

## Episode 1: Pilot/Gathering Storm

*Fade in. A thunderstorm rages overhead as we pan down towards the Jordunn Contact running, out of breath, through the soggy streets of Bal Thorgest. The buildings on either side of the street are not in the same architectural style - some are tents, some are fully bricked and mortared - but the Jordunn Contact seems to be heading toward a small collection of wooden buildings on the side of the river. He bursts into a wooden building and bolts the door behind him. He lights a lamp and pulls out a piece of paper and a quill and begins writing a letter, camera focused on his face and hands, not on the contents of the letter. As he writes there is a hard knock at the door, which startles him and causes him to briefly look up from his writing, but he continues. As he finishes the letter and begins to roll it up, there is another loud banging at the door, this time we hear the sound of the locking breaking, and the door crashing inwards. The Jordunn Contact dashes up the stairs just before the door bursts open and heavy boots stomp across the floor. He arrives at the carrier pigeon storage on top of the building and attaches the letter to the pigeon's leg. The moment he releases it out of the window into the storm, he turns his head in time for an empire operative to step into the frame and hit him over the head. The camera zooms out slightly to reveal the Imperial operatives looking out the window as the pigeon flies away, with the Jordunn Contact's body at their feet.*

Transition to Scene 1:

*Boats creak in the port as Felix disembarks onto the dock of Bal Thorgest. The port is bustling, the weather is fair, and Felix is looking forward to a successful first day of being a merchant. He makes his way up the dock and onto the street, passing by an Old Fisherman.*

**Old Fisherman:** Fresh Fish! Get your fish! Cod, Mackerel, Salmon, all pulled from the depths not an hour ago!

*He notices Felix.*

You, young man! You look like someone who could use some fresh fish!

**Felix:** I've had nothing but fish for three weeks. I'll have to pass.

**Old Fisherman:** A sailor! Trust me boy the fish you've been swallowing wasn't Bal Thorgest fish. Buy some and taste better fish than any you could find in the Empire!

**Felix:** Fish is fish, old man.

**Old Fisherman:** \*sighs\* Where are you from, boy?

**Felix:** Rhone, down on the eastern coast.

**Old Fisherman:** Rhone! Why-ever did you leave, what with such lovely sea and fish at home? **Felix:** As I said, fish is fish, I've got other things to worry about!

**Old Fisherman:** Well, what *are* doing you up in Bal Thorgest that's so much more important than fish then?

**Felix:** I'm here working for a merchant company; we should be setting off for the Jordunn Valley by... well be sooner rather than later, so I really must be going.

**Old Fisherman:** *\*Looking down and shaking his head\** Yet another of the Empire with business in the Valley, it seems there's more and more of you every month. It won't be long now 'till Viceroy Kratoria brings Bal Thorgest and the Jordunn into your fold.

*Felix looks at him with a confused look on his face.*

**Old Fisherman:** I just hope I get to keep fishing.

*Felix departs from the fishmonger's stall towards the opposite side of the street, where the Head of the company is organizing the goods to be sent up into the valley. The merchant company's branch in Bal Thogest is located in a sturdy building near the port's unloading zone. Lucius, the head of the branch, is organizing the loading of goods onto the carts.*

**Lucius:** ... plus the ten crates of allspice that should arrive within the hour. Remember to check your copy of the manifest before you mark off any of the carts. Any issues should be reported to Robert. Thank you for your help, gentlemen.

**Felix:** Good day to you, sir. I'm Felix Irolas.

**Lucius:** Felix Irolas...? I don't believe I've... ah, you must be that junior trader coming up from Rhone? Welcome to Bal Thorgest.

**Felix:** Pleasure to be here.

**Lucius:** I'm sure it is. Not a moment too soon either - if the ship was any later, we'd have to delay the caravan up into the valley by a week! Please, come introduce yourself to everyone.

**Lucius:** Everyone, our newest trader has arrived. Felix, go ahead.

**Felix:** *(As Felix speaks, most of the rest in the building remain uninterested and continue about their business)* Good day to you, everyone. I'm Felix Irolas, a junior trader from the coastal branch, and I will be assisting you for the next few months. Pleased to meet all of you.

