

HAIL

An animated tale

by

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TEASER

FADE IN

EXT. BLUE DULA VILLAGE - CHURCH - GARDEN - DAY

A clock TOLLS from a looming belltower, ECHOING over a jagged rock face. An elegant array of azure marigolds lie nestled below, barricaded by stone bricks: the BLUE DULA.

A TALONED HAND grips a single flower, letting its petals and spindly vine glimmer unnaturally in the sunlight...before crushing it to dust.

DISEMBODIED VOICE (V.O.)

Faith. Reason. Nature. All will
fall to the Blue Dula.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - EXPANSE - DAY - CONT.

A vast maze of moss-cloaked trees, stretching far into the distance. Sandy mountains mask the skyline, the pulse of unbroken WAVES drifting from beyond. Pure peace. Until-

A blinding blue FLASH. A deafening CRASH! Bluish smoke hurtles from the mountains, filling the sky. A vicious wind STORMS the forest. Faster! And faster! Until-

A lone figure CRASHES through the treetops. The wind dies. SILENCE. And-

The clouds break, shrouding the land in the bluish mist of-

RAINFALL: pouring all around, SMATTERING through a ceiling of crescent leaves to run down bark. The only sound around.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - CLEARING - DAY

Amidst the soaked green and pebbled mud, a body lies buried under broken branches. Still. Dead to the world. Until-

A GASP spills from its throat. A white-grey paw grips the forest floor, easing the figure to its shaking feet-

KINN (20s): a striped hyena with urgent flicking ears and heterochromic eyes, one green, one glimmering blue. His paw cups a deep shoulder wound, blood staining his ragged woven shirt. A green *haramaki*, dark cloth trousers and foot wraps save his modesty.

(CONTINUED)

Kinn peers up stunned at his surroundings. He CALLS OUT-

KINN
Hello?! Help! HELP!

-but only a RASP emerges. He paws at his throat confused-

An emerald ring glints on his finger. Confusion fades to worry. He scrapes around his resting place, pulling out a stitched satchel to rummage through its contents-

A water tankard. A metal compass. A book of sermons. A faith pendant, adorned with a BLUE DULA. And right at the bottom-

A silver feline locket. Kinn eases it open, revealing-

A photo of him, holding paws with a smiling male aardwolf: CUTA (20s). An identical emerald ring glints on Cuta's paw. Their names are etched in the locket, next to a faint heart.

Relief crosses Kinn's face. Only to fade to pure fear, peering urgently around. He CALLS OUT again and again, lips forming 'Cuta!'. Still no voice emerges.

Kinn sags, peering to the white sky barely breaking through. His pendant glints. A fierce determination breaks through pricking tears.

He RIPS off his shirt, bandaging his shoulder, BREATHING HARD through the pain. He slings on his satchel, winding the pendant around his free wrist.

Kissing his locket, the hyena folds his paws in silent prayer...and sets off through the rain, compass held close as he disappears among the trees.

A smatter of blue petals float from his resting place, glimmering as they go.

END OF TEASER

(CONTINUED)

FLASHBACK:

INT. BLUE DULA VILLAGE - CHURCH - NAVE - DAY - CONT.

A vast canvas covers a sheer stone wall, showcasing a grand map of-

ENOTOCH: one giant dust-green continent, stretching across blue seas, numerous tribal names inked over the bordering lands. A familiar yet foreign Earth.

Tiny azure Blue Dula petals dot a sparse trail over the continent: a path of promise.

A soft KNOCKING echoes nearby. Upon a wide wooden stage-

A SHADOWED FIGURE hammers a wooden shape. The mallet slips, SMACKING a splinter in his paw. He recoils, yanking it from the cut. And yet-

He simply drops a vial of blue liquid on his palm. The wound clots instantly. He flexes it satisfied...and hammers in the last nail.

He tips a jar of scuttering BLUE BEETLES in a mortar. Adds a sprig of lavender. And CRUSHES them to pulp. A paintbrush dips, streaking bluish blood over the shape. The figure climbs a ladder to hang it across the stage's backdrop-

A grand BLUE DULA, beetle blood glimmering. The figure retreats, finally revealing-

Kinn: golden-grey fur groomed, ears relaxed...but two green eyes, shining with pride, brushing sawdust from white shirt and blue cloth trousers. He drops leaves in the jar, peering at the spared bugs inside-

KINN

Please forgive me.

-before stowing it away, rising to peer out over-

Empty wooden pews, flanked by the stone walls, adorned with polished blue patterns, the light of dawn glinting through the roof above.

Kinn wraps an azure ceremonial robe around himself, marching up stone steps to a waiting rope. Takes a DEEP BREATH. And-

EXT. BLUE DULA VILLAGE - MOUNTAIN ROADS - DAY

The clock TOLLS from the looming belltower, ECHOING across-

A flurry of sandy paths, winding past dozens of sturdy blue wood-stone huts, humble gardens of luscious lentils, fruit and veg bright among flora-blossomed rock faces. A thin mist clouds the summit, barely masking the pink dawn sky.

