

BASED ON A UBISOFT CREATION

ASSASSIN'S
CREED
VALHALLA
SWORD OF THE
WHITE HORSE



ASSASSIN'S CREED: VALHALLA
SWORD OF THE WHITE HORSE - TEMPORIZED

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TEMPORIZED TIMELINE

ARTHURIAN LEGENDS

C. 5TH CENTURY - 537 / 6TH CENTURY CE

WOMEN OF THE MIST & ALLIES

King Arthur Pendragon of Camelot, father : Mordred (T, Ment.)

The Lady of Avalon, mother : Mordred (WotM, Ment.)
Merlin (Ment.)

PLACES & PIECES OF EDEN

Merlin's Cave? (Near icy water by Avalon, Ment.)

Stonehenge (Ment.)

- Excalibur / Caladfwlch

(Floating in a lake > Found by The Lady > Stonehenge > King Arthur > WotM > King Arthur > King Arthur > Stonehenge)

KNIGHTS TEMPLAR & DESCENDANTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

King Arthur Pendragon of Camelot (FA, C?, Ment.)

Mordred the True King, son : King Arthur, The Lady (DotRT, Ment.)

Unn. Advisors of King Arthur (OotA?, Ment.)

Unn. Servant of the True King, great-grandfather : Unn. Great-Grandson (DotRT, Ment.)

C. 860's CE

WOMEN OF THE MIST & ALLIES

Old Mae (Ment. to be cruel to children)

Unn. Witch-Warrior of Argyll, mother : Niamh (WotM, Ment.)

C. 877-878 CE

ASSASSINS & ALLIES

Birdie (Child)
Ebba the Nun (WotM)
Eivor Varinsdottir : Odin
Hytham (Mentor of the current British Hidden Ones)
The Lady of Avalon (WotM)
Marcella ("FT", Roman Hidden One stationed in Lunden)
Mathan the Beautiful Brown Boy (Horse)

Niamh, Hedge-Witch of Caledonia, Witch-Warrior of Argyll, Lady in Waiting of Avalon (I, "T", WotM)
Nimue of the Islands North of Caledonia? (Ment.)
Unn. Burly Dane
Unn. Elderly Washerwoman
Unn. Husband : Wisweth (Posthumous)

Unn. Little Girl Survivor (Child)
Unn. New Witch-Warrior of Argyll (WotM, Ment.)
Unn. Nun of Lunden
Unn. Server Woman
Unn. Silver-Eyed Man
Unn. Survivor Woman
Valka? (Advisor to Ravensthorpe Bureau)
Wisweth (WotM)

ISU

Ceridwen (Ment.)	Flock of Crows (Blessing of The	Lone White Stag (Blessing of
Cernunnos (Ment.)	Mórrigan)	Cernunnos)
Epona the Goddess and	Fox (Blessing)	Odin (Ment.)
Protector of Horses (Ment.)	Freyja (Ment.)	Thor (Ment.)
The Fae (Ment.)	Mórrigan the Battle-Goddess, Lady of Crows (Ment.)	

PLACES & PIECES OF EDEN

Asgard (Ment.)

Glastonbury Tor, Avalon (Women of the Mist's most sacred location, the Sacred Table of Avalon is protected by a long line of chosen Ladies of Avalon)

- Sacred Table of Avalon

- Cup of the Sacred Table (Glastonbury Tor, Avalon. "Decorated to look as though the stem was the twined trunk of an ancient tree, with the branches holding the cup in place. It was encrusted with jewels.")
- Excalibur / Caladfwlch (Eivor > Eivor's tent > Niamh > Hidden in a barrel in a farmhouse > Niamh > Buries it briefly > Niamh > Valka > [Gunnar forges a fake for the ruse] > Valka > Niamh > Restored to the WotM > Chooses Niamh to become the next Lady of Avalon > Lady Niamh. "The pommel was metal and silver that sometimes looked bronze and was decorated with a series of circles intercepted by gold crisscrosses. When she reached out and unsheathed it, the blade itself appeared melded from all kinds of other swords, forged into one strong being that glowed when held by the right bearer.")
- Plate of the Sacred Table (Glastonbury Tor, Avalon. "Bare of any food, shone golden in the sparse light that came through the mist. The plate had a star inside a circle engraved in the center.")
- Spear of the Sacred Table (Glastonbury Tor, Avalon. "Taller than the Lady, twined with green vines and purple flowers.")

Hammer of Thor / Mjölmir (Ment., Valka seems oblivious or cagey to the fact Eivor has it by this point)

Stonehenge (Ment.)

ORDER OF THE ANCIENTS, DESCENDANTS OF THE ROUND TABLE & ALLIES

Cyrus (OotA)	Unn. Bear-Necklaced Brute	Unn. Second Mercenary of The
Father Deoric (OotA)	(OotA?)	Adder's Son (OotA)
Marcella (C)	Unn. Black-Cloaked	Unn. Second-Tallest Bald Man
"Mordred the True King",	Descendant (DotRT)	Unn. Smallest Man
"Him", "The Adder's Son" :	Unn. First Mercenary of The	Unn. Tall Man with Bad Teeth
Mordred? King Arthur?	Adder's Son (OotA)	Unn. "Idiot Boy" (Child)
(DotRT, Ment.)	Unn. Great-Grandson : Unn.	Unn. 3 Co-Conspirators of
Unn. Accosting Guard of Cote	Servant to the True King	Cyrus (OotA)
	(DotRT)	

TEMPORIZED SUMMARIES

ARTHURIAN LEGENDS

C. 5TH CENTURY - 537 / 6TH CENTURY CE

EXCERPT FROM CH.12

“But **we** always have said that [**Excalibur**] was forged at Avalon. Is that not true?”