*There are a few grunts of acknowledgement.*

**Lucius:** Let's put you to work, shall we? The merchants here in Bal Thorghest still won't let Empire merchants operate without reporting their cargo, now that we have the full manifest for our caravan, please bring it to the head of the Trader's Guild. You'll see the building in the Jordunn quarter, the only tall one!

**Felix:** Oh... yes, of course.

*Cut. Felix makes his way through the streets of Bal Thorghest, passing architecture that the Jordunn Contact did on his run in the opening scene. Felix arrives at the building we recognize from the opening scene and walks through the open door to an empty room with a desk and papers on it.*

Felix: Hello? Anyone here? I'm from Golden Road Shipping for the Valley permits. I have the manifest here and I—

**Jordunn Contact:** I'll be right with you, just give me a moment! [clattering in the backroom] ... Alright you're those Imperials heading up to make some money in the valley, right?

**Felix:** I suppose you could call it that.

**JC:** Let me see that manifest.

*Felix hands it to him.*

**JC:** [As he examines the manifest] Call it what it is, I say. All sorts of people are doing it, everyone knows your Empire is on its way to the Valley.

**Felix:** People here don't like the Empire much, do they?

**JC:** What would you expect? No one likes losing control over the land they've tended for hundreds of years. Most kingdoms have survived since the Sword Age. Fewer and fewer of them remain. Some people would say everyone has gotten on just fine without the Empire.

**Felix:** Some people?

**JC:** [smiles] Fewer and fewer, to be fair.

**Felix:** [Furrows brow] Have you finished with the manifest? I'm on a schedule.

**JC:** Yes, yes. Everything seems to be in order here; I'll get your permits and you can be on your way.

*Felix waits as JC leaves for a moment before returning with the permits.*

**JC:** Here you are.

**Felix:** Thank you.

**JC:** You be careful out there!

*Felix gives him a quizzical look.*

**JC:** Storm's brewing that's all, and it's a shame when young get caught in such things.

**Felix:** I'm not that young.

**JC:** [smiling] Of course not.

Scene 2:

*We find ourselves with Elia in the Viceroy's Council room. She is looking at a drawing of the Jordunn Contact. The entire cabinet is assembled to discuss the Viceroyalty's next moves to garner influence over Bal Thorgest for the Empire. She refocuses on the drawing on the table in front of her.*

**Elia:** And what exactly is this man's role?

**Aide:** It's unclear. He appears to be some kind of informant for the Jordunn High King, or perhaps some other powerful Jordunn figure.

**Minister Prevus** (order): It's safe to say that he will be an obstacle to any influence we try to exert over Bal Thorgest, overt or otherwise. He must be dealt with.

**Minister Tunos** (law): Are you proposing we use the Black Cloaks? There must be a better way.

**Minister Prevus:** I don't see one.

**Elia:** There is. It's too early to act that directly; we have the time and the resources to form ties with Bal Thorgest and bring them into the fold *de facto*, without needing to kill spies and march soldiers in. It's safer now and it means easier and more peaceful governance down the road.

**Minister Prevus:** Killing an informant does not mean mobilizing troops, Minister Demir. No one's saying anything about that yet.

**Viceroy:** Minister Demir, Minister Prevus, be civil.

**Both:** Apologies, sir.

**Viceroy:** To be clear Minister Prevus, you would have us eventually move soldiers into Bal Thorgest.

**Minister Prevus:** I... do think that will be the best course of action, yes.

**Viceroy:** I'm not willing to commit to that yet.

*He and Elia share a look.*

**Minister 3:** It seems, according to this report, that even if in the long term we move forward with Minister Demir's... gentle approach to Bal Thorgest, this Jordunn informant remains an obstacle. He'll warn of economic and social influence as much as he would an occupation.

**Elia:** I don't know if

**Minister Prevus:** That was my original point, Viceroy: he'll remain an obstacle no matter what our grand strategy around Bal Thorgest is.

*The Viceroy thinks it over for a moment*

**Elia:** Viceroy, there's no telling what sort of moves this may force us to make, I really can't recommend

**Viceroy:** He's right Elia. I want a peaceful assimilation as much as anyone, but this informant stands in the way of that too. We can't exert soft power if there are people actively undermining it. Minister Prevus, make preparations to silence him.