INT. CHURCH - NAVE - DAY

Kinn strides to heavy oak doors. An EXCITED CHATTER rumbles behind them. Another DEEP BREATH. Before swinging open to-

A humble crowd of BLUE DULA FOLLOWERS: mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, resplendent in blue-white garb as they stroll in, shaking Kinn's paw as they go. Several light candlestands, casting the Church in a soft blue glow.

There are no children.

Kinn LOCKS the doors. Strides to the pulpit. A final DEEP BREATH. And his soft regal voice RINGS out-

KINN

Good dawn to the Dula! Good dawn to you, Blue Dula Village!

FOLLOWERS

Good dawn to the Dula! Good dawn to you, Pastor Kinn!

KINN

I pray my early call has not struck fear upon you. But a most vital sign has greeted us. A sign brought forth by the Blue Dula itself, to meet the eyes of our trusted Elder. A sign of the imminent Hail.

The followers GASP. A CHANT rings out-

FOLLOWERS

40 days to herd, 7 days to perish!
40 days to herd, 7 days to perish!

KINN

Yes, indeed! I trust this unsettles you. After all, our Elder's visions have grown stronger. Truth be told even I feel his creeping dread within me. But I shan't let it

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KINN (cont'd)

forsake what we promised: to uphold
the sanctity of the Dula. And it is
by that promise our Elder calls now
to our final mission: to save our
Village's own beckoning expanse -
Iodonius Forest.

Kinn pulls over a great wooden board, smoothly RIPPING away
a blue sheet to reveal-

A giant MODEL MAP of Iodonius: tiny huts dotted among
painted trees and inked rivers, mountains looming above.

The followers gaze in AWE. Only for DISSENTERS to emerge-

DISSENTER #1

But it's so vast! Surely we
can't reach it all?!

DISSENTER #2

And what of its Folk? They
abide by Nature, why would
they listen now?!

DISSENTER #3

What if we fail?! The Hail
will destroy us! Take our
voices! Silence us forever!

DISSENTER #4

*40 days to herd, 7 days to
perish! 40 days to herd, 7
days to perish!*

The pews CHATTER UNNERVED. Kinn raises a paw. SILENCE.

KINN

I acknowledge followers past have
expressed unease with the Forest's
Folk, shirking belief in forces
beyond us. But be they old or
young; sacred, solemn, or scarred;
born of Faith, Reason, or Nature -
all abiders are welcome here. And
it is our Elder's surest notion
that the sheer humility of their
Nature-abiding ways designates them
as deserving utmost preservation
from The Hail. And so I impart: our
mission begins tomorrow!

He paces from the pulpit, straight to the map of Enotoch.

KINN (CONT.)

And should our word reach as hoped,
as it has so far and wide across
our world of Enotoch, we may rest
safe knowing Iodonius has truly
kindled its purpose. I guarantee

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KINN (CONT.) (cont'd)
 now: as long as we have our Faith,
 our clan, our Elder, and the Dula,
 The Hail shall not surpass us!

The pastor holds a single Blue Dula petal high...and presses it over IODONIUS. One more realm for the path.

The Church erupts with CHEER. Kinn beams, peering past the pews at-

A WHITE-MASKED AVIAN FIGURE, nodding proud from the shadows.

PRESENT:

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - STONE SHELTER FRONT - DAY - CONT.

Kinn limps into a wide clearing. Fresh blood seeps in rivers down his shoulder, dried red matting his soaked bare chest. The *haramaki* around his stomach remains thankfully clean.

The rain's patter suddenly CHANGES. A lighter sound. Kinn's ears flick, peering through a mob of foliage at its source-

A polished shelter, pillars crumbled under fallen trees, reduced to ruins. A cavernous space rests dry beneath it.

Kinn grips his pendant tight, heavy limbs dragging through sagging undergrowth to crawl inside.

INT. STONE SHELTER - DAY

Kinn collapses, satchel spilling off him. He holds his locket, pained tears spilling from green-blue eyes-

KINN (V.O.)
 Please...forgive me...

The rain envelops the wood. Almost peaceful. His wheezing WEAKENS. His eyes drift shut. The rain SOFTENS...

INT. BLUE DULA CHURCH - NAVE - DAY - DREAM

Darkness envelops the pulpit. Cuta waits before it, white fur stark under green woven shirt and cloth trousers, staring into the black. Kinn reaches for him-

KINN (O.S.)
 Cuta...look at me...please lo-

(CONTINUED)

Taloned hands slip from pitch black, DRAGGING Cuta away. Kinn flails back, CLUNKING on the pulpit.

The talons return. One offers a Blue Dula. The other an emerald ring. A LOW VOICE echoes-

DISEMBODIED VOICE (V.O.)
What do you really want?

Two glaring golden eyes shoot open-

DISEMBODIED VOICE (V.O.) (CONT.)
Do you even know?!

