

# Kings, Wizards, and Lasers

a novel (excerpt) by  
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“Full thrust, numbers three and five!”

“Already ten power!”

The craft shook violently, as it entered the planet’s atmosphere. It then spun wildly, causing those who had not had the good sense to strap in, to tumble wildly throughout the bridge. The ship had Vasco’s new Series V Sheildtiles spread completely over it’s seemingly too-thin shell. At the very least, it wouldn’t break up on reentry.

“All retros full!” screamed the Captain, but as before, the first mate had already completed the task - he was no fool and knew full well what was happening.

“The stabilizer is completely sheared off, so is retro two. There’s no way to make a landing. Captain, lets get out of here, before it’s too late!”

“Don’t tell me what to do, Balooud. We’re making a landing - period! I’m sick of you pompous off-worlders trying to run my ship.”

The first mate was dumbfounded. “But Captain, we could probably fix the stabilizer *in space*. I think Balooud is correct; with both number three and the stabilizer gone, I don’t think she’ll hold up.”

“Even *you*, Nwala,” mutiny’s running rampant on my vessel! We will most certainly learn the chain of command when we land this vessel. Right now, just **LAND THIS CRAFT!**”

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The men did their best, but it was to no avail. Most blacked out from the plus-7 Gs of the wildly spinning vessel, and those that remained conscious could not stabilize the ship before it crashed into a thick stand of ancient trees. Some of them thought how closely this resembled their own earth, just before they died.

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A lone figure stepped from the cold, wet and wind-torn night into a small-wooden building. It was a tavern. Though usually a place for him to avoid, he needed warmth. He spent his last three months stealing food and learning a language. He used his wits for the first task, and his Newton's Universal Decoder (Nud) for the latter. Without the decoder, he probably would only have a tenth of the knowledge of his new world's language.

He sat at a cracked little table toward the back of the long, dimly-lit room. He wanted to keep an eye on all who entered. After all, someone could have seen him stealing bread off a sill, or eggs in their henhouse; he had been in this village for too long now. Plus, he didn't yet know enough about all the customs and norms of his newhome.

The place was smoke filled and reeked of from the grey clouds mixed with stale ale and sweaty bodies. Four shallow-burning brazers provided the flickering orange glow. It was relatively crowded for its size, and the murmur was almost comforting. Most averted their eyes from him, due to his strange physical appearance, and alien clothes.

"You a Rel?" finally boomed the huge bartender leaving his post and ambling up to the table.

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“A Rel?”

“Rel. From the South. You daft, or what? ARE YOU FROM THE SOUTH?”

“Uh...Yes. I’m from the South. Sorry, I’ve been lost in the woods some time and ... need some ... food.” Under the pressure, he stubled to remember some of the words he had learned.

“What do you need?”

“Ale, and some meat - any kind - and, uh, potatoes.”

“I’ll get for you, quick, but you ain’t lost your purse, have ya’?”

“I have a bit of money.”

He ate in silence, ignoring the occasional stares, and stray comments. Last week, he performed some manual labor for a rancher, and was paid in coin and room and board. It was his first chance to spend the money.

He ordered another flagon of the strong ale, but he was already slightly intoxicated from the first. It tasted awful, but nevertheless, the warming effect was soothing.

On his return from the outhouse, he noticed three huge battle horses tied to the craked and sun-faded hitching posts. The beasts looked better suited for a beer wagon, instead of saddled for riders. He walked in and headed to his table. On the way, he had to walk past the owners of the horses. They were incredible! They were of a different race than the beings which he had encountered thus far, and they certainly were not nearly as friendly looking. One in particular gave him the shivers. He was massively muscled, and wore minimal clothing to show off his physique. All that covered his body was a crimson billowy cape, knee high light brown lather boots, and some kind of thick leather

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shorts that had the rather amusing appearance of a diaper. He had a shaved head, topped of with two horns, only one was broken near the base. His head looked as if it were much too small for the massive body on which it perched. Short coarse hair covered much of his exposed body, almost like a brown fur. His companions looked much the same, only noticeably smaller, and their uniforms had a much more formal military look to them.

They certainly raised the decibel level with their raucous laughter and bad jokes, even though everyone else had now been reduced to whispers.

“Who are they,” he asked a withered old man sitting alone at the next table.

The man leaned over and softly whispered: “Duke Kell’s imperial guard. The big one is Captain Bahlrod, as vile as they come.”

