick.

BORIN

You again?

ALERIC

The Duke's party is invite only.

NICK

Your wife said I had a standing
invitation.

Aleric grabs him, threatening. Nick doesn't lose his
cigarette.

ALERIC

What's your problem, couldn't find
a gutter to crawl back into?

NICK

(to Galena)

Suppose you talk to these bronze
knockers for me, tell 'em I left my
glove in the Duke's magic mushroom
cellar.

GALENA

It's okay, Borin, he's with me.

BORIN

I thought you was with someone
else.

GALENA

Shut up and open the gate.

INT. CALOMEL'S LABORATORY - NIGHT

Nick strides to the table, picks up his glove.

He waggles it at Galena.

NICK

Here it is!

Nick stuffs it in his belt.

NICK (CONT'D)

Always putting things where they
don't belong.

She hands him a pail of steaming water from the hearth.

GALENA

In case you want to clean the
garbage off.

Nick smiles, strips to the waist. Galena watches him as he
scrubs. He finishes, turns to face her.

NICK

There, respectable enough for this
lot--

Galena lunges, traps him against the table, and kisses him
hard.

Nick jumps, but doesn't resist.

She breaks the kiss.

NICK (CONT'D)

Um--

GALENA

You still want to take me to the
banquet?

Nick puts his hand on Galena's head, smooths her hair.

NICK

Of course.

GALENA

How about you take me here instead?

They tear each other's clothes off, climb partway onto the
table.

They knock bottles over, which steam and hiss.

Galena tries to eat Nick's face.

GALENA (CONT'D)

Don't breathe the fumes.

NICK

Right.

They roll onto the floor.

Nick makes love to her on a oilcloth by the furnace.

NICK (CONT'D)

(inhales deeply)

God, your perfume.

His eyes go wide.

FLASH

The smithy explodes!

INT. CALOMEL'S LABORATORY - LATER

They lie by the fire, wrapped in the oilcloth, and trade swigs from a flagon of brandy.

Galena nuzzles Nick, who thinks hard.

GALENA

Sorry if I seem forward, my Lord.

NICK

You do, but I won't complain. And don't 'my Lord' me. I'm no better than you.

GALENA

I think you are, my Lord. And I wanted to make up for...

(indicates his wounds)

Everything.

NICK

It's nothing. And thank you.

(catches her eye)

My Lady.

She giggles.

Then gasps.

GALENA

My flambé! I have to get to the kitchen.

She jumps up, whips the oilcloth off him.

NICK

Whoa!

GALENA

Sorry-- oh! Sorry.

She dresses underneath the oilcloth, best she can.

NICK
S' all right.

He lies back, looks at the ceiling, takes a drink.

She leans down, kisses him.

GALENA
Stay here, I'll be right back.

She runs up the stairs.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Expectant faces of the Duke and his guests peer out of the dim candlelight. A dozen or so of the Duke's mastiffs gnaw castoff bones on the stone floor.

Galena steals towards the head table wearing only a druid's robe.

Servants escort her, carrying a huge tray with an extravagant dessert of sponge cake and meringue shaped like Stonehenge.

GALENA
(chants in Gaelic)
Cluinnam seóltan, àrsaidag, na
àitich cionn! Hear me wise ones,
old ones, those who dwell above;

She twirls, the robe almost reveals her as she dances around the desert tray.

GALENA (CONT'D)
(chants)
Hear my call and hear my voice,
hear my earnest prayer. Send to me
blessings of joy, of happiness, and
love.

She throws her arms at the dessert and it erupts in flame!

The audience applauds.

Galena grins, breathes heavily.

Antimony scowls.

ANTIMONY

I'll bet it's tart.

The servants set the tray before the Duke, and he is just about to dig in when,

Nick flounders through the curtains from the lab, buckles his tunic.

NICK

I figured it out, yer honor.

All eyes turn to him. The dogs bark.

Galena gasps.

He stumbles into the head table.

NICK (CONT'D)

I figured it and I'm gonna make my case.

CALOMEL

What are you doing here? What's the meaning of this?

NICK

Marcas's death, Calomel. A man's murder.

NOBLEMAN ONE

Murder!

NICK

Yeah, murder, plain and simple, but the how and the why were a puzzle.

NOBLEMAN TWO

Is this true, Calomel?

CALOMEL

I... there was a death--

NICK

But who's to blame? I swore to uncover the truth.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

Truth is, it could have been anyone in town had a beef with the blacksmith, but I knew Marcas. He had scruples.

Nick paces the room.

NICK (CONT'D)

There was evidence to suggest Bishop Saltpeter, on the grounds of dispatching a dangerous heretic. But he's a Cistercian, and on the night in question he was walled away with his order, counting his gold and obeying the interdict.

He passes by the head table.

NICK (CONT'D)

It could've been Lady Antimony or her maid Galena who fed me the false story.

Galena looks horrified.

NICK (CONT'D)

Could've been Realgar, acting on the Duke's orders.

Realgar fumes from his place at the table.

REALGAR

Nick--

NOBLEMAN TWO

Are we approaching a point? You seem to think everyone's a suspect!

NICK

Truer to say I think everyone's suspect. But the real culprit is you, Duke Calomel, who are guilty of not having a clue.

Nick advances on the head table.

The guards shift uneasily.

NICK (CONT'D)

Doddering old fool, convinced of his lady's purity because he had a chastity belt made. Another rooster in the henhouse, eh?

He reaches over the table, knocks on Antimony's pelvis, CLANG!

The guards leap to pull Nick off, but he stumbles out of their reach. He grins at Calomel's obvious surprise.

NICK (CONT'D)

Bad news is, the other man's the one who made the belt - good old Marcas, the blacksmith, and the supposed rival alchemist. How likely is it you think he didn't keep a key for himself.

Nick apes a little hammering action. The crowd gasps and harumphs.

NOBLEMAN #2

No!

NICK

I know! I never really thought Marcas was an alchemist, but I didn't know he was doing the Duke's lady, either.

(to Calomel)

You didn't know about that, did you?

The crowd grumbles. Antimony blushes redder than her gown.

NICK (CONT'D)

But why would she hire me?

