

A Once Great City

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EXT. DESERT WASTES - DAY

NEVRES (a large gothic looking city) stands isolated in the hot sandy wasteland. A large ARMY (some calvary leading much more infantry as well as supply wagons, dressed in red) march towards it.

GENERAL ARKLER (early 40s, well built with cropped dark hair) leads the army on horseback in the company of his officers including CAPTAIN HERDEL (early 30s, porky, brown moustache)

GENERAL ARKLER

So this it it, huh? The famed city of Nevres.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

Yes, sir. Not as great as it once was.

GENERAL ARKLER

I'm still in awe of it.

Arkler and Herdel approach the gates of the city which remain closed.

GENERAL ARKLER

(Shout)

Greetings! I am General Arkler of the Varcian Empire. Your country no longer exists. I've come here to make Nerves a part of our modern civilisation.

From the top of the gates descends a rope. DAGORAS (early 30s, athletic with slightly long blond hair, dressed in a black jerkin) climbs down to the the wall and jumps to the desert floor.

DAGORAS

Well hello. General Arkler, you are indeed famous even in such a far away place such as this.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

And who are you?

DAGORAS

You, I don't know.

(to Arkler)

My name is Dagoras. I shall the be the spokesman for the city.

CAPTAIN HERDAL
By what right can you speak?

DAGORAS
The people want me to.

CAPTAIN HERDAL
(to Arkler)
Sir, you don't have to deal with
this man. He has no authority.

DAGORAS
The last time I checked you weren't
in a position to decide the
authority of your opposition.

GENERAL ARKLER
That's alright, Herdel.
(To Dagoras)
What have you come to say?

DAGORAS
Well, we have considered your offer
but I'm afraid we're going to have
to decline.

Arkler is confused.

GENERAL ARKLER
Decline?

DAGORAS
Yes. We will not let you into the
city.

GENERAL ARKLER
You realise you are outnumbered by
the thousands? Your country no
longer exists, nobody will be
coming to help.

DAGORAS
I know, but we still feel giving
into you would be against
everything the city stands for.

GENERAL ARKLER
You would sacrifice the people who
live there for this?

DAGORAS
The people agree, we had a vote. I
know that might be a hard concept
(MORE)

DAGORAS (CONT'D)

for you to grasp what with having a
tyrannical ruler an-

Captain Herdel unsheathes his sword and attempts to attack
Dagoras.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

How dare you!

A crossbow bolt THUDS in Herdel's thigh and he cries out in
pain. Dagoras takes the opportunity to scamper back up the
rope.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

I'll kill that man. Mangy dog.

Arkler does not respond as he watches Dagoras disappear from
view.

EXT. OPEN WALLED WAR TENT - LATER

Arkler marches in, followed by his advisors. Herdel already
sits on a stall in the tent, being treated by a medic for
his leg.

GENERAL ARKLER

I want all vital information about
the city as soon as possible.

The medic pulls the bolt out of Herdel's leg.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

(Wincing)

Why don't we just attack? We
outnumber them and we have bodies
to spare.

GENERAL ARKLER

We're going to do this with the
least amount of casualties - on
both sides. The city isn't
strategically important so we can
take our time with this one.

Herdel shrugs. A SCOUT enters the tent

SCOUT

General Arkler, we have a spotted a
way into the city using the sewer
systems. A small group of men could
easily climb through it.

GENERAL ARKLER
 Excellent! Gather a group and we'll
 wait for nightfall.

EXT. CITY WALLS - NIGHT

10 SOLDIERS tread softly towards the sewer system. The LEAD SOLDIER silently removes the grate to reveal a hole just wide enough for one man to climb through at a time. The Lead Soldier stands by as the others climb through and then climbs through himself.

INT. SEWER SYSTEM - CONTINUOUS

The lead soldier climbs through the filth of the sewer system. He SPLUTTERS as he struggles through the narrow passage.

EXT. INSIDE CITY WALLS.

The lead soldier flops out of the sewer system, gasping. A sword touches his throat and he goes very still.

DAGORAS (O.S.)
 I have a message I would like you
 to give General Arkler.

EXT. OPEN WALLED WAR TENT - THE NEXT MORNING

The lead soldier kneels in front of Arkler. The other officers are also present, sat around the two men.

GENERAL ARKLER
 Well... What did he say?

LEAD SOLDIER
 He said... you don't outnumber them
 as much anymore and that perhaps
 the sides will be equal soon.

Herdel stands up

CAPTAIN HERDAL
 The little shit! I want to see him
 squealing like a pig.

GENERAL ARKLER
 Alright, Herdel. But whatever that
 man is, he's running circles around
 us. It may be best if we just
 starve them out.

(To officer 1)
 Any idea what their food supplies

(MORE)

GENERAL ARKLER (CONT'D)

are like?

OFFICER 1

There hasn't been any trade carts for a week and none will come now. Their country has been at war for many years so it's highly unlikely there are large stocks left.

GENERAL ARKLER

A simple siege may be the answer.

The scout enters.

SCOUT

Sir, The man Dagoras... He wants to talk to you.

EXT. DESERT WASTES - CONTINUOUS

Dagoras casually sits on the ramparts at the top of the gates of the city, eating an apple and looking down at Arkler and his officers as they approach from the army camp that has now been erected outside the city.

GENERAL ARKLER

Dagoras, I hear you wanted to speak to me.

DAGORAS

General Arkler, why is it you actually want this city?

GENERAL ARKLER

What do you mean?

DAGORAS

It's in the middle of nowhere, has no strategic value and bears no threat.

GENERAL ARKLER

The Empire can find uses for all who serve.

DAGORAS

Or is it just to make it all look tidy on a map? A nice neat Varcian red. We don't want an independent city putting spots in the nice colour do we? Are people going to starve to death just so the emperor can have a pretty map.

