



Kieran King in:

THE HOUSE OF KING II: KINGDOM COME



THE AGE OF KING, YEAR 2 - JUST AFTER THE LAST FIGHT

THE ARENA OF MARCH

Once upon a time, there was a king.

This king had sat in his castle as his lands rotted and his people starved. Those who survived hated him for it. And so they found themselves a new king - in name at least.

Their chosen lord - Isaiah - gritted his teeth as he stared down at the vile, black tongue that curled limp around his feet upon the dais.

In the pit below the stage, The *real* King stared up at Isaiah, next to a slain, mutant wolf. **“Long live the king,”** he said, keeping his eyes on Isaiah. But that wasn’t who the message was for. It was for the spectators that filled out the rest of the Arena of March. He knew their distaste of him; but in spite of their emboldening of Isaiah’s claim to the throne, The King’s crown was not a trinket meaningless bestowed.

It was *earned*.

The message was also for Isaiah’s daughter Universia, who sat on the stage beside her father. They had their moment in days gone by, and even from this distance, The King could feel her heart longing for him. ‘One day,’ he thought. ‘One day *soon*.’

‘But not today.’

He turned his back on the false king, stepping over the paw of the silenced beast, and headed back towards the ramp that led down to the gladiatorial training pit below the arena floor. The lanista, Syn, was waiting near the top of the ramp with a smug smile across his face.

“You’re going to make me a lot of money,” said Syn.

The King regarded him with scepticism. **“I figured you were expecting me to die.”**

“I was.” Syn was bluntly honest. **“But at the end of the day, I still paid good money for you. It’s basically a win-win situation on my end.”**

Side-by-side they began to walk down the ramp to join the rest of Syn’s troupe. **“And what would Prince Isaiah Adeyemi think of that?”** asked The King.

“Whatever he damn well pleases.”

Before they could even reach the training room floor underneath the arena, the sound of marching chainmail drew their attention back towards the opening above them. Syn's lips pursed.

"What is it?"

As if to answer The King, two rows of armed spearmen started filing down the ramp and quickly circled around both men. They pointed their spears inwards, and The King got the sneaky suspicion that they were more than willing to use them.

He spun around looking for an escape.

There was none to be found.

At least, not for him.

"Looks like your day isn't done yet," said Syn. Like a snake, he slipped through the armed ranks and smiled from behind their backs. But he was right.

The tips of two spears gently prodded The King in the back. He took a half-step forward to give himself some breathing space, but they quickly found his back again.

He stepped again.

And again.

In the direction of the ramp.

"Motherfucker..." he muttered.

The spears parted and left only one way for The King to go - back up onto the arena floor.

When he emerged back into the battlefield it was clear the bloodlust of the citizens of X had not been sated by the defeat of the wolf - whose carcass had been removed but whose dark blood still stained the dirt where it fell. They didn't want the wolf's tongue; they wanted *his*.

"HEAR YE! HEAR YE!" Isaiah's herald called for the crowd's attention. **"People of X! His Royal Highness, The 'Lonely King', The 'Heir Apparent', 'The Kingslayer', The Rightful King of All of X, King Isaiah, First of His Name has made a promise to restore peace to the lands! Thus... the FALSE KING's trial will continue. But he shall not face trial alone..."** A rusted clank rang across the Arena, followed by groaning whir. The door that the direwolf had been brought in through began to open once again and a row of guards - not unlike the ones that had fetched The King from below - escorted out a prisoner with a bag over their head. They forced the body to the ground near The King and ripped the bag from their head. **"BEHOLD! The guerilla terrorist leader of The Auroras - Magdalena Lockheart!"**

Jeers met the young woman who stubbornly forced her way to her feet. On her face, The King saw a swollen lip and a splattering of blood painting the fringe of her white hair.

