

NICK GAUNTLET: PRIVATE KNIGHT

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY OF ACRE - DAY

The gates open at the approach of two horses.

The flags of King Richard of England, King Phillip of France and the Kingdom of Jerusalem hang from the battered ramparts.

SUPER: "THE PORT OF ACRE. AUGUST 20, 1191 AD."

SUPER: "THE THIRD CRUSADE."

NICK (V.O.)

Eleven-ninety-seven Anno Domini.
Another helping of chaos and
paranoia. They'd been sending boys
to that meat grinder in the middle
east long as anyone could remember.
War was damn near un-winnable, you
ask me.

INT. ACRE COURTYARD - DAY

NICK GAUNTLET (30s), an English knight, and MARCAS (20s) his squire, dismount. Marcas holds the horses.

NICK

My thanks, Marcas.

Nick's blood-smeared armor bristles with weaponry and improvised gadgets. His helmet faceplate looks like a primitive gas mask.

He's battle-worn, dirty, with a crew cut and stubble. He passes dozens of chained Saracen prisoners, enters the,

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Nick approaches the dais where KING RICHARD slouches on a makeshift throne.

An aide announces him.

AIDE
Sir Nicholas of Gloucester.

Richard sits up.

RICHARD
Gauntlet! Were your negotiations
successful?

Nick removes a sealed letter from his glove, gives it to
Richard.

NICK
I'm sorry Your Highness, Saladin
has raised the necessary monies and
he's willing to pay, but still
refuses to surrender the nobles you
demanded.

RICHARD
The Saracen dog.

NICK
You ask me, he's trying to bottle
us here in the port. He knows we
can't advance with hostages in tow.

RICHARD
He's delayed long enough.
(to Nick)
Kill the prisoners. Kill all of
them, and prepare the men to move.

NICK
(aghast)
Your Highness, no!

RICHARD
What did you say, Gauntlet?

NICK
Sire, Saladin's been a noble
opponent, chivalrous in all his
dealings with us. We can't betray
the terms of surrender.

RICHARD

If he doesn't care for the men of this city, why should we? Teach him not to trifle with the armies of Christ.

NICK

But sire, the garrison numbers almost three thousand. I can't... I won't.

RICHARD

This is treason, Gauntlet. Give me your sword.

Nick backs away, horrified.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Your sword, Gloucester!

Nick springs a catch on his scabbard and his sword leaps into his hand.

A moment's hesitation, but he gives it to Richard.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Sir Nicholas of Gloucester, I hereby revoke your title, and all the rights and privileges thereto. You are no longer knight of this crusade. Guards,

A gesture from Richard, the guards grab Nick.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

If he cares so much for the heathen garrison he can share their fate. Take him and bring me a knight who will follow my orders.

He breaks Nick's sword over his knee.

EXT. ACRE COURTYARD - DAY

The guards lead Nick away in chains. His squire follows at a distance.

They open a heavy iron door. They try to push him through, but Marcas clobbers one with a cast iron pan. CRUNCH.

NICK

Marcas?

MARCAS

I'm with you, my lord!

Nick braces a foot against the stone and shoves. The guards stagger back. Nick, his hands still in irons, trips a switch and knives spring from his heavy armored gloves and boots. He whirls and kicks at his captors.

Nick and Marcas overpower Nick's guards and run for the city gate. Some of the Saracen prisoners escape, too.

EXT. CITY OF ACRE - DAY

Nick and Marcas belt out of the city.

Calls from the ramparts, arrows fly at their heels.

Nick and Marcas dodge them, keep running.

EXT. HILL OVERLOOKING ACRE - DAY

Even from here, they can hear the screams of the condemned prisoners.

Nick and Marcas pause in the cover of a pile of tumbledown stones to stare in horror at the city.

MARCAS

What's the plan, Nick?

NICK

There's no plan here. Only madness.

They turn and melt into the wilderness.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

A roadhouse for peasants. Barmaid CADMIA (30s) serves Nick (now 40s) and Marcas (now 30s) ales.

Nick wears a grizzled leather fedora and makeshift necktie tucked into his mail and tunic, stares at a well-oiled broadsword above the bar.

NICK

That's how it was. How it's always been.

CADMIA

Take it easy, Nick. I don't want any trouble.

NICK

(tips his hat)
Trouble? You already got that, Tutty, don't look my way.

WARIN (20s), backed by two huge townies, leans onto the bar by Nick.

WARIN

Might watch what ale-house you loose your tongue in, stranger. My father fought with our Duke in King Richard's crusade.

NICK

(knocks back ale)
Then your father was a fool.