INT. STONE SHELTER - DAY - PRESENT

BUCKLING. SHUFFLING. PAT PAT PAT.

Kinn stirs, eyes lidded in exhaustion. The rain still POURS, smattering stone above. His ear flicks intently as-

A scaly hand PATS a cloth over his fur. Something blue seeps on his shoulder. Dry white bandages are wound around it. Kinn cracks an eye, peering closer at-

A small squatting reptile, rummaging through a blue satchel for a tankard. A hand lifts his chin, dripping water over parched lips. Curious fingers brush the locket around his neck...and grip to open it-

Kinn jolts up, HISSING in pain. The startled figure SPILLS their tankard, snatching their satchel to scramble outside.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - STONE SHELTER FRONT - DAY

Kinn eases out, BREATHING HARD, peering agitated around the clearing. No sight of the figure. Until-

Something THUMPS a nearby tree. A tail FLICKERS and fades, struggling to match the moss.

Kinn creeps over...and grabs an arm, dragging the figure from hiding. Rain SPLASHES their form, finally revealing-

KHAMY (10): a chameleon, thin shirt and trousers torn and damp, a blue *haramaki* intact beneath. Cuts and bruises smatter his sea-blue scales, tail curled under webbish feet.

Kinn lets go, sending Khamy to SMACK the ground. Innocent azure eyes stare up as he cowers, thin lips forming-

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

I'm sorry! Please don't hurt me!

-but only a RASP emerges. Kinn softens, face filling with regret as he SIGNS-

KINN

You've lost your voice too?

Khamy calms, nodding surprised. The pair peer at each other: 'Can I trust you?'

The rain falls HARDER. The hyena offers a paw. The reptile dithers...and takes it, lifted to his feet to follow.

INT. STONE SHELTER - DAY

Kinn cringes at Khamy's spilled tankard. He offers his own, drinking and swallowing to confirm: 'It's safe.' The reptile accepts, as the pair SIGN together-

KHAMY

Thank you Sir. This is yours right?
I was going to throw it away but-

He hands over Kinn's blood-stained shirt-bandage. The hyena runs it fondly through his paws-

KINN

Good thing you didn't. It's my favourite. Why were you looking at my locket?

KHAMY

I've never seen one. I wasn't stealing it though! I never would!

KINN

Hmm. Very well. I forgive you younger...what is your name?

KHAMY

I'm not supposed to tell strangers.

KINN

That's fair. Well my name is Kinn. And I'm sorry for scaring you.

KHAMY

It's OK. Sorry I scared you too.
Here-

(CONTINUED)

Khamy fishes in his own satchel for a treat: rice crackers and beetles. Kinn's stomach GROWLS. He reluctantly takes a bug...and CRUNCHES it, grimacing. Khamy grins knowingly-

KHAMY (CONT.)
Acquired taste?

Kinn nods graciously. He peers at his bandaged shoulder-

KINN
Bless you. How did you do it?

Khamy shrugs, retrieving a bottle: IODINE SAP.

KHAMY
My mother's a healer. I just watch and copy her. I'm not supposed to take these though. Don't tell.

KINN
Patient's promise. But why? Like you said, I'm a stranger.

KHAMY
I'd want someone to help me if I was hurt. Especially today. Because of-

His hands pause mid-sign. Kinn's smile fades. His paws SIGN for him-

KINN
Because of The Hail.

Khamy's wide eyes shine in wonder-

KHAMY
I thought it was just a story. But I guess if you believe it too-?

KINN
With all my faith. No story could make a storm like that. Were you caught in it?

KHAMY
Uh-huh. There was a bang. And I got swept up into the trees. I climbed down once it stopped. But I don't recognise these parts. I'm not supposed to go too far. Can we really not speak for 7 days?

(CONTINUED)

KINN

Yes. Just like the sermons: '40 days to herd, 7 days to perish.' Never thought I'd witness it. Or be dragged from home in its wake.

KHAMY

Oh, you don't live here?

KINN

Someone I care for very much does. They were going to live with me in Blue Dula Village. But The Hail tore us apart. I simply must find them. Only I don't know the way?

Khamy beams, beckoning Kinn over to open a thick scrapbook. Inside: an intricate map of Iodonus, inked in black, blue, and green on parchment. Kinn gazes astonished-

KINN

You made this?!

KHAMY

My father's a tracker. I snuck his tomes without asking so I could draw the district: Iodonus here, the Border Roads there, and the Water Beyond out there. If we climb West to the mountains, that'll take us right to your Village. That is, if you want to come with me?

KINN

Won't it strife you? Taking a stranger?

KHAMY

If you smelled like danger. But you don't. Besides, I've already helped you. What's a little more?

Kinn dithers...and SIGNS-

KINN

You have a deal, little one.

Khamy shuts his book, tapping the name on the cover-

KHAMY

My name's Khamy. Nice to meet you Kinn.