(to Realgar)

She obviously couldn't go to the Sheriff without admitting the blacksmith was her lover. So she cooked up this little story about the church to throw me off the trail. She approached me - Marcas's former partner - and came on strong.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

Strong enough to spin me into
helping her out of her - how should
I put it - bind?

Nick catches Galena's eye.

She's crushed.

ANTIMONY

A trust that was clearly misplaced.
Guards, put this dog in the street
where it belongs.

The crowd mutters.

The guards move to intercept Nick, but he draws his short
sword and holds them at bay.

NICK

What does it mean to be noble? It
means considering what we don't
want to hear. We're supposed to be
civilized, better, a breed apart.
More than just spoiled children
privileged by accident of birth.

NOBLEMAN ONE

Which of us is behaving like a
child?

NICK

A nobleman should care about
justice! He should take
responsibility for what happens in
the land under his protection. But
this Dukedom is spinning outta
control. Its lord has his nose in a
flask, breathing the fumes.

NOBLEMAN TWO

You're disgraced, sir. You're in no
place to lecture us.

Calomel throws the flambé to the floor.

Galena looks from it to Nick, stricken.

CALOMEL

(brandishes cane)

You have betrayed me, sir. You come into my house, wearing the clothes of a knight, but you are none. You take advantage of my wife and my servants. You spread all manner of lies. I knew about you, of course, what you'd done. I don't suppose I should've expected anything different.

Nick eyes the crowd, they've turned against him.

NICK

(to the Nobles)

When I think I used to be one of you. You have no idea what it's like out there.

He advances on the table, past a mortified Galena.

NICK (CONT'D)

The world is sick, run by vipers who sit in fancy houses and talk of honor, emptying their chamber pots on your head as you scrap for a coin in the street.

He throws the short sword down.

NICK (CONT'D)

I'm sick of the lot.

The guards rush him. The dogs howl.

EXT. CASTLE - NIGHT

Aleric and Borin throw Nick out on the street.

They throw the short sword after him.

It sticks in the ground inches from his head.

BORIN

Back to your pond, filthy scum.

Nick picks himself up, puts his leather hat on.

NICK
Better to swim through the filth
than live with your head up your--

ALERIC
Beat it, villain!

Nick brushes mud off his coat, picks up his short sword and limps off.

INT. NICK'S TOWER - NIGHT

He drags in, finds Cadmia inside.

NICK
Cadmia, what--

CADMIA
It's bad out there, Nick. The
Duke's men are arresting people
without cause. The tavern's empty.

He flops at the desk, rubs his temples.

NICK
What d'you want me to do about it?

She picks up one of his inventions, a crude telescope.

CADMIA
I don't know... something. That's
what you always talk about, isn't
it?

She puts it down, sees the flagon of brandy.

CADMIA (CONT'D)
You want a drink?

Nick shakes his head.

NICK
Need to clear my clockwork.

CADMIA

Well, this is a red letter day.
What's the occasion?

NICK

I put my finger in it. Mind's at
full gallop, can't stop to water it
just now.

Cadmia uncorks the flagon, tries to drink, finds it empty.

NICK (CONT'D)

This thing about Marcas may have
turned south. Way south.

She sits opposite him.

CADMIA

My father was a knight. I keep his
sword in the bar. Growing up, he
always... he made us feel safe.

NICK

You mean you feared him.

CADMIA

I respected my father. But now I've
grown up, there's no such thing as
safe.

Nick takes her hand across the table.

CADMIA (CONT'D)

We lost everything after Richard's
revolt. My father backed King
Henry, and Richard was not
forgiving. My father was never the
same.

Nick comes around the desk.

NICK

You shouldn't have to live in fear.
But respect... respect's good for a
person. You don't respect anything,
you wind up like me.

CADMIA

An abusive drunk?

NICK

I was gonna say charming and dangerous.

He takes her chin in his hand.

The door crashes open.

Sheriff Realgar enters with his men.

CADMIA

Realgar, no--

REALGAR

Stay out of this, Tutty.

NICK

(to Realgar's men)

Close the door, will you? Were you born in a barn?

(sotto)

Not unlikely.

REALGAR

(to Nick)

I told you this would happen, Nick. Didn't I ask you to let me handle it?

Nick stands up.

NICK

We both know it's a slippery pig. And no offense, but I don't think you can corner it on your own.

REALGAR

Well now I'm gonna have to, 'cause he told me to bring you in. Wanting another guilty party, you're the most suspicious.

NICK

And you know I'm gonna have to resist arrest. Matter of principle.

(looks around the place)

Try not to break anything.

The Sheriff's men grab for him.

Nick punches, bites and kicks. One guard restrains a hysterical Cadmia.

Nick picks up a set of lenses to smash a guy over the head.

NICK (CONT'D)

Damn.

He puts it back and kicks the opponent instead. The Sheriff's men pummel him.

NICK (V.O.)

So, it doesn't exactly go my way.
Or maybe it does. Way it always
goes. Never seem to find myself in
a fair fight per se. Guess that's
just my calling.

One of the men throws Nick's oil lamp, which smashes and sets the tower ablaze. Nick mumbles through a bloody nose.

NICK

Ah, you didn't have to do that.

EXT. TOWN - NIGHT

The Sheriff's men drag Nick, coughing and beaten, out of the base of the smoldering tower.

A crowd gathered there grumbles.

REALGAR

You're an unusual man, Nick. Most
people would identify a no-win
situation. But you have to butt
your head against it.

Nick looks up at the tower, flames appear in the window.

REALGAR (CONT'D)

(to townspeople)

Someone get water, put that out.

A stone hits him in the chest.

REALGAR (CONT'D)

Who threw that? I can run you all
in if you like!

He searches the crowd.

REALGAR (CONT'D)

Right, you don't want to help? It's
your homes'll burn. I wash my hands
of it.

They march Nick off.

He walks beside Realgar as the men ward off threatening
townsfolk.

REALGAR (CONT'D)

We've you to thank for the tension
in the streets. Word of what you
said at the castle traveled fast,
and it's causing chaos.

NICK

Glad to be of service.

REALGAR

Townspeople're convinced Duke
Calomel killed the blacksmith.
They're threatening revolt. I have
to oppress 'em just to maintain
control.