**Minister Prevus:** Yes, sir.

**Viceroy:** You're all dismissed.

*Elia sighs as everyone gets up and begins to leave the room. Minister Prevus smiles wryly. Cut to Elia meeting her Chief of Staff, Victoria Kanumba and they go down the hall to her office.*

**Victoria:** Alright, ma'am?

**Elia:** It could have gone better.

**Victoria:** Do we have orders from the Viceroy?

**Elia:** No. Soon, however. Soon.

**Victoria:** How soon, ma'am?

**Elia:** If we're lucky, the situation won't get messy until winter. Minister 1 is making his move tonight and if he does it smoothly Bal Thorgest will be under our control by month's end.

**Victoria:** And if not?

**Elia:** Then we'll have to deal with the Jordunn sooner than expected.

*They enter Elia's office where Friedrich Mercuri and Matthias Vahid are waiting at attention. Friedrich Matthias:* Ma'am.

**Elia:** At ease, and good to see you. Meeting was a complete step back. D don't ask me about it. *Friedrich and Mattias exchange a glance.*

**Matthias:** The scouts are fully outfitted and ready to be deployed, mMa'am. I know it's early to

start making moves towards the Valley, but we can begin to get a lay of the land whenever you want.

**Elia:** Hold off. Moving *any* of our personnel into the valley is something we should discuss with the Viceroy first. Besides, we don't need any information right now that our previous probes and research haven't given. It's too early to risk raising the Jordunn's eyebrows.

**Matthias:** Yes, ma'am.

**Elia:** Still, we must stay alert and ready to move. As soon as we can safely say we're in control of Bal Thorgest, both of your *\*gesturing to Matthias and Friedrich\** jobs start in earnest. Friedrich, you'll send some engineers and doctors to begin assisting the people of Bal Thorgest to start building favor as quickly as possible, while the rest will move with us to the Gate into the Valley where we'll set up the new Viceroy's headquarters.

**Friedrich:** They're replacing Viceroy Kratoria?

**Elia:** No, no, no. It's uh—

**Victoria:** Same Viceroy, new headquarters once we secure Bal Thorgest.

**Elia:** Thank you.

**Friedrich:** Understood.

**Elia:** Matthias, your scouts will move into the valley ahead of the rest of us. We can expect some of their clan chiefs to be receptive to us, and others to be hostile. Find out who's who.

**Matthias:** Yes, ma'am.

**Elia:** There's also the matter of Minister Prevus deploying an assassination group to Bal Thorgest tonight to remove a Jordunn informant.

**Friedrich:** So much for not raising eyebrows.

**Elia:** Indeed... (*looking around at staff*) I don't trust that we'll hear the full story from him if something goes wrong.

**Victoria:** What are you suggesting, ma'am?

*Elia thinks, arms crossed, and looks up.*

**Elia:** Matthias, since the scouts *are* ready for deployment, I want you to select a group to trail the assassins at a distance and report back to me. Are there any men we can trust with that?

**Matthias:** Aye, Ma'am. I would recommend Kendi Arai's squadron, perhaps...

**Elia:** Fine, make it so... And have him debrief me personally.

*Matthias nods. Elia motions with her hand that they are dismissed.*

**Elia:** One last thing, Matthias. An extra angle from rereading the stories we *have* been able to gather. When you finally head into the Valley, find Dann ó Cearrail - they call him the "Shield of the Valley." If we can negotiate with him, he may be an asset to... well to a smoother transition. Keep it in the back of your head.

Transition to Scene 3:

*The camera shifts to an outside view of a tent, with Kendi exiting it. He dons his helmet again and makes his way across the staging ground to the logistics center, seeking new orders for his squadron. However, Matthias intercepts him.*

**Matthias:** Sergeant Arai, hold there a moment.

*Kendi stops and stands at attention in traditional military style. He*

*salutes. Matthias:* At ease, Kendi. No need to be so stiff now.

**Kendi:** Can't help it, Commander.

**Matthias:** I've just received orders for you and the 5th squadron.

**Kendi:** (looks puzzled, gesturing to the logistics center): Sir? I was just going to—

**Matthias:** They were not to be relayed through the logistics center, they come directly from Minister Demir.

*Kendi looks a little surprised but maintains his composed and calm expression.*

**Matthias:** The Viceroy has ordered the deployment of a "special force" to take care of a problem within Bal Thorgest. They will move under cover of darkness tonight - I have the feeling they'll *blend in pretty well with the shadows*. You are to follow them; more details are within this envelope.

