

# **The Return**

## **Chapter Thirty**

Without wasting any time, Celeste took charge giving orders to the rest of the men about. Jakob swiftly introduced his pirate crew and warmly embraced his old friends. However, he was eager to get down to business.

**"Is this all the men you have?"** Jakob asked as he embraced the General.

**"We have close to one hundred of our finest Legionnaires and former Rangers."**

He responded. Master Hanes began, gesturing towards the map of the Capital,

**"The Rangers were disbanded by the crown. The Lord Ranger still resides in the east here, with most of the remaining Rangers. These people here volunteered for the mission. Many Legionnaire leaders and citizens loyal to your father were imprisoned."**

**"But we have an insider,"** Celeste pointed towards the training pits that now served as prison cells. **"Datev volunteered to be captured and imprisoned with the rest of our men to keep them in shape for when the time comes to strike."**

**"The capital is currently under the control of a battalion of Orges, along with a squad of Twelves, led by a man named Espina,"** General Frizela added. Jakob, Jerms, and Gabriel exchanged glances.

**"You know him,"** Celeste asked.

**"All too well."** Gabriel responded.

**"Fred is cautious about being out in the open. However tomorrow, he will be at Paradise Falls, overseeing the construction of another statue of himself. It should be the perfect time to strike. But we need a distraction to be able to get into the military district**

from these passages here.” She pointed to the map. **“Once you enter the capital, we’ll get to the prisoners to free the prisoners to aid us against the Orges,”** Celeste explained.

**“Ah, so it's a suicide mission, is it?”** Jerms exclaimed.

**“Are you scared?”** Celeste challenged. Jerms was about to respond when Gabriel intervened.

**“He’ll do it. You and Semisi take the Rovers and make some noise.”** He commanded to Jerms.

**“Ya know what, mate. I reckon this plan's a beauty.”** Semisi chimed in, enthusiastic.

**“Once they create the distraction, it should provide us with a clear shot. Do you still remember how to get to the falls, Jakob?”** Celeste asked.

**“Just don't fall behind,”** Jakob answered confidently, flashing a playful smirk. Celeste returned his smile with a blush.

**“Will you be able to confront Fred, considering he's your uncle?”** the General inquired. Jakob hadn't given much thought to what he would do when he faced his uncle, but Jerms answered for him,

**“Of course, he can. He's the fookin Guardian mate.”** Jerms said confidently, hitting Jakob on the shoulder. Cheers erupted, and everyone began preparing. The plans were set for the night, they would launch their attack at dawn. The evening was filled with a tense silence, a calm before the storm. The men gathered their belongings and preparing themselves for the impending battle. Jakob briefly caught up with his old companions but withdrew when they

bombarded him with too many questions. As night descended, Jakob gently guided Celeste to a quiet corner away from the activity around them to have a private conversation. With a tender smile on his face, Jakob looked into Celeste eyes, expressing his heartfelt appreciation for her. He thanked her for the unwavering support and belief she had shown in him. In her faith he found strength to push beyond his doubts and fears, embracing the possibility of becoming the person he always aspired to be. With a sense of peace, Jakob knew it was time to rest and gather strength before the battle that awaited at dawn. As he bid Celeste goodnight with a subtle kiss, he carried a renewed sense of purpose. The night passed slowly, the moon cast an eerie glow over the camp as Jakob's comrades mentally and physically prepared themselves for the battle that awaited.

At dawn, the sky was hidden in deep grey clouds, cloaking any sign of sunlight. Despite the gloomy morning the camp awoke from its slumber, bursting with energy. Jakob stood at the forefront, flanked by his loyal pirate crew and the valiant Legionnaires. The time for action had arrived, and the mission to reclaim Stryder's Keep and bring justice back to the land was about to unfold. Guided by Bowhunter, he had a secret knowledge of ancient passageways that had long been lost to time. These forgotten routes would serve as their path towards the capital, providing an advantage against their adversaries.

Finally, they reached the outskirts of Stryder's Keep. There was an old roadway known as White Willow Way, that snaked its way through the rugged mountains into to the heart of the military district, bypassing the gates almost altogether, except for a small portion that remained visible and posed a challenge to their progress. Peering down to the entrance of the capital, it was Jakobs first time seeing home in what felt like a lifetime. The Grand Gates of Stryder's Keep. Once decorated with intricate engravings depicting scenes from their rich history, they now bore

the mark of their new ruler, Fred Stone, which only fueled Jakobs rage. The gates were flanked by towering stone walls that extended from mountain to mountain. Time had weathered these formidable structures, leaving behind the scars of countless battles and the relentless forces of nature. The walls, once a symbol of strength and protection, now bore the weight of a nation that had lost its way. The land itself seemed to reflect the capital's current state. A dark cloud loomed overhead, casting a Shadow that seemed to possess the very essence of the land. The once vibrant and prosperous nation now appeared worn and downtrodden. The signs of neglect were evident in the crumbling infrastructure and the desolate land that lacked the bustle of life it once held. Positioned and ready, Jakob gave the signal, his voice carrying through the still morning air.

