

Rogues & Royals

Story by:
Ryan Matsunaga
Julian Rose

We open our story in an animated prologue, think like an impressionistic painting come to life.

We hear a prologue narrator introducing us to an epic tale of fantasy.

Long ago... a princess was taken from her kingdom by a terrible cult of necromancers.

The king sent four of the realm's finest heroes in pursuit, promising a king's bounty in return for their honorable service to the kingdom.

We're narrated through this adventure, with the party reaching the dread, black fortress of the necromancers, scaling its walls, and fighting their way into the inner sanctum for a final showdown.

There's a dashing leader, a big, burly cleric, an elf wizard, and the princess herself, with a wicked cool scar over her eye.

After a fierce battle, (reanimated skeletons, dark magic, a pair of giant, undead snakes!), the party was successful in their quest, vanquishing their foes.

But when they returned to the kingdom to accept their duly owed reward... they found that there had been a change of management. In the ensuing time after they had departed, the old king had died, and a new king now sat on the throne, one who had a distinct lack of respect for his predecessor's obligations.

Instead, this new ruler, once the commander of the king's army, was only interested in conquest, taxing his kingdom into poverty to fund invasion after invasion to expand the borders of his empire.

But, undeterred, our heroes journeyed on to new and even greater adventures.

A title card lands: 20 Years Later

We're now in a dingy, quiet tavern of some sort, and our narrator is revealed to be a man who's... not wearing his middle age with any particular dignity. While he seems like he once cut a pretty dashing and athletic figure, he's now more than a little past his prime.

As he continues to speak, we quickly come to understand that not only was this our narrator, but that he's also in fact one of the heroes we saw in the prologue, having led the party through their harrowing adventure, although he's not looking particularly heroic these days.

His name is Jona, and we're imagining him being played by Brendan Fraser.

His clearly bored conversation partner gets up to leave, and Jona quickly interjects, explaining that he feels like he's owed a drink for sharing such a thrilling tale. As Jona watches his free drink depart, the bartender remarks that each time he tells the story, it seems to get a little bit bigger, and he's been telling the same story for nearly three decades, indicating to us that they really didn't find much in the way of new adventures since then.

The bartender asks how Jona's wife is doing, and he responds that he's seen her around, clueing us in that they're not particularly close, whoever she is. Not a lot seems to be going right for him.

They're interrupted by a goblin who tells Jona that he needs to get his ass in the saddle, he's up in 10 minutes. Jona, who's maybe had a drink too many, follows him down a hall. As he continues, we're hearing cheering grow louder and louder, it's some kind of big event.

Just as he's about to reach the end of the hall, he's accosted by what looks like a 6-and-a-half foot tall version of the goblin, a hobgoblin, who looms over Jona menacingly. The smaller goblin, clearly the talker of the two, informs Jona that he's going to take a dive in the last lap of the race, the betting odds are very favorable for his client today.

Jona seems exasperated, and replies that he's had to lose the last three now, and people are going to catch wise and figure out what's going on. The goblin essentially tells him to just shut up and do what he's told, or else... very mob like vibes.

A humiliated Jona enters a stable area where a bunch of horses are being suited up with brightly colored armor for the race.

Jona mounts his horse, and puts on a helmet of his own, and through his visor, we cut to the inside of a race starting gate. Outside we

can hear the crowd cheering louder and louder, but it's muffled inside his helmet, and we mostly hear Jona's breathing.

A bell rings, the gates open, and Jona's mount charges out into what we now see is a huge coliseum, thousands of spectators.

The race is a crazy spectacle to watch, it's not just a simple course, there's obstacles, jumps, it's super violent, the competitors are actively jostling each other and a bunch wipe out pretty horrifically.

As we close in on the final stretch of the race, Jona is neck and neck for first place. We see him begin to ease up on his mount, like he's about to slow down and take the dive. But then we hear the cheers... there's people in the crowd chanting his name.

It's muffled through his helmet, but we can just make out a bunch of fans cheering him on. Some people still remember him from his time when he was something more of a real hero, and he's letting them all down for a bit of money.

At the last second he spurs his horse on and crosses the finish line just an inch ahead of the competition. A photo finish.