“**We** [the **Women of the Mist**] found **it** in the lake. **It** washed ashore, and when **the Lady** long before **me** picked **it** up, **it** glowed. Later, **it** was sealed in a **stone** until a rightful holder could come along to claim **it**.”

“And that was **Arthur**,” **Niamh** said breathlessly.

“It was. **We** believe **it** picks leaders for Mercia. That is why **we** need **it**, **Niamh**. **We** need **its** guidance to find the next **Lady**. And the **one** after that. **We** need **it** to find kings and queens. The **sword** knows who **it** can trust with **its power**, and **it** speaks that trust with the **cues** that **we** have been trained to look for.”

EXCERPT FROM CH.19

“The **blade** will not light up for **me**. **It** does not light up for many. But the legends say that when **Arthur** picked up the **sword**, the **blade** glowed gold with an **inner power**.”

EXCERPTS FROM CH.7

In the center of the **standing stones** was a table, laid with **sacred objects**. A **cup**, decorated to look as though the **stem** was the **twined trunk** of an **ancient tree**, with the **branches** holding the **cup** in place. **It** was encrusted with **jewels**. A **plate**, bare of any food, shone golden in the sparse light that came through the mist. The **plate** had a **star inside a circle** engraved in the center. A **spear**, taller than **the Lady**, twined with **green vines** and **purple flowers**. The **sacred objects** of Avalon. All save **one**.

Excalibur.

...

“As **you** might recall from **your** lessons, **we** gave **Excalibur** to **Arthur** when **he** pulled **it** from the **stone**. **He** was a **true king**.”

Niamh did remember, but **she** knew better than to interrupt when **the Lady** used that tone of voice when telling a story. It was a voice that could mesmerize.

“**Arthur** was a good **soldier** for Avalon until **he** obtained **new advisors**. At least, that was the story **I** was told. **I've** never known who **they** were, but **they** ultimately betrayed **him**. That betrayal led to **his** death. After that, **Excalibur** was lost, until **we** learned **it** had been buried beneath **Stonehenge**, but even the bravest of **our witch-warriors** were unable to recover **it**,” **the Lady** said. **Her** voice and expression were a mixture of anger and sadness. “**I** have always wondered if the **Christians** got to **him** and told **him** he had to no longer wield a **magical object** from **our** lands, or if **they** wished to use that mighty **sword** for **their own** purposes. But

regardless... it never returned and has remained lost to this day. ... Or so we thought. Excalibur has been removed from its vault. From the reports from other witch-warriors, the vault was opened by a Norse.”

EXCERPT FROM CH.10

These supposed heirs to the famed knights hunted priestesses down for sport, trying to loosen Avalon’s powerful hold on the isles. Their vendetta against Avalon ran deep, with lore indicating that it was the Women of the Mist who broke their sacred round table and attempted to destroy the revered bloodlines. She remembered hearing terrible stories of their cruelty and reminded herself that they could be out there now, searching for Excalibur to use the mighty sword to influence the islands.

EXCERPTS FROM CH.12

“Mordred’s people are aware of the Women of the Mist, as you know. What you don’t know – what we have tried to keep secret – is that some of them are not just descendants of Arthur’s knights but also our sons. Avalon’s sons. Sons who chose to follow the paths of power rather than the paths of energetic will. ... Mordred was the son of the Lady who ran Avalon during Arthur’s reign. The leaders of the Descendants now are from the bloodline of priestesses who have been cast from Avalon forever. I know it’s hard to believe that the events of three hundred years ago have bearing today, but their leader has claimed his ancestor’s name and thus, Mordred seems to have returned and now believes that Excalibur belongs in his hands. He would want to be seen as the rightful king, with the true king’s blood running in his veins. Fulfilling a prophecy, as it were, of the true king’s return.”

...

“But why not seek out Excalibur to begin with and take it from its resting place under Stonehenge?”

“The sword was protected. When the Descendants first decided they wanted to reclaim the sword, we sent out witch-warriors to kill those who got too close to the truth, which ignited their furious response upon us. We knew where the sword had been sealed away, but not how to re-open the vault. I have since learned that certain artifacts were needed to release the sword and believe that the Descendants simply could not obtain all of them. I am uncertain who originally took the sword and hid it, but I am certain Arthur died believing that no one should have the power of Excalibur. I have always assumed it was someone who wanted to honor his wishes.”

EXCERPT FROM CH.19

“The Descendants of the Round Table,” he whined. Niamh was not used to them breaking so easily, but he was clearly terrified. “My great grandfather served the true king and my family has a claim to the sword that you carry.”

NIAMH'S EARLY LIFE

C. 860'S - 877 CE

CH.1 TEMPORIZED

At her ailing Witch-Warrior mother's behest, a child named Niamh of Argyll (pronounced 'Neev' in the UK?) leaves the village to train in Avalon once her mother dies, to pass along the title of Witch-Warrior to her child. One of the final tasks of the women who trained to be priestesses on the isle shrouded in mist was to take a ceremonial walk.

