

HAIL

An animated tale

by

Nate Rymer

TEASER

FADE IN

EXT. BLUE ROSE VILLAGE - CHURCH - GARDEN - DAY

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

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 Rose.

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, ECHOING through the rain. A white-tan 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 emerald, 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 to the distance-

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.

Kinn 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 ROSE. 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, as he peers urgently around. He CALLS OUT again and again, lips desperately forming 'Cuta!'...still no voice emerges.

Kinn peers up to the white sky barely breaking through. His faith pendant glints. A fierce determination breaks through pricking tears.

Kinn 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 ROSE 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 and winding across blue seas, numerous tribal names inked over the bordering lands. A familiar yet foreign Earth.

Tiny azure Blue Rose 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 wields a mallet, HAMMERING curved wood into a shape. The mallet slips, SMACKING a splinter in his paw. He recoils, yanking it from the bloodied cut. And yet-

He simply nods, pulling out a vial to drop something on his palm...the wound clots instantly. He wraps a bandage around it, flexes it satisfied...and HAMMERS in the last nail.

A jar of scuttering BLUE BEETLES waits nearby. A paw tips some in a bowl. Adds a sprig of lavender. And-

A pestle CRUSHES them to pulp. A paintbrush dips in the bluish blood, streaking over the shape. The figure climbs a makeshift ladder to hang it across the stage's backdrop-

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

Kinn: golden-grey fur groomed, ears relaxed...but TWO emerald 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. He rises, peering 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 ROSE VILLAGE - MOUNTAIN ROADS - DAY

The clock TOLLS from the looming belltower, ECHOING across-

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

INT. CHURCH - NAVE - DAY

Kinn strides down the aisle to heavy oak doors. An EXCITED CHATTER rumbles behind them. Another DEEP BREATH...and he swings them open to-

A waiting crowd of BLUE ROSE FOLLOWERS: mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, resplendent in blue-white garb as they pace in to the pews, 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. He strides up to the pulpit, paws trembling. Gazes out at the humble crowd. A final DEEP BREATH. And his soft regal accent RINGS out-

KINN

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

FOLLOWERS

Good dawn to the Rose! 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 Rose 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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KINN (cont'd)
 have grown stronger. Truth be told,
 as of late, even I have felt his
 creeping dread within me. But I
 will not let it forsake what we
 promised to uphold: the sanctity of
 the Blue Rose. And it is by that
 promise that our Elder calls now to
 our long-awaited final mission: to
 save our Village's own beckoning
 expanse - Iodonus Forest.

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

A giant MODEL MAP of Iodonus: tiny model huts dotted among
 delicate painted trees and inked rivers, mountains looming
 in the distance.

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 the idea of forces
 above 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 beauty of their land, and
 humility of their Nature-abiding
 ways, designates them as souls
 requiring utmost preservation from
 The Hail. And so I impart: our
 mission begins tomorrow!

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

(CONTINUED)

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 Iodonus has truly
kindled its purpose. I guarantee
now: as long as we have our Faith,
our community, our Elder, and the
Rose, we will not let The Hail
surpass us!

The pastor holds a single Blue Rose petal high...and presses
it on the map 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 stone shelter, pillars cracked and crumbled under
fallen trees, reduced to ruins. A flat cavernous space rests
dry beneath it.

Kinn grips his pendant tight, as heavy limbs drag him
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 as he
peers out at the rain enveloping the wood. Almost peaceful.

KINN (V.O.)

Please...forgive me...

His wheezing WEAKENS. His eyes drift shut. The rain
SOFTENS...

INT. BLUE ROSE CHURCH - NAVE - DAY - DREAM

Darkness envelops the raised pulpit. Cuta waits before it, white fur stark under green woven shirt and cloth trousers, staring into the black.

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

Kinn's paw reaches for him. Just as-

Taloned hands slip from pitch black, DRAGGING Cuta away. Kinn YELPS, flailing to sag and CLUNK on the pulpit.

The talons return, stretching out to him. One offers a Blue Rose. 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, bloodshot eyes lidded in exhaustion. The rain still POURS outside, smattering the stone above his head.

PAT PAT PAT. His ears flick, listening intently as-

A scaly hand PATS a cloth over his fur. Something blue SEEPS on his shoulder. Dry white bandages are wound around it.