NICK

All that does is convince them he's
a tyrant. Duke owns the land, not
the people. No reason they should
let an impotent old man trample
'em.

REALGAR

You're not doing him justice.

NICK

We both know you can't do justice
when the Duke's a suspect.
Feudalism's out of balance.
Personal responsibility's the only
thing separates us from barbarism.

REALGAR

What would you have me do? I don't want to lock you up. Hell, it's naïve to think that's all the Duke'll do to you. So point me in the right direction. Prove me wrong!

NICK

Working on it. I told you, it's a slippery pig.

REALGAR

More trouble than you're worth, Nick. And that ain't much.

INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT

The bars slam shut, Nick sits down amongst the sorry rabble of other townsfolk.

Guards shove Galena in through another door.

She approaches Nick's cell.

GALENA

Realgar said you wanted to see me.

NICK

Say they're going to execute me.

GALENA

I heard. I hope you got what you came for. I hope it was worth it.

She puts his glove on the horizontal bar, they share a look.

NICK

I wanted to apologize for misleading you. I took advantage. Always putting things where they don't belong.

GALENA

I understand. I share some of the blame.

NICK

I thought maybe there was something
you could tell me about what
happened to Marcas.

Galena looks conflicted.

NICK (CONT'D)

Don't want to die with the case
unsolved. Somebody should know what
happened to him, and I was the
closest thing he had to family.

GALENA

You didn't know him. Not anymore.

NICK

You don't have to tell me if it was
your mistress. Just nod.

GALENA

Like you said, we're all guilty of
something.

(grips bars)

This thing is bigger than any of
us.

She takes a piece of parchment from her robe, rolls a
cigarette, holds it for him to lick.

GALENA (CONT'D)

It takes elements of all kinds. We
can't help the bonds that attract
us. We don't choose the kind of
element we are.

NICK

We always have a choice.

She gives him a wan smile.

INT. CASTLE - DAY

Guards frog march Nick down a long hallway that opens into a
bright courtyard.

A crowd murmurs beyond.

Antimony steps from the shadows inside the archway.

ANTIMONY

Guards, hold him a moment.

NICK

Come for one last gloat? I'll keep
my belt on, it'll be like iron
sharpening iron.

She leans in. Her lips hover over his.

ANTIMONY

I was hurt at first, when you said
what you did. But I understand now.
It's a result of serving with
chastity, and we all lash out at
the ones we serve.

Nick grabs her neck, pushes her against the wall, the guard's
blades hover at his throat.

NICK

I'll speak a word in your ear. You
lied to me from the beginning, not
that I didn't know it. You wanted
to make sure I didn't upset your
situation. Hiring me was just a
pretense for keeping me too drunk
to do anything about it. Maybe you
figured I could pick your lock
after, I don't pretend to know
everything.

ANTIMONY

You don't understand.

(adjusts her skirt)

For all my gusseted furnishings,
I'm a prisoner in this palace. My
parents married me off to Clissold.
It was their idea, not mine. I was
fifteen, he was fifty. Can you
blame me for wanting to see a
little bit of life beyond these
walls before I wither?

NICK

(releases her)

That's not what I blame you for.

ANTIMONY

It's not too late for you and me. I could still speak a word in his ear.

NICK

What about Galena?

ANTIMONY

Forget her, be with me.

NICK

Pass.

She steps back.

ANTIMONY

Fine, have it your way.

The guards drag Nick out into the,

EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - DAY

The Sheriff's men take Nick to the center of the courtyard.

The Duke stands from his seat on the balcony.

Seated next to him, the Bishop and Gallium Bismuth look on.

REALGAR

Silence!

The crowd goes quiet.

CALOMEL

Sir Nicholas of Gloucester, you stand accused of treason, of attempted murder on our person and that of our wife. Of the murder of Marcas the blacksmith and the spreading of vicious lies about said murder, and for the recent intemperate weather.

NICK

(sotto)

Don't leave anything out.

Antimony slips onto the balcony and perches beside the Duke.

In the crowd, Warin - the meathead from the tavern - leans over to Cadmia.

WARIN

Good to see the law finally catch up with that villain.

CADMIA

Sometimes the law and justice are two different things.

Calomel produces the wanted poster with Nick's picture.

CALOMEL

And most grievously, the desertion of holy crusade, for which I have just learned you are wanted in your home town. How do you plead?

NICK

Never if I can help it.

CALOMEL

Very well. Let it be recorded you have shown contempt for this court and its proceedings, and are therefore sentenced to die by quartering - your limbs to be--

The crowd grumbles, protesting.

CALOMEL (CONT'D)

Your limbs--

TOWNSPERSON

Brute!

The crowd grows unruly. Calomel stamps his cane.

CALOMEL

Please, my people. This man is a coward, and a traitor, and is thoroughly false. Like lead, he is corrupt, and the burnout of impurity must be completed before unification with the unlimited can begin.

The crowd grumbles in confusion.

TOWNSPERSON

What--?

Calomel seizes the lull in jeers to continue.

CALOMEL

(to Nick)

Your limbs to be torn from your body by four strong horses, and hung on the gates of the town as a deterrent to wastrels who would follow in your soon-to-be-very-wide footsteps.

(to guards)

Carry on.

The Sheriff's men tie his arms and legs to four iron bars.

These they hitch to four horses, attended by black hooded horse masters.

ALERIC

(to Borin)

You think he'll go to pieces?

BORIN

I dunno. It's a stretch!

The horses pull, suspend Nick between them.

NICK

(groans)

One of the hooded horse masters checks all the chains to ensure their strength. Nick recognizes a familiar scent.

The Duke raises his hand.

CALOMEL

Horse masters, ready your beasts!

The horse masters raise their whips.

The crowd grows restless, conflicted.

Antimony jeers at Nick.

ANTIMONY

Tear the animal apart!

The Duke gives the signal.

The horse-masters crack their whips, and the horses charge ahead. The chains yank Nick's limbs, but three of them snap!

The leader of the fourth horse-- the one who checked the chains-- leaps onto its back and drags Nick behind, mostly unharmed, his left hand still connected to the harness.

NICK

(struggles)

He cranes to see who the rider is as he bumps along the cobblestones.

She looks back. It's Galena in disguise!

CALOMEL

What?