“What are they doing here? They look ... sort of out of place.”

“They are in search of King Elon’s son Merritt.”

“What ... did he run away?”

His attempt at humor wasted, the old man simply ignored the question, and asked one of his own.

“You are not of this country, are you?”

“Must be the clothes. No ... I come from far away. My name is Wes.”

“Odd name. I am Olin. You see, King Elon was murdered by his cousin, Duke Kell, but it was never publicly proven. Now the Duke wants Prince Merritt out of the way. He wants no claim to what he sees as his legitimate rule.”

“Sounds like a Mallory soap opera.”

Again, Olin ignored Wes’ meaningless joke. The three warriors continued their raucous behavior, and Olin

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continued his story.

“The Duke and his court are an evil lot. They are undoing years of progress under King Elon. They hoard the wealth of the kingdom, and are taking education away from the common folk. Kell has laid claim to many lands surrounding the kingdom. This will surely result in a war with the Rels to the south.”

Wes sensed the urgency of the old man’s story, and suddenly felt bad for the people of this country. It was such a beautiful place. Geographically speaking, it was much like Earth had been hundreds of years ago, and the people were very much like Earth’s - that was a curiosity his former shipmates were going to investigate.

Wes’ musing was cut short, however, when the huge captain stomped over to their table.

“What are you whispering about?”

“We were just conversing about the good fortune of the kingdom since Duke Kell saved us from an empty throne, my lord,” said Olin.

He was not convinced, but his state of semi-drunkenness also kept him a bit off balance.

“Are you *sure* that is what you were talking about?”

Wes’ cheeks grew warm. He was not used to being treated in such a fashion. He was, after all, a Senior Galactic, and had been to over thirty planets.

“We were having a private conversation, if you don’t ... mind.” Inwardly he cursed his hesitation. It made his reply seem weak, but the reality was he could not remember the proper word for a moment.

Olin looked visibly shaken. “My Lord, please forgive him. He is a stranger to our country, and knows not who you are.”

The huge Captain was not satisfied. “He better learn his manners very quickly, or he’ll get a lesson he

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will *not* forget!”

Now Wes was steaming. This had gone far enough!

“Why don’t you get away from us, big boy, before I spank you on that diaper of yours?”

The Captain did not know what “the hell or diaper” meant, but he did not like Wes’ tone nonetheless. He clenched his fist, let out a howl, and swung ferociously.

The blow sent the much smaller man sprawling into a neighboring table. It shattered, sending splinters flying every which way.

But Wes just bounced back up.

“Sorry,” he apologized to the table’s startled occupants. He then walked directly up to the Captain. “If that is the best you can do, you better pack it up, Ball Rot!”

The Captain was furious. Clearly he had never encountered a human strong enough to withstand a blow from his gigantic arm. His eyes narrowed.

“What manner of creature are you, stranger?”

Before Wes could get a word out, the behemoth slammed his fist into Wes’ face; he was quick as lightning!

Wes’ head - and most of the rest of his upper body - was jarred back, but this time he didn’t go sprawling.

“Bar keep, do something about the ... flies in here. I think one just landed on my nose.”

Bahlrod was nearly psychotic with rage.

“Men, Eradicate this vermin!”

All hell broke out. Chairs went flying, weapons were swinging, and innocent patrons were screaming and hiding under tables while the barkeep escaped via the back door. Wes quickly drew his stunner, and blasted the captain square in his massive chest. It was set to full,

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but it still took several seconds for the behemoth to collapse. Also, Wes' kick to his face probably helped as well.

The room then went black, and Wes heard Olin's voice in his ear.

"Grab my hand, so we can get out of here."

Wes did as he was told and soon they were out the door and into the cold, wet night - but it was still much brighter than the tavern. They tuned of the cobblestone road onto a rahter vague trail, not slowing for a considerable distance.

"Can we slow down now?" Wes asked, obviously winded. "How can you run so long..."

"...at your age?" Olin finished for him. "I manage to keep fit. And, just like you, I am not what I appear."

"Obviously. What happened back there? I get the feeling you had something to do with it."

"I did. Just a simple Dark Spell. It has gotten me out of several similar situations." said Olin, smiling mischievously.

"How did *you* see anything in there?"

"Well...it was *my* spell. Wouldn't work too well if it blinded me too!"

Wes was rather surprised. He knew all sorts of folklore from several cultures and worlds, but never had he witnessed anything *real*. But "Good point," was all he said.