Sticky footsteps PATTERN across the shelter floor. Kinn opens his eyes fully, peering closer at-

A small squatting reptile, rummaging through a blue satchel. They pull out a tankard, turning back-

Kinn shuts his eyes tight. FOOTSTEPS. 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 figure startles, SPILLING their tankard, before snatching their satchel to scramble out of sight.

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 against a nearby tree. A tail FLICKERS and FADES, struggling to match its mossy colour.

Kinn creeps over, pretending to peer around it...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-

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. Kinn offers an apologetic paw. Khamy dithers...and takes it, lifted to his feet to follow.

INT. STONE SHELTER - DAY

Kinn cringes at Khamy's spilled tankard, offering his own. The reptile hesitates. The hyena drinks first, swallowing to confirm: 'It's not poisoned.'

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 holds out Kinn's blood-stained shirt-bandage. The hyena takes the garment, running it fondly through his paws-

(CONTINUED)

KINN

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

KHAMY

I've never seen one before. It's pretty. I wasn't stealing it though! I never would Sir!

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. Just so you know. And I'm sorry I grabbed you like that.

KHAMY

It's OK. I'm sorry I scared you. Here-

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 shares a knowing grin-

KHAMY

Acquired taste?

Kinn nods. He peers at his bandaged shoulder, a grateful smile emerging-

KINN

Bless you. How did you do it?

Khamy shrugs, retrieving a bottle: IODINE SAP.

KHAMY

My mother is 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.

(CONTINUED)

KHAMY

I'd want someone to help me if I was hurt. Especially in a big place like this. And especially today. Because of-

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

KINN

Because of The Hail.

Khamy nods, eyes wide 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

I think so. There was a bang. The biggest I've ever heard. A great wind blew me away, right over the Forest, until I fell in the trees. I climbed down once it stopped. But I don't recognise these parts. I'm not allowed to go too far. Did The Hail bring you here too?

KINN

Yes. It was only a matter of time, given the sermons: '40 days to herd, 7 days to perish.' Never thought I'd witness it though. Or be dragged from home in its wake.

KHAMY

Oh, you don't live here?

KINN

No. Someone I care for very much does. But they were going to live with me in Blue Rose Village.

KHAMY

Along the mountains?! I've always wondered what it'd be like to live there. You must feel so lucky.

(CONTINUED)

KINN

Not now I don't. The Hail tore us apart. I don't even know if they survived. I simply have to find them. Only I don't know the way?

Khamy BEAMS, beckoning Kinn to a dry corner to open a thick scrapbook, revealing-

An intricate map of Iodonus, inked in black, blue and green on parchment. Kinn gazes astonished at the detail.

KINN

You made this?!

KHAMY

My father is a tracker. I'm not allowed to read his tomes without asking, so I snuck one to draw the district: Iodonus Forest here, Blue Rose Village right up there, and the Border Roads between them, to the Water Beyond.

Khamy's finger circles a hut-like symbol in the mountains, dragging his finger neatly across the map-

KHAMY (CONT.)

My parents told me if there's ever any danger, I should make my way to this shelter to hide. If we climb the Forest floor West toward the mountains, that will take us to the shelter AND 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, we only have 7 days before The Hail takes our voices forever. And you may need help while your shoulder's healing?

Kinn dithers...and SIGNS-

KINN

Bless you little one. You have a deal.

Khamy closes his book, TAPPING the name on the cover-

(CONTINUED)

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 from the shelter, head held high, basking in the rain. Kinn crawls out after him, 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 and SQUELCHING to a shrouded clearing ahead. Kinn takes a DEEP BREATH...and strides after him. Thin 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 unrolls his map, TAPPING at a blue circle-

KHAMY (CONT.)

Ah-ha! The Grand Pool. A stone wall surrounds it to stop contamination. Just a little further and we can collect more water there.

Kinn TAPS a black-barred symbol intrigued-

(CONTINUED)

KINN

What is this place?

KHAMY

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

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

Khamy tucks away his map, peering at Kinn's Blue Rose pendant-

KHAMY (CONT.)

What is that anyway? Jewellery?

KINN

My pendant. It shows I abide by Faith: the Blue Rose Church. You must know of it?

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? Do they show you love them too?

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 friend? Or a husband?

Kinn double-takes, eyes wide-

(CONTINUED)

KINN

H-How did you-?

KHAMY

You have a Nature scent on you,
like my parents. But not a girl's
scent. It's sweeter, more caring. 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 hyena and chameleon trek the winding paths. The rain
PATTERS 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
before.