She rides towards the gate with Nick in tow.

BISMUTH

Stop him!

Some guards move to intercept.

She rides them down, splashes a liquid on the rope holding the portcullis. It hisses and breaks.

The portcullis drops, cutting off their pursuit.

CALOMEL

Gauntlet!!

The crowd erupts into cheers and applause!

CADMIA

Yes! Yes!!

She throws her arms around Warin, who shrugs her off, annoyed.

Chaos on the Duke's balcony:

SALTPETER

(to Realgar)

They're getting away! What are you going to do?

REALGAR

(to Calomel)

We were expecting this. A plan is in place.

ANTIMONY

What?

REALGAR

Come with me, my Lord.

They exit.

Salt peter turns to Bismuth.

SALTPETER

It's the maid, I'm sure of it. Find them. Gauntlet you can kill, but bring the girl to me.

Bismuth grins.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Galena stops the horse long enough for Nick to gather himself.

GALENA

Get on!

He jumps on behind her, and they ride out of the city together.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

They race through the trees.

Galena slows the horse as it become obvious they've lost their pursuers.

NICK

What was that stuff?

GALENA

Aqua regia. Combination of Aqua fortis, Vitriol and salt. Not a universal solvent, but it's close.

NICK

You put it on the chains?

GALENA

Mmm.

NICK

Neat trick. How'd you get to be a guard?

GALENA

I put some on him, too.

(off Nick's look)

His foot.

NICK

Guess I owe you one. What's your plan now?

GALENA

Get you to the Beverly Minster. Once you're past the sanctuary stones I'll return, with luck before I'm missed.

NICK

Stay off the main road. It's slower, but if we're patient we may yet slip the noose.

She rides off the road, into the tangled forest outside of town headed for the border.

GALENA

We're getting close.

NICK

Closer than you think.

He slips a sponge from his pocket and crushes it over her mouth. Galena passes out almost instantly.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Galena comes to, discovers she's tied up. Nick stands nearby, adjusts the horse's saddle. He's lit a campfire.

GALENA

What was that?

NICK

Mixture of opium and hemlock.
Brought a bit of alchemy back from
the east myself.

GALENA

But we have to get to the sanctuary
stones!

NICK

I may cross those stones tonight,
but I'm not sure you will.

He crosses to her.

NICK (CONT'D)

I appreciate the rescue, so I'll
tell it to you straight. It was the
head... you were trying to create a
Brazen Head at the smithy with
Marcas's help.

Her eyes go wide.

NICK (CONT'D)

The two of you were lovers. But
then Antimony got her hooks in him.
(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

You couldn't kill her, so you altered the final instructions for the head to make it explode.

Firelight dances on the cave wall, soot and shadows play.

FLASH

Galena leaves Marcos at the workbench, tears in her eyes.

The Brazen Head is a clockwork skull, with thermostats full of caustic chemicals.

NICK (V.O.)

The night you bumped into me, you were beating it out of there before he completed them.

She puts her hood on, runs out the door and into Nick.

BACK TO SCENE

NICK

That about right?

Galena doesn't deny it.

NICK (CONT'D)

You saw I wasn't gonna let it go, you concocted this story to pin it on the church. Only natural.

GALENA

How long have you suspected?

NICK

I was getting there already, but the tryst in the laboratory was telling. I flatter myself I'm worth fighting over, but there was more to it than that.

GALENA

Should have known.

NICK

Duke said you grew up in a convent. French one, probably. Explains your perfume, your cooking, and how you knew Tironian notes, among other things. I could tell he recognized your handwriting.

GALENA

Oh.

NICK

You lied about the Michelmas confession. And then there was the withered rose at the funeral.

FLASH

While Nick makes a scene on the gravestone, he looks from the grave to Antimony, to Galena holding the dead flower.

NICK (V.O.)

Jabir says black rose's a hermetic symbol for disaster, arguments, ended love, and death.

BACK TO SCENE

Nick shows her the pocket-sized Jabirian corpus.

NICK

I only need to know one more thing. Why?

GALENA

I couldn't keep her away from him. To ensure the secrecy of our work, he was always back and forth to the castle, another of his regular clients, and she couldn't help but notice him. You know what she's like.

NICK

Still, a maidservant competing that hard with a noble lady. Takes guts.

GALENA

You can't love if you're not
jealous.

NICK

You're a philosopher, but you can't
lead into gold.

GALENA

Not yet. When we figured out how,
Marcas was going to buy my contract
from the Duke. We're all looking to
be more than we are.

NICK

No matter what it takes?

GALENA

Duke Clissold won't last forever.
Someone has to continue his work.

NICK

And you can't do it without
Antimony. You didn't want to lose
your position.

GALENA

I live in a mansion full of beauty
I can't possess. I work with
borrowed tools, borrowed ideas. She
had clothes, money, men, much as
she could want. Marcas was the only
thing in my world that was special,
that was mine.

FLASH

Galena comes upon Marcas and Antimony in Antimony's boudoir.

They're involved on the bed, don't notice her.

GALENA (V.O.)

Until she tempted him, polluted him
right in front of me. She took him
for her amusement. Like she didn't
even care I existed.

She leans against the wall around the corner from the bed and cries.

GALENA (V.O.)

I'd be damned if I was going to share him with her. Was I supposed to wait until she was finished with him? Take him back and accept my master's privilege?

She wipes her tears, her face grim and set.

BACK TO SCENE

GALENA

Marcas was my first love. Can you even imagine what that kind of betrayal is like? Nothing I can do to her will make up for what she took from me.

NICK

I knew a girl once, daughter of my feudal lord. Sort of girl you turn pale in her presence. I was set to marry her, we were betrothed and everything. But I was vexed with too much passion as they say.

FLASH

The crusader camp in Jaffa.

Nick-- in full armor-- miserable, battle worn and desperate.

NICK (V.O.)

My Lord went on Crusade. He asked for my service and in a bid for glory and status I went along with it.

The Saracens attack!

Nick gets up and joins the fight.

NICK (V.O.)

It started out with a noble idea,
but like so many things it turned
into another opportunity for bloody-
mindedness and horror.

BACK TO SCENE

GALENA

And the bird?