The walk was in the dark on the coast, to the cave that was rumored to belong to Merlin. At the cave, every person who wished to serve the God and the Goddess must ask for the blessing to tread the path of the witch-warrior.

Niamh had walked in near darkness by the shore. Her feet were bare, her hair unbound. She used only her hearing to understand where she was in space, because the sky was so dark. Somehow, no stars shone, and the moon was at its darkest phase. Even now, as she stood in the forest of her home, she could feel the frozen waters that licked her ankles. She knew that one wrong step would mean her death then, and she had accepted the cost. She had accepted the consequences to follow this calling to the end.

When she had reached the cave, which was filled with round stones worn smooth by the ocean, she stripped off her robe and waded deep into the frozen waters that flooded it. She dipped beneath the salty water and came back up, asking for the blessing of the waters. The bravery it took to swim into that cave was significant, because she knew that at any moment, if the waters willed it, she would drown, or freeze, or be bashed against the rock wall by the surf and be lost.

...

She had certainly done her time studying the rites of the Morrigan and taking lives with respect. She was good at understanding the shadow world, but that was not quite the same thing as walking with shadows.

Niamh, as a certified Witch-Warrior Priestess, protected Argyll from Danish raiders by sinking their longship and forcing them to run in retreat to their stolen lands to the west.

EXCERPT FROM CH.9

My village was terrorized for two years with raids. We managed to stay standing, but it was hard won.

[The core of the story is a little blurry to time, but takes place somewhere between 877-878 CE. It's simultaneously after Basim had been bested by Eivor (so sometime during 878, since Hytham is leading the British Hidden Ones), yet before Eivor travels to Ireland (with her mentioning needing to aid her cousin, while Flann Sinna was crowned in 877).]

CORE STORY OF SWORD OF THE WHITE HORSE

C. 877 - 878 CE

CH.1 TEMPORIZED

Niamh, now having been wearing the many hats of a [Witch-Warrior](#) or [Hedge-Witch of Caledonia](#) for “a few years”, is tasked by [The Lady of Avalon](#) to assume the guise of a potential [Hidden One](#) named [Nimue](#), as [she](#) had intercepted a missive and had it delivered with [her](#) orders via [Niamh's](#) young apprentice, [Birdie](#). [Niamh](#) mentions believing [the Goddess](#) - meaning [the Mórrigan](#) - has planned this somehow.

[Whoever](#) had sent this first missive sought a skilled [warrior](#) who went by the name of [Nimue](#). According to the letter, [she](#) was skilled with a sword, could creep with the stealth of the fox and the silence of the adder. [Whoever](#) wrote this letter was asking [someone](#) to meet this [Nimue](#), because [she](#) was meant to join [their order](#).

Hidden Ones Message

[We who hide in the shadows](#) seek the trust of [Nimue](#), who hails from the islands north of Caledonia. [We](#) know [you](#) are as cunning as the fox and as silent as the adder. That [you](#) have within [you](#) the fierceness of the wolf and the speed of the rabbit are of great assistance as well.

[We](#) know why [you](#) have those skills. If [you](#) would like to hone them further, to know who [you](#) are better, come to the [Hawk's Nest](#) by the Tamesis. Ascend [our](#) ladder and tell [us](#) what [you](#) know of the ways to walk with shadows and darkness.

The Lady's Orders

[You](#) are the one with the best skills [we](#) have to assess the situation. [The Goddess](#) has spoken, and it is [your](#) fate that [you](#) should walk this path. [We](#) choose [you](#) as [our spy](#).

Even as [you](#) give [them your](#) trust, [you](#) must still pretend to be this [other woman](#) and [you](#) should not yet tell [them](#) who [you](#) represent. Give [them](#) the tale of [your](#) origins, not that [you](#) are a [Woman of the Mist](#). [They](#) may not know of [us](#), or if [they](#) do, [they](#) may trust [you](#) less because [you](#) are [one of us](#). Use [your](#) judgment, [we](#) trust it, but [we](#) believe [they](#) will want to keep [you](#) away if [they](#) know [you](#) are backed by [our community](#).

[Niamh of Argyll](#) was meant to travel through to Lunden posing as [Nimue](#) for [The Lady of Avalon](#). [The Lady](#) wanted to know [who](#) was running such a murderous [group](#) sneaking about, and whether [they](#) should have the approval of the [Women of the Mist](#) to do so.

[Niamh](#) decides to bring [Birdie](#) along for the ride - at least at first - and sends [her](#) to fetch 2 horses, food for a few days and a new weapon from a blacksmith before they head out the next day, while [Niamh](#) visits [her mother's](#) cairn one last time and mulls over [her](#) memories in [her](#) hometown.

CH.2 TEMPORIZED

Mathan the Beautiful Brown Boy (the horse Niamh brought back from Avalon) is retrieved by Birdie along with the supplies for their journey. Birdie and Niamh head out, and Niamh gives Birdie one last chance to turn back at Hadrian's Wall, but Birdie agrees to continue, so they crest the hill.

While camping in the forest one night, both of them feel the forest doesn't enjoy the humans being there, but Birdie begs to take first watch, and Niamh agrees for the first time. Awakening to nothing but sunlight, Niamh finds Birdie's been taken from right under her nose as she slept!

Following their trail by slinking in the shadows and listening for animals calling out the movements of people, Niamh finds a group of 3 men accosting the poor young girl, and valiantly steps forward to challenge them, telling them she knows how to use her weapon, how to make them feel pain, how to make them meet the Lady of Crows - again, the Mórrigan.

