

"A CROWN OF SWORDS: INTO THE WOODS"

FADE IN:

EXT. THE WOODS OUTSIDE CAIRHIEN - DAY

In a small clearing surrounded by trees and hills, a black rectangle eight feet high blinks into existence. Through this GATEWAY emerges RAND AL'THOR and MIN FARSHAW. The dead leaves crunch beneath their feet as they check out their surroundings. Rand's face is expectant, as if waiting for something, while Min looks confused.

MIN

Which way do we go?

Before he can answer, a loud noise to the left. The CAMERA swivels quickly to see a woman approaching on a horse. A noblewoman wearing a dark blue silk riding dress, CARALINE DAMODRED looks remarkably like her sister, Moiraine. She carries a crossbow, which she aims casually at Rand.

CARALINE

You... are not familiar to me.

RAND

I thought I might like to take a look at your camp. I believe you are the Lady Caraline Damodred?

Caraline nods, then tilts her crossbow upwards, launching the bolt harmlessly into the air. She nudges her gelding closer to the young couple.

CARALINE

(off the bolt)

I would not like you to think I was threatening you. There can only be one gray-eyed man with your height who might suddenly appear out of nowhere, but perhaps you would be so kind as to supply a name?

RAND

I am the Dragon Reborn.

CARALINE

I have heard so very much about you. That you went to the Tower to submit to the Amyrlin Seat. That you mean to give the Sun Throne to

Elayne Trakand. That you killed Elayne, and her mother.

RAND

I submit to no one. Elayne is on her way to Caemlyn to take the throne of Andor. After which, she will have the throne of Cairhien as well.

CARALINE

I could accept my young cousin on the throne, but... I am not sure I can accept you in Cairhien. You change fate by your very presence. Bizarre accidents, husbands and wives separating. You will tear Cairhien apart if you remain.

MIN

Balance. There is always a balance of good against bad. That's how the Pattern works. Name the evil, and you can also point to the good. He only increases the chances of what might have happened anyway in nature.

RAND

Balance?

MIN

I've been reading some of Master Fel's books.

A man on a black warhorse bursts into the clearing, followed by a half dozen riders with crossbows. The HIGH LORD DARLIN is tall and slender, with a face that just misses being handsome.

DARLIN

Well, Caraline, are these strays, or did you find spies from the city? I've never believed al'Thor would continue to let us sit here unhindered.

Another dozen riders enter the clearing; nobles with servants on foot. Rand and Min draw closer together, watching, waiting.

CARALINE

Not spies, Darlin, but a cousin and his wife from Andor. May I present

Tomas Trakand, from a minor branch of the House, and his wife Jaisi.

DARLIN

You are welcome, Lord Tomas. It takes a brave man to join us in our present circumstances, what with the Aiel on the loose.

RAND

Not much happens as we expect. For instance, I heard you were in Tear, in Haddon Mirk.

CARALINE

The High Lord Darlin is but lately come by longboat with a few of his close friends, Tomas. Do not trouble him.

DARLIN

I do not mind, Caraline. A man should know what he is stepping into. I came because Aes Sedai approached me months ago with the suggestion that al'Thor would be going to the Tower, a suggestion Caraline also received. We thought to take the Sun Throne before Colavaere could take it, but al'Thor is no fool. I believe he played the Tower like a harp, and now we sit in his hand, waiting for him to make a fist.

RAND

A ship brought you; it could take you away.

DARLIN

So it would, Tomas, but I've asked your cousin to marry me, and I cannot leave her to the mercies of the Aiel while I wait for her to decide.

CLOSE SHOT - MIN

Min's eyes go wide, and she blinks.

MIN'S POV

She looks at Caraline, who has auras of red and white dancing around her and Darlin, and a ghost image of a wedding dress. She focuses on Darlin, who has a ghost image of a crown on his head.

CLOSE SHOT - MIN

She blinks again.

MIN'S POV

The auras and images vanish.

BACK TO SCENE

Darlin turns his horse towards Caraline.

DARLIN

There's no game to be found today. Toram has already returned to camp, and I suggest we do the same. It seems your cousin and wife have lost their horses, but I'm sure Rovair and Ines will give up their mounts.

Two of the nobles obediently dismount from their horses, shooting quick, cutting glances at Rand and Min. Rand helps Min onto her horse.

MIN

(whispering)

You mean to go into their camp? Are you mad?

RAND

(whispering)

Not yet.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - LATE AFTERNOON

Rand and Darlin lead the party, their horses side by side, while Caraline and Min hang several feet back. We join the two men in the middle of a conversation.