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Dinner was delicious. This night it was a large rabbit roasted over open flames on a spit. Severla delicious tubers cooked to perfection accompanied the meat. Merritt had also made a thick cheese soup, which

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was gone in no time.

“Olin, have you *yet* decided what we’re to do?”

“Wes and I have made some plans. He knows of a large weapon which may give us the needed strength to keep the Duke’s guards at bay while we take care of him. First, however, we have to get some draft horses, and a sturdy wagon.”

“When do we go get it?” asked the prince.

“We will start our journey next week. Tomorrow, I’ll go purchase the wagon set up. I’ll be gone for a few days, so you can continue your studies, and Wes has volunteered to give you some martial training.”

“Sounds good,” said Merritt.

They spent the rest of the day fine tuning their plan to retrieve the starship’s laser cannon, which Wes thought was possibly undamaged when the Starfarer crashed. Olin and Merritt had no idea what such a weapon could do, but Wes did his best to explain it.

Durng the past three days, he mostly asked questions about his new home, but he also told them a bit about his space flight, the crash, and how he came to be at the tavern.

“Wes?”

“Yes, Merritt?”

“I can figure a *lot* of what you’ve told us, but *how* did you withstand the blow from Captain Bahlrod?”

Olin, stopped whatever it was he was doing and said, “Yes, I wanted to ask you that also. Are you too a sorcerer - or what was it you called me, a ... magician?”

“No, where I come there is no magic, but we have something called ... science,” he had to use the English word, for lack of a native term, “I had a ... healer procedure on my home world, which gives me some

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resistance to great shocks. It's called a PhaseX Encephelo Chip, and it's implanted in my skull right here," Wes said, pointing to his left temple. I guess that's what saved me during the crash.

olin frowned. "But what about all the others you mentioned - they all ... perished?"

The chips are new - and very rare. Only certain officers with certain ... clearance could receive one. A friend on the ship also had one, but the crash was too much for him, even with it. I guess I got lucky plus having the chip..."

He had to stop at the thought of his lost friends. Visions of their broken, twisted bodies was hard to bear.

Olin saw the pain in his face, so tried to change the subject.

"What about that curious weapon which felled Bahlrod?" he asked.

It is called a stunner. It can knock a man out for hours, and can even kill him, if used at close range and it's setting are on high. I figure it probably just stopped Bahlrod for a few minutes; he's awfully big."

"He's huge!" added Merritt.

The conversation continued long into the night, and many intimate details were revealed. Olin had once been the King's Court Magician, but was "let go" after the King's death. He used a disguise spell in the tavern, so as not to be recognized by anyone. He was not nearly as old and frail as he had appeared on that cold rainy night.

The prince and wizard had been in hiding for the last couple months, trying to formulate a plan to get Merritt his deserved place on the throne. The problem was that the Duke had bought some of the highest ranking army officials, and with that he pretty much had complete control.

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The next day, Olin set out on his *shopping* expedition while Merritt and Wes started some martial training. Although only sixteen, Merritt fought like a seasoned veteran.

WHAM! Wes hit the floor.

“Kid, *where* did you learn these moves?”

“My father had the best fighting instructors in the kingdom.”

Again Wes hit the floor.

“I actually *felt* that. Well, I guess it’s apparent that there is nothing *I* can teach *you*, so why don’t we just work out for awhile?”

“That sounds good ... or I can give you some pointers.”

“Shut up kid.”

They started some calisthenics, each doing similar exercises even though they learned the moves on planets hundreds of light years apart.

“How does your magic work?” asked Merritt.

“I told you it isn’t magic.”

“It is to me.”

“I can turn on a ... shield that covers my entire body. It feeds off of my body energy, much like Olin’s spells. The greater the shock, the more energy is sapped. When the rocket crashed, I was just plain lucky to survive. Fortunately, I was strapped in a pretty protected spot. And even so, the energy use from the shield knocked me out for a long time.”

“Olin has been teaching me *some* magic, but the spells are so hard to learn. You have to learn them in the Necromancer’s Tongue, which is an ancient - and complex - language passed down from countless generations of sorcerers.”

“Yeah, I was even thinking of learning a few spells, but I’m having enough problem with this language,

thank you!” Wes said. Magic peeked his interest, but Wes still seen it as trifling, probably because he had yet to see it in large, powerful doses. “What spells do you know?”