NICK

Well, nothing voids a betrothal
like deserting a crusade, and she
flew when the deal went south.
Life's a broken promise, honey. I'm
living proof.

Galena turns, looks at him.

GALENA

I wanted to kill Antimony too, but
I was selfish, afraid. What you did
- standing up to your lord, being
cast out - took real courage.
Courage I wish I'd had.

BISMUTH (O.S.)

Nobody's perfect.

Nick and Galena whip around to see the Black Knight and his
crew arrayed across the mouth of the cave, crossbows ready.

BISMUTH (CONT'D)

Just ask my boss.

Bismuth advances towards them.

BISMUTH (CONT'D)

He was real interested in those
notes you showed him. Said you knew
how to make a Brazen Head, whatever
that is. Sent me to get it, even if
I have to cut it off.

Nick stands in front of Galena.

NICK

Your skill at mixing metaphor is undiminished, Bismuth.

GALENA

I don't have it! I blew it up. Just ask Nick.

BISMUTH

Afraid I can't take either one of your words for it. You're wanted outlaws.

(leers)

I'm gonna have to search you.

GALENA

Nick, your things!

Galena gestures towards her saddlebag. Nick rushes for it as the men circle him.

He reaches in, finds his short sword and his collapsible crossbow. He springs the crossbow, and observes her repair job.

He turns to Bismuth with a wide grin.

NICK

Now, then.

Bismuth lunges, fires his crossbow.

Nick blocks it with his short sword, it glances off and hits one of Bismuth's men.

MAN ONE

(screams)

Nick and Bismuth meet in the middle and fight with short sword and crossbow.

BISMUTH

Don't be an idiot, Nick. You're not defending an innocent. Hell, she's not even a lady. She killed your friend, she paid me to beat you and leave you in an alley.

FLASH

In a dark alley, a hooded Galena puts gold in Bismuth's hand.

BACK TO SCENE

GALENA

(to Nick)

Sorry about that, by the way.

NICK

You wanted me dead, you'd have
blown me up.

BISMUTH

Like she blew up the blacksmith?

The fight ranges out of the cave, into the,

EXT. FOREST - DAY

They circle in the wooded glen outside the cave.

One of Bismuth's men rushes Nick from behind.

Nick points the crossbow over his shoulder, shoots him square
in the chest.

BISMUTH

Why're you doing this?

Bismuth knocks Nick's short sword out of his hand so hard it
sticks into a tree.

They fight crossbow-to-crossbow.

NICK

You remember the code. 'The weak
defend with valor, a lady serve
with chastity.'

BISMUTH

What does that even mean?

NICK

Means it doesn't matter which of us is right. You have to maintain your principles.

Nick lands a solid blow.

NICK (CONT'D)

Or maybe I just don't want you to have her.

GALENA

What?

Bismuth knocks Nick down.

Nick lays there, dazed, as Bismuth reloads his crossbow.

GALENA (CONT'D)

Nick!

Nick rolls to avoid the shot.

One of Bismuth's men grabs Galena, who's still tied up, throws her over the saddle of her own horse and jumps on.

GALENA (CONT'D)

Nick!

NICK

Galena, no--!

Nick gets up and tries to rush after them, but Bismuth blocks him with a crushing blow that drives Nick into a tree.

The same tree his short sword is in.

BISMUTH

You're not a knight anymore, Nick.

NICK

What does it mean to be a knight? Is it the right to bear arms, the power to mete justice? Or is it a meaningless title to justify a killer?

BISMUTH

Get over it. Side with us.

NICK

I'd sooner join the Saracens.

Nick pulls his short sword from the tree and fights as never before, his dance with Bismuth whirling and deadly.

Nick lands a solid blow that knocks Bismuth's helmet off.

BISMUTH

Merde!

He staggers back, falls. He's clearly not English.

NICK

What was that?

BISMUTH

I... um--

MAN TWO

What the hell did he just say?

MAN THREE

I think he just said 'merde!'

NICK

(to Bismuth)

You're not even English, are you?

(points crossbow)

Talk!

BISMUTH

What? Of course I am. Don't be preposterous!

MAN TWO

Preposterous?

MAN THREE

What's he talking about?

NICK

He's one of Phillip's court! How'd you get Wismuth, anyway? Trade for lands in Normandy?

(to Bismuth's men)

I'd never even have considered joining you if I'd known that.

Bismuth's men grumble.

BISMUTH

It was good enough for your King
Richard. He was French too!

Protests from the men.

NICK

Funny how that works, isn't it? A
little shine sticks to a king and
he can do no wrong. People love a
winner. But what were you doing
during the crusade? Stabbing
Richard's back as part of some
French land grab?

The men laugh.

MAN TWO

I'm not fighting for this fancy-
frocked pretender. I'm leaving.

He does, the other men laugh and join him.

Bismuth finds himself alone, and backs away.

BISMUTH

You'll pay for this!

He turns and runs.

NICK

Go put your tongue in something,
you dirty bastard!

Nick chuckles, turns and chases down the path after Galena.

INT. TAVERN - DAY

It's shoulder-to-shoulder with angry townspeople all talking
at once.

They quiet as Cadmia stands on a bar stool.

CADMIA

You saw what they tried to do today. What we, in our weakness, almost let them do. We're not worth a damn to the Duke except as figures in his alchemical equations.

TOWNSPEOPLE

Yeah!

CADMIA

I saw Nick and Marcas in here all the time, we all did. And I don't give a damn what they did on Crusade.

Shouts of agreement.

CADMIA (CONT'D)

He said to me once, 'you can't count on counts to come to your defense. All you can count on's yourself, your wits, and your will.'

Murmurs of assent.

CADMIA (CONT'D)

That's the man they tried to kill today. Not a failed knight, but a symbol of a failed system that tried to kill him 'cause he spoke out against it. Nick's a fighter, but he's not a murderer. The Duke tried to kill Nick to take our minds off his own guilt!

Louder shouts of agreement.

CADMIA (CONT'D)

Are we going to stand for this?

TOWNSPERSON

No!

CADMIA

Are we going to let them try to fleece us like a flock of sheep?

Shouts of "No! No!"

She takes her father's broadsword down from above the bar.

CADMIA (CONT'D)
Or are we going to fight?

TOWNSPERSON
Yes!

