

A woman dressed as a queen or noblewoman stands in front of a lush green grove of orange trees. She wears a red velvet bodice over a light blue dress, a wide gold belt, and a light blue veil with a gold tiara. She holds a single orange in her right hand. The background is filled with green leaves and several ripe oranges.

REIGN OF
ZOULVISIA

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Once upon a time, the lovely benevolent queen Zoulvisia sat alone by her chamber window. It looked out into spectacular grounds of the palace and in the far distance there was a gleam of orange. The moment she caught sight of it, the queen was filled with an insatiable desire for one of the oranges hanging from the tree. Loth to send a courtier walking such a distance and longing to escape the bustle of her court, Zoulvisia gathered up her satin skirts and sedately made her way towards the succulent fruit.

Directly she plucked one of the large round oranges, a dreadful snarl erupted from the distance. With a shriek, for the queen was fair and sensitive by nature, she dropped the fruit and glanced about helplessly as a frightful creature stalked closer. Her wish to be alone had been fulfilled for there was none to help—not a single knight or courtier could be seen in any direction!

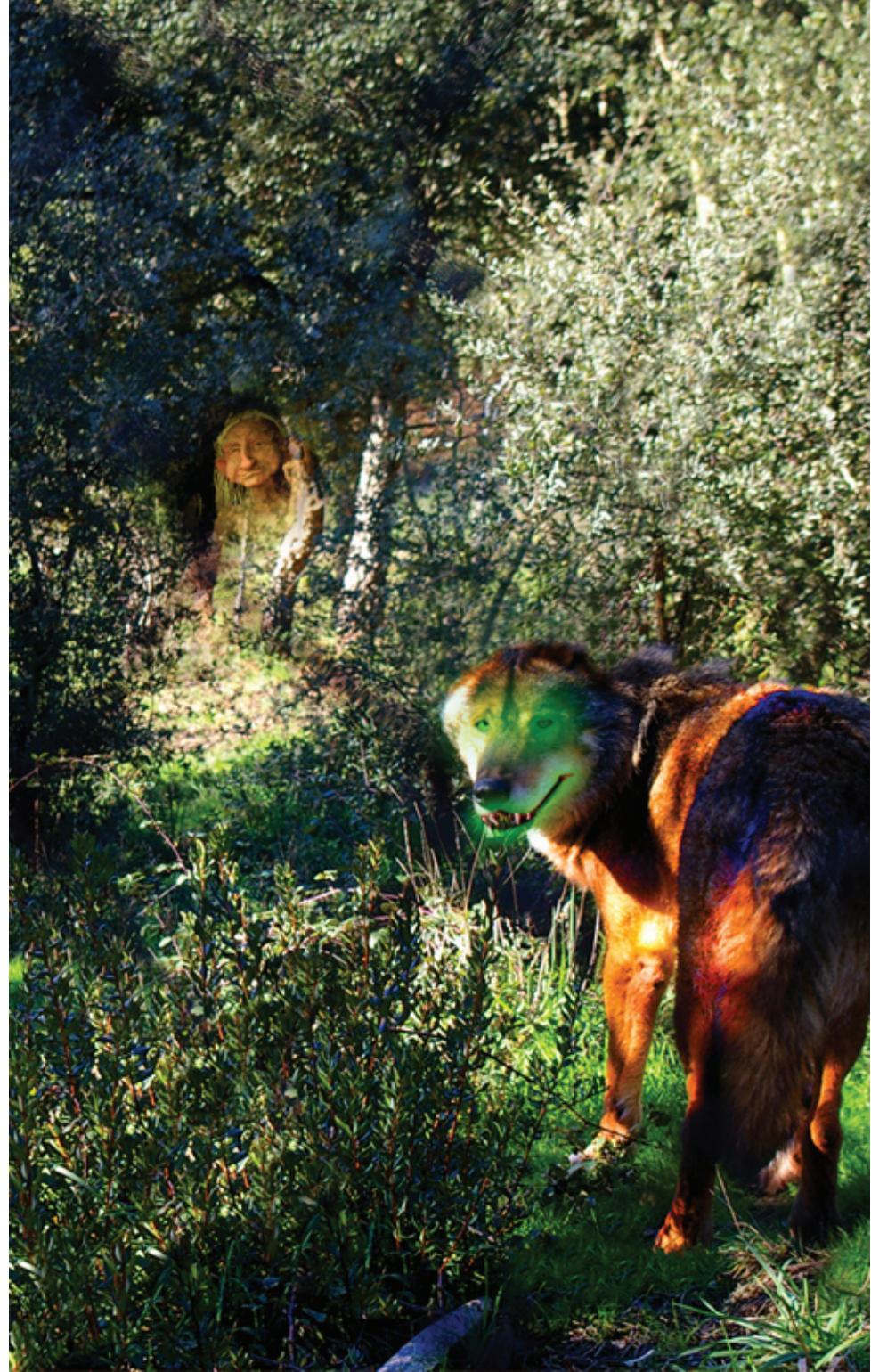


Suddenly a hideous dwarf popped out from behind a nearby tree, grinning a clearly evil grin, “come with me, and I will save you!” he promised, “only you must marry me,” the dwarf cackled.

From behind, the dreadful animal was still advancing, and in her terror, the queen allowed her white lily hand to be taken by the small crushed fist of the dwarf as he led her inside the tree itself.

In a flash, instead of a dark musty trunk, they found themselves in a very dirty little cottage at the edge of a vast lake bobbing gently in the breeze. Her fear subsiding, the queen turned to kindly thank the dwarf.

“You shall have all the time in the world to thank me as my wife,” the creature sneered at the beautiful queen, “return tomorrow as my bride and do not forget me,” he opened the door to his little house and she stepped safely back into her palace.





In the serenity of her own chamber, with dozens of anxious ladies-in-waiting flustering about, the queen quickly returned to her usual routine of courtly life. There were stacks of parchment and peasants with complaints. Lively jesters and entertainments of the evening soon drove all thought of the dwarf from the queen's head. That is until the next morning when her knight Sir Oliver strode in to announce a petitioner.

