WILL WIGHT

NEW YORK *TIMES* BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

KICKSTARTER SPOILER SCENE!

UNCROWNED

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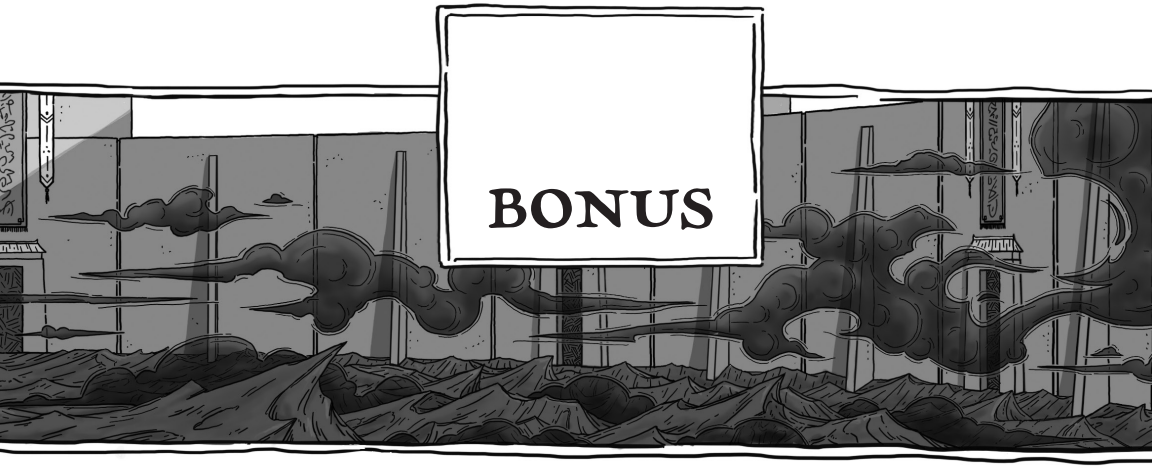

Uncrowned Kickstarter Bonus Scene: SPOILERS!

Location: Middle of Chapter 20 of *Uncrowned*

SPOILER WARNING

AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED: If you have not read *Cradle: Volume 10, Reaper*, you are not authorized to proceed beyond this point.

Enter Spoiler Territory at your own risk.

You have been warned.

Eithan smiled as he watched Lindon struggle with himself.

As an Underlord, the boy looked older than ever. But at that moment, he looked as young as he really was. Tears welled in dark eyes, his shoulders were slumped, and he squirmed in place.

Eithan saw shame, anger, regret, fear, self-pity, and a dozen other emotions.

"I don't know what you want me to say," Lindon said. "It's too late to do anything. I failed."

Eithan struggled not to laugh.

Not in mockery. No one understood what Lindon was feeling better than Eithan did, not even Lindon himself.

But to see someone who had come so far in such a short time think he was a *failure*. Top sixteen of the Uncrowned, when so recently he had been a Copper in the backwoods of nowhere.

Anyone but Lindon would see no failure. In fact, they would see wild success.

But what others saw didn't matter. Even what Lindon saw hardly mattered.

Far more important was what he did.

Eithan leaned forward. "I want you to tell me what you're going to do next."

Lindon shook, as though Eithan had struck him a tiny blow. He sat up straighter and subconsciously worked the Heaven and Earth Purification Wheel.

"Yerin won," he said with resolve. "I'm going to see her."

A good start. As long as Lindon could put his pain aside long enough to support her.

Eithan nudged him in the right direction. "Congratulations from

you will mean a great deal to her, but are you in shape for that?"

"I don't know," Lindon said, and that was a good answer.

He wrestled with himself in silence for a moment more and then bolted from the room.

Alone, Eithan grinned.

He had many plans left unfinished. There were still many ways this could all go wrong.

But, at the moment, he was happy.

Then came the alarm.

A sound like shrieking seabirds echoed from the walls of the Ninecloud Court. The Soul, the construct that oversaw all others, spoke in a tightly contained panic. "All guests, prepare for imminent spatial transfer—"

Someone pulled Eithan through the Way.