Jona is receiving congratulations from fans as he exits the arena, and he's really eating it up... until he spots the goblin from earlier, along with several big enforcers.

They corner him in the stables, and he tries unsuccessfully to talk his way out of it. He apparently lost this gangster a *huge* amount of money with his little stunt, and now they're going to take it out of him in flesh and blood.

Jona gives them the slip and sprints out of there, and a bunch of hobgoblin gangsters give chase.

We get a cool chase sequence through the city streets, through alleyways, across rooftops, giving us a nice little tour of the fantasy setting.

It's sort of a mega-city, as if the entire kingdom has been organized into one giant urban sprawl, built over what look like classic fantasy elements like enchanted forests and wizards' towers.

At the center of it is this massive castle, that's seemingly slowly eating up the rest of the city around it. Multiple layers of walls, a moat, a moat in a moat, just a ridiculous structure of someone who's probably a little more than a bit paranoid.

We get the strong sense that it's a bit of a police state, lots of guards everywhere, and a lot of the population seems to really be struggling to get by.

Jona thinks he gets away when his pursuers have to stop chase to avoid some guards, but he's knocked over the head by another of the guards and blacks out.

He wakes to find himself chained up in a prison cell. Across the way from his cell he can see a wanted poster for a woman... with a wicked cool scar.

Hey Honey, he says. It's his wife. His ex-wife. Him and the princess were once a thing.

He struggles about, trying to free his hands. As he does, he spots a small hole in the wall, and voices coming from the other side. He scooches his way over to see that it connects to a guard room, and they're discussing something big.

Apparently, the king is planning on emptying out his vaults, and moving that immense wealth somewhere via wagon. No one knows why, but all of the city guards are pulling triple and quadruple shifts to make preparations, and they don't love that.

Jona scoots his way back away from the wall, and we realize he's already undone his shackles. He might seem a little buffoonish, but he's also really capable, or has at least learned to survive on the streets. He picks the lock to his door, and sneaks out as the guards are occupied, quickly disguising himself as one of them.

He's got a plan now, a way to take back his life now that he owes the goblin mob a ton of money, and get back at the guy who took it away to begin with, the king.

But to pull this off, he's going to need a crew.

By nightfall he's reached a church, and entering it, he finds it deserted. He hears a distant crowd though, and following it, he finds a secret entryway into the church basement, where he essentially finds an underground fight club.

In the "ring" at the moment is the big guy from the prologue, and somehow, an even bigger guy that he's fighting, an orc of some kind. The orc wraps him in a bear hug and begins to crush his spine, in response the cleric cranes his neck back, and head butts him right in the face. Again, and again, until the orc collapses, and the cleric raises his arms and shouts in victory as the crowd roars.

We're thinking John C. Reilly in the role, just a great balance of comedy, but also he can be a big, imposing guy at the same time.

He steps out of the ring, face bloody, as the unconscious orc is dragged off to make room for the next pair. The cleric is collecting his "winnings" from bookie when Jona steps up to him.

Quinn, he says. Been a while.

Quinn socks him right in the teeth. Not long enough he grunts and begins to walk away.

Quinn heads upstairs, and a staggered Jona follows, telling him to hold on, they have to talk.

They reach the main floor of the chapel, and Quinn washes his bloody face in the holy water basin.

Jona asks him, isn't that holy water? Not anymore, Quinn replies.

Jona explains why he's come. They argue a bit, but ultimately, Jona is able to convince him that they can finally make things right. Quinn agrees, but only if they're all in it together this time, they need the third member of their party.

Together, they track down Emere, the elf wizard from the prologue, who now appears to essentially be a two-bit stage magician in a beaten up part of the city.

We're imagining Neil Patrick Harris in the role. He had sort of a "child prodigy" sort of vibe when he was younger, but now that he's

older, and even though he barely looks like he's aged at all, the shtick has kind of worn off, and now it's just a little bit sad.

They sit in on the end of one of his shows, and he's actually not bad, but it's definitely not real magic. As his stage hands, two identical dwarf brothers, go around collecting tips after the performance, our heroes notice that they're discreetly picking pockets at the same time.