MARCAS

(sees where this is headed)
Well, I have an early shoeing.

He gets up, leaves his ale untouched.

NICK

No Marcas, wait. Don't give up the good work.

Marcas holds Nick at arm's length.

MARCAS

I can't keep doing this, Nick. I've moved on, and I have a business to run. You don't want to help, that's fine, but...

NICK

Smithy isn't gonna black itself.

MARCAS

That's right. Come with me, got a new project I want to show you.

NICK

Think I'll stay. These serfs lack education.

MARCAS

Suit yourself.
(eyes Warin)
Better make it armor.

NICK

(to Warin)

It's been a few years, son, so you may not know. Before the King's Crusade there was the Wendish Crusade, and before that the Siege of Jerusalem. Even then it was more about politics than heretics.

WARIN

I would have done my duty to the king if I'd been of age.

NICK

Give it a year, you'll get your chance. They'll keep going long as they can find fools to follow 'em.

Warin growls.

CADMIA

Oh, Nick.

MARCAS

A good night to you all.

Marcas exits.

NICK
Marcas wait--

WARIN
(grabs Nick's shoulder)
I'll teach you to insult my father
you-

Nick whips a collapsible pistol-gripped crossbow from a shoulder holster, arrow tip to Warin's nose.

NICK
Finish that pejorative.

CADMIA
Nick, I said no bows!

NICK
(ignores her)
Go on. I'm Nick Gauntlet, son. Who
are you?

Warin makes a threatening motion.

Nick flinches, pulls the trigger.

The arrow shoots sideways as the crossbow flies apart.

WARIN
(laughs)

Nick looks at the pistol grip in annoyance.

WARIN (CONT'D)
Should take better care of your
livery, squire.

Warin punches Nick in the face.

EXT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Warin and his friends toss Nick into the street, and throw the pieces of his crossbow after him.

Horses tied in the muck outside. A weathered sign reads 'Lady of the Lake.'

Cadmia stands in the doorframe, holds Nicks' leather trench coat. Nick staggers to his feet, ready for more.

CADMIA

Let it go, tough guy. Or I'll tell Sheriff Raelgar you've been fighting.

NICK

But Tutty, it was the right thing to do. We gotta stand up for what's right.

CADMIA

Glad to see you're not bitter, that'd be pathetic.

She helps him on with his coat, straightens his tie.

CADMIA (CONT'D)

What are you doing to yourself, Nick? Everybody knows your story, why you're not a knight anymore. But it was seventeen years ago. You don't have to take it out on them night after night.

NICK

What does it mean to be a knight? Is it the right to bear arms, the power to mete justice? Or is it a meaningless title to justify a killer?

CADMIA

Go home, sleep it off. That's what you're best at.

NICK

How about one for the road?

She gives him a sad look, slams the door.

Nick glares at the horses who eye him, stoical.

NICK (CONT'D)
What're you lookin' at?

EXT. TOWN OF CALOMEL - NIGHT

A small village in the Yorkshire countryside.

Nick staggers into town. A wooden road sign for 'Calomel' points in the direction he's headed.

NICK (V.O.)
Calomel was a crappy little Dukedom in the East Riding of Yorkshire. It was a backwater, and that suited me fine. But it did have the best blacksmith in three counties.

He splashes through the squalid street to the smithy.

NICK
(shouts at upper window)
Marcas! Damn thing fell apart again. Are you sure the chu-ke nu is better than the polybolos as a basis for a collapsible bow?

NEIGHBOR (O.S.)
Quiet in the street!

NICK
Shut it, you. I need a smithy, not a smart-ass!

While Nick looks for the source of the voice, a cloaked figure runs from the smithy, knocks him aside.

NICK (CONT'D)
Whoa, there!

He gets up, just in time to see an explosion blow out the windows!

Flames and smoke pour out of the stone building.

INT. SMITHY - NIGHT

Nick kicks his way in, finds Marcas blackened and near death amid the flaming debris.

NICK

Marcas!

Nick gathers him up.

He has massive acid burns.

NICK (CONT'D)

Marcas! Jesus.

Marcas' eyes drift around and find Nick.

MARCAS

(faintly)

The head... it was the head...

Marcas dies.

Nick holds him as the smithy burns.

NICK

Aw Marcas, damn it.

He notices a concealed door, half open behind the forge.

EXT. SMITHY - LATER

A bucket line of townsfolk put out the smoldering ruin.

INT. LABORATORY - NIGHT

Torches glare in the smoke.

Beyond the concealed door, Nick stands with SHERIFF RAE LGAR (40s), who covers his face with his arm against the stench.

The sheriff's men kick over braziers, jars, chemical containers.