

Book of Ruin Draft 1
Chapter 6 of 7 for critique

Summary of story so far:

Chapter 1: The year is 1860. Edward is visiting his estranged father, Professor Albert Thomas, at a monastery in southern England. Professor Alfred has 2 assistants with him, Langston and Heath. They're making a record of the old manuscripts in the monastery library. They discover a hidden door to a cellar

Chapter 2: In the cellar is a table with an old corpse & dagger (apparently suicide), ancient book, and a sickle. The book is written mostly old Celtic and Old English. They read from the book, and accidentally summon an ancient Celt.

Chapter 3: They communicate briefly using old English, but when the Celt hears the language he mistakes them for his persecutors from his own time (the Anglo-Saxons killed the Celts when they arrived in Briton a long time ago), kills the assistant Langston, and flees the scene

Chapter 4: It's a few hours later. The Professor has been studying the book, and it turns out the Celt is actually a druid named Cynwrig, and the book contains a prediction/prophecy (this was something druids could apparently do) about Cynwrig being released on the world and taking a child.

Then we see Cynwrig in the woods around the monastery, and we (the reader) realise that he can learn from his victims, including personal info and how to speak modern English.

Chapter 5: After studying the book more, the Professor determines that Cynwrig is actually a red Druid a.k.a a Battle Druid. Heath freaks out and runs outside, and the other 2 chase after. Mist has fallen everywhere and they can't see. They get lost in the mist, and Edward and the Prof barely see Cynwrig kill Heath. Edward shoots and injures the druid, who in turn throws his sickle at him, knocking the gun down and cutting off his thumb. They retreat back into the monastery and barricade the door.

6

Several hours passed without any sign of Cynwrig. They'd stopped the bleeding on Edward's hand and had it firmly wrapped in clean strips of cloth. Afterwards, to Alfred's surprise, Edward devised several makeshift incendiary devices by strapping a small water pouch filled with lamp-oil to each of the lamps. This, he said, would explode on impact, setting the target ablaze. The academic in him had objected – "it's too dangerous for the library," he'd said – but Edward was having none of it.

They now sat on the ground just outside the library door. The dark room seemed to creep in around them, chilling Alfred's skin. Jesus hung on his cross overhead, staring down at them. He was dimly lit by the stained glass window above, shades of yellow, green and red highlighting his thorn of crowns. Alfred ripped more strips from Heath's clothing, changing

the bandages on his son's hand. He shook his head and chuckled while strapping on a fresh strip.

"What's so funny?" asked Edward.

"I'm guessing this is going to make playwriting a little more difficult for you."

Edward laughed in return. "It's alright. I hear they've had tremendous success with adding full-set keyboards to typographers. Somewhere down in Italy I think."

Alfred leaned back against the wall, staring down at his feet, smiling absentmindedly. Edward would be alright - he always seemed to be alright in the end – *if* they made it out of this.

"Father, I'm sorry about Heath. I know you loved him."

Those words stung him like cold daggers. He looked up at his son. "Tell me why you hated him?"

"I never hated him. He just, well... you seemed to treat him more like a son that you treated me."

Alfred leaned forward now, trying hard not to raise his voice. "He's my *student*, Edward. He's like me; a historian!" he cried. "*Was* a historian, anyway. You're different."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Edward's brow was creased up, his own voice also raising now. He winced from pain when moving his hand.

"It means you're more like your mother, Edward." Alfred felt tears building up now, and looked away from Edward.

"Then why the cold shoulder all these years?"

Alfred wiped his face with the back of his sleeve and took a deep breath before turning back to his son. "Because you remind me of her too much."

Just then a loud *thud* came from the nearest window, followed by a short flurry of flapping sounds. "Was that a bird?" asked Edward getting up.

Alfred watched his son walk towards the window, happy for the interruption, but fearful of what the interruption may be. Edward carefully loosened the latch on the window and peeked outside.

"Father, you're not going to believe this."

The mixture of herbs and leaves worked well, Cynwrig thought. After chasing off the Englishmen he retrieved his sickle and took to the woods to care for his shoulder. What a strange weapon that was; the deafening noise, the searing shock and pain. It seemed the world had indeed moved on since his own time, and he had much to learn. He racked his brain, sifting through the knowledge he'd acquired from the two dead ones. *There it is*; the word came to him like a diamond in a riverbed. *Gun*. He would need to be careful of those. He now pressed a mixture of herbs and fruit pieces into his shoulder, quickly stemming the pain and bleeding. *Silíní, sinséar* and *marós* in his old tongue. He searched for the words again – cherries, ginger, rosemary.