Arkler is silent.

Dagoras throws the core of his apple from the ramparts.

DAGORAS

People say you are an honourable man... And a man of your word.

GENERAL ARKLER

I'd like to think so.

DAGORAS

If some citizens of the city wanted to leave, would you promise no harm will come to them? We have no allies for them to rally, they just don't quite think the siege life is for them.

GENERAL ARKLER

If they are unarmed, I promise no harm will come to them.

DAGORAS

And if I open the gate to let them out, will you standby and not try to enter?

A pause. Herdel turns to look at Arkler who keeps his eyes firmly on Dagoras.

GENERAL ARKLER

I promise.

DAGORAS

Thank you. I shall hold you to your word.

The large gate SCREECHES as it draws up as ORDINARY TOWNSFOLK emerge and shuffle forwards. Nobody stops them as they pass through the army camp.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

You're not actually going to let that gate shut are you, sir?

GENERAL ARKLER

We must. I gave him my word.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

This is nonsense!

GENERAL ARKLER
This is the agreement.

Arkler and the others watch as the gate closes.

CAPTAIN HERDAL
Everybody calls you a hero but
you're just a fool.

GENERAL ARKLER
Perhaps, but a fool in charge.

Arkler returns to the tent, leaving Herdel simmering in
rage.

INT. ARKLER'S SLEEPING TENT - NIGHT

Arkler sleeps in a single hammock. A table sits in the
middle of the tent. The scout enters Arkler's tent, waking
him.

SCOUT
Sir, sir!

GENERAL ARKLER
What is it.

SCOUT
It's Captain Herdel, sir. He caught
up with the civilians.

Arkler sits up.

EXT. DESERT WASTES - NIGHT

Arkler, not dressed in armour reaches the city gates where
the civilians have been skewered on stakes and hammered into
the ground. Herdel and some other men walk around them, some
holding hammers. Arkler walks up to Herdel quickly and
punches him hard in the face.

Herdel falls to the floor.

GENERAL ARKLER
You are an honourless malicious
animal. These were innocent
people... You are relieved of your
rank.

Arkler angrily walks back to his tent.

INT. ARKLER'S SLEEPING TENT - NIGHT

Arkler enters and smashes his fists on the table.

A BLADE slowly pricks the back of his neck. He turns around to see Dagoras, his face tear stained. Dagoras keeps the blade near Arkler's throat.

DAGORAS

You promised those people would not be harmed.

GENERAL ARKLER

I... I had nothing to do with that. Those were vicious, cruel men.

DAGORAS

How does it feel to be fighting on the side of vicious and cruel men?... You don't need this city. You're just working for an old greedy man.

GENERAL ARKLER

That's not my choice.

DAGORAS

You could leave. Take your wolf pack with you and leave us in peace.

GENERAL ARKLER

I have my orders.

Dagoras lowers his blade.

DAGORAS

And an honourable man follows his orders.... If I challenge you to a battle, man against man for the city, would you accept?

GENERAL ARKLER

If I lose, the army marches away?

DAGORAS

Do you have men you can trust to lead that?

GENERAL ARKLER

Yes.

DAGORAS

And If I lose, you take the city. I don't want anybody else to be harmed.

GENERAL ARKLER

They won't.

DAGORAS

Just one more death.

Dagoras backs out of the tent, leaving Arkler standing alone.

FADE TO:

EXT. DESERT WASTES - DAY

Arkler waits outside the city gates, fully armoured. The Varcian army stand still, surrounding the gate so there is a circular fighting area.

The gate rises and Dagoras steps forward. Dressed still in only black clothing and holding his rapier.

DAGORAS

Are we still agreed?

GENERAL ARKLER

We are.

(To army)

If I lose to this man, this city shall be left in peace. Nobody shall make any attack upon it.

Herdel, near the front of the ring, glowers.

The two begin to duel.

Dagoras gains the upper hand at first, dodging and blocking Arkler's attacks and making small cuts upon his body.

After one show of acrobatics where Dagoras jumps to the floor to dodge Arkler's attack. Herdel, from the circle, kicks sand into Dagoras's eyes.

Arkler stops as Dagoras recovers.

GENERAL ARKLER

This will be a fair fight.

Herdel scowls and the battle continues.

Dagoras' attack creates a cut on Arkler's face and he lunges forward but Arkler blocks and stabs him, mortally wounding him.

Dagoras falls to the ground. Arkler kneels beside him.

DAGORAS

We put up a fair fight.

GENERAL ARKLER

That's the best anyone can ask.

Dagoras dies and Arkler stands up.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

The city is ours!

The soldiers rush forward through the gate. Herdel picks up Dagoras' leg and drags him in.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Arkler enters the gate to the town square where he sees Dagoras' body hanging in the centre from a concocted gallows for all to see. Herdel and many others throw stones at the corpse, bruising it further. Arkler watches on.

CAPTAIN HERDAL

Not so stuck up an mighty now is he!?

Many of the soldiers laugh.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Dagoras' body still hangs in the square. Arkler enters, his face now stitched, and looks at it.

He approaches it and cuts it down.

He hears SCUFFLING and looks around. A crowd of VILLAGERS emerge from the darkness, surrounding him. Arkler warily keeps his sword raised.

VILLAGER

We'd like to bury him if you don't mind. He was a hero, whether you accept that or not.

GENERAL ARKLER

He was. I was going to myself but perhaps it's more fitting if you do it.

VILLAGER

Thank you.

Arkler sheathes his sword and begins to walk away. The villagers pick up the body, gently.

He turns back.

GENERAL ARKLER
Who was he by the way? A soldier?

LADY VILLAGER
He was the buckle maker.

General Arkler nods and walks away, leaving the villagers to carry the body towards the open gate.

END