The Tall Man with Bad Teeth strikes first, the Second-Tallest Bald Man tries second, but Niamh kills them both, frightening the third and Smallest Man to run in fear into the forest. Niamh sees Birdie is not yet ready for such a perilous journey, and sends her back to Argyll with word of a promise that their village will not be without a Witch-Warrior for long.

CH.3 TEMPORIZED

Niamh rides for Lunden alone, tying down her horse Mathan near the Hawk's Nest, a nondescript building with an eagle's profile the only giveaway on the door. She meets with Hytham and Marcella, a Roman Hidden One running the Lunden Bureau, and claims to be Nimue, but twists the ruse to her favor by "correcting" Hytham's pronunciation of her name to her real one, careful to not divulge of her mission from The Lady of Avalon or her history as a trained Witch-Warrior. Marcella was wary of her from the start, but when Niamh asked for food and a comfortable place to rest after such a long journey, Hytham allowed her a room at the Hawk's Nest, against Marcella's protesting scowl.

CH. 4 TEMPORIZED

Niamh awoke before the Hidden Ones, and decided to ingratiate herself in the foreign city to better acquaint with the sights and smells, spotting a girl about her age raising a sword in a pond and praying to the Goddess, to which Niamh says a silent prayer to the Mórrigan in solidarity before returning to the Hawk's Nest.

The Hidden Ones decide to test her, and Hytham leads Niamh through the city in a hide-and-seek chase. When the roles reverse, Niamh grabs an extra hanging nun's cowl and slips into a church amongst a group of other nuns. One of them grows suspicious and flashes a sword at her hilt, to which Niamh presses her finger to her lips.

The nun questions Niamh when inside, asking right away if she is a warrior woman like the ones in Caledonia. Niamh tells her she is, and the nun relates that she left a small village in Caledonia after Vikings attacked to join the safety of this nunnery, and begs for her help, mentioning the Order of the Ancients has overrun a nunnery back in Caledonia, but she doesn't know where. Niamh takes this information and leaves before having to perform any Christian rituals.

She tried to keep up her edge in the cat-and-mouse game with Hytham by leaving through the other side of the building and climbing into a tree where children came and basked in its shade, granting extra cover for never glancing up at anything suspicious above them, as Niamh watched Hytham approach and search the areas within view, but not her tree. That was, till he sat on a bench across from her spot and just waited. The kids left, and he strode right up to her tree. As Niamh came down, discovered and defeated, Hytham told her to use alternate routes and environments as much as she could to escape view entirely, but praised her approach with the nun disguise, and walked her back to the bureau.

Hytham vouches for Niamh's abilities to Marcella, and Niamh interrupts to tell them what the nun had said about the Order of the Ancients. The Hidden Ones bristle, but Hytham tells her about their secret war going on for centuries. Niamh mulls over how these people vying for power at all costs reminds her of how the Women of the Mist pushed Mordred and his Descendants of the Round Table from Avalon, and that they sound a lot like the Order, that maybe the Hidden Ones and the Women of the Mist aren't meant to be enemies at all!

At last, Hytham and Marcella got to why they had sent the letter (to Nimue), and gave Niamh the name of a priest in Oxenefordshire, tasking her with his murder - but gave her autonomy to go alone, as both were needed elsewhere. Father Deonic, living in a small village near Cote, was in the Hidden Ones' sights for being a member of the Order. But Niamh being left alone might grant her the chance to go to Avalon on the way back and relay what she'd learned of these mysterious factions to the Lady of Avalon - though she'd have to be vigilantly wary of any spies that might tail her on such a detour.

CH.5 TEMPORIZED

Niamh awoke for her journey to Cote, but was confronted by Hytham in the common room, who had prepared her saddlebags for her. He regretted not being able to join her, telling her of his injuries that kept him from traveling more than once a month. Then he asked her something he wanted to get out before Marcella awoke: He wanted Niamh to tell him if she ever learns or hears anything about a mysterious group of 'Ladies of the Mist' holding unstated power in Caledonia, and whether they could be friends or foes. Niamh said she would, but didn't divulge she already knew plenty. That would come after she could meet back up with The Lady.

Niamh loaded up Mathan and sojourned to Cote, finding a ruined farmhouse to change her attire to more match the villagers here, hiding her bow and quiver but keeping her sword. She entered the town's church, and quietly mimicked the congregation as she studied her prey while he preached. Leaving the service, Niamh spotted a bowl of fresh cream and a portion of bread on one villager's doorstep - a marker of belief in the old ways, a way to garner the 'good favor of the fae.' The wary woman inside only gave her name and withheld an invitation till Niamh presented her priestess tattoos of the lunar cycle and the mask of Avalon.

Wisweth, as she was called, claimed that Deoric showed up just 3 months prior and began tearing through anything pagan in the town, confirming it was he who knocked down the cairn to Wisweth's husband's gravesite. Niamh processes her deep disgust at desecrating the dead, and Wisweth offers a home cooked meal, not getting many visitors like herself these days. Niamh agrees, then slips into the afternoon to go see the ruined cairn for herself, and maybe where the stones went.

CH.6 TEMPORIZED

Niamh visits the ruined cairn, finding the exposed grave of Wisweth's husband and a Christian cross left behind by the uncaring Father Deoric in his wake. Niamh was thoroughly shaken by such callousness, and rescinded her mercy for these acts, now agreeing with the Hidden Ones that this man deserved to die for such evil. Niamh spent the evening resetting the cairn and putting Wisweth's husband back to rest, before returning to the abandoned barn under the cover of darkness.