DARLIN

I would have let him take Callandor from the Stone, but I could not stand aside when he brought those Aiel savages into Tear.

RAND

I've read the Prophecies of the Dragon. The Stone had to fall before he could take Callandor. Other Tairen lords follow him, so I hear.

DARLIN

They cringe and lick his boots! I could have followed, if... Too many ifs, Tomas. There is a saying in Tear: 'Any quarrel can be forgiven, but kings never forget'. The Dragon Reborn has charged me with treason, and I must go on as I began.

The party emerges into a clearing where the CAMP is spread out down a treeless slope and up the next hill, with several large tents hugging the ground and cookfires dotting the hillside. Thousands of men wander among the cookfires and wagons. They approach a huge tent, as big as a circus, and dismount. Taking Min's arm, Rand leads them into the tent.

INT. MAIN TENT - LATE AFTERNOON

There are long tables stuffed with food and drink, nobles dressed to the nines, a handful of bards playing through the crowd. The CAMERA pans through this organized chaos and stops at a knot of four shawled women.

RAND'S POV

The action moves in slow motion as the CAMERA zooms in on the Aes Sedai. The noise of the crowd also quiets to a whisper as their faces come into focus. Suddenly one of the faces turns to stare directly into the CAMERA.

BACK TO SCENE

The CAMERA, panning through the crowd again, focuses on two men who are looking in Rand's direction. The taller, finely-dressed man is dressed in a dark coat, and the smaller man is dressed in an ill-fitting red coat with a dagger at his belt.

RAND

Who is that?

CARALINE

That is Lord Toram Riatin himself, with his constant companion, Master Jeraal Mordeth. They both make me feel unclean. I would be careful if I were you, Cousin Tomas. You may have wrought some ta'veren magic on me, and even perhaps Darlin, but Toram hates you with a fevered passion. Since Mordeth joined him, Toram would have us attack Cairhien immediately, in the night. But I think he seeks your death more than any throne.

RAND

Mordeth... His name is Padan Fain, and there are one hundred thousand golden crowns on his head.

CARALINE

Queens have been ransomed for less. What did he do?

RAND

He ravaged my home because it was my home. He brought Trollocs to kill my friends because they were my friends. He is a Darkfriend, and a DEAD MAN.

Rand crushes his goblet with his fist, and Min puts a hand on his chest to try and calm him.

MIN

For the Light's sake, take hold of yourself.

CADSUANE

(off-screen)

Will you present me to your tall young friend, Caraline?

CLOSE SHOT - MIN

The CAMERA rises from Min's chest to reveal CADSUANE SEDAI standing behind her, looking as imposing as ever.

BACK TO SCENE

Min turns around and presses herself against Rand's chest, as if to protect him.

CARALINE

Of course, Cadsuane Sedai. This is my cousin Tomas, from Andor, and his wife, Jaisi.

CADSUANE

Tomas, is it? Well, most boys learn not to stick their fingers into the pretty fire the first time they are burned. Others need to be spanked, to learn. Better a tender bottom than a seared hand.

RAND

You know I'm no child.

CADSUANE

Do I, now? Well, it seems I shall soon see whether or not you need spanking.

Cadsuane drifts away into the crowd without waiting for a reply, and this time it is Caraline who puts a hand on Rand's chest to hold him back.

CARALINE

I take it you know Cadsuane. Be careful of her; even the other sisters stand in awe of her. I think it is past time you were gone, Cousin Tomas. Now...

TORAM

(off-screen)

This is your cousin, Caraline?

They all turn to greet Toram, who is even more good-looking up close. His sneer is unmistakable as he cocks his head, staring at Caraline's hand on Rand's chest.

TORAM (CONT.)

The Lady Caraline is to be my wife. Did you know that?

CARALINE

Do not say that, Toram! I have told you I will not enough times for you to know I mean it!

TORAM

I think women never know their minds until you show them. What do you think, Jeraal? Jeraal?

His head turns this way and that, looking for his companion, but his eyes never really leave Rand.

CARALINE

I saw your friend scurry off towards the drink table, Toram, probably to bother the serving girls.

TORAM

A worthy pursuit, then. Speaking of such, would you care for a little sport, Tomas? With practice swords, of course.

CARALINE

Certainly not, Toram, he's just a boy, and his mother would never forgive me...

RAND

Sport. I might as well see where this leads. I agree.

TORAM

(to the crowd)

Listen, everyone! You are going to see some sport. Clear a space, clear a space here.

He walks off, waving people to the sides of the tent. Min slaps Rand in the thigh.

