

The Hermit's Tale

by
David Accampo

Wormwood: Portraits
Wormwood Season Three, Volume Two

Email: wormwood@habitformingfilms.com
Web: www.wormwoodshow.com
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EXT. WORMWOOD WOODS - NIGHT

SFX: footsteps rushing through the trees.

JACOB

I'm...I'm not gonna make it, Deputy Drexal! I can hear them. In the trees.

WAYNE DREXAL

Now you listen to me, Jacob! We stick to the plan. It's just like we walked it through. Run for the quarry. Go. Don't look back. Henry's waiting in the quarry. Tell her not to wait. Activate the ward immediately. Do you understand?

JACOB

Wh-what are you going to do?

WAYNE DREXAL

(grim)

Don't you worry about that, Kitter. Leave these mutts to me.

SFX: Jacob runs off.

WAYNE DREXAL (CONT'D)

Hiyaaaah!

SFX: fires the shotgun.

WAYNE DREXAL (CONT'D)

C'mon, fido! Let's see how you like a little silver buckshot made from Mama Irene's best cutlery!

SFX: Wolves roar and crash through the trees!

SFX: Drexal's lines are interspersed with shotgun fire

WAYNE DREXAL (CONT'D)

Yahhh! Yahhh! C'mon!

SFX: the shotgun clicks. Empty.

SFX: Wolves laugh, gutteral laughs.

WOLF #1

It's out of silver, brother.

WOLF #2

Unfortunate.

WOLF #1

Not for us.

WOLF #2

Tired of catching squirrels. He'll
make fine meal.

WAYNE DREXAL

Oh, I'm really kind of stringy. Not
good eatin' at all. Irene keeps
trying to put a few pounds on me--

WOLF #2

This one talks too much!

WOLF #1

Make it talk about the star child!

WAYNE DREXAL

I'll never talk to you, you
oversized Saint Bernard!

WOLF #2

Eat its leg, then see if it talks!

SFX: tussle as the wolves move in.

WAYNE DREXAL

Ahhhhhh! Wait! Wait! I know--!

SFX: Jonesy emerges from the brush, brandishing a large
broadsword~

JONESY

Raaaaaaaaaaaaawr!

SFX: The battle ensues. We hear the sounds of a sword
swinging a slicing flesh. The wolves snarl at first but then
howl in pain and scurry away, cursing!

WAYNE DREXAL

Jonesy...?

JONESY

Hello, Wayne.

WAYNE DREXAL

What... what... just...happened?
Are you carrying a sword?

JONESY

Yes. I've not held her in my hand
for many years now.

(MORE)

JONESY (CONT'D)

She's called "Fótbítr," which means "foot-biter," interestingly enough...

WAYNE DREXAL

Are you... are you wearing chain mail?

JONESY

It is my father's coat of armor. It's said no steel can bite through this armor. Why he put me in his armor that day, I will never know.

WAYNE DREXAL

Jonesy... What is going on? Who are you?

JONESY

I haven't used... my real name in many years, Wayne. A long time before I was Benjamin Jones, I was Balli, son of Brodir of the Isle of Man. I am the rightful successor to the Norse-Gael Queen Gormflaith's throne, as she bequeathed it to my father for his part in the defeat of Brian Boru. I am a Viking prince... and I am also the coward who brought the Object to Wormwood many, many years ago.

WAYNE DREXAL

Like in the 80's?

JONESY

(sighs)

No, Wayne. Like around one-thousand-fourteen AD.

WAYNE DREXAL

Dang. That's... that's pretty old.

OPENING CREDITS.

ANNOUNCER

The Isle of Man. 1014 AD.

INT. BRODIR'S KEEP - THE ISLE OF MAN - 1014 AD - DAY

SFX: a large door creaks open.

BALLI

(This is Jonesy, only much
younger sounding)
Father? King Sigtrygg Silkbeard of
Dublin has come for his audience.

BRODIR

Send him in, Balli.

