

JONATHAN ALLEN



LICH KING

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Jonathan Allen



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CHAPTER 6

TITLE TBD - SEE LINK
AT END

“Vich!” Jagar leapt backwards and shook out his hands, flinging bits of some of the finest, mostly-digested elven fare available onto the ground. “Unngk, are you alright? Did any get on you?”

The Silken Swift’s head bobbed, his body swayed. Chunky drool ran down his chin.

Jagar inspected his hands and forearms, then shook them again. He looked back and forth at his arms, and sniffed. “Ach! Don’t worry, Unngk. It’s not poison, or acid.” He scowled. “Just vomit. Lagch, humans.”

Before Unngk could reply about his condition, Jagar pointed to The Swift. “Unngk, catch him.”

The younger orc stepped forward and reached out as The Swift fell backward, his body limp. Unngk cradled the man’s head and laid him softly onto the forest floor. Small bits of food on Unngk’s forearms pressed into the Swift’s already messy hair. The man groaned and showed no signs of awareness.

“Is he going to be alright?” Unngk looked up at his father.

Jagar nodded and held out a water skin. “He’s reacting to being possessed by the spirit of the dvergr I just killed up on the rocks. Here. Give him some of this, but slowly. He doesn’t have

full control of his body back yet, but he should recover quickly, now. I hope so. Though, he is just a human.” Jagar poured some water out onto both of their arms. “And clean yourself up, as best you can.”

Unngk did as his father directed. “Who is he, kor?”

“Good question, Unngk.” Jagar knelt next to the Swift again and continued to search him, looking for some kind of identification. “Humans are rare in these territories, though he could be some kind of merchant. If he is, he should have papers identifying who he is, and what he’s selling. You can be sure it’s not Constitution potions.” As he searched, Unngk dripped water into the Swift’s mouth. Jagar noted his son’s efforts. “Hmm. Yes, good. Just like that.”

Without warning nor and signs of gradual recovery, The Swift jumped to his feet and backed against a boulder behind him. He rubbed his eyes. The two orcs watched as his hand fiddled around his waist. The Swift looked down to find an empty sheath where a dagger usually rested. He turned his attention back to the orcs. He screamed. “What did you do to me?”

Jagar held out one hand, and with the other, he put a finger to his lips. “Shhhhh.” He pushed both hands down and whispered, “Quiet.”

“The hell I will be quiet!” The Swift straightened. “I’m warning you, I’m a powerful mage. Stay back!” Then his form began to change. He grew taller, thinner. His ears lengthened and pointed. A few seconds later, the elf Athralaryn, tutor to the princess, stood before the two orcs.

“He’s an elf!” The smaller one pointed and called out, excited.

Jagar squinted at the elf. “Unngk. Quiet.”

Unngk’s shoulders sank. “Sorry, kor.”

Jagar put his hands on his chest. “We’re not going to hurt you.”

Jagar reached over to his son and retrieved a dagger from Unngk’s waist. He spun it around in his hand, pointing the bejeweled hilt toward the elven Swift. He leaned forward, stretching out his hand. “Looking for this?”

The elf’s eyes darted to the dagger, then back to Jagar. He snatched it and pointed it at the orcs with both hands, straight out.

Jagar tilted his head. “Wow. That was fast.” He then stepped back and put his hands up. “I was just checking to see if you were one of them, but it looks like you’re not. We’ll leave you now,

yes?”

The Swift’s eyes shot back and forth, up and down. He then squinted, tilted his head, and took a breath. “One of whom?”

Jagar smiled and put his hands down. “Ah, good.”

The Swift swung the dagger back and forth. “Ah, ah, ah. Don’t get any ideas. This may not look too threatening,” he flipped the dagger between his hands and swished it in the air, “but this blade has been enchanted with *powerful*, elven,” the elf paused, as if confused, “umm, enchantments, and things that you can’t even begin to understand. I can still gut you with it,” he tilted his head and squinted, “or worse.”

Jagar held out a hand. “Please, calm down. You’re still recovering. Besides, if I’d wanted you dead, I had plenty of opportunity to do that when you were flopping around on the ground just a few moments ago, yes?”

The Swift swished the blade some more. “I’m recovering from what you did to me.”

Jagar shook his head. “That wasn’t us.”

“Then who was it? The trees?” He spun around, his eyes, wide. “Wait. Was it one of Reiklyn’s men? Are they here?”