Merritt thought a moment. “Well, the only spell I *really* have memorized is the Dark Spell. Olin thinks that it is important that I learn defensive spells first, especially with Bahlrod and my uncle after me. I also have the Freeze Spell almost memorized. Every once in awhile I can get it to work, but not all the time.”

“What happens when you miss, do they just catch a cold?”

“Your stupid jokes leave a lot to be desired.”

“True, that, boy; they’re not all golden.”

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Severla days later, the three companions left Olin’s “Cave Country Retreat,” as Wes had dubbed it, and headed off in the general direction of where the starship had crashed.

The wagon bounced roughly down the forest trail for at least an hour before Wes announced, “Damn! I can’t get the homing devise on this minicom to work. The little piece of trash must have been damaged in that bar fight! I’m not sure I can find the ship without it.”

“I may be of some assistance in *that* regard,” laughed Olin.

The two had been building a little magic versus science routine. Either had not seen much of the other’s goods yet, so at this time there was just speculation as to the extent of the respective powerson both sides - though they actually both had quickly come to respect each other and it was all in good fun.

“Help yourself,” smiled Wes.

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With the blink of an eye, a couple twitches of the forehead - and the hint of a self-satisfied smile - olin cast the spell.

“What, no smoke or lightning?” asked Wes.

“No, but I know where we are going, do you?”

They arrived at the spacecraft on the evening of their third day of travel. All were tired from the long, bumpy ride.

“It looks pretty mangled,” observed Merritt.

“Yeah, but look at the gun. Those two protrusions off to the left,” Wes pointed in the direction of the huge, dual-barrelled laser cannon, which was in remarkably good shape. “I was in the berth directly below the gun deck. Way back before they had sheilds - and could make the ships a lot thinner - that area of a warship was always the strongest area, because smaller fighter ships always tried to disarm larger crafts when first attacking. Looking at the ship and me being here must mean it’s still the strongest part of a ship.”

Olin and Merritt looked a bit confused, but Wes didn’t elaborate.

“I think I can get it to work,” he said. The ship runs a FusionXC drive, but, but has a decent hydrogen-battery back up, in case of emergencies. I’ll need to harness the back-up system to the gun, and fit both on the wagon.”

Atthis point the others were entirely lost, but Wes enjoyed it; it was a welcome change from the past few months to have others dumbfounded! He walked over to the ship, and began the ascent to the cannon.

After a ten minute inspection, he called down, “It’s okay! But I’ll need a few hours to unfasten it. Then I’ll need that rope to make a winch. We can ...”

“I can get it myself, if you show me exactly what

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must be moved,” interrupted Olin.

“Well ... okay. c’mon up.” Wes sounded skeptical.

“I’ll try,”

The wizard scaled the ship with ease. Wes showed him the anchoring bolts, and the place where the platform fit into the grooves on the ship’s deck.

“This should not be too difficult,” Olin laughed.

“I’ll get some tools, just in case,” said Wes.

Olin closed his eyes, his lips quivered, and the huge octagonal nuts began to spin. Slowly at first, then they gained momentum, until they spun wildly off the bolts and disappeared with a small POP! The cannon then began to slowly rise off the anchoring platform. Wes stopped in amazement. “Sheeeit...”

Soon, Olin had the cannon placed on the reinforced wagon.

“I’ll have to rest for a while. That was quite a strain to maintain that energy level for such a long time,” gasped Olin.

“I apologize ... I really didn’t think you could do it.”

“I *told* you he is the greatest wizard alive,” laughed Merritt.

“I know, but up till now I had not really seen anything that spectacular,” said Wes, watching as the exhausted wizard made his way onto a tree stump to rest. “Merritt, let’s go inside the ship to see if I can round up some useful supplies Olin certainly deserves the break!”

They searched the ship thoroughly, and Wes did indeed find some useful gadgets. He gave a stunner to Merritt, which could probably save the Prince’s life a couple dozen times in a world like this one.

“It will last until you are an old man, if you use it sparingly,”

“I’ll add it to my collection. Thanks!” exclaimed the

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young man. Wes had also given him the Newton language decoder. After all, he probably would not use it again, while the boy might need it someday for diplomatic reasons. The planet was large, and loaded with many different cultures and races.

The two companions cut their search short, after finding the scattered remains of one of Wes' former companions scattered about his cabin. Some kind of scavenging animal had entered the open ship, and fed on the remains of the crew. They nearly vomited.