"And also on trial..." the herald continued. Thudding footsteps came from behind The King, where the same soldiers who had forced him back into the arena were bringing a beast of a man up from Syn's subterranean facility. **"The monstrous Nickleman of Stueben Village!"**

The hulking figure batted away at the armed men, knocking spears from hands and sending a few of them sprawling. **"I R NICKLES!"** Any guards who managed to remain on their feet immediately jabbed their spears into The Nickleman's back and like The King had earlier - he retreated further into the Arena to get away from them.

The King spotted Syn slinking up the ramp in the background and posturing for Isaiah - in stark contrast to his earlier words.

With the three now summoned, King Isaiah took centre stage to outline the charges.

“Prisoner Lockheart,” he began, **“You are charged with espionage, committing terrorist acts upon the commerce of the House of Gorgo, and for making your own inadequacies everyone else’s problem. How do you plead?”**

Magdalena Lockheart spat on the ground.

Isaiah scoffed and moved down the line. **“Prisoner Nickleman, you are charged with child abandonment and... necrophagia? Ugh, gross. How do you plead?”**

“I R NICKLES!” The Nickleman roared.

“Hmm... indeed,” Isaiah mused. Finally, he moved on to The King. A tense moment - ‘King’ to King - preceded the arraignment.

“Prisoner—”

The King interrupted. **“Go on fam’, say my name...”**

Scowling, Isaiah opted to skip the surname completely. **“You are charged with high treason, insurrection, sedition, lèse-majesté, and crimes against the people of X. How do you plead?”**

“...King.”

Rolling his eyes, Isaiah proclaimed, **“I hereby find all three of your responses unacceptable. By divine right I charge that here in the Arena of March, you shall do combat until only one remains living. Let the Ides of March continue!”**



TODAY 
 STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, ENGLAND

“On the 30th of January, 2023, in the middle of an XWF ring, I was set on fire. I wish I could say that was the first time my skin sizzled, but... it wasn’t.

Later that year... ARCADIA. I was drugged - twice - and thrust out into an underground complex to fight for my life. Again... not the first time.

On my left inner thigh, there’s a scar - a stab wound. Right side of my back, another stabbing. It just missed the kidney. Two gunshots in my left shoulder; bicep torn to shreds. Another in my right foot. Another clipped my ear. Three separate incidents. I’ve been starved, beaten, spat on. I’ve crawled through fucking glass just to get the next fix.

And yet... here I am, scars on display; mouth writing checks; and still fucking standing!

So what the fuck did you expect to happen when Scoops and Sarah both nailed me after the bell? I know there’s this notion out there about me that I like to take the easy way out, but I gladly invite anybody to question the dues paid or the scars I wear like badges of fucking honour. And that’s the thing... people want to act like I haven’t paid my dues. At the outset of this tournament, Aurora tried to lecture Gorgo on this very topic, but I wonder... with the shoe on the other foot, will she turn hypocrite or ignorant? Or both?

She and I are at very different paths in our stories. Aurora's plugging away, telling herself that some day soon she'll be the person she thinks she can be - her words. But while she's busy reinventing herself after her life fell apart, my own life has never been a quest to find out who I am. I've never had to grapple with fighting my heroes or peeking out from under the shadow of anybody else. I'm not cycling through names like Maggie, Aurora, or *JENOVA*... I'm just the same ol' four letter descriptor that applied this exact time last year: KING.

And it's going to remain that way. After all, how the fuck is anyone supposed to take seriously a wannabe Queen who couldn't even win every one of their tournament matches? Imagine the degradation to the crown if that were to occur!

Never fear, your King is here.

Because it's like I said to Mark Flynn this time last year: Good people don't win this tournament. And as long as her conflict with Stars and Strife continues to distract her from getting *her* fix - an addict, again her words - she won't ever have the self awareness to do what needs to be done.

Nor the understanding of me.

Because while she was there at Spooky Savage while Gorgo wasn't, I was here long before Savage - Spooky or not - was ever a fucking thing. If Aurora manages to get through to meet ME in the finals, she'll find out that I represent the very scars etched into the XWF itself.