For just an instant, he was home again. Textured blue, the foundation of all existence, buffeted him on all sides.

The shock overwhelmed him. He had been transported by others before, of course, but almost never unaware. With so many Monarchs in the Ninecloud Court, he had to keep his bloodline senses somewhat constrained. And his current body was a poor conduit for authority, so he hadn't seen anything.

Eithan was deposited, kneeling, next to fourteen other contestants. The ones remaining in the tournament.

Instantly, he knew the Monarchs weren't responsible for the working. Several had enough control over space, but to move so many people so precisely, so quickly, over such a short distance, with no warning and no spiritual signature...

The Abidan were coming.

Why?

That question shook his whole being. Why would they interfere *now?* What had happened? Was this a recruitment? An investigation? A punishment for one of the Monarchs?

Had they found him?

Old, ugly anger bubbled up from inside of him. Of course they would interfere now. When things had been going so well. They couldn't even follow his arrangements and keep everything running for a few more decades.

The anger deepened when the Abidan revealed himself.

"Children," the rat-like man with the beady eyes said, "I am Kiuran of the Hounds."

He continued talking, but Eithan only listened with half an ear. Makiel was responsible. Of course he was. They were here to recruit, and they were doing it with all the care and subtlety of a bull tumbling down a flight of stairs.

Eithan had known Kiuran, once.

Not well. There was nothing about Kiuran to pique the interest of any Judge, let alone the Reaper.

But Eithan was aware of all Hounds-in-training. He didn't keep those memories—a mortal brain couldn't contain everything he knew—but he remembered a distaste for Kiuran. At the arrogant way the man did things, despite his relative insignificance.

Then again, Eithan was the last person who should judge another for arrogance.

Now that this didn't have anything to do with him, he was starting to calm down. The Abidan were here to recruit Monarchs, and so they were interfering with the Uncrowned King tournament.

That made enough sense, even if the sight of the white armor made him furious.

Then Kiuran extended his hand, palm-up. "I give you the new grand prize of the tournament: a weapon of the gods."

He brought out Penance.

Remove restraints and release authority. Authorization zero-zero-eight, Ozriel.

Eithan could taste the words in his mouth.

Whatever weapon Ozmanthus made, he found it insufficient to bring order. Too weak to bring peace. Ineffective at fixing the world.

He had never been able to use the power of a Phoenix, so he had tried to repair his home with the tools of death. When one didn't work, he made another.

Under his leadership, House Arelius had been the best-armed of all the great factions. Their strength only inspired their rivals to work harder, to improve their own strength, and to find other ways to strike at them.

Even then, he had known he was trying to get out of a hole by digging deeper.

But he'd convinced himself that there was a way out. That he could make a weapon so perfect, he could leave it to his descendants to protect them from any threat. It was to be his penance for failing to succeed while he was with them.

And his penance for leaving them behind.

In the end, he succeeded. The Icons of Death and Creation were reflected powerfully in his arrowhead, to the point that it effectively commanded the Way itself to kill. To turn any being from 'alive' to 'dead' as simple as flipping a switch.

The perfect weapon.

Ozmanthus had succeeded. And he'd been unable to leave it behind.

When he saw his Penance realized, he knew that it would not lead to the Fate he wanted. It would be a curse on his line, not a blessing. His descendants could not be trusted with, and should not be burdened by, the power of Death itself.

So he had brought it with him when he ascended.

And now it was being used as a prize in a game for children.

Eithan wrestled his own self into silence. To break his Shroud now would be to ruin everything. To make all his work worthless.

And, once Kiuran's words penetrated the haze of his rage, he realized that Penance itself wasn't *really* the prize. Only a single use.

The perfected arrowhead had no limit on its use, at least on targets that had not ascended. Given enough time, someone holding Penance could eliminate anyone and everyone they wanted.

At least the Hounds hadn't succumbed entirely to madness. It was still a hideous insult, and one Makiel should one day pay for.

But Eithan mastered himself. He forced down his rage.

He would not throw away his current solution for one that had already failed. He had a new plan.

And maybe Penance had a place in it.

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