**Kendi:** I understand, sir.

**Matthias:** Prepare to leave soon. You can wait in the Golden Road shipping warehouses until nightfall.

**Kendi:** Aye, sir.

*They salute each other and Matthias walks away. Kendi makes his way back to his tent. He swings the flap open as he enters before sitting on his bed and opening the envelope and reading the orders. He exits the tent and whistles, eight of the ten of his men stop what they're doing/come out of surrounding tents and sit/lean around him.*

**Kendi**(still looking at the orders): Everyone! We have our orders. We are to – (he looks up) where are Bertolt and Philbert?

**Argius:** Don't know, sir.

**Sven:** Philbert is at the mess hall - or maybe looking for men at the tavern. He's somewhere in town.

**Alexander:** Knowing Bertolt he's probably still at the training ground.

**Kendi:** Sven, would you go get them?

**Sven:** Sir.

*Sven leaves.*

**Kendi:** Hopefully that will be settled soon. As I was saying, we've been given orders directly from the Minister. We're to go to Bal Thorgest on surveillance. I'll share more detail with you on the way (*the walls have ears subtext*): for now, get yourself fed and equipped. Wear light, quiet armor under street clothes.

**All:** Aye, sir.

**Kendi:** Any questions?

**All:** No, sir.

**Kendi:** Good. Alexander: brief Sven and the rest when they return. Everyone else: you have 30 minutes.

**Alexander:** (in unison): Aye, sir.

*The men scatter, some going towards the mess hall, others towards their tents. Kendi has an "introspective" moment as he watches the preparations. Shots of Kendi himself putting on clothes and strapping on weapons, knives etcetera, interspersed with vignettes of interactions with squad members and their interactions with each other.*

*Kendi enters the mess hall for a bite to eat. He notices Jonathan and Akila at a bench with bowls of army stew. Kendi gets a piece of bread for himself, then sits down next to Akila.*

**Akila, Jonathan:** Sir.

**Kendi:** Stew any good?

**Jonathan:** (mouth slightly full) Not particularly. Better than last night.

**Akila:** What I would do for some Western Salt right now... I could make this stew so much better...

**Kendi:** Could you, now?



**Akila:** \*Grunts\*

**Jonathan:** So, nothing more to say about Bal Thorgest, sir?

**Kendi:** Nothing more to say, John.

**Jonathan:** Would be good to have some idea of what we're up against is all, just to start thinking about.

**Akila:** You've got no patience at all, have you?

**Jonathan:** Just asking!

**Kendi:** (chews and gives him a look) Nothing more to say for now.

**Jonathan:** Aye, sir. Apologies.

**Kendi:** Don't worry about it. Enjoy the rest of your meal, and don't be late.

*Kendi stands with the camera close to him. Transition to him returning to their group of tents as Sven, Bertolt, and Philbert return.*

**Sven:** I found the stragglers and Alexander has briefed us, sir. Do you need any assistance with anything?

**Karl:** (yelling from inside the tent): SVEN! HAVE YOU SEEN MY Dice?

**Sven:** (departing): Fuckin' hell, Karl, I'm right here! Shut up!

*Camera focuses on Sven and Karl briefly with Kendi leaving for the fire where Bertolt and Philbert are sitting, smirking.*

*He and Sven enter the tent. Kendi sits down to text Philbert and Bertolt. Philbert is slurping down some soup, Bertolt is tying on his armor and strapping on knives and short swords.*

**Kendi:** How are you two doing?

**Bertolt:** Fine, sir, eager to head out

*Kendi looks at Philbert, who is intensely drinking the soup, for it is SOUP TIME. He sees Kendi looking and chokes on his soup as he stops drinking it while nodding his head yes.*

**Philbert:** Yes (clear throat) doing good, sir, ready to go.

**Kendi:** You have a productive time in town?

**Philbert:** I *would* have, but Sven found me *just* as I'd gotten talking to this server at The Flying Frog, if I'd had had just a *moment* longer with him, I'd have—

**Bertolt**(rolling his eyes): Oh, sure you would have...

**Philbert**: I swear I was *this* close.

**Kendi**(sarcastically): If I had known you were in the middle of such important business, I'd have asked Commander Matthias to tell Minister Demir that we couldn't go until tomorrow.