For days following, Niamh learned all she could about the Father by veiling her face and "paying respects" to the grave grounds surrounding the church, in an ironic twist of desecration of purpose. As night fell, the priest sent an "idiot boy" from his quarters to fetch a flagon of ale and douse the candles, and Niamh sprang at the isolated opportunity.

Deoric thought the boy returned too quickly, and didn't turn around to properly address the boy he cared nothing for till Niamh was near. But to her surprise, he challenged and berated her upon notice, rather than any surprise or fear of his own. They tussled, but Niamh bested him and slit his throat, avoiding his blood as he fell. She then gathered as many important documents as she could spot that didn't look like sermon notes - a cache of potential information for the Hidden Ones. One such paper stood out, mentioning Excalibur was somewhere, easily stolen, at least by Deoric's notes.

Niamh heard the "idiot boy's" return approach, and swiftly hung from the window and climbed to the roof, scaling down the opposite end of the church to the graveyard to escape the immediate area while the boy screamed in discovery. But she couldn't leave the town with the guards on high alert now, and decided to hide in a tower till morning. Crows flocked to obscure her hiding spot further, and she thanked the Mórrigan, but finding no rest, looked at the papers she had grabbed, and learned of Deoric's other Order members and how they do operate on Avalon, wondering if The Lady could be unaware of both the organizations under her nose.

Eventually making it to the abandoned barn at daybreak, Niamh heard the rumors floating of the priest's death, and wondered if still having planned 5 more days of travel would allow her to save Wisweth from further ridicule in this town after this. Quickly saddling up Mathan, she could sense his fear as she rode straight for Wisweth's house to sadly see it already ablaze, finding only smoldering ashes, burning thatch, and Wisweth's moon necklace in the rubble.

Niamh questioned her purpose, and considered she wasn't cut out for the spy games, that her anger and reactions had endangered her own people, but she would have to ask the Women of the Mist for permission to go home. Niamh silently spoke a small prayer for her fallen friend's soul to be guided by the Mórrigan, then climbed back onto Mathan and pointed him towards the Tor, or "tower", of Avalon.

CH.7 TEMPORIZED

Glastonbury Tor stood high on the horizon, and Niamh found a stable for Mathan near a tent bearing the sigil of a hawk perched on a sword's pommel, being held by a feminine hand - The Women of the Mist. Wading into the cold water nearby, Niamh waited patiently as a rowboat with no oar skimmed slowly out of the mist. Climbing on top, she was somehow ferried through the misty lake and to the shores of Avalon (It's mysteriously unexplained). Niamh makes for the shore's bathhouse unfazed, sinking into a sanctimonious herbal bath meant to respectfully wash away soils of the outside world before stepping into Avalon. Redressing in her ranking of a mid-tier priestess, she left the bathhouse.

Passing other acolyte Women of the Mist, Niamh made her way up the trail to the Tor. She knelt at the top and meditated patiently, till The Lady touched her shoulder and bade her to follow. They discussed what she had found out, what she had brashly done, and the consequences thereafter. The Lady listened all the while, then showed her to a special dining area where several of Avalon's secret Pieces of Eden were on display atop a table.

In the center of the standing stones was a table, laid with sacred objects. A cup, decorated to look as though the stem was the twined trunk of an ancient tree, with the branches holding the cup in place. It was encrusted with jewels. A plate, bare of any food, shone golden in the sparse light that came through the mist. The plate had a star inside a circle engraved in the center. A spear, taller than the Lady, twined with green vines and purple flowers. The sacred objects of Avalon. All save one.

Excalibur.

Niamh's stomach sank as she asked, "Lady... what... exactly are we doing here with the sacred objects?"

"I wanted to visually remind you of the stakes on your quest. That you are not merely investigating a new group, but you are out there to protect our most sacred artifacts. Have you heard anything from the Hidden Ones about such artifacts?" the Lady asked with a raised eyebrow, not answering Niamh's question.

"I have not seen the table set properly in my life," Niamh said, tearing her eyes from the artifacts and bowing her head. "No... no I haven't," she stammered, belatedly answering the Lady's final query. "The Hidden Ones do not trust me much, yet."

"It will take time." The Lady paused and let her gaze linger on the table. "No one has seen such a setting in a long time. Not in my lifetime, not even in the lifetime of the Lady before me. One piece is missing, though. As you might recall from your lessons, we gave Excalibur to Arthur when he pulled it from the stone. He was a true king."

Niamh did remember, but she knew better than to interrupt when the Lady used that tone of voice when telling a story. It was a voice that could mesmerize.

"Arthur was a good soldier for Avalon until he obtained new advisors. At least, that was the story I was told. I've never known who they were, but they ultimately betrayed him. That betrayal led to his death. After that, Excalibur was lost, until we learned it had been buried beneath Stonehenge, but even the bravest of our witch-warriors were unable to recover it," the

Lady said. Her voice and expression were a mixture of anger and sadness. “I have always wondered if the Christians got to him and told him he had to no longer wield a magical object from our lands, or if they wished to use that mighty sword for their own purposes. But regardless... it never returned and has remained lost to this day. ... Or so we thought. Excalibur has been removed from its vault. From the reports from other witch-warriors, the vault was opened by a Norse.”