CADMIA
I say we fight!

The townspeople cheer their assent.

CADMIA (CONT'D)
I say we fight back, just like--

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

Nick staggers out of the woods, breathing hard, his crossbow and short sword held limp.

REALGAR (O.S.)
Hold it!

Nick stops, sees Saltpeter, Realgar and Calomel with Bismuth's man and Galena in chains.

The Sheriff's men surround Nick and march him to where they stand beneath an oak tree by a carved granite standing stone.

CALOMEL
(to Realgar)
Right where you said he'd be,
bringing up the rear.

NICK
May have overestimated me. But
you're not alone. Never thought I'd
see the three of you on the same
side.

SALTPETER
Only thing crossing those sanctuary
stones tonight will be your corpse
if you cross me, Gauntlet.
(MORE)

SALTPETER (CONT'D)
I'll burn you now and kill you
later. Where is it?

NICK
She doesn't have it.

GALENA
You set me up?

NICK
That was the plan.

GALENA
I thought you owed me one.

NICK
Until we take Marcas into account.

GALENA
I helped you escape!

NICK
Other three horses had orders not
to pull unless you compromised the
chains. You'd be guilty if you did,
way I figured it.

GALENA
That's hardly fair! Marcas cheated
on me with Antimony. They did it
together!

NICK
Fair's a marketplace on feast day,
Galena. Lotta cheating there, too.
Crime of passion, I understand.
Antimony deserves as much, but that
won't happen.

SALTPETER
Don't listen to him, child. Just
give me the Brazen Head and all
will be forgiven.

NICK
She can't. It's destroyed.
Ascended, if you will.
(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

It resides in the spirit world,
just like your credibility.

SALTPETER

My good name is not for a man like
you to impugn.

(to Galena)

Is this true?

BRAZEN HEAD (O.S.)

(filtered, mettalic)

Not completely.

They all react in surprise at the strange voice.

SALTPETER

What's that?

Galena slips the palm-sized brass skull from a hidden pouch
in her skirts, holds it up to them - gears whir and chemicals
bubble.

GALENA

You had it mostly right, but the
one that killed Marcas was a copy.
This is the original.

Galena looks at Nick, tears in her eyes.

GALENA (CONT'D)

You can't become part of another
element without losing a part of
yourself.

She hurls it at the ground.

SALTPETER

No!

The brazen head goes off like a grenade, knocks them all from
their feet!

Galena drops her shackles, eaten through by acid, and runs.

The Sheriff's men chase her down. She almost evades them, but
they tackle her.

SALTPETER (CONT'D)
No... No! She was across the
stones! She's mine.

They drag her back to the group.

CALOMEL
I didn't see anything.

SALTPETER
This isn't right - I'll inform the
archbishop. She belongs to the
church.

The Bishop's man looks from him to the Duke's men. He's not
getting involved.

REALGAR
Make sure you search her right this
time.

Realgar puts another pair of shackles on her hands.

REALGAR (CONT'D)
(to Galena)
Don't bother burning through these
too, I've got a dozen more.

And on her feet.

REALGAR (CONT'D)
The Duke's prison won't be kind for
a woman, but the town needs to know
the truth.

Saltpeter shakes his head.

SALTPETER
What a waste. A head of prophecy.

CALOMEL
(points cane)
She'll make another one. She'll
make it for me. But we still need a
scapegoat. And we have a convicted
murderer right here.

All eyes turn to Nick.

GALENA

No!

CALOMEL

(to Galena)

The saying is, 'in order to create,
something of equal value must be
lost.'

REALGAR

My Lord, he did his part. He found
the real murderer!

CALOMEL

(to Realgar)

You'll do your duty, Sheriff, or
you'll die where you stand.

Realgar looks at his men.

They aren't going to back him over Nick Gauntlet.

NICK

It's okay, Realgar. What you gotta
do.

REALGAR

I will.

(indicates Saltpeter)

But this churchman has witnessed my
protest.

CALOMEL

Shut up and shackle him.

EXT. TOWN - NIGHT

Realgar and the Duke ride up to the city gates with Nick and
Galena on their horse in chains.

They draw back in shock.

The townspeople - led by Cadmia and Warin - guard the gate
with torches and pitchforks.

WARIN

Hold it right there, your Lordship.
We don't like the way you run this
town anymore, so you're out.

GUARD ONE

Stand aside for your Duke, peasant!

CADMIA

Don't 'peasant' me son, I know your
mother!

Inside the town, the citizens riot. They tear down the Duke's
banners and trample them in the mud. Fires have broken out.

The Duke surveys the scene in horror.

CALOMEL

(to Nick)

What have you done?

NICK

Seems to me you brought it on
yourself.

A group of townspeople break from the bushes and surround
them.

The horses rear, Nick falls off the back of Galena's mount.

NICK (CONT'D)

(grunts)

The townspeople get between Nick and the Sheriff, pull the
Sheriff's men down and subdue them.

Nick gets to his feet.

Realgar rides towards Nick, but Calomel heads him off.

CALOMEL

Leave him!

Calomel rides up beside Galena's horse, drags her over to
his.

CALOMEL (CONT'D)

(to Realgar)

Ride behind me.

(MORE)

CALOMEL (CONT'D)
Close the castle gates, organize
the defense! I have work to attend!

Nick and Galena share a look as Calomel turns horse and rides
off through the gate.

The townspeople guarding it scatter in confusion.

They cheer to see the Duke's retreat.

WARIN
Go on, then!

Nick surveys them, as a townsman helps unshackle him.

NICK
What are you people doing?

Cadmia steps to the front.

She holds the broadsword from the bar.

CADMIA
You looked to be in trouble, Nick.

NICK
But this is war, Tutty. The other
nobles can't ignore this. You'll
all be killed.

CADMIA
You're always saying a knight
shouldn't fight a meaningless
battle, but you fight all the time.
Now these people are fighting for
their homes, and they need a knight
to lead them.
(offers the sword to him)
So lead them.

Nick looks at her. She doesn't flinch.

CADMIA (CONT'D)
Shouldn't have said it if you
didn't mean it.

WARIN

Come on, Cadmia. We can't waste
time on this weak-livered worm.

NICK

I need to get something first.

He takes Galena's horse, mounts.