The pair shake hands, sharing a hopeful smile.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - STONE SHELTER FRONT - DAY

Khamy slips out, head held high to bask in the rain. Kinn crawls out behind, satchel and locket held close, peering inquisitive as the chameleon SIGNS-

KHAMY

We've never had anything like this!

He hops off through puddles, sticky feet SPLASHING to a shrouded clearing ahead. Kinn takes a DEEP BREATH...and strides after him. White light breaks through above, glinting over him.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - DEEP WOODS - DAY

The rain falls steady. Bare paths streak a trail among the towering trees, remnants of rock broken beneath them.

Kinn and Khamy stroll side by side. The hyena shakes wet from his fur, feet faltering as he SIGNS-

KINN

May we rest a while?

The pair perch on a tall mound, shielded under a Giant Rhubarb plant to open Kinn's tankard. A thin river trickles out. The pair SIGN-

KINN (CONT.)

Oh dear. We could catch the rain?

KHAMY

I tried before. It tastes strange.
Best find another source.

Khamy unfurls his map, tapping a blue circle-

KHAMY (CONT.)

Ah-ha! The Grand Pool. A stone wall surrounds it to stop contamination. We can collect more water there.

Kinn taps a black-barred symbol intrigued-

KINN

What is this place?

KHAMY

The Low Holds. Where bad people go.
Until they want to be good again.

(CONTINUED)

Kinn stifles a GULP. A paw cups his stomach. Khamy raises an eyebrow. Kinn releases his paw, looking away.

Khamy shuts his map, peering at Kinn's Blue Dula pendant-

KHAMY (CONT.)

What is that anyway? Jewellery?

KINN

My pendant. It shows I abide by Faith. A gift from Elder Gambel.

KHAMY

Elder Gambel?

KHAMY

Of the Blue Dula Church. You must know of him?

Khamy tenses. An odd guilt in his eyes.

KHAMY

A little. You abide by a flower?

Kinn gives a RASPING CHUCKLE-

KINN

I abide by my community. As they abide by me. Like one big family.

KHAMY

Why do you need jewellery to show you love your family?

Kinn blinks flummoxed. Khamy points to his ring and locket-

KHAMY (CONT.)

What about those?

Kinn brushes the treasures around his paw and neck-

KINN

They show love to one person.

KHAMY

'The someone you care for very much'? Like a husband?

Kinn double-takes, eyes wide-

KINN

H-How did you-?

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

You have a Nature scent on you,
like my parents. But not a girl's
scent. I thought it was obvious.
Hey, are you blushing?

KINN

The rain falls heavier. Let us move
on, little one.

He clambers off to stride on, BLUSHING as he goes. Khamy puts out a hand confused. The rain falls just like before.

LATER

The pair trek the winding paths, rain PATTERNING peacefully, the ceiling of leaves breaking to spiral and flutter down.

An ivory-white dragonfly ZOOMS from a prickly shrub, darting across their path. Khamy clings to Kinn, BLUSHING sheepish. The hyena smiles fondly, letting him lead on as they SIGN-

KHAMY

I'm sorry. If I embarrassed you.

KINN

It's alright. I'm just not used to
talking about my love. Not like
Nature abiders.

KHAMY

What's his name? Your husband.

KINN

Cuta. But he's not exactly my
husband.

KHAMY

Will he be?

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. IODONIUS FOREST - HUT - BEDROOM - DAY

In the light of dawn, Cuta smiles warmly, emerald eyes shimmering. His white paw reaches for Kinn's own grey, lifting it to rest gently over his heart. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP-

PRESENT:

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - DEEP WOODS - DAY

Kinn's smile wavers-

KINN

I'd rather not talk about it,
little one.

Khamy wilts. Kinn softens-

KINN (CONT.)

So...have you lived in Iodonus all
your life?

Khamy blinks stunned. Like no-one's ever asked him before.

KHAMY

Yes Sir. Well, until today. I came
to your Village for the first time,
just before The Hail. Not that I
was supposed to.

KINN

If I may guess: your parents?

KHAMY

Uh-huh. They don't understand. They
think it's safer staying here.

KINN

Even with all the trees? Surely you
get lost in Nature?

KHAMY

Not if you know your way. You've
not been in these parts before?

KINN

Never this deep. My Elder doesn't
believe in straying too far. In
case we lose our way. It shames us.
I have seen most of Enotoch though.

KHAMY

Enotoch? You've seen the world?!

KINN

The Blue Dula sows its path across
land *and* water. Many followers from
many places, bound by one undying
idea. At least, that was our hope.
My Elder sought Iodonus most of
all. And now: behold our failure.

(CONTINUED)

Kinn raises a forlorn paw to the rain. The odd guilt returns to Khamy's face. Until-

He halts. SNIFFS the air. His face lights up, sprinting up an embankment to peer over an unseen edge.

KHAMY

Finally!