**Philbert**: I'm sure a smart woman like her would understand.

**Bertolt**: Connecting with the locals, then, is that it?

**Philbert**: (smiling) Anything to serve the Empire.

**Kendi** (chuckles and stands up): Alright, I'll see you two soon. Bertolt, make sure he's ready on time.

*Kendi walks away with a similar shot as before, camera focusing on Philbert and Bertolt. Philbert puts his arms up in a "what gives" motion as Bertold chuckles and pats him on the shoulder.*

Transition to Scene 4:

*Cut to Dann waking up, raising himself out of bed into his wheelchair. He's maybe just under 60 years old and has graying hair, a worn face, and enormous arms. He wheels over to a washbasin, splashes water on his face, and raises his eyebrows in the reflection of a small copper mirror. He dresses himself slowly and methodically, clearly able to deal with his paralyzed legs, it's hard but he can manage it. He puts on pants, a belt, a kind of doublet that he buttons up, shoes, and several warrior bracelets on his biceps, each carrying an honor of some kind. After getting mostly dressed, he wheels outside of the room to an antechamber where an attendant awaits him. The attendant puts the final ceremonial touches on his outfit and escorts him outside of his abode. As he wheels away, we see the shield on the back of his wheelchair.*

*The sun has risen by now, and the capital city is shaking off its slumber. There's a bit of fog burning off in the early morning sun. Dann and his attendant himself down the path towards the trainee barracks. Shot of the Jordunn capital from above, showing people waking up and moving about, as the camera zooms out we get a picture of what the valley looks like around the capital: a river surrounded by beautiful green fields, with the sun rising over the mountains in the distance. Dann wheels himself through the gate to the training barracks into the yard, where his trainees are already awake and outfitted for morning training. Those who see him salute as they pass.*

*Dann nods approvingly as he passes through the grounds towards the hall of the Jordunn High Council. Two large trainees - especially burly ones, carrying large sticks - follow him towards the Hall. Dann wheels himself up a reasonably crude and steep dirt path at the back of the hill, the attendant and the trainees following him exchange some worried looks, but he succeeds. Eventually they reach a flight of stairs. At this point he locks his wheels, and the trainees attach the sticks to the front and back of his chair. Using this makeshift palanquin, the trainees, led by the attendant, carry him up the stairs to the backside of the Hall. They transfer him into a larger, more ceremonial chair, and he sends the two trainees back to the barracks. He wheels through the entrance with his attendant behind him. The hallway is warmly lit, and he soon arrives in the council chamber, where the other 10 lords are just arriving. They are here for the summer meetings to discuss the affairs of the Valley. Everyone knows that the meeting will be about the Empire. Chieftains talk and mingle, greeting old friends and shooting glances at rivals. Dann locks eyes with Fionn, a warrior: enormous, hot-blooded, and well known for his desire for violence against the Empire. Dann and he are very much at odds on this point. A door opens on the other end of the hall and the King walks through it. People continue to talk but Dann watches the King take his seat.*

**The King** (in a loud voice): Settle down! Settle!

(The court settles)

**The King**: Welcome, all, to my hall once again. I call this summer's Moot into its first session. Let us take oaths.

**The Chieftains** (in Unison): Upon my honor I swear to protect and serve our people. Upon my house I swear to tell no lies. Upon our land I swear to uphold my duties as chief. Until I fall to the

earth or the Valley crumbles, I swear.

**The King:** Let us begin. Be seated.

*The Chieftains and representatives take their seats.*

**The King:** I'm glad to have all of you here again. This summer may prove to be even more eventful than we thought.

*Chieftains murmur in agreement.*

**The King:** As you all know, the Empire to the south has steadily increased its influence over the region outside our valley over the past several years... Many among you have expressed concern over this and view the Empire as a threat.

*He looks at Fionn, and the hawkish chieftains.*

Our informant in Bal Thorgest reports that the trading town falls further under the influence of the Empire with each passing month, and I admit I am concerned about what this means for the future of the Valley. Chief Gallagher, as the Chieftain of the land closest to the Gate, I feel it is appropriate for you to voice your opinion first.