SFX: Footsteps as Silkbeard and his men walk into the hall of
the keep.

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD

Well met, Lord Brodir.

BRODIR

(slightly irritated)
Aye, well met, King Silkbeard.
(to Balli)
Balli, fetch us some mead, boy. The
king must be parched from his long
journey.

BALLI

Yes, father.

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD

A fine boy, you have there, Brodir,
beardless though he is. He'll grow
into a great warrior one day, I'm
sure. Like his father.

BRODIR

Let's not mince words, Silkbeard.
You'd not come all this way to pay
compliment to my kin.

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD

Yes, I see civility does not suit,
you, eh, Brodir?

BRODIR

Not to an Irish half-breed like
yourself, Silkbeard.

OSPAK

Now, brother. Let's hear what the
Lord of Dublin has to say for
himself.

BRODIR

I've no stomach for this, Ospak.

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD
You've no stomach for battle,
Brodir?

BRODIR
(flash of anger)
Do not fear my worth in battle,
your "father" knows better.

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD
I don't come here representing
Brian Boru, Brodir. I've come on
behalf of my mother.

BRODIR
(with a snide smile)
Gormflaith ingen Murchada, eh? I
hear she was once a beautiful woman-
-

OSPAK
(warily)
And still just as wicked -- or so I
hear.

BRODIR
Bah! What does your mother want
with us, Silkbeard?

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD
Perhaps you've heard that
Gormflaith has left the High King.

BRODIR
Word of unrest has reached our
ears.

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD
My mother seeks to take the high
king's throne. She needs warriors.
Brave men, such as you.

BRODIR
We are brave, Silkenbeard. But we
are not fools. I've no need to
prove my mettle against Boru's
forces.

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD
She has promised the victor a grand
prize.

BRODIR
Oh?

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD

To share with her the throne?

BRODIR

Hah! You hear that, brother? King
of the Irishmen!

OSPAK

I do not like this, Brodir. It
doesn't augur well, to fight so
good a king as Brian Boru.

SIGTRYGG SILKBEARD

Of course, I understand your
hesitation, lords. I have also been
tasked with approaching Earl Sigurd
of Orkney. Men say he has no fear
of Brian Boru. I suppose he can
share the throne with my queen, if
you prefer.

BRODIR

Nonsense! Ospak mewls like a child!
So good a king? Your own brother
would be better, Ospak!

(to Silkbeard)

Your offer intrigues us, sire. Let
us discuss just what your gambit
requires of my men.

(to Balli)

Balli! Where is that mead?!

BALLI

Here, father.

BRODIR

Excellent. Now I need you to send
word to the men...

EXT. WORMWOOD WOODS - PRESENT NIGHT

JONESY

Despite Uncle Ospak's fears, my
father and his men sailed to
Ireland to engage Brian Boru. My
uncle read the runes and told my
father he feared we could not
succeed. My father ignored him,
even as the signs became clear.

WAYNE DREXAL

What signs?

JONESY

On the first night, we experienced a rain of steaming blood. It washed over our ships. Thick and red. It was not a natural occurrence, Wayne. It was my first truly supernatural experience.

WAYNE DREXAL

It sounds gross.

JONESY

It was. On the second night, we were attacked once again. This time by ghostly weapons that seemed to fade and disappear in the inky blackness of night. There was no moon that night. But men fell to the bite of axe and the sting of spear. My Uncle Ospak warned my father that Brian Boru must possess an object of immense power.

WAYNE DREXAL

Man, I'll tell you what, Jonesy, I am SO sick of the Object. Object, object, object! All everyone ever talks about is the Object anymore!

JONESY

We're surrounded by vampires and werewolves and a rather suspect priest, Wayne. It's the life we lead.

WAYNE DREXAL

I wish it were an enchanted shotgun. I could understand that. I don't even know what that thing is!

JONESY

No one does.

WAYNE DREXAL

So what happened next? Hail of brimstone?

JONESY

Not quite. On the third night, a thousand black crows filled the night and attacked our ships, slicing at us with steel beaks and steel talons. We lost more men.