Kinn clambers up to join him. His eyes go wide. He can only stare awed at-

EXT. THE GRAND POOL - DAY

A vast shimmering clear POOL in the clearing, stone bricks ringing its edge. A great veranda of marble and thick roots shields it from above, rain flowing down in rivlets to bright blooming flowers below.

KINN

It's...it's beautiful.

KHAMY

And just what we need. Come on!

The chameleon dashes down the embankment, tankard in hand. Kinn follows, paws SQUELCHING in moss to survey the lush greenery. He shuts his eyes, letting the steady sound of RAINFALL wash over him.

SCRAPE! SCRAPE! SCRAPE! He double-takes, peering confused at a nearby alcove.

INT. ALCOVE - DAY

Kinn steps through the opening. And stops dead, staring stunned at-

ZEN (30s): an elk, crimson-white fur matted with dried blood above a torn jumpsuit, tugging hard at his thick muscled leg trapped beneath a towering oak, coarse antlers SCRAPING the bark for purchase. But no luck.

Zen sinks to the dirt, built bare chest PANTING in steaming breaths. Sad red eyes meet Kinn's, urging help.

The hyena rushes over, offering a kind smile: 'I can help.' He grips the root tight. Steadies his flexing arms. And-

Zen's sadness vanishes. A hand slips behind his back. And-

(CONTINUED)

SMACK! Kinn SPLASHES face-first in a glimmering rain-soaked puddle. The hyena GULPS water, SPLUTTERING dazed as-

The elk rises, trapped leg suddenly free: a simple trick. Kinn scrambles to get up. Too late as-

Zen leaps over, pinning him down. Vines SNAP from shrubbery, wrapping around Kinn's wrists. A carved makeshift blade meets his throat. Trapped.

Zen rifles through Kinn's satchel, tossing aside sermons to pocket the compass. He slips off his ring. He scoffs at his pendant...but grips the locket intrigued. He opens it. Blinks surprised at the photo. A flash of concern. Guilt. Then stoic resolve, as he RIPS and pockets the treasure.

Kinn sags, throat RASP-CRYING-

KINN

No, please! You can't take that!
Khamy! Khamy!

Zen double-takes. He touches his own throat, following Kinn's eyeline. His ears flick-

Sticky FOOTSTEPS tread nearby.

EXT. THE GRAND POOL - DAY

Khamy gazes at his rippling reflection. He grips a patch of flowering moss determined, scales FLICKERING, struggling to match the green. No luck.

He SIGHS, scooping water in his tankard to tread off. Until-

HEAVY FOOTSTEPS approach. A horned shadow looms. Khamy SNIFFS alarmed, head whipping for cover. Just as-

Zen stalks into the vicinity, rugged form meeting...no-one. He peers in the pool, suspicious eyes scanning for life.

Khamy peeks out over a rock. He eyes the alcove nearby...and dashes up behind a tree, scales FLICKERING against the bark.

Khamy checks again...and dashes to another. The alcove is within reach. He grins, checking once more. And-

The vicinity is empty.

Khamy steadies his feet. Grips the furry bark behind him. And...freezes. He GULPS, slowly turning to stare up at-

Zen's towering form, blood-red eyes piercing his soul.

(CONTINUED)

Khamy trips back shocked, SMACKING into moss to scramble away. Zen is too quick, hurling a looped vine around his tail, yanking him back bit by bit to hang in mid-air.

The elk smirks, reaching for the reptile's satchel. Until-

Khamy's fist SMACKS out, spraying wet mud. The elk RASPS blinded, dropping the vine to scrub his eyes clean.

Khamy slips his tail free, sprinting for the alcove.

INT. ALCOVE - DAY

Kinn rocks back and forth, flipping on his front. His feet SCRAPE in the leaves below, struggling to stand. Just as-

CLAP! Kinn freezes. Hazy lidded eyes travel up to meet-

Two shadowed HYENAS, glowing white eyes rife with judgement. The female CLAPS in prayer. The male grips a cane.

Kinn gazes terrified. His lips form a single silent word: 'No.'

CLAP! The male swings his cane high. CLAP! Kinn shuts his eyes. And-

SILENCE. White paws gently cup his face-

CUTA (V.O.)

It's OK. You're here now.

-and vanish. Kinn risks a peek. Only Khamy stoops before him, hurriedly untying his wrists, helping him to his feet to SIGN-

KHAMY

Are you OK Sir?!

KINN

Did you see them? Those people?
They stared so viciously!

KHAMY

What people? It's just me. Although
that elk-

Kinn hugs him tight, eyes watering. Khamy blinks stunned, gently returning it. Only to stop dismayed-

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY (CONT.)

Oh no, our water!

KINN

We can find more, little one! But
now we must flee before-

Zen CRASHES into the alcove, knocking them down. His blade hovers at Khamy's throat, emptying his satchel to snatch the map. The elk GRUNTS satisfied. His hoofish hand SIGNS-

ZEN

Don't fight. Don't follow.

- before marching away with his bounty.