NICK (CONT'D)

I'll meet you at the castle.

Nick rides off into the town.

Warin steps to Cadmia's side.

WARIN

He'll run. Just like the Crusades.

Cadmia sets her jaw.

INT. CALOMEL'S LABORATORY - NIGHT

The Duke drags Galena down the stairs and hurls her at the
table.

Realgar follows.

REALGAR

My Duke, the town--

CALOMEL

Never mind the town!

(to Galena)

Get started, girl! I want you to
recreate the experiment.

GALENA

But I don't have the things I need!

CALOMEL

Just start the work, we'll send
Realgar for supplies when
necessary.

GALENA

I need a blacksmith.

Antimony descends the stairs.

ANTIMONY

Husband, what's going on? Have you seen what's happening outside?

CALOMEL

Silence, woman! A Brazen Head... this could be the pinnacle of my great work.

Galena looks from one to the other.

She starts mixing chemicals.

INT. NICK'S TOWER - NIGHT

Nick enters, hops painfully between the remaining stairs, tosses his few charred possessions around, reflected in the shards of the broken stained-glass window.

He finds a bundle wrapped in oilcloth.

EXT. CASTLE - NIGHT

Warin and Cadmia have an army of townspeople gathered at the castle gate.

WARIN

I'm through waiting. If we're going to oust the Duke once and for all, we'd better do it now before they solidify their defenses.

CADMIA

Just wait. He's coming.

She looks down the street.

Nick emerges from an alley, rides up.

NICK

Evening, folks.

Cadmia smiles to see him.

CADMIA

I knew it.

Warin frowns.

NICK

(indicates sword)

You still want me to--

She hands it up to him.

CADMIA

No one better.

He takes the sword, observes it with reverence.

He looks at the townspeople.

NICK

It's a fine line between a knight
and a criminal. You live your life
on the edge of a blade, you're
going to make mistakes.

He levels the sword at them.

NICK (CONT'D)

But a knight stands up for what he--
or she-- believes. For justice. And
when you defend the weak, and right
what's been wronged, then you're
knights. Every one of you.

The crowd cheers. Nick has them wheel carts into place as a
defense from arrows, and turns to face the ramparts.

WARIN

So what are we waiting for?

NICK

Patience. More'n one way to storm a
castle.

INT. CALOMEL'S LABORATORY - NIGHT

Galena sloshes chemicals together in a flask.

The Duke sits to one side, lost in thought.

In his moment of distraction, she takes a candle and lights a hidden fuse. Calomel notices what she's doing too late.

CALOMEL

Wait... no, girl! That's not the way. You'll--

Antimony screams.

Calomel dives out of the way as Realgar tries to stamp the fuse out. But the spark races across the floor and disappears behind the stone wall.

Galena leaps into the giant empty iron cauldron. Calomel, Antimony and Realgar rush to follow.

EXT. CASTLE - NIGHT

A massive explosion shakes the whole house, blows a hole in the exterior wall.

The townspeople gasp.

CADMIA

What in god's name?

A purple aluminum-iodine cloud pours from inside.

Fire breaks out on the timber works.

The drawbridge crashes down, reveals the compromised portcullis.

WARIN

(to Nick)

You were expecting this?

The Sheriff's men scream and stagger around with acid burns.

NICK

Something like. Flambé's her specialty.

Nick unwraps the package he got from his office.

It's his old crusader helmet, with the primitive gas mask built into the faceplate.

He takes off his hat and props the helmet on his head, faceplate up.

NICK (CONT'D)
Don't breathe the fumes.

He spurs his horse across the drawbridge and the townspeople follow him.

They swarm through the shattered portcullis into the,

INT. CASTLE COURTYARD - DAY

Guards rush to meet them and the townspeople engage in battle.

Nick hacks and pierces a path into the heart of the castle with the broadsword and his crossbow.

He sees the crater where the lab used to be beneath the courtyard. Cracks travel all the way to the compromised gatehouse.

NICK
Galena?

He can make out figures below in the overturned cauldron, obstructed by rubble.

ANTIMONY
Nick, help! We're trapped.

NICK
Workin' on it.

Aleric and Borin rush up to him, halberds ready.

NICK (CONT'D)
Gotta settle these pikes first.

Nick dismounts, and holsters his crossbow.

NICK (CONT'D)
One weapon each.

BORIN
Don't do us any favors. It's not a
duel.

NICK
Honor's a funny thing. Selfish,
really. I give you every chance to
level the field so there can be no
argument of advantage. So in the
end, it's clear who's the better.

Nick assumes a ready stance.

They hesitate.

ALERIC
I'm, uh--
(indicates door)
I'm gonna go.

NICK
Good man.

Aleric exits.

NICK (CONT'D)
And you?

Borin growls, and runs at Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)
Thought so.

In a single fluid move, Nick disarms Borin and holds him
against the wall with his sword.

NICK (CONT'D)
Made my point?
(Borin nods)
I believe you know where the gate
is.

Nick lets him go, and Borin runs.

Across the courtyard Nick sees Warin, who pauses in his fight
to nod in approval.

Nick looks for a way down into the lab, determines the only one is through the main building.

NICK (CONT'D)

Looks like I gotta make a house
call.

Nick drops his faceplate, breathes through the gas mask.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Nick kicks the door in. The dogs and smoke-blinded guards that fill the hall rush him.

Nick parries, clobbers and shoots his way through the crowd. They have one-handed arming swords and bucklers. Nick, however, has a heavy English broadsword—a true knight's weapon. He cuts them down like so many stalks of wheat.

INT. LABORATORY - NIGHT

Nick fights down the remains of the circular stone staircase into the demolished dungeon, defeats guards and shoves through debris.

The last knot of Sheriff's men surround the Duke, Antimony, Realgar and Galena.

They're all a little singed and worse for wear, they climb from the cauldron, cough and choke on the thick air.

NICK

Realgar!

Warin and Cadmia come in, see the scene, and guard the door.

REALGAR

You're not with this rabble, are
you Nick?

NICK

Never abandon a noble cause.
(to Calomel)
Sins come home, the goat goes free.

CALOMEL

And back into the charnel house.
Guards!

Realgar's men rush to the attack, and Nick meets them with steel and arrow.