WAYNE DREXAL

(muttering to self)
Oh. Crows. With... metal. Right.

JONESY

Upon our arrival on the Irish shores, my Uncle Ospak fled. Later, we discovered he had renounced his beliefs and been baptised by Boru's priests. He had joined the enemy. But in the meantime, our battle was engaged. Late in the day, my father returned to me.

EXT. CLONTARF, IRELAND - 1014 AD - DAY

SFX: a massive battle rages as Norsemen and Irishmen clash on the battle field.

BRODIR

Boy! Here! Attend me! Help your old man out!

BALLI

Yes, father. I'm here.

BRODIR

Get me out of this mail.

BALLI

Yes, sire. The battle goes well.

BRODIR

Fah! Every time I get close to Boru's encampment, something sends me back. Ospak was right. There's powerful magic at work here.

BALLI

What will you do?

BRODIR

Come here!

BALLI

Father, what--?! You cut me!

BRODIR

Drain the blood into this cup, boy. I have need of it.

BALLI

But father, what are you doing?

BRODIR

Quiet!

(praying quietly)

Loki Laufeyjarson, I call upon thee. Wolf father, Originator of deceits, calumniator of the Aesir, I offer the blood of my kin that you may grant me the cloak needed to lay waste to my enemies.

(grunting)

It works!

BALLI

Father, what... what is happening?

BRODIR

The god of mischief helps us this day, son.

BALLI

You--you're growing younger...

BRODIR

Yes, we switch ourselves Balli, that I might infiltrate our enemy's camp.

BALLI

My beard, it grows!

BRODIR

Hah! We'll make a man of you yet, Balli Brodirson! Even if only for a day! Put on my armor, Balli. Stay safe. I will return once my axe has tasted the blood of Brian Boru!

SFX: Brodir leaves. Several other Viking warriors arrive.

VIKING #1

Lord Brodir! Boru's forces are weakening! We need you on the battlefield, sire! We can beat these Irish bastards!

BALLI

(playing as Brodir)

Er..

(clears throats)

... yes...

VIKING #1

Sire, why do you hesitate? Have the gods spoken to you? Is it as your brother Ospark feared?

BALLI

No... No! I was... assessing the plan of attack. Come, men! Onward!

End Flashback.

EXT. WORMWOOD WOODS - NIGHT

JONESY

I was terrified. A boy, not even a man, a boy brazenly attempting to fill the shoes of his father for fear of being discovered. I couldn't dishonor his name. It was a different time then, Wayne. I was raised to fight, to tear my enemies limb from limb. And yet...it was not who I was. I think my father sensed this. Maybe he used me to attack Boru. Maybe he was trying to force courage upon me by way of a beard. I do know the gods were on our side that day.

WAYNE DREXAL

Huh. I always had you pegged as one of those liberal god-hating atheist types, Jonesy.

JONESY

A healthy dose of skepticism is always a good thing, Wayne. But when you've borne witness to true magic... there is no denying the will of gods.

WAYNE DREXAL

I remember when I thought we had a secret genetics laboratory hidden under Wormwood.

(sighs)

Yeah... those were good times.

JONESY

I can't honestly tell you how I survived the battle that day.

(MORE)

JONESY (CONT'D)

I may have been lucky. It may have been my father's chain mail. Years later, the Norsemen would tell tales of my father and his coat of mail that could not be pierced by spear or axe. But I did stay alive. And then I felt an invisible tug. I assumed that it was the magic beginning to fade. I knew this meant my father faced unimaginable horrors at the hands of the old King Boru. I let the invisible force grab hold of me, and I ran. I must have looked like a man driven to the men around me, but the truth was that I was being dragged along. Running was all I could do to keep up. It was late in the day, and the sun had begun to set. In the long shadows of the evening, I found myself in the midst of the enemy camp. I was alone now, hidden in the trees. Armed soldiers encircled the camp, but I could see... I could see old King Boru. The emperor of the Irish. He was old and slow. He wore a long gray beard and armor strapped about him that he could barely lift. He stood in the torchlight of the encampment, and I saw... my father. He still looked as I did. Young, a mirror image of myself. And I watched as I... as he... Howled in anguish as the old man drove a knife into my...father's gut.