Arranging her ornate sleeves upon the throne, Zoulvisa nodded granting audience. In hobbled the wizened creature of the day before, still with a wicked grin etched upon his face. With a rush her memories returned before the dwarf opened his mouth to speak. Her lovely head drooped in despair at the prospect.

“You must return and marry me now!” the little creature demanded as Zoulvisia began to weep quietly.



“How dare you,” Sir Oliver roared, and without waiting for his monarch’s command, he lifted the dwarf up by the collar of its miserable rags and tossed the creature all the way through the two ornate doors which lay on one side of the hall. Taking their commander’s cue, palace guards roughly ushered the dwarf the rest of the way out.

To his surprise, the queen began to weep harder and the gallant knight knelt before her asking what was so troubling.

“I must marry the dwarf,” she sobbed, “for he saved my life and I promised to marry him in return. Honour demands it.”

The knight turned pale, knowing his queen was right. A word once given was irrefutable, and he blamed himself for not being there to protect her instead of the dwarf.

“Find him,” Zoulvisia said firmly, “I must marry the dreadful creature today.”





Meanwhile, black and blue with bruises, the dwarf ambled along a forest path muttering to himself against the queen.

Who did he come across but our heroes—Isabel and Bob the Unicorn! The dwarf decided to trick them into helping so he bewailed the cruel queen, telling how she had promised to marry him, then had him beaten and tossed out of the palace. Being naturally kind, Isabel took pity on him, “we’ll get that horrid queen to agree,” she said, “don’t you worry.” The dwarf was pleased that his evil plot was working so well and skipped along leading the way back to Zoulvisia’s court.

As they rounded the final bend, hooves drew near and the valiant Sir Oliver reined in his steed and dismounted, “I was sent to fetch you,” he addressed the dwarf.

“You see, he means to torture me!” the small creature squealed to Isabel.



Barely a sound was heard as many a sword was drawn from its leather scabbard and the unicorn lowered his horn menacingly.

“Your marriage awaits,” Sir Oliver tried to ignore the obvious hostility, though he grasped his own broadsword tighter.

“Lies!” the dwarf cackled, “kill him!”

Isabel was not so easily deceived, however, “is this true, sir knight?” she asked.

“Of course, the queen intends to honour to her word, I swear it!”

Acknowledging the knight, Isabel thrust her sword into the ground before continuing the questioning. She was not comfortable enough to sheathe it just as yet.

Unfortunately the cunning dwarf pulled it swiftly out again and charged the surprised knight. Without thinking, he parried the blow and buried his own sword into the dwarf with keen accuracy.



