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Onslaught: Book Three of the Rebellion Trilogy

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BOOK THREE OF THE REBELLION TRILOGY

ONSLAUGHT

ETHAN PROUD & LINCOLN PROUD



Onslaught

Book Three of the Rebellion Trilogy

**Ethan Proud
&
Lincoln Proud**

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Second Edition

Dedication

For our parents, Larry and Jenifer, our brother, Dalton, and for all our family, friends, and fans who have supported us along the way.

Chapter 1

Keldron clicked an immaculate nail on the edge of his throne as he waited for the guards to bring in their catch. He had waited two years and offered countless rewards for the capture or killing of these three. Yet, when the doors to the throne room were opened, only two prisoners were escorted in. They were covered in bruises and blood oozed from cuts on their faces and their clothes were torn, but they were recognizable. Rylin and Breyhl.

“Alexa?” The question slithered from Keldron’s mouth and the last syllable cracked like a whip. The guards’ heads dropped in unison. The captain managed to mutter the answer audibly, but only barely.

“She managed to escape us.” The captain’s voice trembled. Even without his pets, Keldron was feared. The king clucked his tongue impatiently.

“Where did she *manage* to escape you?” The king demanded coldly. His tone mocked the guards.

“The shores of Icekeep. There was something in the water that at-”

“Enough. I told you to deliver the three of them to me. Take these two to the dungeons, and then return to Icekeep and bring me Alexa. It is her that I most desire.” Keldron’s wrath was plastered across his face. His grey green eyes flared dangerously. The guards obeyed without hesitation. There wasn’t a soul in the kingdom that felt comfortable in the king’s presence.

Chapter 2

Not far to the north an army marched on Durthia. The last of winter's snow crunched under the horses' hooves and the boots of the soldiers. The men were tall and of slender build, but strong at the same time. Their slanted almond eyes peered from behind their helmets, only the sallow skin of their necks and wrists were exposed to daylight. At the head of the column a flag fluttered in the strong western wind, a red starling emblazoned on the quivering grey material.

Underneath the flag rode a woman, Vikinu, flanked by four men. She had long dark hair pulled back in an extravagant braid adorned with bronze wire. Her stomach showed the telltale signs of an early pregnancy. Her skin was olive toned and her eyes slanted at the same angle that the men's did. Her pearlescent teeth reflected the same blinding white as the snow and her canines appeared uncannily sharp. She looked wolfish.

To her right rode a man on a bay stallion. His skin was darker than the rest of the armies and his stature was incredible compared to his lithe companions. The stubble of beard darkened his jawline and he rested the butt of a pale spear on his foot as he rode. Next to him rode an old man, his white beard hung down to his chest. Though he was old, he wasn't weak and his body had been hardened by war.

On the other side of the warrior queen rode her two lieutenants. They were of her native country and had been pledged her guardians since her birth. With them, she had been cutting a swath through the north, striking westward from their home country of Likurni. On her conquest she stumbled across the small town that Sorrongoth and Ulthen had come to call their home and enticed them with the promise of adventure. Originally she had no intention of taking them along, they both looked like warriors but she had plenty of them and two more wouldn't bolster her ranks. Yet, when they revealed that they had travelled from their home country of Durthia, her interest had been piqued. Vikinu agreed to take them along. Sorrongoth's taste for battle and Ulthen's tried and true tactics proved them a worthwhile venture.

It wasn't long before Sorrongoth's exotic looks had attracted her and despite her lieutenants warnings she followed her desires and found herself pregnant with a foreigner's child. Regularly this would have been taboo in Likurni, but she was the warrior queen on a quest for expansion and she would have what she wanted.

In his absence from Durthia, Sorrongoth had not been idle.

Two more days of marching brought them to the northernmost border of Durthia. Before them the plains faded away from snow into the first grass of spring and expanses of sagebrush. Just south of them, the abandoned village of Benaer was waiting, the perfect camp for an army on the move. Sorrongoth and one of Vikinu's lieutenants, Hirno, rode ahead to make sure that the village was indeed empty. Corefelk's powerful hooves churned up earth as the two galloped towards the once rebel-aligned town. Hirno's horse was smaller than Sorrongoth's warhorse and its hoof beats weren't as loud but the animal's gait was much smoother. Its neck was proportionately longer as well as its legs, the animal was much faster than Corefelk and was raised in the rocky hills of Likurni. The horse had a thick coat and was the result of cross breeding horses imported from the south and those native to Likurni.