Glad to be outside, they checked on Olin, who was fast asleep, so decided to get a meal prepared.

"Will the weapon work?" asked Merritt, grabbing two apples from the burlap bag.

"Yeah, I think so. Why don't you save a couple for Olin." Wes said, pointing to the quickly-shrinking bag.

"Yes, you're right. What are the 'plans' that Olin said something about, back at the cave?"

"Believe me, we have this pretty worked out. I'm not going into all the details now. All *you* will end up doing, hopefully, is stating your demands to the Duke. The rest will be up to us," Wes said, pointing to the slumbering Olin.

"All my life, I'm never let in on anything. It's always, 'You'll see' or 'never mind.' Why can't anyone tell me anything?"

"Sometimes it's safer *not* to know anything, if you know what I mean," said Wes, his eyes narrowing. "And quit whining - it's not very princely."

Merritt saw visions of the torture stories Olin had told him Captain Bahlrod had performed for his uncle.

"Maybe your right, Wes. And, I just wanted to thank you for helping us out - soemtimes I can't figure why you're going to all this trouble."

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The kid really was a quality person, and Wes had discovered that soon after meeting Merritt. He wasn't what Wes would have pictured at all. He wasn't spoiled, wan't full of himself and he was very kind.

He simply swiped softly at Merritt's hair. "Kid, what else have I got to do around here?"

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Getting the battery back up on the wagon was a lot more difficult, Olin's spells did most of the "heavy lifting," but Wes had to perform the intricate wiring.

They started toward the city, early the next day, after an apple, a bit of cheese and a biscuit for breakfast. Merritt and Olin sat atop, on the pilot seat, while Wes fidgeted with the cannon, crawling all over it. About midday, he called for Merritt to stop the wagon, so he could fire what he called a test shot.

"See that huge tree over there," he said pointing to the edge of a lake, some two hundred meters distant. "I'm going to blow it completely apart. It's dead, and I think most of the explosion will land in the lake. Hopefully there are no animals using the trunk as a home."

Olin closed his eyes a moment. "No, I sense nothing but insects over there.

"Good, then whenever your ready," cried Merritt in anticipation. He *really* wanted to see what the weapon could do.

Wes checked and adjusted the coordinate screen he had dissembled from the bridge of the spacecraft. He crossed his fingers and flipped the power switch.

The screen came alive with color, and the power unit began to purr softly. Both Merritt and Olin craned their

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necks to see what was happening.

“If the screen is correctly synchronized, that tree should be history ... NOW!” he yelled, hitting the fire button, after the target was locked.

The result was a bright-red beam, followed by a spectacular explosion which splintered the gigantic tree into an unrecognizable seared stump. Red embers sent smoke swirling up into the clear blue sky, as they collided with the cool water.

“Wow ... we might really pull this off!” cheered Merritt.

There was a gleam in Olin’s eyes. “Yes, we just might get away with it.”

The trip to the city went slowly, but without mishap. Merritt drove most of the way, while Olin and Wes checked their plan, and worked on contingency plans.

They eventually hid the wagon in a gently sloping valley off a rarely used side trail. They camouflaged it with fern fronds, making it very hard to see, unless one left the trail.

Wes then gave Olin a wrist-com.

“I have it set so I’ll be able to hear anything you say, Okay?”

“I suppose I’m all set.”

“Me too, but I wish I knew what was going on.” complained Merritt.

“You will, soon enough,” laughed Wes.

While the two made the long walk to the city gates, Wes ate his remaining apple, washed his hands, then carefully cleaned the laser optics.

Over his wrist-com, Wes could hear Olin filling Merritt in on the plan. He also briefed him on the contingency plan, which for Merritt was nothing more than an escape back to the cave.

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When they reached the guard house at the foot of the city gates, Wes turned up the volume, to make sure he did not miss anything.

“We want to speak with the Duke. Tell him we have an important message,” it was Olin’s voice.

Both were disguised, via Olin’s magic, so they were not recognized.

“Why should we tell ’im? What so special about an old man and a little peasant girl?”

Merritt scrunched up his nose. Had no idea he was disguised as a little girl. He had assumed Olin would just change his features a bit.

“Who you calling a little girl?” he asked, resisting the urge to drop the guard. He had tried to sound manly, but to his astonishment, he even *sounded* like a little girl!

“Oh ... I’m sorry. You must be a lady,” snickered the guard, who had no idea as to the real objection.