MIN

Shepherd, you're not wool-brained. You don't have ANY brains!

CARALINE

Your 'wife' is right, Tomas. I suggest you leave now. Whatever... tricks... you may think of using, there are seven Aes Sedai in this tent, four of them Red Ajah, and I hardly think they would let you walk out of here if they knew who you really are.

RAND

I won't use any 'tricks'. If I've touched you and Darlin in one way, maybe I can touch Toram in another.

The crowd is moving back, clearing a space fifty feet in diameter for the duellists. The Aes Sedai stand at the front, the Red Ajah at one end, Cadsuane's bunch at the other.

CARALINE

Listen to me, cousin. If you don't use your 'tricks', Toram will hurt you very badly. He has never liked another touching what he thinks is his, and he suspects every pretty young man who speaks to me of being my lover. Go, cousin. No one will think less of a boy who decides not to face a blademaster. Jaisi, help me convince him!

Min begins to speak, and Rand puts a finger across her lips.

RAND

I am who I am, and I doubt I could run from him if I wasn't. So, he's a blademaster.

He unbuttons his coat and strides into the cleared area, where Toram is already waiting for him. The CAMERA stays with Min and Caraline for a moment.

CARALINE

Why must they be so stubborn when you least wish it?

As Min nods in agreement, the CAMERA pulls back and up to circle the two men as they circle each other. Toram has stripped to a shirt and breeches, and carries two wooden swords, his gait confident. He tosses a practice sword over to Rand, who picks it out of the air just before it hits him in the head. Rand assumes the proper beginning stance, taking the hilt in both hands, turning slightly sideways, keeping the blade down towards his front foot.

TORAM

Well, at least he knows how to stand.

Toram spins on the last word and lashes out with his sword, aiming for Rand's head. Just before the wooden blade strikes, Rand's sword flashes up to stop it. Toram looks

surprised for a moment, then nods and steps back. The real dance begins.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) Rand spins and swings his blade across in a sweeping arc towards his opponent's knees. Toram jumps out of the way.
- B) Toram attacks Rand with a series of downward strokes that the younger man parries with ease.
- C) Rand feints left and lunges right, tricking Toram into committing to a thrust that finds only air. As Toram stumbles by, Rand taps him on the back.
- D) Through Rand's POV, we see Toram slashing at the CAMERA.
- E) Their swords meet and they crash into each other, both struggling for the upper hand before Rand drops down and trips Toram with a sweeping leg kick.

BACK TO SCENE

The CAMERA pans the crowd quickly before turning back to the duel. The two men dance back and forth, thrusting, parrying, attacking, defending. Their dance elicits oohs and aahs from the crowd.

CLOSE SHOT - CARALINE AND MIN

Caraline grips Min's arm with excitement.

CARALINE

He is also a blademaster! He must be, look at him!

LONG SHOT - TORAM AND RAND

Rand starts to back away, totally on defense now. Toram's attacks are becoming quicker and more desperate.

BACK TO SCENE

Offscreen, a scream is heard, and the CAMERA pans up just in time to see the tent snapping up into the air, vanishing into a huge fog that surrounds everyone. The CAMERA pans back down, and we see that the crowd is staring in amazement at the fog.

CLOSE SHOT - RAND

Rand is also transfixed. Toram's blade smashes into his side, knocking him over.

BACK TO SCENE

Toram lifts his blade high, ready to deliver the killing blow.

TORAM

You are dead, cousin.

He freezes, staring at the fog.

TORAM'S POV

A section of the mist solidifies into a thick tentacle and wraps itself around one of the Red Ajah, pulling her up into the fog.

CLOSE SHOT - MIN

Her mouth is open to scream, but no sound comes out.

MIN

What the Light?!?

BACK TO SCENE

Cadsuane steps forward, twisting her hands, and a ball of fire shoots across the open space to strike the tentacle of fog. There is a burst of flame inside the fog, and the Red sister falls back to earth, her head twisted 180 degrees. This shakes the crowd out of their amazed stupor, and they riot. People start running back and forth, screaming and yelling. The CAMERA finds Min, who is pushing and shoving her way towards Rand. We follow behind her until she finds her man, who is struggling to his feet. She helps him up, handing him his real sword.

MIN

Are you all right?

RAND

Well enough, but we need to get out of this.

The CAMERA pulls back to show that nearly everyone had fled into the fog, and the only ones left in the clear air were the Aes Sedai, Caraline, Darlin, and Toram.

DARLIN

I agree, Tomas. The question is, in which direction? And how far do we have to go?

TORAM

This is al'Thor's work, damn the man. Jeraal, the Light burn you, where are you? Jeraal!