EXT. BRIAN BORU'S CAMP - EVENING

BRIAN BORU

Scream, boy! Scream!

BRODIR/BALLI

(not sure if this should
be Brodir of Balli's
voice at this part. We
may try both)

No! You'll not take him. You won't!
I'll kill you, you bloody old fool!

BRIAN BORU

That's quite a voice for a hairless
pup like you, boy. Now scream--!

SFX: Brian stabs Brodir again and he screams.

BRIAN BORU (CONT'D)

I know not why you attempted to invade my camp, boy, but you are resourceful. I wanted to keep your father at bay. But now... with you, I'll bring that oafish father of yours... and I will have his head!

SFX: he stabs at Brodir again and the man screams.

SFX: Balli emerges from the woods.

BALLI

Wait! Hold! Do not hurt my fa-- my son! I am here.

BRIAN BORU

Guards! Bring him to me!

SFX: rush as the guards struggle and bring Balli forward.

BRODIR

No! Go away... get out of here you bloody fool!

BRIAN BORU

Is that how you speak to your father? I'll never understand you Danes. Now, quiet!

(to the guards)

Put the mercenary on his knees!

BALLI

Let the boy go!

BRIAN BORU

Is this how it all ends? If I kill you now, warrior, does my treasonous wife Gormflaith surrender in her vain attempt at usurpation? And what did she promise you, I wonder? The crown?

BALLI

Just let the... let the boy go, and I will submit to your will.

BRIAN BORU

Indeed. Hmmm. Odd. I've heard tales of your prowess, Brodir of Man.

(MORE)

BRIAN BORU (CONT'D)

They say you were once a Christian man, but you gave up your faith and embraced pagan gods. Is this true?

BALLI

Just... please. Let him go.

BRIAN BORU

They also say no man can defeat you in battle. And yet now you beg for your son's life? Have you no pride?

BALLI

It is... as you say.

BRIAN BORU

Then why don't I believe you?

BALLI

Wh-what?

BRIAN BORU

Wolf! Wolf the Quarrelsome! Come here, man!

WOLF THE QUARRELSOME

Yes, sire.

BRIAN BORU

Does this man strike you as the feared warrior of Man?

WOLF THE QUARRELSOME

No, sire. He mewls like a pup.

BRIAN BORU

Bring me the Object.

WOLF THE QUARRELSOME

Sire.

BRIAN BORU

I sense a great magic at work here. But you know something, Brodir? I have power of my own.

WOLF THE QUARRELSOME

Sire... here.

SFX: a stone casket is laid in front of the king.

BRIAN BORU

You are a pagan, and your gods are mere shadow puppets of Satan.

(MORE)

BRIAN BORU (CONT'D)

False gods bearing empty promises,
Brodír of Man. Mine is the kingdom
of Heaven. The angels of the Lord
have seen fit to bequeath me a
small fragment of his essence. It
has no true name, no more than He
himself has a name.

SFX: the lid of the Object is slid back.

BRIAN BORU (CONT'D)

Let light of the Lord reveal
Satan's false shadows!

SFX: weird noise builds and issues forth over the scene.

BALLI

No!

BRIAN BORU

What? No!

SFX: in the rising wave of sound, Brodír breaks free, and
tackles Brian Boru to the ground. He stabs Boru with his own
knife!

BRODIR

(back to sounding as himself)
Enjoy your heaven, you decrepit old
fool. I will toast you from
Valhalla!

BALLI

Father! No!

BRODIR

Balli! Grab the Object. Run! Take
it!

WOLF THE QUARRELSOME

Danish bastard! You'll die

SFX: of battle as Wolf and Brodír begin to fight!