The two slowed as they reached the town. The horses hooves echoed as they clacked along the cobblestone road that ran through the town. The bones of half transformed men and women could be seen where animals hadn't dragged the corpses off. Sorrongoth nor Hirno knew of The Witch's experiment and assumed that the bones belonged to monstrous creatures.

"This place is cursed." Hirno spat, speaking his native tongue. Sorrongoth stared at the Shadow Cappe Mountains mere miles away from them. He felt a shudder run down his spine. He had never been so close to the dreaded and haunted range.

"It's the swamp." He all but whispered.

"What? Explain yourself." Hirno demanded. Sorrongoth sighed. Neither of Vikinu's lieutenants trusted him and were constantly nagging him for the details of the things he spoke of.

“A swamp lies in those mountains, terrible things dwell there.” Sorrongoth said and still his companion wasn’t pleased with his answer.

“What kind of terrible things?”

“I’ve never been there. I don’t know.” Sorrongoth said with a sideways glance.

“Let us go back. I don’t like this place. We should march through the night.” Hirno whirled his horse around and spat on the ground before galloping off. Sorrongoth rode a little further into the town, he was parched and it was common in Durthian villages for a well to be in the center of town. Sure enough he found it. He dismounted and strode towards it, the hairs on his arms and neck stood on end. He looked down and saw the bucket bobbing in the water some thirty feet down. Frost licked the edges of the aquifer. He began to pull the bucket up with the pulley system and found the bucket felt unusually heavy. When it was within reach he stooped over and grabbed it, but what he found coiled in the bottom of the pail sent him stumbling back. The bloated body of a small child was rotting in the bottom. Flesh peeled off its body and floated on the surface of the pail. Its face was contorted horribly; it nearly resembled a dog with needle sharp fangs protruding from its mouth. The pail fell to the ground, splashing its unearthly contents on the street. Sorrongoth backpedaled away from the accursed water, he lost balance and the thing slid against his foot. Its rotting body squished audibly and Sorrongoth shuddered. The smell of death and stagnation was overwhelming. He retched, adding to the perversion of the pool at his feet. As he lifted his gaze he began to see other bodies contorted savagely in rigor mortis in the shadows of the houses and buildings that surrounded the well. Ghoulish hands clawed at the air as the now desiccated corpses had taken their last breaths. The wind picked up and the smell of fetid flesh hit Sorrongoth flat in the face. There was something else in that breeze though, it carried a power to it that Sorrongoth had never felt. Now he believed Hirno, this place was cursed. He clambered back to the saddle and tore out of Benaer, urging Corefelk to such a pace that he caught Hirno before he had reached the rest of the army.

By the time they had reached the army, both horses were dripping foamy drool as they gnawed on the bit. Sorrongoth tried to rub the goose bumps from his arms. Vikinu laughed when she saw them.

“Do the villager’s frighten you so? You look like you have seen a ghost.” She flashed a wolfish smile at Sorrongoth who didn’t answer. Instead Hirno told her what he thought of the village.

“It is cursed. We cannot stay there.” He said forcefully.

“Is this true?” The warrior queen asked Sorrongoth. She didn’t share the same superstitions as her kinsman. Sorrongoth bit his lip and began with “I wouldn’t say cursed...”

She raised an eyebrow for him to continue and he acquiesced. “The village is deserted, but I don’t have a good feeling about that place.”

“Tell her about this swamp.” Hirno urged him and Sorrongoth obeyed. Vikinu’s smile only broadened.

“We will camp in Benaer tonight. Ghosts and monsters do not exist.” She dismissed the folk stories of the swamp with a wave of her hand.

“No!” Sorrongoth blurted out and dropped his eyes when his queen turned an angry glance his way. “I mean, I will show you what I found. But we cannot stay there.”

“Sorrongoth, the army needs to rest and there will be water in the town. It makes sense to stay there.” Ulthen interjected.

“There was a dead thing in the well. It looked almost...human. We can’t drink that water.” He argued. Vikinu threw her head back and sighed.

“Fine, fine. We will avoid this scary little village as my bravest men tremble at the thought of it. But, Zhilgi!” She called and a man stepped out of the ranks. His eyes were paler than the rest of the soldiers and the whites were yellow with jaundice. His lips were cracked and they frequently bled. He was one of the queen’s most dangerous soldiers.