...

After they studied the sacred table for a few more moments, the Lady led Niamh by a way she had never seen before, off the back of the Tor and down an unknown path. There were so many avenues on Avalon that came, went, and even seemed to disappear when their purpose had been used. The prickles on her skin told her this mossy path guided by mushrooms and fireflies, was one of those.

Ultimately, The Lady tasked Niamh with resuming her mission, and despite Niamh's shortcomings, gave her a blessing before leaving her to weigh her options. Renewed in her resolve, she aimed to return to The Hidden Ones and see what she could do.

CH.8 TEMPORIZED

Niamh snuck back into the Hawk's Nest under the veil of night via the window to her temporary quarters, hoping to settle into fur blankets beneath cover from the light rainfall, but was alerted to Marcella and Hytham speaking to a Dane woman in the common room below. Wagering the Goddess had brought her back to the bureau at this very time for this very reason, she got out of bed and peered through the floorboards at the trio huddled around the hearth. Seeing a woman that is dressed in feathers and sacred bones, she assumes her correctly to be a Seeress - Valka - and Niamh comments that the Norse “had their Thor and Freyja, and she had Ceridwen and Cernunnos.”

Niamh overheard Valka tell Hytham that Eivor would be heading for Ireland soon, and Hytham tells Valka of Niamh and how he wants her initiated so she'll open up about the Women of the Mist and the ancient histories of the isles. Meanwhile, Marcella is outright racist towards Niamh's Caledonian heritage, saying she distrusts her whole people. Caledonians weren't exactly compliant with Roman occupations after all, Niamh notes.

Staying hidden for a while longer till Hytham is mid-story of a time in Constantinople [what time?!], she makes herself known and offers to relay the tales after their guest departs, but Hytham says

“It's all right, you can speak freely. Valka is one of ours. ... She is the seer for the community I live in — Ravensthorpe. ... Valka is one of the advisors for us at the bureau. She also brings news of the other people associated with our organization when she can.” [Does this confirm Valka as a Hidden One???

Hytham speaks of how Valka wanted to meet Niamh, and Valka adds that Eivor wishes to meet her as well, much to the Hidden Ones' leers. Niamh was just as wary of the intentions of this potential Dane rival of a priestess. But Hytham cut the tension by asking how her assignment went.

Under Valka's present scrutiny, Niamh was honest about the fallout suffered unto the uninvolved Wisweth due to not hiding the body, and Marcella and Hytham both approve that for her honesty in admitting what went wrong and in identifying the issue, she can be trusted as an Apprentice, not quite ready to take the steps for an Initiate getting their gauntlet, which Marcella indicates with her missing finger, but Hytham says no such ceremonies will happen while he's in power here in England.

Niamh accepts the Apprenticeship after shuddering at what she might have to do as an Initiate. Then Hytham skipped protocol and put a hidden blade gauntlet over Niamh's left arm, telling her to train with it when she can, that this weapon of the Hidden Ones isn't hers - yet, but warning that there's a reason Marcella's missing a finger. Marcella was very displeased, but Hytham outranked her and she was shut down.

Testing the weapon, Niamh says she

“felt the weight of the metal draped over her hand and then up her forearm, and then she found it - a spot inside the gauntlet that, when she pressed it, shot out a single spike, a blade meant for death.”

At this, Hytham ordained her as an apprentice of the Hidden Ones. Niamh was grateful for the gift, and Valka spoke of the hypocrisy of Hytham gifting such a weapon early, just as he had chastised Basim for when Eivor was given one, and Hytham balked at the similarities. The throng dispersed, leaving Valka and Niamh to sit awkwardly till Valka gave unneeded permission for Niamh to rest, and questioned if Niamh had earned the Hidden Ones trust. Niamh left the room in silence and made her way back up to her loft to finally fall asleep.

CH.9 TEMPORIZED

Niamh awakes and goes downstairs to find Valka still there. Ignoring her for some cheese and bread, she sits down and Valka airs out the elephant in the room, that Niamh's Caledonian, and she doesn't like the Danes. Niamh talks about the two years spent fending off raids, and Valka is impressed at her having a hand in it. Niamh then says she intends to see about the nunnery in potential trouble when the Hidden Ones allow, despite the differing religion, which Valka relates and says she wants to know more about the witches where she's from and gods they follow, then drops a question about the Women of the Mist.

Niamh cautiously turned the question on Valka, and she knew a decent amount, but Niamh neither confirmed nor denied what she claimed. Niamh then asked Valka if they have had problems with the Christians in the area removing paganism like she'd experienced, and Valka agreed, then asked if the raven on Niamh's cloak was for Odin, to which Niamh told the truth, that

“No. I do not know your Odin, but I do treat with the Morrigan. She is a battle goddess, and her crows take the souls of the dead on to their next destination.”

Valka tries to pry more info about the Women of the Mist, but Niamh silently lies to not break her oaths by shaking her head that she didn't learn on their hidden island, that she learned from the women of her village. But Niamh tried to steer the conversation to an amicable close, saying

“I don't think that the women of my village, or any of the women working with the Mists, are incompatible with your truths. Nor is our Morrigan incompatible with your Odin. They're different paths, truly, different gods and goddesses. But they don't seem to be completely against one another, unlike the Christian god and ours.”