Olin got back on track.

“Here is why you should get us a meeting. Tyrannosaurs Rex!”

Of course, Wes didn’t know anything of the Necromancer’s Toungue, so he thought this would add effect.

On cue, Wes hit the fire button, sending the red beam of destruction toward the palace. Olin had picked an abandoned tower for a target, which Wes had locked onto with the guidance screen.

Apparently it had the desired effect, for the guard screamed to the others, “Hurry, dolts! Tell the Duke we have ... important visitors!”

It was nearly half an hour before Olin and Merritt were escorted into the palace proper. Once in the secret meeting room, which Olin had specifically requested of the duke, he dropped the disguises.

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“I thought it had to be you!” cried the Duke.

“You’re not the only one who can be a sneak, Kell. I have been getting pretty adept at it myself.”

“Young Prince,” said Duke Kell, with a slight bow. “Tell me you haven’t taken to transvestitism.”

Merritt was not amused.

“Uncle, I, the rightful heir to the throne, find you guilty of murder! And by murdering the king, I find you guilty of high treason. Relinquish your claim to the throne, and I promise that I will only condemn you to life imprisonment. End this now, and I will spare your life. Otherwise ...”

“What? You *dare* threaten me whelp? Your washed-up wizard’s own trickery will be your undoing! A hundred of my personal guard await outside this chamber, and have been warned of ‘evil magics.’ If I give the word, both you and your magic slave will be dead within seconds.”

“But so will you, Kell. And if I know you, you will not gamble your own life. So what’s it gonna’ be?”

From his post, Wes smiled. It was good to see that Merritt was picking up on some of his expressions. He was also very steady in his speech. Yes, Wes was definitely proud of him.

Suddenly, Wes’ radio drama was interrupted by the thundering of hooves. He looked up to see three gigantic riders atop of the biggest mounts he had seen since...

His heart sank. It was Bahlrod.

“*YOU!* I might have known!,” he screamed, pulling hard on the reigns, so his horse skidded to a halt.

“How did you find me, Lord Peanuthead?” Laughed Wes, doing a pretty fair job of hiding his anxiety.

“I’ve been searching for you for days. We rode into

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yonder valley when we saw the red light. It only took a while before we then found wagon tracks, and here we are,” said the Captain.

“How clever. I never would have ...”

Olin’s voice - and some background noise - blared out from his wrist-com, which surprised the three huge warriors. All motion ceased. Both Wes and the huge guards looked intently at his wristcom.

*“If you don’t relinquish complete control over the kingdom, now, I will begin to destroy the entire town, starting with the palace. You’ve already seen what I can do,”*

*“Wizard, you probably spent your entire energy level on that trick. You don’t fool me, one bit. No human is that powerful,”*

*“Maybe this will convince you of my new power,” Olin said raising his hands in the air, “Eye the North Tower, vile one. Rumpelstiltsken!”*

Wes knew what he had to do, and he had to do it quickly! Luckily, he set the machine on the next target portion of the castle. According to Olin, it had been sealed off by the dead king, because the ceilings leaked.

He ran for the wagon, and hit the switch. Again, the twin-red beams of destruction erupted from the turrets. he ground under their feet vibrated from the distant explosion

“What kind of demon are you?”

“What is this, deja vu? Oh, yeah, you called me a creature before. I guess I’m moving up in your world,”

The Captain had heard enough.

“Seize him, while I take care of that thing,” he

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screamed, reaching for his huge, silver-handled battle axe. With a grace that belied his size, he sent the axe crashing into the laser turrets.

Wes saw that the weapon had to be out of commission, so he abandoned his first thoughts of defending it. He ran for the woods, to escape the openness of the clearing.

Both the other guards hurried after him after dismounting from their gigantic armored steeds. Meanwhile, Bahlrod retrieved a huge crossbow which was fastened upon his warhorse.

Wes aimed his stunner at Bahlrod, but before he could fire, the first of his attackers was upon him. His shield was up, so the wildly flung morning star had no effect.

“Say goodnight,” he said, taking aim, then pulling the trigger.

The warrior was halted in his tracks, then collapsed forward in a heap. But the second guard was already on top of him. They rolled around on the grass for a short time, before Wes was able to stun the second behemoth.

Wes then pushed clear of the second guard, and took aim on Bahlrod, who in turn was getting a bead on him.