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 - NIGHT

In the light of dusk, Cuta's white paw reaches for Kinn's-

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?!

(CONTINUED)

KINN

The Blue Rose 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.

Kinn raises a forlorn paw to the rain. An odd guilt flickers
over Khamy's face. Just as-

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

KHAMY

Finally!

Kinn clambers up, joining him at the top. 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 ripe with clean water. Come on!

The chameleon dashes down the embankment, tankard in hand.

Kinn eases down, paws SQUELCHING in moss as he surveys the
lush greenery. He shuts his eyes, letting the steady sound
of RAINFALL wash over him.

SCRAPE! SCRAPE! SCRAPE! Kinn double-takes, peering confused
at an alcove nearby.

INT. ALCOVE - DAY

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

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

(CONTINUED)

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

The hyena rushes over, kneeling at the oak. A kind smile: 'Don't worry, I can help you.' He grips the root tight. Steadies his flexing arms. And-

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

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 lifts the hyena up, slipping off his ring. He scoffs at his pendant...but grips the locket intrigued. Kinn STRUGGLES-

No luck, as Zen simply RIPS it from his neck. He opens it. He blinks surprised at the photo. A moment of concern. Guilt. Then stoic resolve, as he 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 sadly away. Until-

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

(CONTINUED)

Zen stalks into the vicinity, rugged form meeting...no-one. He peers into 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.

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-

(CONTINUED)

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-

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, dragging each other into the blue. Kinn snags Zen's waistband, gripping the map in his toes-

Zen grabs his leg, dragging him up to CHOKE him. Kinn beats against him to no avail. He eyes Zen's snout. And-

He grips it hard, claws DIGGING into flesh. Zen's eyes go wide, grip tightening to win out. Until-

He lets go pained, swimming up for air. His pockets open, Kinn's treasures floating down-

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

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-

He opens his eyes fully, 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!

(CONTINUED)

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.

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-

(CONTINUED)

Zen stops, patting his waistband. Just as Khamy holds up his blade. The elk stares dumbstruck-

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-

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. His brow furrows. And-

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-

(CONTINUED)

ZEN

Well 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 Rose Village.

ZEN

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

KHAMY

But what about The Hail?

ZEN

That empty 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?

(CONTINUED)

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!

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. Zen glances suspicious-

ZEN

What?

Khamy rests some crackers and beetles in the elk'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-

(CONTINUED)

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? Please? He just needs help. Like you did. And he IS a Guard.

Kinn dithers. The wistful reptile holds his breath.

KINN

Do you have any words for the boy?

Zen SIGHS...and-

ZEN

I'm sorry I called you 'runt'.

KINN

Very well. You may join us. But I expect good morals. That means no more threats.

ZEN

What makes you think I'll obey, Stripes?

KINN

Because 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 glowers...and shakes it. Khamy joins in, shaking vigorously-

KHAMY

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

KINN

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

(CONTINUED)

ZEN

Smart. Don't know what I might do.

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 away 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 without a care.

- 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.

KINN

Oh bless us. Isn't that-?

KHAMY

A sleep shelter! Iodonus 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 might get cold if you stay-

ZEN

I said NO.

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

KINN

I do wish he weren't so blunt.

(CONTINUED)

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 do you think The Hail took our voices?

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 in the sky, taking our voices from us?

KHAMY

You mean in the rain?

KINN

I was thinking more ABOVE the rain.

KHAMY

'Above'? I didn't think there was an above. No-one in Iodonus says anything like that.

Kinn's ears droop confused-

KINN

Then what do you believe is up there?

KHAMY

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

(CONTINUED)

KINN

A nice thought. Strange. But nice.

KHAMY

So, The Hail...you don't think it 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-

KINN (CONT.)

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

Zen peers at him. 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.

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

KHAMY

You said your Elder sought Iodonus most of all. Why?

KINN

Because it's where he appeared.

KHAMY

He was born here?

(CONTINUED)

KINN

In a way. He was born of the Rose's power itself. A great mystic, with beautiful golden eyes, destined to heal all of Enoch. 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.

Khamy gazes guiltily at Kinn, SIGNING to himself-

KHAMY

Did you save him, Elder Gambel?

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 ROSE VILLAGE - CHURCH - GARDEN - NIGHT

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

Elder Gambel, glistening golden eyes peering from white mask over the drenched Forest.

The cuckoo grips a single flower, letting its petals and spindly vine glimmer unnaturally...before crushing it to dust.

END OF PILOT