Backstage, the two of them find Emere, and Emere likewise punches Jona square in the face. Quinn holds him back from more, and Jona tries to explain the situation. They obviously didn't part on good terms, and Jona is to blame somehow. They explain the situation though, and while he's interested, Emere is wary. He's no longer a wizard it seems, he's had a rough stretch since they last saw each other, and at some point, was forced to sell his spellbook, meaning he can no longer do magic.

After some convincing though, he agrees to help plan the heist, including his two associates, Tic and Toc, the dwarf twins from before, who also happen to be expert pickpockets.

Jona explains what he has of the plan so far. There's a dungeon beneath the castle, one that very few people know about. When they were young, their first adventure was helping the former king clear it out when a curse brought undead back to life. They're one of the few people who know about it, and better yet, can remember how to navigate its maze-like structure. And it connects to the stables. From there, they could hijack one of the wagons carrying the gold, and make off with a fortune before anyone knew they were gone.

But to pull this off, they need to get in, and there's only one person who still remembers the secret entrances. They need Avery, the princess from the prologue. Jona sheepishly explains that the two haven't been together in over two decades, and he has no idea where she is.

All they know is that over the years, she's been a major thorn in the side of the new regime, organizing an underground resistance movement that is gaining steam. She's now the number one most wanted person in the kingdom.

Emere says he might know a guy, or at least, know of a guy who knows two guys who might know where she is. They're called the Brain and the Fist, two con-men slash gangsters slash information brokers who don't come cheap, but might have the connections to get them in touch with Avery or her resistance movement.

They travel to an extremely shady part of town to find the two, paying off a series of informants that each get them a little bit closer to the Brain and the Fist's secret hideout. Finally reaching it, they give the special knock, and the door opens to an eight foot tall, ogre-like creature.

You must be the Fist, Jona says. The ogre retrieves a pair of spectacles from his coat pocket and puts them on, and in an eloquent, gentle tone, he replies, well that's a bit unfair, don't you think?

Jona looks down and sees a much smaller form, the diminutive figure of a halfling with wild, mangy hair and a maniacal look in his eyes.

Ah, he says, realizing his mistake. The halfling gives a warcry, leaps up into the air, and punches Jona square in the face.

He wakes up once again tied to a chair, this seems to be a repeating pattern in his life. He's in a dimly lit room, and someone is sitting across the table from him in the shadows. They're playing with a knife, and the glint of it keeps catching Jona's eye, annoying him.

As he opens his mouth, the figure leans forward. It's Avery in the flesh, we're thinking played by Lucy Lawless.

She wants to know why they're looking for her, or more specifically, after all these years, why *he's* come crawling back.

While they argue, we see a flashback that reveals Jona's retelling of the story is not exactly what happened. Far from the princess in distress, Avery left of her own accord to put an end to the threat facing her kingdom. Jona and crew followed after her, and ended up more or less as her backup.

When they returned they found that king had died, and ruling in his place was the commander of his soldiers. With the army behind him, Avery was forced into hiding to try and organize a resistance

movement, and soon after she and and Jona had a falling out, and he left, leaving his friends behind as well.

Back in the present, Jona explains their plan, only to learn that she already knows about the shipment. Furthermore, the resistance has learned what it's for. With the wealth, collected from harsh taxation of his populace, the new king plans to hire a mercenary army, the same army that the heroes defeated so many years ago. With the might of this army behind him, he can finally crush all rebellion in his kingdom, and turn his attention towards conquering neighboring realms and building his empire.

They realize they each have something the other needs. She can get them into the castle dungeons, and he can navigate it. In return for this collaboration though, she wants a big cut of the money to help fund her resistance effort. With this, they might be able to properly arm their fighters, and fight back against the invaders.

Jona isn't happy about it, but with no other choice, he agrees. He's untied, only to find that his two friends have been enjoying a couple of drinks, quite comfortably in the adjoining room.

Together, they lay out the plan. It's going to be a two-team effort, that relies on impeccable timing and coordination. Jona, Quinn, Emere, and Avery will venture into the catacombs below the castle, navigating the maze to reach the castle entrance. To do so, they will need to split up, and reach two magical totems that have sealed the entrances to the castle. Jona and Avery will take one, and Quinn and Emere will find the other. That will open up a path into the castle sewers, and allow them to enter the castle near the stables.