End Flashback.

EXT. WORMWOOD WOODS - NIGHT

JONESY

I reached into the stone cask that
housed the Object, and I grabbed
hold of it. It was a painful
sensation. It burned.

(MORE)

JONESY (CONT'D)

The light traveled up my arms,
leaving strange markings--

WAYNE DREXAL

Like Jacob!

JONESY

Like Jacob. Yes. His transformation
is what roused me again, Wayne. It
is time to act. I had forgotten so
much. I began to run. While Wolf
the Quarrelsome fought my father, I
ran. I was pursued by Boru's men. I
ran into the woods, but the
brilliant light of the Object made
hiding impossible. I was
surrounded.

WAYNE DREXAL

And then, just like John Rambo, you
leapt from the ground and---
(makes machine gun sound
effects with his mouth)

JONESY

No, I didn't. I was a coward,
Wayne. What happened was... my
Uncle Ospark.

EXT. WOODS - 1014 AD - NIGHT

BALLI

Don't come any closer!

OSPAK

Hold, men!

BALLI

Uncle?

OSPAK

My nephew is no fighter. But he
holds an Object of great power.
Balli... please... give us the
Object.

BALLI

Uncle, why did you betray us?

OSPAK

That is a matter for men, Balli.
Your father was driven by darkness.
I couldn't bear to see--

BALLI
They've killed him!

OSPAK
Please, Balli! Give us the Object!

BALLI
No, no! Stay back! Uncle, you can't touch it--!

OSPAK
Give it to us!

BALLI
N-no! I can't stop it--!

SFX: Weird explosion of sound, similar to the end of Season Two.

End Flashback.

EXT. WORMWOOD WOODS - NIGHT

JONESY
The explosion killed all of the men. My uncle stirred, still barely alive. His skin was charred and cracked. He whispered to me with barely a voice. I knew what he was doing. Though he had renounced his faith that day, my Uncle still new the power of the old rituals. He uttered the names of gods, he offered his soul to eternal damnation. And he cursed me. He bound me to the Object for all eternity. My life is that of the Object's. And the Object is eternal.

WAYNE DREXAL
Wow. Jonesy. I had... I had no idea. I always thought you were kind of a sissy.

JONESY
I am, Wayne.

WAYNE DREXAL
But you're an immortal viking warrior, Jonesy!
(badly quoting
'Highlander')
(MORE)

WAYNE DREXAL (CONT'D)

" I am Conor MacLeod of the Clan MacLeod... There can be only one! "

JONESY

It's not really like that, you know. Although, I do enjoy the Queen soundtrack to that film.

(beat)

Do you know how I spent the next 20 years? Running. I left Ireland. I left the Isle of Man. And when I heard that Lief Ericson had founded a settlement in a new land called Vinland, I jumped on a ship and headed there. I left Vinland, which you now know as Newfoundland...

WAYNE DREXAL

(covering that he has no idea what Jonesy is saying)
...eh, yeahhh, Newfoundland...of course...

JONESY

... and then I made my way into what would eventually become the United States. That was an amazing journey, Wayne. This land, unspoiled by the industry of man. You could walk across rivers of the backs of swimming salmon. I traveled across the country, carrying the Object as my burden. Until I reached another ocean.

WAYNE DREXAL

Wait! I know this one! The Pacific ocean!

JONESY

Understand, Wayne, that at the time, this was all new to me. To my people. Another ocean. The world was too vast. I was too tired. I traveled inland to the foothills, and there I used the power I had within me to bury the Object deep in the granite of the land.

WAYNE DREXAL

In Wormwood?

JONESY

Long before it was called Wormwood. I lived there. Befriended the Maidu people native to the region. Even took a wife. They told stories of Worldmaker, who created the land, and Coyote, who made it dangerous. I made sure that the area of Wormwood was known as Coyote's Footprint. Where Coyote's mischief was most deeply felt.

WAYNE DREXAL

He never could get the better of that Road Runner... but if I had me some rocket skates...I bet I could...