Their conversation was interrupted by Hytham slipping in, telling Niamh of a new mission he'd accompany her on to save the life of a pagan woman who had rallied against men in power near her village, to which Niamh agreed, and Hytham added that they'll be interrogating on the whereabouts of a man, who Marcella names as Cyrus upon entering the conversation.

Cyrus is the man hunting Marcella, keeping her from freely traveling around Mercia till he's dealt with. Niamh presses her luck prying further into Marcella's past, and Marcella lets on that Cyrus is a member of the Order of the Ancients that views women as things, that she knows from personal experience, having come here with him as one of his “things” before leaving of her own wits and becoming a Hidden One, voicing displeasure in getting to enact vengeance herself for fear of losing what little anonymity the Hidden Ones grant.

Valka suggests Niamh goes alone, as Hytham is in poor shape after [dealing with Basim], and Hytham says no one should fight Cyrus alone, to which Marcella reluctantly agrees. Valka then warns Niamh that she'll hold her responsible if Hytham re-injures himself on this mission. Niamh argues that any scuffles Hytham joins are his decision, and Hytham says he's annoyed by all the restrictions - and Niamh remembers an injury that kept her from protecting her village for a time. Hytham says that he trusts her skills to watch out for him, which Niamh is very happy to hear, and they go prepare to leave for this woman's village outside Lunden.

CH.10 TEMPORIZED

As the pair rode for the village, Niamh noted Hytham's hasty trust in her was not from naïveté, but desperation, and compared their enemy Cyrus and the Order of the Ancients once again to the Descendants of the Round Table, the foes of the Women of the Mist.

These supposed heirs to the famed knights hunted priestesses down for sport, trying to loosen Avalon's powerful hold on the isles. Their vendetta against Avalon ran deep, with lore indicating that it was the Women of the Mist who broke their sacred round table and attempted to destroy the revered bloodlines. She remembered hearing terrible stories of their

cruelty and reminded herself that they could be out there now, searching for Excalibur to use the mighty sword to influence the islands.

Niamh asked a bit about Cyrus, and Hytham confirmed his evil against women, which Niamh remembers throwing a man out of her village before she left for acts against his family, finding him torn asunder by wolves a few days later, considering it a just reward, and riding for the village harder.

They tied their horses up just outside the smoked sight lines of a tower in the village, at Niamh's behest that guards might be patrolling to make up for the obscurity. Hytham teases that she's trying to lead, and Niamh shoots back that she'll get them in the tower if he asks. Hytham trusts and observes as Niamh leads them through fog, across a street just before a patrol and hiding behind trees. Eventually coming upon a patrol of 4 Romans, Hytham and Niamh teamed up to take out two each in the fog, Niamh with a bow and Hytham with his hidden blade. They then heaved the bodies into a ditch, having learned from her mistakes on the last mission.

The mentor and the acolyte then each scaled a side of the tower, and Niamh pulled a guard over the battlements from the top, then joined Hytham in clearing out the bare-bones operation at the gates. Niamh blockaded the entrance to a dining hall where guards were heard, then weighed the options where the woman they sought might be held, shouldering through a locked door to find her, a lunar tattoo like Niamh's on her arm.

As suddenly as they had found her, a large guard found Hytham, and Niamh had to set down the prisoner to intervene. Nearly losing when her wind was knocked, she managed to bring down the big brute with a deep slash to the gut, and Niamh and Hytham wondered if that was Cyrus for a moment before determining it wasn't him, as he wears a clasp necklace with a bird sigil, and the dead man wore a bear.

Hytham offered to look after the frail woman while Niamh searched for and found Cyrus's quarters, but no Cyrus. However a note from "a brother of the Table" was found here, confirming for her that the Order of the Ancients and the Descendants of the Round Table were working together.

Niamh escaped the area as the keep filled with fire and smoke, hoping Hytham was well enough to have escaped before her, and finding him with the frail woman hiding in a bush. Knowing they were relatively safe, Niamh made off for their mounts, finding Cyrus had stumbled upon their hiding spot, and laughed that he had no more use for the woman anyway, but that Niamh might be useful for a nunnery up north - the same nunnery she'd heard of earlier - as they began to fight.

Niamh kept her guard, and repeatedly goaded Cyrus into backing into the mounts behind him, where her trusty steed Mathan reared and kicked Cyrus in the back, who then fell face-first into the dirt, unconscious. Niamh dragged his unconscious body off the road without confirming the kill with her borrowed hidden blade, but used his own clothes to bind and gag him if he should ever awaken.

She gathered the horses, saddled up Hytham and the released prisoner, explaining what had happened to Hytham as they prepared, and "lied" saying she wasn't able to catch Cyrus, that he was still alive - which was true for now, and then determinedly told Hytham they need to bring the woman back to the bureau to rest, that she was the information they needed, and so as the keep burned behind them, they headed back towards Lunden - "where none of them belonged" - once more.

CH.11 TEMPORIZED

They made it back to the bureau to find it empty, and Niamh let the released woman sleep while tending to Hytham's muscle spasms in his legs. She wrapped it to hold it tightly in place and poured a poultice over it to keep things clean. Hytham commented she's well-trained, and Niamh brushes it away with saying the women in her village were. Hytham begins fading in exhaustion after their long-fought journey's end, and went to his room with one last assurance of his trust in Niamh despite Valka and Marcella's reservations. With Hytham's door closed now, Niamh got to preparing wash-water and more healing wraps for the woman, who stirred awake and asked her if she was "one of us" (a Woman of the Mist), and Niamh silently showed her matching lunar tattoo, calming any fears she had and finally saying her name is Ebba.