**"Hootie Hoo," he called out.** Jerms and Semisi sprang into action, executing their diversion with precision. With a thunderous crash, they sent a riderless Rover hurtling towards the imposing gates of Stryder's Keep. The vehicle exploded upon impact, engulfing the area in a brilliant display of light and sound. The deafening explosion immediately drew the attention of the Twelve's stationed at the gates. Seizing the moment, Jerms and Semisi swiftly mounted their Rovers and raced away, expertly leading the guards on a wild chase across the rugged terrain. They counted on Fred's pride to brush off the incident as nothing more than a run-in with common outlaws, unworthy of his attention or concern. Meanwhile, with the guards distracted and the gates momentarily unguarded, they slipped through the forgotten passageways, making their way into the military district, with the prison cells as their ultimate destination. Reaching the cells, Jakob and Celeste silently subdued several guards, their movements as quiet as a whisper. Emerging from the shadows of a cell, Datev appeared with a grin on his face,

**"Took you long enough,"** he uttered. Jakob embraced Datev recognizing the old legend.

**"We're not finished yet,"** Jakob declared. With the prisoners freed and armed, Jakob led a smaller group of men towards Paradise Falls, where they suspected Fred would be. Meanwhile, The General took his forces to the remaining part of the prison locations to free the remaining reinforcements they needed. Jakob and his crew snuck through Legends Row and caught sight of the statues he held in high regard. However, seeing the statues' heads severed filled him with a burning rage. They emerged from the forest and headed through the courtyards, before making their way to Paradise Falls.

**"Hold on."** Celeste said, slowing down Jakob's pace. **"We need to find a safer route. The courtyards are swarming with Orges."** The Ogres moved with an air of sinister confidence, as if darkness itself was their ally. These creatures appeared as hideous beasts, their twisted faces, a chilling and menacing aura. There were several types of ogres, each with their own unique characteristics. Some had murky dark green skin, while others possessed a stony grey complexion that mirrored the hardness of a stone. Another group of Ogres displayed a deep, dark brown color, adding to their intimidating presence. Jakob assessed the rest of the courtyard and noticed a pile of burning clothes and books in the center of the smaller courtyard.

**"What's going on over there?"** Gabriel asked quietly.

**"They're burning books and the robes of former Rangers and Legionnaires."**

One of the men said.

**"Those bastards."** Aleki chimed in.

**"And what about the statues?"** Jakob asked looking at many erected statues throughout the courtyard.

**"It's all Fred's doing."** Celeste responded with a heavy heart.

**"I didn't realize the situation was this bad."** Jakob responded.

**"We need to find a better way to get there. There are too many here, and we don't even know if Fred is here yet."** Celeste continued.

**"Do you remember the route we took at the celebration?"** Jakob asked.

**"Yes,"** she replied, a realization dawning on her.

**"We can use that to sneak up to the Falls."** Jakob commanded. With that, Jakob led them off, maneuvering around the courtyards and into the lower section of the city. Along the way, they had to disarm a few guards, but they managed to do so without being detected. Finally, they reached the secret passage that Fred had told Jakob about many years ago. Not wanting to expose themselves, Jakob and his crew climbed up onto the roofs of the buildings to get a better view. From his vantage point, Jakob finally saw the construction of Fred's towering statue at Paradise Falls, a symbol of his oppressive rule. Fred himself stood at the base of the statue, surrounded by only a small number of guards.

**"We could take him down right now,"** one of the men whispered.

**"Shhhh,"** Jakob hushed them, peering over the edge of the roof. He needed to gather more information before making a move. Fred paced back and forth, donning a sleek black tunic and matching robe. The years had not been kind to him, as streaks of grey peppered his hair.

Jakob waited patiently, biding their time for the perfect moment to strike. Suddenly, Tita appeared, a sight Jakob hadn't seen in many years.

Suddenly, Tita appeared, flanked by Ogres. "You've returned?" Fred's indifference dripped like poison, his gaze fixed ahead, on his statue.

**"Hello Fred,"** Tita replied dismissively, showing little regard for his status.

**"I am the king, and you shall address me as such, or face the consequences,"** Fred snapped. **"What news do you bring from the meeting with the Masters of Dunes?"** he inquired but showing a disregard for their foreign enemies.

**"I tried to negotiate with the Masters of Dunes,"** Tita said, frustration coloring her voice. **"They refuse to treat with Ogres."**

**"Then threaten them more!"** Fred roared, his temper flaring.

**"We must surrender before war erupts,"** Tita stood firm, unyielding in her stance.

**"I will never surrender!"** Fred seethed, pacing back and forth, consumed by rage.

**"Then our nation will fall."** Tita uttered sternly

**"If I want it to crumble it may!"** Fred hissed, consumed by his malevolence.

As Jakob's anger simmered, Tita's words pierced his heart. **"The King should protect his people, not oppress them!"** she cried defiantly.

**"I shall do as I please,"** Fred sneered, stepping closer, his malice palpable.

Tita turned away, muttering, **"If only you were like your brother..."** In a moment of unchecked fury, Fred struck Tita, sending her sprawling to the ground.



**“Don’t you ever disrespect your King! Don’t you disrespect a servant of the true God!”** he towered over her, a tyrant in his own right. Jakob could no longer contain himself. Tita had been like family, and he refused to stand idly by. Celeste attempted to restrain him, but Jakob leaped off the roof of the building, landing gracefully and rolling to his feet. His hood covering his face.

**"Fred!"** Jakob yelled, his voice echoed across the platform.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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