Jagar stood up straight. “Who?”

“Reiklyn. You know, the king around here.”

Jagar thought for a moment and counted on his fingers. “Could be. Yes, we could be in his woods. But no, that was not one of his men. It was a dvergr.”

“A what?”

“Dvergr.” He squinted. “Er. What do you call them?” He held a hand flat, around his high. “Annoying little guys who live in the mountains.”

Elven Swift recoiled. “A dwarf? That’s a lie, orc.”

Jagar tilted his head at The Swift. “Dwarf? Yes, some call them that. Well, they, or I should say, an army of them, attacked our village and kidnapped or killed everyone. We’re hunting them down and trying to find out what happened to the members of our clan.” He pointed to the top of the boulder. “That was one of them. Now, if it’s all the same to you, we need to get back to our business.”

The Swift shook his head. “Why would dwarves kidnap a bunch of orcs? That just doesn’t make any sense.”

Jagar started to walk toward the rocks. “I really don’t care if you believe me or not.” He pointed at the dagger. “Now, you

might as well put that thing away. You're not going to stop anything out here with that little rat sticker, least of all me." He took in a breath. "Now, it was a dwarf. I killed it, and it exploded in purple light like they all seem to do, now. Unngk—"

"Wait, that was real?"

"The dvergr? Of course it was real. I just said that."

"No, the purple..." The Swift's voice trailed off.

"Yes, that was real, too. That's what possessed—"

The Swift's face went white. Sweat began to bead on his forehead. His breathing became short and rapid.

Jagar stopped. "Hold on there. Don't make yourself black out again. Just calm down, now. It's gone."

Terrified eyes stared at the orc. "It was real. I thought it was some kind of spell."

"No. That wasn't any spell, at least not one that I know of. It was very real. But now it's gone. Really, it's not coming back."

He whispered. "What was that? That was no dwarf. It was some kind of ghost or something. I could feel it." He pounded on his chest with his fingertips. "Inside."

"Oh, it was a dvergr, alright. I should know, I killed it. But you're right, these are not your usual dvergr. I've fought many of them in my time, and I've never seen any that blow up with purple light and try to possess you when they die, like these do."

"There's more?" Whatever color The Swift's face started to get back, faded again.

"Yes, weren't you listening to me? An army of them attacked our village. We're hunting them. Now, we really need to get back to it before the trail gets any colder.

The Swift paused for several seconds, then straightened up. He sheathed his dagger and looked at the orc. "Did you say an army?"

"Yes, at least it seems that way from the tracks around our village. We still haven't seen the full force. We weren't there when our clan was attacked."

The Swift opened his mouth as if to say something, but then turned his head and closed it.

Jagar squinted. "What is it? What are you thinking?"

The Swift's eyes lifted for a moment, as if in reflection, but then filled with fear.

"What is it? What do you know?"

The Swift looked back at the orc shaking his head, his hands

up. “I don’t think—”

Jagar rushed up on the elf and engulfed his head like he was grasping a grapefruit, lifting him off the ground. He stared into the The Swift’s eyes. “Tell me what you know!”

The Swift slapped and grabbed at the orc, but his hands could barely encircle half of the massive, green forearms. He grunted.

“Tell me!”

“Let.” The Swift shook and coughed. “Me...down.” He started to go limp.

Jagar lowered him to the ground, but still held onto his head. “Start talking.”

The Swift grabbed his throat and coughed again. He choked out a whisper. “Are you out of your damn mind?”

Jagar cocked The Swift’s head to face him. “You have about two more seconds.”

“Alright! I’ll talk, but let go of me, you goddamned psychopath.” The Swift’s words were muffled, his mouth barely moving to form the words.

Jagar hesitated, but then loosed his hold around the elven Swift’s head. “There. Speak.”

The Swift arched his back. “Ugh!” He then bent over to each side. “You really need to work on your personal skills.” He held up a finger toward the orc who was leaning in, as if to grab him again. “Hold on a second.” He took a deep breath. “Now. I have a pretty good idea where your dwarf army is. But—”

“Where? How?”

“But...I really don’t think we should—”

“WHERE?”

The Swift closed his eyes and exhaled. “As you said, it’s an army. You also said they apparently wiped out your entire village. You don’t really think—”

Jagar pulled out his axe, raised it, and stepped back to give himself some room to strike. “Where are they?”