After mending his shoulder, he walked back towards the church, finding his way through the mist confidently. When he sacrificed the man earlier – *Heath? Yes, that was his name* – he watched his arms thrash, his legs kick; he read them as a wise man might read the stars, and he knew what to do. His gods still had some power yet in these woods. The final act of his own prophecy was close.

Animals drew near him as he walked, taking comfort in his presence. This pleased him. The church was within sight now, but he made sure to remain out of sight. A rabbit approached him now, looking up at him. He picked it up, said a word of consolation in its ear, and cut its throat. He let the blood fall to the ground as he walked around the church, leaving an arched splattered line in his wake. The last of the animal's blood fell as he reached the starting point. He'd enclosed the church in a circle of blood.

Then he sat on a rock, staring ahead through the mist, focusing his mind on one of the windows. The two Englishmen, father and son, were behind that window, scared and angry. Then, just what he was waiting for, a blackbird landed on a branch nearby, and Cynwrig willed it to action. The blackbird sped off through the mist and smashed into the window, breaking its wing. Moments later the window opened and he saw the face of the younger one. Cynwrig searched through his mind and found another diamond. "Edward," he said, testing the name on his tongue. "It is time."

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A cold chill ran down Edward's spine as he looked out the window. Animals. A deer and a couple of rabbits stood grazing on the grass outside the window. More rabbits hopped along, just within sight through the mist. Even a family of hedgehogs scurried along just within view, and several more indistinguishable figures moved just out of view. One of the shadows, Edward was sure, had a different shade to it – red. As he stared at the red spot through the mist, his mind seemed to clear and cloud at the same time, like all other thoughts just vanished except for one single thing. A cold feeling of dread and certainty sank into his chest and he shut the window.

"We're going to die today," he said matter-of-factly. He looked back at his father, whose mouth dropped open for several seconds before thinking of something to say.

“He bled when you shot him, didn’t he? Maybe we can hurt him again.”

Edward looked down at his own hand and at the blood-soaked rags from his thumb. His father was right – he did bleed. Edward pictured the pool of blood gathering beneath the druid’s shoulder. Yes, he had bled, bled the colour of his cloak, and if it bleeds, it can die. A shaft of light suddenly struck through the crack in the windows – a single thread of light in the gloom of the church. Then another reached through from the next window.

“The mist!” they both cried out.

Edward dared another look out the window. The mist was vanishing, like looking through a steamy window exposed to the cold. The animals – the few left anyway – were running off into the woods. He looked to where he’d seen the red shadow before, but there was no sign of the druid.

Edward shut the window and ran for the front door. He lifted the beam and had his hand on the handle when his father pulled him back, his face an expression of alarm.

“My revolver!” Edward cried as he creaked the door open. Blue cloudless skies stretched beyond the tree-line. Everything was bright and green, like the day he’d arrived, and it felt warm outside, friendly and inviting. Edward looked down the footpath and a glint of light caught his attention – his revolver. He edged towards the threshold but his father pulled him back, shutting the heavy door.

“Edward, wait. What if he’s still out there?”

“I need that gun, Father. I don’t think we can kill him without it.” Edward moved for the door again but his father stepped to block him. He pressed his injured hand on his father’s shoulder, forcing the pain back. “Don’t try to stop me.”

His father stepped aside. “Before you go,” he said, “tell me, why’d you come?” Edward shook his head, not understanding the question, his mind focused now on one thing only.

“Last night,” his father continued, “when you arrived, you said you came to see me. Why’d you come?”

Edward’s mind pulled back from its singular thought, and focused on his father now.

“Because I’m engaged, Father.” His father began to speak but Edward cut him off, “Her name’s Elizabeth.” Again his father motioned to speak but Edward spoke first, “I came because...” He took a deep breath, gathering himself, “I came because I wanted to make peace with you before I became a father myself. Elizabeth is pregnant.”

These last words seemed to knock his father like a punch to the gut. All the color drained from his face. Edward could almost see his father’s mind flipping back to the pages in the druid’s book, and his eyes widened in sudden understanding. “The book. The child.”

Edward nodded in affirmation. "We need that gun."

He crept out the door, scanning the woods for any sign of movement: nothing. As he stepped out, he crept along the wall and checked around the other side of the building, making sure he wouldn't be ambushed. Again, no sight of the druid. Back to the safety of the door, he estimated the distance to the revolver; seven yards, maybe eight. Six, seven seconds to run, pick it up, and get back. He stepped forward, hand still on the door, and scanned the woods one more time. *Surely Cynwrig wouldn't just leave?* This didn't feel right, but they couldn't fight the druid without the gun. He had to make a break for it. One more step before he launched himself down the path. Then something creaked above him. He turned just in time to see the big druid launching himself off the ledge above the door. He hammered down with his massive fist on Edwards head, and then it all faded to black...