And she's just a scab that will fade away with time.

She fears becoming what Gorgo wants to be?

She already is.

She's just another broken shell of a human who flicks through new identities like it's another tattoo on her body. Gorgo with a nicer smile.

More than that... after a disappointing tag team championship run and an inability to ever truly put Gorgo down... isn't Aurora just another *failure*?

Just like Gorgo.

Just like Charlie.

It's super fitting that Aurora went digging through the back catalogue of the others who have made Charlie their bitch, because that little quote that Cheddar Al gave sure sums up the lay of the land for the Nickleman as much now as it did back then.

Charlie Nickles once again has the TV Championship as an opportunity presents itself.

Charlie Nickles once again *chokes*.

Oh, but what was his response to Aurora's little necro-quoting? 'I ran that guy out of town just like I did this person, and that person, and this other person over here!'

First of all, fuck ALIAS. Good riddance to that ho.

Second of all, shouldn't the honour of his scalp go to either Raion Kido or Corey Smith? God forbid we expect logic from Charlie Nickles.

THIRD of all... that was THREE years ago. So was Betsy Granger, and Jim Caedus, and whoever else he's mouthing off about. What has he done since?

Now, I know that's rich coming from YA BOY here - last of my generation and all that. But I've got this fancy crown now. Charlie? Well, it's like Aurora-through-ALIAS pointed out... *Same as he ever was.*

It's why he has to hang his hat on running people off, because he couldn't actually *beat* them in a fight. And it's the same reason he runs around the 24/7 corridors like a goddamn sex pest hoping against all hell that if he manages to nab the X-Treme Championship then maybe he can get a fucking sniff of the panties of the Universal Champion, only to drop the fucking ball every single time.

He has nothing else than that.

And if it were anybody else it would almost be sad.

I wonder what it's like living in his shoes and knowing that no matter what he does, Geppetto will never make him a real boy?

He's not Pinocchio. He's fucking Lampwick - post-transformation.

Because this is not his story. It's mine.

BACK. TO. BACK.

Charlie, like Aurora, is just another side character in my re-coronation. It doesn't matter which of them I see at the end. I'm running right through them just like I will the fucking loser I'll be wrecking earlier in the night.

Ugh.. do I *have* to talk about him?"



THE AGE OF KING, YEAR 2 
 THE ARENA OF MARCH

"Death! **DEATH! DEATH!**" The citizens of X only wanted one thing for the three criminals.

The Nickleman was happy to oblige. Before the gates to the arena had even been closed, he bellowed "**I R NICKLES!**" nonsensically once again and charged in The King's direction.

The King dove under The Nickleman's swinging arms.

Right towards one of the soldiers the big guy had knocked to the ground.

More specifically, the soldier's spear.

Deftly, The King snapped it up and spun. His feet planted firmly in the ground and the spear fired from above his shoulder. Sailing through the air, it skimmed past The Nickleman's shaggy mane and jammed into the crack between different planks of timber in the frame just below where Isaiah and his council sat.

"**I R NICKLES!**" The Nickleman boasted. The other soldiers scrambled and made sure there were no more weapons lying about for one of these prisoners to use.

A harrowing creak sapped the energy out of the entire arena. Soldiers and spectators alike watched on, eyes wide.

The Nickleman cocked his head like a confused dog. "**I R NICKLES?**"

CRAAAAAAASH!

The entire staging collapsed forward, wiping out The Nickleman and taking him, Isaiah, the herald, and even lovely Universia down into a pit of dust and debris.

A stunned silence was broken by a faceless voice shouting out the same word the crowd had been begging for: **“DEATH!”**

And one of the soldiers quickly jumped to the ready. **“Kill the prisoners!”**

“Fuck...” Lionheart mumbled. A throng of spears came charging for both her and The King.

“DEATH!” a different voice joined. And suddenly a horde of gladiators came pouring up the ramp and onto the arena floor. Meeting their call, citizens began leaping into the pit, and pockets of violence spread across the grounds until the whole arena erupted into a riot.