“Alright! Rygch! Really. Learn to control your anger. There’s a rather large elf city not far from here, Tava Caraid llynn, city of the twin lakes. Surely, you’ve heard of it.”

Jagar nodded. “Of course.”

“That’s where I just came from when I,” The Swift opened his hands and smirked, “well, when I ran into you. You tracked your dwarves here, that’s the most likely place for an army that’s knocking off towns. But again—”

“Take us there.”

“Really? Will you let me finish a damn sentence?” He lowered his head and whispered something under his breath.

“What was that?”

The Swift looked back at the orc. “Look. Why don’t you just wait a little bit. That’s a very heavily fortified city. Sure, it’s not the capital, but it might as well be. It’s a major port city, right on the dwarven border. The university of light and life magic is there, which is home to a dozen or so of the most powerful mages in the world. Plus, one of the king’s own daughters goes to school there.” He smiled and blushed a little shaking his head. “Anyway, the elves will surely win any attempted attack on the city. Did you think about that? When they do, then you don’t have to worry about it. Problem solved.”

“We’re going now.”

“We?” The Swift lurched and snorted. “Fuck that.”

Jagar approached him again. “We’re going now.”

“I just told you I was trying to get away from there. An invasion from an entire army of weird, magic-possessed dwarves doesn’t make me want to go back any sooner. It sounds like I got out of there just in time. I should be thanking Tsaharian for my luck.”

“You can walk, or I’ll carry you.”

Elven Swift threw up his arms. “But, why? What’s the point? If we go there we’re bound to get swept up in the fight, and there’s what, a ninety-nine and a half percent chance we’ll be captured or killed.”

“There’s a hundred percent chance I’ll kill you right now if you don’t take me there.”

“You’re clearly a tracker, you got this far.” The Swift pointed. “Just go that way for an hour, or so. If there’s really a siege going on, I’m sure you’ll hear it soon enough.”

Jagar step up to The Swift, towering over him, blocking out the morning sun. “Listen, you little shit. I’m not going to fight them. I’m not a suicidal idiot.”

The Swift smirked and tilted his head.

“I’m going to observe and find out where they take their prisoners, so I can find my family and clan members. You know the city. You got out, so you know how to get back in. You know where the important buildings are, and probably a whole lot more. You’re coming with me. Got it?”

The Swift stepped back, then lowered his head and exhaled. “Fine.” He looked back at the orc. “I’ll take you and tell you all I know about the place, but I’m not going in. Agreed?” He held out a hand to the orc.

Jagar stared at the Swift for a few moments, then grasped his arm. “Agreed.”

The Swift rolled his eyes. “Thank Rygch.” He pointed up. “Let’s go.”

Jagar looked up to the top of the rock, several feet above them both, where he was standing when he first spotted The Swift.

“Unngk, follow me.” He swept back his arms and jumped up the height of the rock, stepping out of view. The smaller orc jumped after him. He turned to watch as the elf then scaled the rock with an impressive level of skill.

Jagar bent over the body of a dvergr scout next to some trees.

“Is that—is that it?”

Jagar looked up to see The Swift looking rather pale, again. “The dvergr? Yes. This is him.” He saw the elf frozen at the top of the rock. “Unngk, watch him. Make sure he doesn’t fall back and break his fool head.”

The Swift fixed on the body.

“It’s fine. I checked it. He’s clean. Come on, let’s go.” Unngk tried to lead the elf away, but he didn’t move. Jagar scowled.

“Really, it’s dead.” Unngk tugged again, but the elf’s body was unresponsive.

Jagar then jerked his head up. He sniffed the air. With two quick strides, he closed the distance to his son and The Swift. He tossed them both aside into some shrubs near the rocks. Before either could express any indignation, Jagar was upon them with rather large hands, one over each of their mouths and most of the rest of their faces. The Swift’s eyes followed the orc’s nod, directing him to look up. He shook in Jagar’s arms when he saw an enormous body, easily as big as a three-mast ship, gliding above the tops of the trees. It dipped to turn, coming back around toward their position.

The Swift squirmed and kicked to get away, but Jagar held him tight. “Quiet!” he whispered. “Do you want to get us all killed.” A muffled scream eeked from below the orc’s massive hand.

Jagar stared at the creature. He had not seen a dragon in a long time, and he didn’t think his son ever had, not a real one at least.