Khamy stares after him, tearing up. Kinn's disbelief fades away. His eyes glow with danger.

EXT. THE GRAND POOL - DAY

Zen studies Khamy's map, tracing the path to a symbol: the Low Holds. Guilt returns to his eyes.

He folds the map in his waistband, chest flexing to CRACK his back. Fingers massage a deep scar in the muscle. Lost in thought.

RAPID FOOTSTEPS. Guilt turns to readiness. Zen whips out his blade. Just as-

Kinn leaps on his shoulders, lean limbs wrapping on for dear life. The elk HUFFS in effort, dropping the blade to spin around the pool.

He trips back. His calf SMACKS the edge. And-

INT. GRAND POOL - UNDERWATER - DAY

The men CRASH through the surface, sinking into the blue. Kinn snags Zen's waistband, gripping the map in his toes-

Zen drags the hyena up to CHOKE him. Kinn beats the elk's chest to no avail. He eyes Zen's snout...and DIGS his claws into flesh. Zen GRUNTS alarmed, grip tightening to win out. Until-

He lets go, swimming up for air. Kinn's treasures float down from his pockets-

Kinn flails, catching the compass and ring. His locket slips past. He dives down after it. Closer. And closer. Until-

(CONTINUED)

His paw grips the locket safe. Kinn smiles relieved, turning for the surface-

His foot snags a reed, trapping him in place. He kicks out desperately. Bubbles break through his lips. One last TUG-

The reed SNAPS. Kinn floats sluggish. The surface seems miles away now. His eyes flicker shut. Just as-

A scaly blue form CRASHES through above...

EXT. THE GRAND POOL - DAY

Khamy BREAKS the surface, Kinn's scruff gripped tight as he swims to the edge, HEAVING himself out to drag the hyena onto the moss.

Kinn SPLUTTERS awake, paw rising to his PANTING chest, gazing stunned at the ring and locket wound around his fingers. Just above: a dripping wet Khamy gazes relieved. They SIGN-

KHAMY

Kinn! How do you feel?

KINN

Like I should be saving your life more. I'll run out of blessings at this rate.

KHAMY

That's not funny! You could've drowned! And all for treasure!

KINN

Alright alright! I'm sorry. I shame myself. It just means too much to lose. At least your map is safe?

Khamy fidgets ashamed. He unrolls his map-

Ink runs in rivers down the parchment. An illegible mural.

KHAMY

I'm sorry Sir. I got it back from the elk, but it was already soaked.

KINN

The elk! Where is he?!

Khamy points to Zen nearby, HEAVING on his knees, eyes wide and frightened at his bloodied snout and fists.

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

I think he's in shock.

He delves for his sap, tiptoeing to smear the blue liquid over Zen's snout. The elk WINCES back to reality, giving him a dirty look. Until-

The scratches clot. Zen feels his face surprised. They SIGN-

KHAMY (CONT.)

Are you OK? Do you feel sick?

ZEN

Leave off! Not good with blood, that's all.

Kinn lurches up, glaring down to SIGN-

KINN

Well perhaps the next time you need help, you'll ask for it. Not pry it from the hands of the innocent.

ZEN

Oh sure. You're real innocent.

KINN

I beg your pardon?! Have you no shame?! Where's your faith in-?!

ZEN

Save it Stripes! Don't forget I've got my-

Zen stops, patting his waistband dumbstruck. Just as Khamy holds up his blade.

ZEN (CONT.)

Hey! Give it back!

Kinn GULPS. A paw cups his stomach. Khamy and Zen raise an eyebrow. Kinn releases his paw, taking the blade disgusted-

KINN

To think you would even use this. It's vile.

ZEN

Can you blame me? It's survival. Don't know who you'll find in here.

Khamy peers closer at Zen's torn jumpsuit. A black-barred symbol is stitched in the leg. He SIGNS surprised-

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

Wait. I know that symbol. That's a
Low Holds uniform!

Panic flashes in Zen's eyes-

KHAMY (CONT.)

You're a Guard, aren't you?! Is
that why you tried to take my map?
You're lost too?

The elk freezes.

ZEN

Yeah. Lost.

KINN

A Guard? Why not just tell us that?

ZEN

So you don't jump and kill me.

KINN

Kill you?! He's a child and I'm a
pastor! It doesn't make sense!

KHAMY

Actually Sir, it does. Some Folk
fear the Guards. Especially if
they've been to the Low Holds.
Maybe he was attacked before today?

Zen flinches, rubbing his back scar-

ZEN

Exactly. Resentment does funny
things to people.

KINN

Well that doesn't explain why you
took my ring. Or my locket!

ZEN

For bargaining! Like I said: it's
survival.

KHAMY

Well if you're lost, maybe we could
show you the way out? We're heading
for the mountains, to find the Blue
Dula Village.

(CONTINUED)

ZEN

Ha! Like I'd go there. Nothing but preachers and no-hopers.

KHAMY

But what about The Hail?