The Captain was quicker; it was also a good shot. The arrow slammed into Wes’ chest, sending him flying off his feet. Even with his shield, he felt great pain from the blow. The crossbow was massive, and sent finger-thick arrows flying at tremendous velocity. While lying on the ground, he heard Olin asking him for the “all clear” signal, which was a laser blast directly up into the sky. Apparently they were having greater success than he.

Bahlrod, meanwhile, had retrieved the gun, and walked up to Wes, as he tried to regain his footing.

“You will not get a second chance to use this weapon on me, vermin.”

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He pointed it directly at Wes' head. "Prepare to die!"

The captain fired the weapon, which at point blank range could easily kill a man of Wes' size. That is, if not for the encephalo implant protecting him.

It did cause *intense* pain, however.

"Please ... stop ... it," he gasped.

"Now it's *please*. What about my men, over there?"

"They ... will be ... okay,"

"But that much I can't say for you."

Before Bahlrod could fire the weapon again, a flash, then a figure, appeared from behind him. Wes thought it was like an angel that came to sweep him away to heaven, like in the holos he watched many years ago in catechism.

He slipped into unconsciousness, so did not get to see the battle before him. Olin had fiddled with the wrist-com, to find out what was happening with Wes, but received no answer. When the all clear signal had not come, he became worried, so teleported back to the clearing.

Bahlrod seized the opportunity of Olin's surprise at seeing *him* to ready his weapon and fire. The older man brought up his hands instantly, releasing a counter spell. Magic and science collided in a shower of sparks. This time, however, magic was the victor. Olin had averted the stun beam with a magical force of his own, then willed the small object out of the behemoth's hand.

Bahlrod was furious.

"I've always been more than a match for you, Olin, even without the demon's weapons."

"Bahlrod, you self-centered fool. You only *think* you're a match for me," cried Olin, before casting yet another spell.

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The spell, aptly named The Web, entangled the ferocious Captain in a myriad of sticky fibers.

“Let me.... GO,” screamed Bahlrod, to no avail. He was stuck as sure as any petite butterfly in a spider’s web

Before he could possibly get loose, Olin picked up the stunner, and walked over to his prey, who was still uselessly pulling against the milk white, sticky threads.

“Your only tangling yourself more by struggling,” said Olin, with mock concern.

“When I get loose...”

He never finished, for Olin stuck the stunner up to his chest and fired, sending him into induced slumber.

“Promises, promises.”

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“Where are you going?” asked Merritt, fidgeting with the crown. It was a little too big, and kept slipping down over his eyes.

Wes smiled “It’s time, your nearly highness,”

“Have you seen Olin?”

Wes peed out of the ready room into the huge throne room. it was packed. “Yes. He’s already in there.”

It did not take a genius to see that Merritt was troubled.

“What is it?”

“I’m just nervous ... wouldn’t you be, if you were about to become king of the largest country in the known world?”

“Frankly, I wouldn’t want the job.”

“Thanks for making me feel better,” he sneered. Then he began pulling at the heavy imperial cape, “I hate the idea of having to wear this bear-skin rug all day,”

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“Stop whining. It’s only for today, then you can wear whatever you like. After all, you *will* be king.”

“A scary thought.”

“Well, you talked me into the job of being the king’s bodyguard *and* Captain Of The Imperial Guard, so I guess we both have our work cut out for us.”

“But I don’t *know anything* about being king,” protested Merritt.

“Who does? What do you want ... a degree in potentate science? You are a good man, Merritt. Very considerate, intelligent, and even tempered. Those are the qualities that can make a good man a great king.”

“But what if I screw up?”

Wes smiled at the young man’s use of another of his world’s phrases.

“Your friends will be here to help you. Anyway, you’re entitled to the occasional screw up.”

Trumpets blared outside, followed by loud applause.

“Kid you’re on!”

“I guess I’m ready as I’ll ever be,” he sighed.

“Go!” Wes lightly pushed Merritt, sending him on his way.

Merritt bowed slightly to the nobles, ministers and various dignitaires from other lands. He then stood in front of the throne, turning to face the crowd. Wes followed, taking his place next to Olin, who was directly to the right of Merritt. The General Of The Army took his place next to Wes, with the rest of the court standing in front of a long, wooden bench.

Wes closed his eyes, and thought of all that had transpired since his arrival on the planet. He was pleased with the way things had turned out, and was looking forward to his life in “Camelot.”

end