**Chief Gallagher:** Thank you, my King. We of Clan Gallagher are affected most strongly by the changes in the world outside. The Empire's influence has certainly been felt: our traders receive less favorable deals and face more competition from imperial caravans. Still, I do not encourage violence, of any kind, against their people who come: it would be too costly, and they pose no threat to the Valley.

**Chief Rolf:** No threat? And when our merchants are pushed out of Bal Thorgest once and for all, will they still pose no threat? The border clan grows weak, my king.

**Chief Gallagher:** Our merchants are used to exclusively supply certain goods; they aren't being *pushed out*. They will recover as we adapt to the changing times.

*Several Chieftains grunt and murmur disapprovingly.*

**Dann:** My king, if I may.

**The King (nods):** The Shield of the Valley is always free to speak.

**Dann:** Chief Gallagher is correct. We *cannot* risk war with an enemy we know little of, for something as small as trading rights in a town *outside* the Valley. It would be reckless and unmeasured, two vices you do not possess, my king. (*looks at hawks*)

**Chief Rolf:** There is no need to attack *me*, Dann.

**Dann:** I simply do not think it a wise policy, Haughty Hawkish Chieftain.

**Random Chieftain #1:** I agree with The Shield. We do not even know the Empire's intentions.

**Chief Paer:** That makes them *more* dangerous does it not? We should at least do something to show that we cannot be bullied. (*he and Fionn exchange a glance*)

**Dann:** And what would that involve? Burning farms? Doing so would tell *them* that *we* are a threat, that we are some barbarous people who attack unprovoked.

**Rolf and Paer:** We have been provoked!

**Chief Gallagher:** Trust me when I say that we have not.

**Random Chieftain #2:** It is not worth the risk. (*looks at Dann and nods*) It would indeed be too reckless.

**Random Chieftain #3:** I'm not so sure. I know Bal Thorgest isn't *part* of the valley but—

**Random Chieftain #2:** But that's precisely the point!

**King:** Settle now once more—.

**Fionn** (bellows): Are you all BLIND? This is not a matter of some petty trading dispute. They are *already* rich and decadent. They do not need Bal Thorgest for trade: the *only* reason anyone should want control over Bal Thorgest is to be able to move through the Gate to the Valley undisturbed. Any control they have over Bal Throgest is a threat to us.

**King:** Fionn, please —

**Fionn** (continuing): And if they *do* move into our home, we will be lost. They spit in the face of the Valley, poisoning the minds of our people with backwards ideals. I for one, do not intend to let us be subjugated. I do not intend to allow our us to become simp(ly) one of many, forced to live with peoples who know. We cannot, must not, allow them to take us lying down! Suffer not the alien, the heretic, to live! Burn them in their homes, burn them in their beds!

**Chief Gallagher:** Please, Fionn, calm yourself! You clearly misunderstand their intentions. The Empire is ambitious, yes, but also learned and industrious. Just as they could stand to learn humility, we could stand to improve our own sciences and industry. Clan Gallagher knows the benefits that come from outside our borders. A tempered approach, that shows our strength but creates bonds of friendship

**Fionn:** Clan Gallagher! Clan Gallagher is weak. The Gate leaks under your watch. What's the value of a few extra coins, or a fancy foreign invention, when our culture and our people are crushed? These foreigners will not respond to words of friendship, for they have no respect for our home! They will respond to nothing but our arrows shrieking through their skies and our spears piercing their armor!

**King** (angry): Silence! You are far out of line for one who does not even lead his clan. Remember that you have no legal right to this moot.

*(Fionn scowls)*

**Dann:** Fionn, you assume the worst of them when you know nothing of them.

**Fionn:** *(Looks at Dann, then around at the rest of the Chiefs)* If you cannot see what's coming now, then we truly are lost.

**King:** Enough! Fionn I will forgive this outburst because I know you only speak from love for our country, but your passion overwhelms you and you forget your place! We cannot risk provoking a people we know so little about, and we *certainly* will not burn farms and terrorize innocent people. They would see us as even more barbarous than they do now. And they would be right to. *(He looks around at all the chiefs)* We will *not* mobilize the Valley against the Empire at this point, if that means Bal Thorgest falls under their influence, then so be it.... Are the majority of the Chiefs in agreement?