He held his son tight. Seeing a dragon drawn in a book, or some shaman's flying illusion floating around the room is one thing, but seeing one in real life, that was something altogether different. They don't look like majestic defenders of the realm, or some awe inspiring great, wise universal force. When you see a dragon, a real one, and it doesn't even have to be looking at you, it could just be passing by, like this one was, what you see is something that is gigantic and terrifying. It's something that defies any image or description you may have seen or thought they might be. They look like massive beasts that were designed for one purpose: devouring everything in their path.

Even stout warriors have been known to loose their bowels when they see their first dragon, and Jagar did not have stout warriors in his hands. He had his ten-year old son, who cared more for baking and home crafts than fighting, and some human, who fashions himself an elf, and is more concerned with deception and evasion than confrontation. He'd be lucky if they didn't both faint at the sight of the beast, though that might be better than trying to hold two squirming children in his arms.

Jagar scowled and tightened his hold, pinning The Swift and Unngk against him. He looked back up at the dragon to watch its approach. It seemed to float on the air, spiraling around their position as it lowered closer with each pass. When it reached the level of the trees, it opened its claws. It dropped into the canopy and grasped onto one of the trees. With a quick upward thrust, it ripped the tree from the ground, causing several others surrounding it to topple or list.

Jagar curled and covered The Swift and Unngk as the dragon tossed the uprooted tree aside, as though it were a toy, like a bored child kicking a stone on a walk. The trunk crashed through the woods, felling several more trees, some hundreds of years old. The ground shuddered around them as the heavy wooden trunks thundered to the ground. The Swift kicked wildly in an attempt to escape Jagar's grasp, but the orc held him firm.

The dragon spread its massive wings for its final descent. Leaves, twigs, and all manner of forest artifacts scattered across the small clearing where Jagar had killed the dvergr. Branches crashed down where the monster brushed against them with its enormous wings and tail. Opening its claws again, it raised up tall, wings wide. The forest floor shook as it touched down and fell forward. The woods around them exhaled in relief and came



to rest with the beast.

Jagar rolled his shoulder to get a better view without rustling the bushes that kept them hidden. His breath caught in his throat. In front of them was indeed a dragon, but none like had ever seen, nor dreamt of in his worst nightmares. The wings, they looked torn, like a ships sails that had been through a terrible battle. At first thought, maybe it had been injured at the elven city. But as he took in more of the beast he saw that it was not just its wings. The beast's body was thinner than he expected, rib bones showing through like an emaciated dog on the streets. Chunks of flesh and torn skin hung down off the exposed skeleton. It raised its head to the sky, several vertebrae of its serpentine neck were stripped bare. It opened its mouth and let out a howling screech that swept through the trees, fluttering their branches. A bright purple glow radiated from inside it and exploded straight up into the sky, out of its half naked skull. Jagar, Unngk, and The Swift all recoiled from the bright, vibrant fountain of purple light that crackled into the air.

The dragon lowered its neck, and let its body rest on the forest floor. A rider raised up from behind its shoulders, mounted at the base of the neck. Swathed in tattered robes, it raised its arm, more bone than anything else. A purple glow spiraled around it and flowed like a shimmering river over the dragon's back and into the dvergr body that lay still on the ground. The small form glowed, then rocked to the side and stood up. One of it arms, along with a sizable chunk of its torso, hung down from the shoulder to the waist, from where it had been cleaved nearly in two by the orc's axe, not even an hour ago. The purple energy coiled up the dvergr's lacerated limb. Slowly the two halves of its body joined back together, and sealed into its original form.

The Swift screamed into the orc's hand. The orc stared at the dvergr. It looked up at the dragon and its rider. The beast screeched and rose up on its hind legs. Powerful thrusts with its wings stirred up miniature tornadoes of sticks and rocks, disrupting the forest around it as it lifted into the air again. Branches tore away from their trunks again, as the dragon rose up to the tops of the trees. After it had ascended above the forest canopy, the dragon leveled off and began to fly away. The dvergr, who just a few moments ago lay lifeless on the forest floor, turned and started to walk in the same direction. The Swift squirmed and continued to scream. Jagar watched the dvergr walk into the

woods as if the events earlier that morning had never happened.

“Vit’ash miagch.”

The two orcs and the Swift stayed there in the bushes. The elf squirming as best he could, while Jagar stared out into the woods, largely unaware he was still holding The Swift down. Jagar lay as still as he could. He had heard of dark magics, things like zombies, and resurrecting the dead, but he’d never actually seen it. He assumed it was all tales the shaman would say to scare the children into behaving, more than anything else. Now that it was a terrifying reality, he wasn’t in any hurry to see it again.