CADSUANE

Direction? I should think north, up the hill. Climbing might take us above this. Stop that caterwauling, Toram! Either your man's dead, or he can't hear.

Toram stops shouting and grabs his coat and sword from off the ground.

CADSUANE (CONT.)

North, then. My companions and I will take care of anything your steel can't handle. We have three fine swords here, two of them heron-mark, I see. They will do.

They quickly form a star-like formation with Cadsuane in the lead, Darlin and Rand flanked by the two other Aes Sedai on either side, Caraline and Min in the middle, and Toram at the rear. The CAMERA follows their formation as they head into the fog. The grayness is thick enough that we can barely see them. Cadsuane tosses a couple of fireballs ahead of her to clear a lane, and something darkly gray explodes into flame. The other two Aes Sedai shoot fireballs into the fog every few seconds. On the ground, they pass by collapsed tents and mangled bodies. A deep growl, and a shape coalesces in front of Darlin, all tentacles and teeth. He slices his blade through the gray beast once, twice, three times, and the shape melts into fog.

DARLIN

Well, at least we know steel can cut these... creatures.

The fog begins to form the same shape again, and Cadsuane sprays some liquid flame at it, which destroys the fog completely.

CADSUANE

But no more than cut, it seems.

A woman appears in the fog, laughing and screaming at the same time. She runs toward them, but behind her the fog takes shape, a terrifying beast of teeth and claws. Rand lifts up his hand and a bar of the whitest light imaginable shoots out over the woman's head, slamming into the fogbeast. It disappears so suddenly it was as if it had never existed. The woman stops, shocked, then runs back into the fog screaming.

TORAM

You!!! You are him! I was right,
this IS your work! You will not
trap me, al'Thor!

Toram runs off at an angle up the slope, yelling incoherently.

DARLIN

Come back! We must stick together!
We must...

Darlin moves between Caraline and Rand, his sword raised.

DARLIN (CONT.)

You ARE him. The Light burn me, you
are!

Cadsuane walks over to Rand and slaps him full on the face.

CADSUANE

You will not do that again, you
hear? Not balefire. Not ever.

RAND

You were wrong, Cadsuane. He's
real. I'm certain of it.

Behind Rand, Padan Fain leaps out of the mist, his dagger raised. Min screams and throws her dagger at him. The action turns to SLOW MOTION as Rand turns, twisting away, and Fain matches his twist, lunging for him. Min's knife misses Fain, but Fain's cursed dagger finds Rand's left side, and the young man screams, collapsing to the ground. Fain dances away from Darlin's blade and runs back into the mist, cackling. The action returns to NORMAL SPEED as Min rushes to Rand's side, cradling his head in her arms.

MIN

Help him, Light, help him!

Cadsuane motioned for the Yellow sister to come forward.

CADSUANE

Samitsu, quickly, he's beyond my
Talent for Healing. Min, I will
hardly let the boy die when I
haven't taught him manners yet.
Stop crying, now.

SAMITSU kneels beside Rand and touches his forehead with her
fingertips. Rand convulses as she frowns, but his face is
getting paler.

SAMITSU

Something is amiss.

She grabs his coat and pulls it aside to look at the wound.

CLOSEUP - RAND'S SIDE

The cut from Fain's dagger is a shallow one, slashing right
across Rand's old round scar. The edges of the gash are
puffy and red. There is no blood. Samitsu's finger points
at the round scar.

SAMITSU

(off-screen)

This seems like a cyst, but full of
evil instead of pus.

Her finger points to the gash left by Fain's dagger.

SAMITSU (CONT.)

And this seems full of a different
evil.

BACK TO SCENE

Samitsu glances at Cadsuane and shrugs.

SAMITSU

If I had the words, Cadsuane, I
would use them. I have never seen
the like. But if I had been one
moment longer... As it is, I believe
he will still die.

CADSUANE

Phaw! I will not allow you to die
on me now, boy.

Cadsuane pulls Min to her feet and raps her head with a
knuckle.

CADSUANE (CONT.)

All right, then. Stop sniffing, girl, he hasn't died yet. Darlin, you will carry him. This fog is not leaving us, so we had better leave it.

Darlin picks Rand up by the shoulders and Cadsuane starts upslope again.

CARALINE

Be careful, Darlin. Be sure to stay behind me, and I will protect you.

Darlin laughs as they continue up the hill. The Aes Sedai explode a few more fog creatures before finally emerging from the mist into the bright sun.

CADSUANE

Cross-country will take too long, so let's get to the road. This day isn't over yet!

FADE OUT