From the chaos, a flying fist came at The King’s face. He found the body it was attached to and threw them over his shoulder. Another punch was caught, and the corresponding face was drilled by The King’s head. The originator of a flung shoe was less easy to spot, but it hit a soldier in the face and allowed The King time to drive his knee into the soldier’s crotch and step over the crumpled body.

The mass of unarmed humanity filling up the coliseum proved just the right shielding that The King needed from sharp pointy sticks and those who would wish to use them.

He cut a swathe through the crowd in a similar fashion. Every now and then a whirl of white showed that Magdalena Lionheart was still fighting amongst the chaos. But the frenzy was less about her, The Nickleman, or even The King now. As The King battled through, he saw civilians unite against soldiers, only to then turn on each other. Long-held vendettas and unbridled rage united to expose the *truth* of the people that lived in the Land of X.

That was *their* problem.

Ahead of him, the remains of Isaiah’s platform came into view.

That flash of white appeared between it and The King.

“You can run free,” The King said to Lionheart. **“Back to your Auroras, back to your home.”**

“I have no home left,” she said. He could see her muscles tensing.

“Because of me?”

She laughed. **“No. But you’re in the way of the only way I can make what I’ve lost mean anything.”**

Those tense muscles twitched. And her eyes... The King saw them flick backwards towards the pile of rubble.

She was after the same thing he was!

Closer to the wreckage, she bolted back towards it. The King hurried after and grabbed her by the arm. He pulled, and she came falling back. Reacting quickly, Lionheart used the change in momentum to turn herself in the air. A spinning kick caught The King in the face and dropped him to his knees. With a powerful stamp of her foot, she caught the end of a wayward piece of wood and it flipped up into the air and into her hand - another pointy stick. **“It’s okay, I’ll make this quick.”**

The King grunted. Grabbing a handful of sand, he flung it into Lionheart’s face.

And then like a wild animal backed into a corner, he bit her fucking ear off.

Magdalena let loose an ungodly scream.

The King pushed past her and started tearing through the rubble.

Coming across a body, he never bothered to even see who it was, let alone check whether they were still breathing. He just kept searching.

Over the riot behind him, he heard footsteps approaching.

"I'm going to fucking kill you!" Magdalena screamed, tapping into a *different version* of herself.

Finally taking a pointy stick for himself, The King spun to face her.

A slow rumble interrupted their exchange.

"I... R... NICKLES!" Timber flew in all directions as The Nickleman burst from the staging like a kaiju coming out of the ocean. Ducking for cover, the sound of clinking metal caught the attention of both The King and Magdalena.

Isaiah's crown bounced right to their feet.

They both looked down.

And then back at each other.

And then down again.

For The King, it was déjà vu. It was in this very arena that he took the crown one year ago. And now... it was there for the taking once again.

"Hey big guy!" He shouted out, drawing The Nickleman's attention. **"Did you know ol' Mags' here is a WOMAN?"**

True to the beast's reputation, that inspired a unique rage within The Nickleman, who set his sights firmly on the terrorist Lionheart. The King mouthed 'sorry', and yanked the crown from the ground.

And he fled the scene, leaving Magdalena Lionheart to her fate.

Scaling the rubble and up to the side of the amphitheatre, the promise of freedom beckoned.

He took it.

The King dropped over the edge of the Arena of March and onto a small patch of brown grass. The echo of violence on the other side of the wall continued as he hugged the edge of the arena and crept his way towards finding a street he could slip down - and away into the night. *With his prize.*

He was so close to freedom, so close to taking his crown and retreating back to whatever new-old castle he could find...

The sound of a man's voice gave him pause. **"There, there... it'll be okay."**

Peering around the wall, he saw the slimy Syn gently caressing the hair of a young woman.

"That was a nasty fall," said Syn. **"Don't worry, I'll look after you... Princess."**

Hunched over on the ground, Princess Universia sobbed.