Nick's a terror with a real sword-- he twists, turns, uses the pommel, in every way a master of the western martial arts.

He clears the room of opponents until the only one left to cross swords with is Realgar.

Nick cuts to the cross-section. Their blades slide against each other down to the crossbar.

NICK

You're not going to defend the Duke, too?

REALGAR

Honor demands it.

NICK

As you like.

Nick and Realgar fall to swords, range throughout the wrecked lab, trampling glass.

Nick knocks Realgar against the table and a flask of acid spills on his arm.

REALGAR

(groans)

NICK

Sorry.

Realgar trips Nick and forces his head into the furnace.

REALGAR

Always said your temper would land you in trouble.

Nick kicks him off, stands, and advances.

NICK
Perhaps cooler heads will yet
prevail.

It's not fencing.

They pull, grapple, brawl and throw using every surface of
their weapons and limbs. Iron sparks fly off their blades.

It's the ultimate showdown between two consummate war
craftsmen.

NICK (CONT'D)
This really how you want it,
Sheriff? Fight to the finish?

REALGAR
Mano a mano.

NICK
Didn't know you spoke Spanish.

REALGAR
I travelled a bit.

The fight rages on, but both combatants tire.

They step back, breathe, lunge again.

In a swift and clever move, Nick outmaneuvers Realgar and
drops him to his knees. Nick's blade stops short of Realgar's
neck.

NICK
Do you yield?

Realgar looks around at his defeated men.

REALGAR
Suppose I should.

NICK
This petty Duke's not worth another
good man's death.

Realgar looks at Calomel who cowers in the corner with
Antimony and Galena.

REALGAR

Or yours, come to mention it.

He lowers his sword.

Nick gives him a hand up.

NICK

Thank you, old friend.

Antimony rushes to Nick's side.

ANTIMONY

My hero! I always knew this day would come. Now you can take me away from all this. We can be together--

CALOMEL

Antimony!

Nick throws her arm off.

NICK

One side, Lady Calomel. You're not the main attraction of every tournament.

He looks at Galena.

Antimony looks from one to the other.

ANTIMONY

Wait a minute, you're here for her? My maid the murderess?

NICK

You knew?

ANTIMONY

Of course I knew. I wasn't very well going to lose my help over the affair, no matter how sick what she did was.

NICK

Galena was a symptom, lady. You're the plague.

REALGAR
(indicates Galena)
So what happens to her?

Nick looks at the girl.

NICK (V.O.)
I'm the only one who can serve
justice for Marcas now. I'm King
Richard at the port of Acre. I can
leverage my authority to make an
example of those who defy me. Or...

Nick shrugs.

NICK
Searched the cellar. No body. Not a
scrap, just blood and clockwork.
Damndest thing.

REALGAR
Wasn't much left of Marcas either.
Is that justice?

NICK
Love's all she wanted, and she got
treachery for her trouble. We've
both killed men for less, no one
knows if we don't. The system sure
ain't just.

REALGAR
The town deserves to know the
truth.

Nick looks from Cadmia and Warin to the Duke and Antimony.

NICK
They already know it.

Realgar nods.

REALGAR
He was your friend. Only you can
guess what he wanted. You sure?

NICK

I got enough ghosts on me. Don't need hers, too. Besides, she makes a mean crossbow.

Galena lunges for the table, grabs an unbroken flask.

GALENA

Sorry, but I'm through letting men control my fate.

NICK

Galena, no--

She dashes it to the ground, and a cloud of purple smoke envelops her.

Nick and Realgar cough.

When it clears, she's gone.

NICK (CONT'D)

Damn. Guess I'll have to look after the crossbow myself.

EXT. CASTLE TOWER - DAY

Nick looks out over the town.

Smoke still rises, but the fires are out.

A cloaked figure takes the back way out of town, pushes a wheelbarrow full of braziers and chemical jars.

NICK (V.O.)

We always have a choice. Marcus made his, Galena made hers. This was mine. Once removed from this situation, I'm betting she'll be a better person. Maybe you can transmute lead into gold.

Nick catches a glimpse of her face.

It's Galena.

NICK (V.O.)

Few years later, mug by the name of Albertus Magnes preached the peaceful coexistence of science and religion. Claimed he discovered the philosopher's stone, and made a Brazen Head, among other things. Maybe he did. Maybe he had help.

Cadmia and Realgar join Nick on the ramparts.

NICK

Glad you reconsidered your loyalty, Sheriff.

REALGAR

My loyalty's to the lord of the castle. Right now looks like that's you.

NICK

Don't wanna be anybody's lord. Lords lead to inequity. We can serve the people of this town together.

REALGAR

Living like a king, no doubt.

Nick scrutinizes the castle.

NICK

Might take a tower for myself, seeing my old place got redecorated and I don't like the color. But mainly I was thinkin'--

(to Cadmia)

Problem with the Lady of the Lake is, it's a bit small, and a bit of a walk.

CADMIA

Are you serious?

NICK

Occasionally.

(to Realgar)

This place would make a good tavern, don't you think?

Cadmia throws her arms around Nick and kisses him.

Realgar shakes his head and smiles.

When Cadmia breaks the kiss, Nick offers her the sword.

NICK (CONT'D)

You should have this back.

Cadmia shakes her head and pushes it back to him.

Nick looks to Realgar.

REALGAR

Keep it. Good to have a knight in town.

They watch from the tower as the townspeople run the Duke and Antimony out the main gate, beat the old man with his own cane.

NICK (V.O.)

Years that came, the townsfolk's movement snowballed—eventually even rolled up the barons who forced King John to sign the Magna Carta. It included the right to trial by jury, unlike the kind I got. It's a start, but a piece of paper never gives you justice. That only comes from a blade in the right hands.

Nick puts his arm around Cadmia, and the two of them and Realgar smile in friendship.

NICK (V.O.)

As for me, sometimes being a knight isn't about following your feudal lord. Good thing, too, 'cause that's pretty much how I'm forged. It's about doing what you know is true and honorable, no matter the consequences. No one's going to hand you Justice, she has to be won;

(MORE)

NICK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
and Justice is always a judgement
call, which is why, in all the
statues, she carries a sword.
Justice is a knight.

FADE OUT

THE END