ZEN

That myth? Please.

KHAMY

Oh. I see. You're a Reason abider.

Zen double-takes-

ZEN

How did you-?

KHAMY

Your scent isn't sweet like Nature, but not refined like Faith. It's strong and smart and travelled, like old tomes. You must read a lot. You're also very impatient and afraid of change.

ZEN

Well aren't you perceptive. Now get lost, runt! Got my own path.

Khamy flinches at 'runt'. Kinn bares his fangs-

KINN

A path so clear you needed to steal a map to follow it? A map you've now RUINED?

Zen glares: 'smart-ass'.

KHAMY

Please Sir, don't blame him. I should have drawn it with lead, not ink. Then I could still guide you.

KINN

But surely you still know the way? You do live here after all.

KHAMY

But I haven't seen *all* of here. I only know a few landmarks. If I'd seen more, I would know where we're going. I'm so stupid!

(CONTINUED)

Khamy bows his head, tears spilling. Kinn softens, kneeling down-

KINN

Hey. It's not your fault. I have every faith we'll find our way out. Here, take this. Now: what can you remember?

Kinn hands Khamy his compass. The reptile wipes his eyes, peering up through the rain at the white sky.

KHAMY

I can't tell where the Sun is. But it sets behind the mountains in the West. So if North is this way...we have to go that way!

He points back to the alcove.

KINN

See? Nature shines on you today, little Khamy. You can lead the way!

Kinn gathers up their satchels. Khamy dithers...and rests some crackers and beetles in Zen's hand.

KHAMY

In case you get hungry Sir.

He treads off after Kinn. Zen gazes conflicted...and rises, STAMPING his foot for attention to SIGN-

ZEN

How far is the way out?

KHAMY

A few days travel. But shorter with shortcuts!

ZEN

Fine. But I ain't sticking close. Not in the mood for making friends.

KHAMY

Can he come Kinn?

KINN

I don't think that's wise. Not after what he's just done to us.

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

Please?! He just needs help. Like you did. And pastors are meant to forgive, right?

Kinn dithers. The wistful reptile holds his breath.

KINN

Do you have any words for the boy?

Zen rubs his neck sheepish. And-

ZEN

I'm sorry I called you 'runt'. And tried to rob you both. It was a crappy thing to do.

KINN

Very well: you may join us. But I expect good morals. That means no more threats. So I'm keeping your blade for now. I'll return it once we're out. Truce?

Kinn tucks Zen's blade away, holding out a paw. The elk SIGHS...and shakes it. Khamy joins in, shaking vigorously-

KHAMY

Great! Now come on. It'll be dark soon I'm sure!

KINN

Hang on! Perhaps we'll allow our Guard to go first?

ZEN

Hmm. Smarter than you look Stripes.

KHAMY

Oh, my name's Khamy by the way! And this is Kinn! What's yours?

Zen CRUNCHES his crackers and bugs, trudging for the alcove. Khamy shrugs, taking a cautious Kinn's forearm to lead them from the shimmering pool.

Moments too late to see the blue petals floating down behind them, glimmering as they go, to settle on the forest floor.

The rain FALLS HARDER, washing them away downstream.

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - DEEP WOODS - DAY

MONTAGE:

- The rain falls steady. The trio tread the spiralling paths, winding past numerous trees, shrubs, and giant flowering plants.
- The trio clamber over crumbled stone and marble shelters.
- Khamy gazes forlorn at woven clothes and keepsakes lying lost. Kinn holds him close as they pass. Zen scavenges among them, pocketing fallen fruits and grains as he goes.
- END MONTAGE.

INT. IODONIUS FOREST - SHORT CLIFF - DAY - CONT.

The rain falls HARDER. Daylight fades fast. The trio trudge on, tired limbs faltering in the wet. Until-

Zen halts, a strong arm blocking their path. Kinn and Khamy follow his gaze, staring up awed at-

A great wooden shelter set in the cliff, shielded by vines.

KHAMY

A sleep shelter! Iodonius Folk take turns cleaning and stocking them for travellers. It looks empty?

INT. IODONIUS FOREST - SLEEP SHELTER - DAY

A calm space of clean planked wood. Thick cotton blankets and stitched pillows line the floor. Drywood sits piled by a fireplace. A wide bare window lights the space.

The window pushes up, spilling raindrops. Khamy clambers in, sticky limbs SLAPPING the wall to BOUNCE on the blankets.

Kinn follows, HISSING with effort on the ledge. Just as-

Zen's hand shoves him down to CRASH in a heap. The hyena SIGNS sarcastically-

KINN

Bless you.

The elk smirks, easily hauling himself inside, shutting the window after them.

INT. SLEEP SHELTER - NIGHT

Rainfall HAMMERS softly above. Kinn and Khamy fold their damp clothes, placing them by the now-SIZZLING fireplace. Zen remains in his open jumpsuit. They SIGN-

KINN

Don't you want to dry yours?