“Yes my queen.” He rasped. He smoked tobacco frequently and the effect on his lungs and throat were obvious.

“Take two of your scouts with you and tell me if there is any truth to this swamp.” She commanded and he bowed before shouting two

names. Two young men with a striking resemblance to him separated from the army and stood behind him. Allegedly all of his scouts were his own offspring.

He nodded his head at Vikinu before slipping off in the direction of the Shadow Capps.

“But return to me in one piece. You are one of my favorites.” Vikinu called after him and he turned to bow again, this time lower.

“How will he know where to find you? He has never been to Durthia and doesn’t know the land?” Ulthen asked and Hirno chuckled along with the other lieutenant, Nukko.

“It is Zhilgi. He has his ways.” Was Vikinu’s cryptic answer.

Chapter 3

Bretyhl's chains clattered as he paced back and forth down the cell. He hadn't stopped since his imprisonment had begun. Rylin on the other hand sat with his back pressed against the bars of the door as he stared at the other chained bodies in the room. There were three of them, emaciated figures, bones jutting out from under papery skin. It was impossible to tell if they were alive or if their shallow breathes were just figments of the imagination.

Just on the other side of the door, the bailiff watched them. He was a grimy man; his fingers were constantly covered in soot and grease as he fondled the key ring at his belt. The light jingling gave hope to the prisoners, even though escape would be impossible. The bailiff's long cowl hid his face, but the very bottom of his jaw was exposed, it was just as filthy as the rest of him. He was an incredibly skinny man and it appeared that he was as starved as the prisoners; his lanky form rarely left his post.

Footsteps echoed down the hallway as someone approached. The bailiff stiffened as Keldron appeared, ghosting between torchlight and darkness. The bailiff stood and bowed, but the king paid the man little attention. Instead he turned to the prisoners. His cold eyes settled on Rylin first.

"Where is she?" He sneered at them. "She's not going to save you."

"We didn't figure she would." Rylin answered tiredly, without looking at the king.

"I've sent men to Icekeep. They will find her before long and the three of you will have a little reunion. I might spare one of you if you speed up the hunt, even by a marginal amount." Keldron's silky voice slunk past the bars and settled between the prisoner's ears.

"We don't know where she is." Rylin said as indifferent as before.

Bretyhl piped up, "Don't you want to know what lurks in the waters of Icekeep?"

“I’ve been to Icekeep.” Keldron started arrogantly. “There is nothing there other than the ruins of an old castle. Grish and Envore would have told me if it had been otherwise.”

“But they aren’t here right now, are they?” Bretyhl smirked. “Because we killed them.”

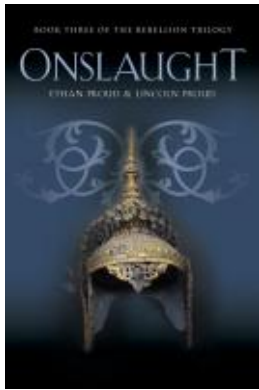
The king’s face contorted with fury before he regained composure. “Silence.” It was almost a whisper. “Or I’ll feed you to the cracks, right now.”

Bretyhl looked at the floor and didn’t mutter another sound until the king had departed. Rylin kicked him in the shin and the young man yelped.

“You idiot! Can’t you learn to keep your mouth shut?!” Rylin hissed. When Bretyhl offered no explanation, the bailiff snickered. After that the only sound was Bretyhl’s fetters clanking as he wandered aimlessly between the walls of the cell.

Rylin felt the bailiff’s eye boring into his back, but he refused to turn to match the stare. He had no doubt that he and Bretyhl would face some grisly execution, sooner or later. Their escape was improbable, even if Alexa did return in some daring escapade. In matters of life and death, however, he had little faith in Alexa’s loyalties. She hadn’t survived this long by looking out for others. Rylin blew out a low sigh and let his head touch the iron bars behind him. He had resigned himself to his fate.

Bretyhl on the other hand, had not. He paced like the metaphorical caged animal he was, never in one spot for a moment. He wracked his mind for a way out, no matter how ludicrous it was. The longer he thought, the more apparent it became that there was no way out. He stopped moving when this dawned on him and sat down in capitulation, much to Rylin’s relief. If his last moments were to be filled with the sound of Bretyhl’s pacing and the clamor of the shackles he would have found a way to end his life himself.



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