*A majority of the Chiefs stand and bow. Fionn looks around at all of them and exits dramatically. The king watches him exit.*

**King:** Then this session is adjourned, we will meet again in the afternoon to discuss like cows or rain or some shit.

*The council adjourns, and the chieftain exit with their retainers. Some pause or stay behind to talk with one another, but most of the hawkish chiefs leave immediately. They catch up with Fionn, who is standing outside of the hall. He is clearly fuming mad.*

**Rolf:** My my Fionn that was quite an—

*Fionn turns and glares at him.*

**Paer:** Why don't we find somewhere more private, gentlemen?

**Fionn** *(Still glaring at Haughty Hawk):* That would be best.

*They walk down the stairs towards the main yard, which is currently full of tents set up for each of the chiefs and their retainers. This is the main political scheming ground of the valley. They approach a tent with a retainer outside, who pushes the flap aside for them to walk in. Fionn walks in and kicks a chair over (or some other violent act that sets people on edge). Conniving Hawk stops before walking in to talk to the retainer.*

**Rolf:** Make sure no one listens to us (name of retainer).

*The retainer nods, Conniving Hawk steps inside and sits in a chair at a*

*table.* **Fionn:** Blind, foolish bastards, the lot of them!

*Haughty and Conniving Hawks are startled.*

**Fionn:** I swear to you now, if the King will do nothing about these this vile people on our borders, if he will do nothing to protect our people, I will act where he will not. T

**Rolf:** Quiet, you great fool! Say what you will, they are right that you forget your place as an honored witness.

*Fionn walks slowly towards Haughty Hawk, cornering him against a bookshelf or wall.*

**Fionn:** Is it treason to defend my home? Is it treason to protect my people and correct the failings of those supposed to lead us? Chief Rolf, have you a spine? Do you love your home?

**Rolf** (stuttering): I - I - yes –

**Fionn:** You are so cowardly, if I cut you open right now, I doubt if piss wouldn't slip out from the wound. All your arrogant words and high-minded speech does nothing to hide your ineptitude!

*The chiefs are stunned into silence.*

**Paer:** Perhaps the two of you could cease fighting for a moment and sit down with me? We all want the same thing.

**Fionn** (*Backs off from Haughty Hawk and sits down*): Do we? I seem to be the only one willing to protect our country.

**Rolft** (*Also sitting down*): We are too importa– too visible, to act so rashly. We have our positions as chiefs to consider - the king could call other banners against us, or strip our powers

**Fionn:** Piss on your positions, the Jordunn people are more important.

**Paer:** No one disputes that Fionn, but if Rolf and I broke with the will of the King and the Council it would undermine us, undermine the legitimacy of our concerns. Surely you see that.

**Fionn:** (hesitantly grumbles affirmation)

**Rolf:** So, for the time being, there's nothing we can do.

*A silence hangs over them for a moment.*

**Fionn:** Nothing *you* can do.

**Paer:** Excuse me?

**Fionn:** Nothing *you* can do, because of your positions. But I'm not a chief. **Paer:** What are you saying?

**Fionn:** I can take action against the Empire, and you can keep your positions secure. All I would

need is material support.

**Rolf:** You want us to, what, *lend* you our men? I think others might notice.

**Fionn:** Keep your men, all I need are weapons and money, whatever material support you can discreetly provide. There are enough There enough true patriots to be found across the Valley; I can take care of recruitment myself.

**Paer:** *Discreetly* provide, Fionn... I mean I see how this would work, but even for you this

is... **Rolf:** I mean it's simply too risky. I don't think that

**Fionn:** Too risky? Too risky is waiting for the Empire to burn our homes and slaughter our people!

*He smashes his hand on the table, and a crack appears across it. There is another*

*silence.* **Fionn:** If you have any love for the Valley at all, you will do this at the very least.

You must. *Haughty Hawk and Conniving exchange a glance. Conniving Hawk looks up at*

*Fionn.*

**Paer:** If we do this, you cannot simply start attacking imperial caravans. *That* would be too risky. For now, it would just be to build up your forces.

*Fionn stands.*

**Fionn:** For now, then, that's all I'll do. But by every spirit in this Valley, if the Empire takes Bal Thorgest, nothing, not you, not the High King, will be able to keep me from them.

*He storms out pushing the flap aside and stepping out into the light.*