ZEN

No way I'm getting naked in here.

KHAMY

But we won't be. We're in our coverings?

He motions to his and Kinn's undergarments: dark cotton *subligaculum*, like breechcloth shorts.

KHAMY (CONT.)

Besides, you'll get cold if you-

ZEN

I said no!

The elk hoists himself high to the ledge, shaking his head.

KINN

I do wish he weren't so blunt.

KHAMY

It's OK. Reason abiders tend to be more closed-off. Or so I've heard.

Khamy crawls under the blankets, SIGHING within the warmth. His scales FLICKER to match the cloth. Still no luck.

KINN

Does that always happen?

KHAMY

Yeah. I've never been good at changing. But I'm trying to get better. For my parents.

A familiar fear flashes in Kinn's eyes. The reptile fidgets, SIGNING curious-

KHAMY (CONT.)

How does The Hail take our voices?

(CONTINUED)

KINN

I'm not sure. My Elder told us
those who lay beneath it would
'lose their voices to Nature'.

Zen HUFFS, rolling his eyes. Kinn ignores him-

KINN (CONT.)

Perhaps there's something up there,
taking our voices from us?

KHAMY

You mean in the sky?

KINN

I was thinking more *above* the sky.
A life of some kind. Or a spirit.

KHAMY

My parents said I shouldn't believe
in spirits.

Kinn's ears droop-

KINN

Then what do you believe is up
there?

KHAMY

The stars. And maybe more worlds
like Enotoch. With people like us.

KINN

A nice thought. Strange. But nice.

KHAMY

So...you don't think The Hail came
from below?

KINN

I can't see how. But come now, time
to rest. We've a long way to go.

KHAMY

You think we can make it, Sir?
Before the 7th day?

KINN

With all my faith, little one.

Khamy manages a smile, huddling down, eyes slowly shutting.

Kinn glances up at Zen, perched at the window, strong back
HEAVING quietly. He taps his foot, SIGNING-

(CONTINUED)

KINN (CONT.)

I'm sorry for hurting you, elk. I
shame myself. Will you bed with us?

Zen peers at the warm glow below. A flash of guilt. And-

ZEN

I'm good. And it's Zen. Not 'elk'.

He turns away. Kinn settles down beside Khamy, resting Zen's blade under his pillow. He gazes sadly at the elk's scarred back, running a paw over his stomach fur, where-

His own deep pink scar lies faded in the skin.

He brushes the fur down, folding his paws in prayer, gazing torn between his pendant and silver locket. He KISSES both-

KINN

Goodnight my love. I pray for you.

A scaly blue hand taps him. Kinn turns hazily to Khamy-

KHAMY

You said your Elder Gambel sought
Iodonius most of all. Why?

KINN

Because it's where he appeared.

KHAMY

He was born here?

KINN

In a way. He was born of the Dula's power itself. A great mystic, with beautiful golden eyes, destined to heal all of Enotoch. His visions of The Hail led us here: our final call. To kindle your hope and save you all. Like he saved me.

Kinn's bloodshot eyes drift shut. Fast asleep.

Khamy waits. Checks Zen isn't looking. And slips out his scrapbook, FLICKING to the final page-

A sketch of a familiar white-masked cuckoo, clad in azure, golden eyes stark, a bluish vial snug in his talons. A name inked below: ELDER GAMBEL.

Khamy slips an identical vial from his waistband: a spindly azure vine, glimmering in bluish liquid. He retrieves his iodine sap, holding them side-by-side...identical again.

(CONTINUED)

Khamy gazes guiltily at Kinn, SIGNING to himself-

KHAMY

Did you save him, Elder?

EXT. IODONIUS FOREST - EXPANSE - NIGHT

Beyond the shelter, the rain casts a blanket over the land, trees stretching for miles to the mountains far away.

EXT. BLUE DULA VILLAGE - CHURCH - GARDEN - NIGHT - CONT.

The belltower clock TOLLS, ECHOING over the jagged rock face. Among the Blue Dulas, a robed cuckoo stands stoic-

Elder Gambel, glistening golden eyes peering from white mask over the drenched Forest. He grips a single flower, letting its petals and spindly vine glimmer unnaturally...before crushing it to dust.

INT. CHURCH - NAVE - NIGHT

Gambel strides from a shadowed alcove, surveying proud over-

A vast crowd of anxious and exhausted Iodonus Folk, packed along pews: young, old, families, and KEENING babies. Blue Dula followers drift among them, offering woven blankets, candied fruits...and a shimmering blue tonic.

Across the pulpit: an avian BLUE DULA CHORUS, harmonies ringing over the pews.

And perched at the Church doors: a wilted white aardwolf-

Cuta. Cautious emerald eyes holding the Elder's golden gaze. Searching. Unblinking. All the while, the chorus SING out-

BLUE DULA CHORUS

*#40 days to herd, 7 days to perish.
Hold true past The Hail's burd-en,
kindle all we cherish#*

END OF PILOT