It was all starting to come together. The purple magic energy that burst out of the dead dvergr, possession, now dead rising again. That rider. It must have been some kind of necromancer. His heart raced. Mey. Is it going to do this to her? Is that going to be her fate? He would not allow that. He looked down at Unngk and The Swift. He began to loosen his hold and emerged from their hiding spot.

“We need to go now.”

The Swift scrambled to his feet and started to run. Jagar thrust out a hand and grabbed the elf’s chest.

“The only place you’re going is right where they just went.”

The Swift shook his head violently. “No!”

Jagar lifted The Swift up by his shirt and stared at him. “What did you just say?”

The Swift kicked at Jagar. “I said no! I don’t know what the hell I just saw, but I know I’m not getting anywhere near that thing.”

Jagar ignored the boots hitting his arms. “We had a deal.”

The Swift squirmed some more, hanging in the air above Jagar. “I don’t care.”

Jagar lowered The Swift to the ground, but held him firm. “You’re coming with me now.”

The Swift shook his head again. “No, I am not.”

Jagar scowled and stared at The Swift.

“What are you going to do? Kill me? Well, at least then I’ll stay dead.”

Jagar relaxed. “Will you?”

The Swift squinted. “Of course.”

“I killed that dvergr. It didn’t stay dead.” Jagar paused. “How long do you think it will take until they come back for you?”

The Swift opened his mouth to reply, but then stopped. He

scrunched up his face and clicked his tongue against his teeth.

Jagar let go of The Swift, straightened up, and crossed his arms. "In fact. What chance do you think you have out here by yourself? Where are you going to go? I'll bet you'll be captured, killed, and turned into a zombie before the day is out."

The Swift scoffed. "I've been in fights before. I've escaped from—"

"Fights?" Jagar stared at The Swift. "This isn't some squabble over drinks at a bar, boy. This is an army."

"And?"

"I've been in fights, I've been on raids, and I've been to war." He leaned in and pointed at The Swift. "This is war. You don't know war. They aren't here to fight. They are here to conquer. Your only chance to," he spun and pointed in the direction that the reanimated dvergr had just walked away, "to not become that... is to stay with me, and do exactly what I say."

The Swift was still. "You're right, I don't want anything to do with your war. I'll take my chances on my own." He turned to leave, but was stopped by Jagar's meaty hand on his chest.

"I'm sure you have something in that city that you want to save. A stash you've saved up?" The Swift gave no reaction. "A sweetheart? They may still be alive. With your knowledge of the city, I'm sure we can get them out without confronting the army directly."

The Swift twitched. His eyes moved back and forth. The princess was great, sure, but not worth seeing that dragon again.

Jagar turned The Swift back toward him. "Yes?"

The Swift pursed his lips. The orc may be a big, dumb brute, but he wasn't wrong. While saving the princess on her own might not be worth the risk, saving her and returning her to her father, now that is a prospect worth considering. At worst, he would be set up for life as some kind of honorary noble, but if he was able to win over the king, or maybe even his queen, well, then the princess herself, and a seat at the royal table would be a definite possibility. He snickered imagining Lloreaan having a heart attack when he learned that Gerellynth Lightfoot not only shared a bed with the princess, but won over her entire family.

The Swift looked up at Jagar. "If she's alive, you'll help me get her out?"

Jagar nodded. "Yes."

"Swear it."

Jagar scrunched up his face. “What?”

“Swear on your honor, or god, or whatever you orcs swear on. Swear that if I come with you, and get you inside the city, you will help me get the princess out.”

Jagar’s raised his eyebrows. “The princess?”

The Swift nodded. “Yes, of course. Swear it, or I’m leaving.”

Jagar nodded. “I swear on the honor of my family that I if you get me into the city, I will help you get the princess out.” He then head butted The Swift, knocking him back.

“Ow! What they hell!” The Swift rubbed his forehead.

“Right. Let’s go.” Jagar waved his arm forward. “Unngk.” He started walking the same direction that the dragon and risen dvergr had just gone.



This scene is sad because it doesn't have a fancy title, and only you can help. Send suggestions to:

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Then look for the poll on Discord. Let your voice be heard, or don't. It's your choice!

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THANK YOU!



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