However, the sewers are filled with, well, water, a lot of water. To actually traverse it, they'll need to drain them, which can only be done from a control room in the castle walls.

To actually breach the castle, someone else will need to scale the walls, find that control room, and drain the water before they break the seal, otherwise they'll pretty much immediately drown. As skilled burglars, Tic and Toc are sent on this mission.

The "heist" turns into a cool dungeon crawl sort of adventure, when the party soon discovers that the catacombs are not exactly clear anymore. In fact, it seems like someone has been intentionally

populating it with all sorts of creatures, and the heroes must fight through an assortment of fantasy foes, from oozes to a basilisk.

Emere gets a great moment when in a tight spot, he "accidentally" blows up a locked door with magic, proving he's still capable of casting spells somehow without his spellbook.

Concurrently, Tic and Toc have an adventure of their own, making their way through the outer walls, getting into shenanigans, including at one point, pulling a "two kids in a trenchcoat" with a suit of armor in a pinch.

After making their way through, our adventurers are able to make their way towards the entrance of the castle sewers, where they're cornered by a terrifying assembly of large figures clad in pitch black armor. Quinn knocks the helmet off of one to reveal a chittering skull, they're some kind of undead, and they can't seem to be stopped.

They escape through the sewer hatch, with Tic and Toc draining the waterline just in the nick of time.

Once inside, their plan hits a snag, as they realize that they had misjudged the king's plan. He's not emptying his vault into the wagons, he's putting the entire vault onto a wagon. There will be no chance to hijack a piece of it, because all of it is being transported on one, highly secured, vehicle, guarded by a caravan of hundreds of soldiers.

The plan seems dead in the water, but Avery rallies them, and with Jona's support, they all decide to take one last, possibly suicidal, swing at this opportunity. They're going after the caravan.

In a shoot-from-the-hip plan, they rally the resistance fighters, and break into and steal dozens of horses from the arena stables, riding them out the city gates. Goblin mob enforcers are in pursuit, and as our heroes begin to catch up to the caravan, it becomes a threeway melee as they clash with king's soldiers.

There's a huge, ridiculous, like twenty minute chase sequence where people are jumping from horses to horses, onto wagons, off of wagons. Just phenomenally over the top, Fast and Furious style action, on horseback.

It all culminates on this bridge across a huge canyon. On the other side, you can see the mercenary army waiting. We sort of realize that if the caravan crosses this bridge intact, they're toast. This is their last chance to make things right.

A big climactic action beat happens, including a moment where Jona seems to go over the edge of the bridge, only to be brought back by Emere, who's made him levitate.

The vault is opened, but before they can transfer it, they are stopped.

Jona and Avery face off with king for one final duel, where he reveals that he orchestrated the plot to take power all those years ago.

Knowing that a peaceful kingdom such as theirs could easily fall prey to a neighboring land, he conspired with a group of necromancers to raise an army for him.

But the scheme was exposed, and after the heroes departed to end it, the king discovered who was behind the treachery. The commander was forced to kill him and take the throne, for the good of the kingdom of course. He blamed it on a neighboring kingdom and used it as a pretense for war, beginning his decades long campaign.

Jona and Avery realize that the troops on the other side of the bridge aren't just any mercenaries, they're an undead legion raised by the cult they defeated so long ago.

They have to stop the crossing at any cost.

After a big duel, they are victorious, with the treacherous commander plummeting off the side of the bridge to his death, along with the riches.

It seems like the crisis has been averted, at the cost of untold riches. But once they've returned to the city, Avery reveals that not all of it was lost. Thinking ahead, she had her people prepared with nets, scooping out much of the gold as it passed along the river. The rest will make its way to the shallow banks of the poorer districts

in the city, to hopefully begin the process of returning to the people what belonged to them.

Jona, Quinn, and Emere are asked if they'll stay and help Avery rebuild. They agree to stick around, for a time at least, until some new adventure calls.

And so, one chapter closes for our heroes, but that's certainly not the whole story. We're in a new tavern of some sort, and Jona is talking directly to the audience. But first, he says, raising an empty glass, how about a drink?

Roll Credits.

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