



REIGN OF  
ZOULVISIA

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DREADED DUKE

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Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Zoulvisia, an imposing castle sat on a mound in the midst of a lake. It was the fortress of the Duke of Northmorland, who was the younger brother of the queen. He did not rule, for according to the law of the land, the eldest child took the throne, even if the heir was a woman.

He was very angry that his older sister got to be queen, and decided to find allies who would be willing to help him depose Zoulvisia. He'd heard that Isabel and Bob the Unicorn sometimes opposed the queen, so he sent messengers to summon them to his castle.

“Help me seize the throne from my sister,” he cackled, “and I will reward you with lands and titles.”

Isabel told him she needed to talk it over with Bob and the two went down to the lake shore to decide what to do.



“I’ve heard of this Duke,” Bob whinnied, “and it wasn’t good. He likes to tax his people until they can barely afford to live.”

Isabel didn’t like the look of him either, and together they decided to pretend to agree to the Duke’s proposal so they could stop his evil plans.

“Well?” the Duke of Northmorland looked grimly at them, for he planned to kill them if they did not agree.

“Sure, why not,” Bob tossed his mane, “if the food is good— I refuse to eat grass!”

The Duke brought them into a sumptuous banquet hall filled with all sorts of soups, dishes and desserts to make anyone’s mouth water.

After, he gave Isabel his uniform of black robes with trim of golden yellow to make it clear to everyone that they were allies.





The Duke asked Isabel teach his men some of the finer points of swordsmanship and train them for the coming battles. He was testing to see if she really approved of his evil plot, and it seemed that she did.

One evening, he asked our heroes up to the topmost tower of his dark castle, “the plan,” he began, tossing aside a black cloth which covered the table and revealing a map of Zoulvisia’s palace, “is to infiltrate my sister’s throne room.”

Isabel was to tell the queen she had a petition. Once in audience with the queen, she was to kill Sir Oliver while the Duke killed his sister.

“The queen will easily fall for your story,” the Duke smiled cruelly, “any tale of her people being wronged will melt her heart.”

Isabel agreed, but she and Bob thought up a way to counter the plot.





The gleaming gates of the palace opened to the group without question, and the guards even saluted as they rode past into the courtyard. Bob had to stay behind due to palace rules, so Isabel and the Duke stepped inside alone.

Isabel told the courtiers that she needed to see the queen immediately about some villagers who were being attacked by raiders demanding their crops. Just as her younger brother predicted, they received summons into the throne room.

Meanwhile, in the courtyard, the Duke's evil knights sat idly on their horses waiting for the signal to attack the palace. With a whinnying roar, Bob charged them. He kicked at the horses, rearing up to frighten them. The knights' chargers went wild and galloped off in all directions as Bob herded them outside the palace gates. He ordered the guards to close them, blocking the knights' re-entry.





Isabel entered the throne room and bowed, “Your majesty,” she began, “there is a heinous plot against you.”

“This isn’t the plan,” the Duke hissed, “kill Sir Oliver now!”

“What did you say?” Isabel pretended she couldn’t hear.

“I said eliminate her guard while I kill the queen!” the Duke roared in anger, exactly as Isabel had planned. He drew his sword but Isabel was faster and he barely parried her blow as she defended the queen. Sir Oliver joined in, but the Duke was one of the most powerful swordsmen in the kingdom and managed to hold them off long enough to leap through a window and escape. Sir Oliver wanted to go after him and execute the truant nobleman, but Zoulvisia stopped him, “he is still my brother,” she said, weeping.

**THE END** (for now)

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