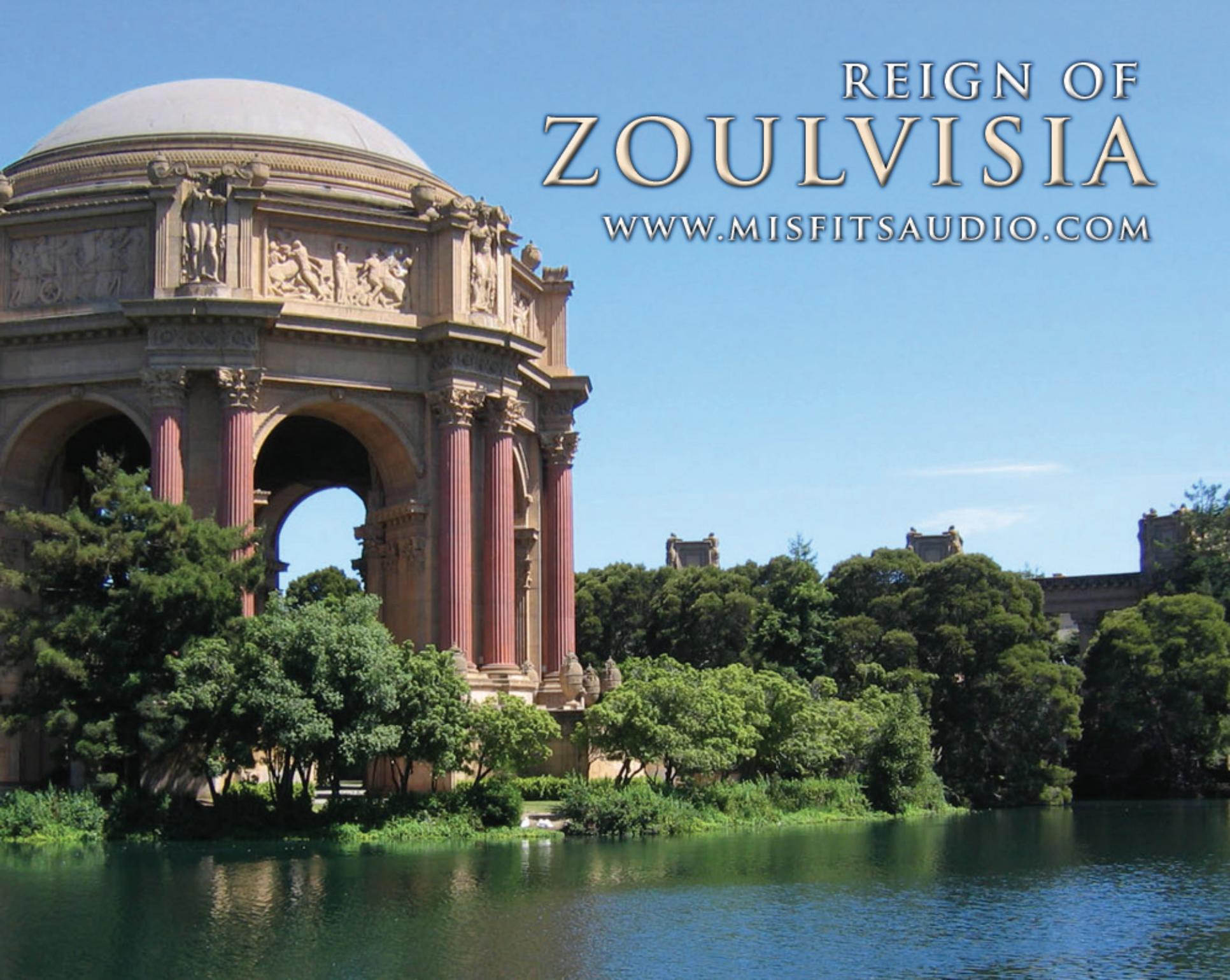


The knight was dismayed as the evil dwarf fell to the ground but also relieved. He begged Isabel and Bob to come to the palace and relate what had occurred to the queen.

Zoulvisia felt rather like her knight—distraught at the end of the creature, but forever grateful to be free. Isabel explained it had been in self defence, and the queen pardoned her knight instantly.

From that time forward, Zoulvisia never gave in to desires of personal pleasure and Sir Oliver took extra care that she was accompanied at all times. As for the heroes of the realm— they journeyed on in search of adventure and wrongs to be righted.

THE END (for now)



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