Meanwhile, The King spied the exact kind of route he had been looking for across an otherwise empty market: A laneway edged by a smattering of houses that seemed to fade off into a row of trees. A way out.

He looked down at the crown he still clutched in his hands.

"Come with me," Syn urged Universia. **"Before any of those savages find out you're still alive."**

She looked up at him, and in the water pooling around her eyes, a glint of gold shocked Syn into spinning around.

A pointy stick drove up under his ribcage.

"I knew you were the type to go after another man's girl..." The King quipped, the crown now sitting comfortably on his head.

Syn fell to the ground, blood gurgling from his mouth.
Universia stammered. **“Y-y-you... you came back for me?”**
The King wiped the tears from her eyes.
“It’s about time...”
And he offered her his hand.



TODAY 
 STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, ENGLAND

“It’s not the norm to start this shit with addressing those in the finals rather than my first fight. One might think I’m looking past Matthias Syn in the process...”

Of course I fucking am!

Matthias Syn is SHIT.

My entire second reign will forever be marred by the fact that having to go through him to win is going to make me feel like I haven’t earned it.

After all, Matthias Syn has shit the bed every time he gets near someone worth half a damn. Ned? L. Bacchus? L. Game Girl? L. That wily sonofabitch allegedly known as Micheal Graves? L. Matty’s sitting on a title that he defends LESS than once a month, and when he does it’s against people like Roger and Razor Blade. Even Charlie Nickles is putting his TV Title on the line each and every week in THIS VERY TOURNAMENT. Meanwhile... Syn is NOT. And I could even give him the benefit of the doubt that the last rounds were on Warfare rather than Anarchy, but this is a fucking Pay Per View and he gets a pass? Since when? He’s totally the kind of guy who would make a fucking show about he would never accept management’s decisions, so I reckon Syn should grow some fucking stones here and make decisions for himself instead of being a giant bitch - cause he sure was cool with defending against Razor! But not against me, eh?

Of course.

Because even when faced with the very visage of the system he alleges he wants to overthrow - and rest assured that’s EXACTLY what I am... Syn still won’t put it all on the line.

See, Syn’s lying to everyone - himself included.

You’ve heard him speak, right? ‘Matthias Syn offers dignity! Follow him and he will set you free!’ Well... fuck that shit!

He isn’t trying to change the system.

He’s no revolutionary, he’s just another piece of shit promising change but only serving himself.

He just wants to be the one running things.

Look at how he bangs on about Atty freely taking her husband's surname. He never saw the fight that Atty put into getting James in the first place. And he doesn't care to hear her out on it! He doesn't want *freedom*, he wants *control*. ...And to fucking goon over her or whatever.

But when he steps against his betters, control gets forced on him.

So that's exactly what I'm going to do.

And what the fuck is he going to do about it? Call me autistic and hope I like to wear dresses so he can tell me to get back in the kitchen?

So fucking edgy!

So fucking... *pathetic*. Like his title; like his history-to-date; and like his chances at ever achieving in his career what I achieve with my morning shit the day after a night of tequila shots and chicken korma.

For every French Revolution there are hundreds of pissant attempts to overthrow the monarchy. No guesses needed which side of that divide Syn is on:

'Cause I don't care to even let him eat cake.

I'm going to starve the bitch."



A FEW DAYS AGO ██████████
██████████ NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

"It's about time, amirite? Kieran smiled.

Thaddeus Duke shut a small black binder and placed his pen down on top of it.

"Better late than never," he said. That typical smug smile of his didn't annoy The King quite as much as it had on other occasions.

"How about a drink to celebrate?"

"Tempting, but Frankie's got a thing. Raincheck?"

Kieran tapped on the binder. **"We're going to have plenty of opportunities once the lawyers finalise it all."**

"That we are." Thad rose and Kieran followed suit. Over top of the binder, the two shook hands.

On a page sticking just out from the top, the words 'NEW XWF CONTRACT' were clearly visible.

Long live the King...