JONESY

Am I boring you, Wayne?

WAYNE DREXAL

No! No... Not at all! Hey, Jonesy, was the Road Runner cartoon based on you?

JONESY

I don't think so, Wayne. Although, I did spend a summer with Chuck Jones once, many years later. He had a relative who lived in Wormwood.

WAYNE DREXAL

Huh. So you buried that thing here in Wormwood?

JONESY

Yes.

WAYNE DREXAL

So, this is kind of all your fault?

JONESY

I am sad to say it is so. It would have happened elsewhere, if not here.

WAYNE DREXAL

But you could have buried it in, like, Maine. No one cares about Maine.

JONESY

If I knew then what I know now,
Wayne, I suppose I would have done
things differently. As it was, the
choice was not without
consequences. Several hundred years
after I settled here, the demon
Ornias, the one you fought--

WAYNE DREXAL

The one that we totally bagged and
tagged!

(suddenly crestfallen)

And that killed my cousin's,
fiancé...

JONESY

Yes. Ornias appeared in Coyote's
Footprint. He was searching for the
Object. He killed families of the
village in which I lived. We
fought. He had been followed to the
West by an ambitious young Puritan.
A witch finder named Bartholomew
Locke, a student of the *Malleus
Maleficarum* or "The Hammer Against
Witches." Locke was a little too
soaked in the Catholic doctrines
for my taste, but we made a fine
team against our adversary. We
trapped Ornias deep in the Granite
under Wormwood. It was only when
Francis Griffin began to mine the
land that I began to fear.

WAYNE DREXAL

Jonesy, this is... this is too
much.

JONESY

I joined Griffin's men, taking the
name Benjamin Jones. They called me
'Jonesy.' A quaint title, which I
enjoyed. I was there the day they
found the Object in the quarry. And
though Bartholomew Locke had long
since passed on, he had bequeathed
to me various grimoires of the
occult sciences. I decided that I
couldn't steal the object and run
again. Instead, I helped Griffin
form the secret Order in Wormwood
that has guarded the Object ever
since.

WAYNE DREXAL

Why are you telling me all of this now?

JONESY

I've been hiding for too long, Jonesy. Far too long. I've forgotten more than I know. But I can tell you that with all of these forced searching for the Object... no good will come of it.

WAYNE DREXAL

I just don't get it, Jonesy. You knew all of this. Why did you wait all this time?

JONESY

I've never been warrior. I was a boy who got lucky. A boy who ran. A man cursed to live forever. I tried to help Griffin form an alliance of men who could protect the object the way I never could. But it seems nothing can sever my connection to the Object, and it's time to face it.

WAYNE DREXAL

But Jacob is connected now, too. He's the new guardian!

JONESY

No. He isn't. Wayne, the tattoos that marked me... they faded from my skin months after I had the Object in my possession. There is no true Guardian, other than the one we make. Jacob's connection to the Object is like... catching a flu. He's been infected. But eventually... he's going to be just like the rest of us.

WAYNE DREXAL

Except you're, like, totally old.

JONESY

My uncle's curse. Jacob doesn't have that. And that's what worries me.

WAYNE DREXAL

I have to tell... we have to...
look, Jonesy, you have to tell all
of this to Sheriff Bradley. There's
no way I can keep all of this
straight. Vikings, road runners...
I mean that's a lot of stuff.

JONESY

I know, Wayne. I'm sorry to burden
you.

WAYNE DREXAL

Don't worry about it, Jonesy. Maybe
some time I'll bend your ear and
tell you about the two months I was
a masked street vigilante.

JONESY

Looking forward to it, Wayne.

WAYNE DREXAL

I fell in love with this beautiful
french cat burglar... man, she was
something else.

JONESY

Sounds like quite a tale.

WAYNE DREXAL

But, uh, don't tell Irene about
this, okay, Jonesy?

JONESY

You've got it, Wayne. Now...let's
get moving before the wolves come
back.

END CREDITS