Ebba explained that she was an escaped nun from the nunnery to the north that Niamh heard tell of before, that she escaped to tell of what was happening there. She said Cyrus was kidnapping women to become nuns there, and that sometimes women who weren't even nuns were brought there to be interrogated and tortured, freely speaking about their search for Excalibur and Avalon's sacred artifacts, which immediately had Niamh on edge.

Niamh suggested taking Ebba to wherever she needed as soon as she was dressed, to avoid allowing Hytham the chance to interrogate Ebba himself, and Ebba suggested just north of the Tamesis was far enough for her to walk home without aid to avoid suspicious talks. While Niamh waited for Ebba to dress, she found a note left for her from Valka:

"I was intrigued by all that you had to share when it came to your own practices. We seem both far apart, and also close together in the ways that we walk and observe this world. I would like to get to know you further and understand the ways of your people better. Should you be open to this invitation, please come find me at your convenience. Distrust lies between us, but I know we can put such hesitations to rest."

Niamh and Ebba travelled the short distance together then separated, leaving Marcella and Hytham to unhappily greet Niamh upon her return to the bureau. Niamh shared the letter she found in Cyrus's study naming three co-conspirators, and Marcella tried to dismiss her, but Niamh continued on about Ebba's nunnery connection. Marcella chastised Hytham's need for sleep and allowing Niamh to make such decisions without consulting anyone, but Hytham sticks up for her, and adds that the important info is in the letter she shared.

He openly says they must be looking for Excalibur too, that he should warn Eivor the Descendants and the Order might be looking for her. Marcella argued that it mostly just confirms what they already know, after Marcella's sweeps of info on "these round table children." Hytham pleads for her to fill Niamh in like the initiate she is.

“These **Descendants of the Round Table** have been surveilling pagans for weeks, enlisting **them** when the **Order of the Ancients** needs **locals** to do **their** dirty work. **Their alliance** is deadly and could transform the workings of both politics and religions across these islands. Rumor has it that **they** had some kind of plan or capability to jumpstart **their** hold over the development of the islands and **their peoples**, and this just confirms that using the mythos of **Excalibur** will simply push those of a pagan mindset over to the all-encompassing iron fist of the **Order of the Ancients**. Whoever wields the **sword** would be the true king of the islands, eh? A king that no one would question. Well, **they** are determined to ensure that **king** is **one they** can **puppeteer**. But all of this is information **we** already know.”

Marcella then blatantly speaks **her** mistrust of **Niamh** in front of **her**, but **Niamh** now had too many pressing matters to chase. The nunnery needed dealing with, but so did finding this **Eivor** and getting **Excalibur** rejoined as **centerpiece** on the **Sacred Table of Avalon**, causing **her** to leave the room to breathe and weigh **her** options.

As **she** left, **Marcella** made sure **she** heard **her** telling **Hytham** that **Eivor** needs to be warned, by **him** not a **messenger**, and that trusting **Niamh** with the full extent of **their** mission rests the responsibility on **his head** if **she** betrays **them**, though same goes for the glory.

Niamh wagered that the **sword** is the top priority, but **she** also knew nothing of who this **Eivor** was, nor how **she** had obtained the **Sword** from **Stonehenge** when **so many** had not, nor what **her** plans for the **Sword** were. So **she** prioritized reporting to the **Lady of Avalon** again, heading to the nunnery to see what intel **she** could gather, then returning when **Hytham** was more recovered to travel with **him** to take out the **Descendants of the Round Table** corrupting **her** homeland, all the while hoping to garner more trust from **Marcella** by not immediately leaving to steal **Excalibur** from **Eivor**.

CH.12 TEMPORIZED

After returning from **her** breather, **Niamh** makes a wild suggestion to **Hytham** that **she'd** like **Valka** to accompany **her** to investigate the nunnery while **Hytham** is recovering (telling **him** of **Valka's** letter in the process), and **Hytham** is surprised but tells **her** to leave for **Ravensthorpe** and get **Valka** before **Marcella** can deny **her**. **Niamh** then leaves the **bureau** and grabs **Mathan**, but heads for Avalon instead.

Niamh relayed what **she** did know to the **Lady of Avalon**, who was angry that **Niamh** knew **who** had **Excalibur** but hadn't retrieved **it**, and **Niamh** explained that while **she** had a **name**, **she** didn't know where **they** kept **it**, or where **they** were either, and spoke of **her** intentions to ally with **Valka** to use in case **she** needed to ask for the **Sword** back. This angered **the Lady** further, saying **they** have no need to ask for **what's** rightfully **theirs**, that **she** should find out **who's** working against Avalon.

“**Who** could be working against **us**? Is it **Mordred's Descendants of the Round Table**? Or is it **someone else**?”

Niamh then tells her that there's many factions vying to take the sword, that she's being careful, and Niamh asks what the Lady knows about Mordred's Descendants.

"Mordred's people are aware of the Women of the Mist, as you know. What you don't know – what we have tried to keep secret – is that some of them are not just descendants of Arthur's knights but also our sons. Avalon's sons. Sons who chose to follow the paths of power rather than the paths of energetic will. ... Mordred was the son of the Lady who ran Avalon during Arthur's reign. The leaders of the Descendants now are from the bloodline of priestesses who have been cast from Avalon forever. I know it's hard to believe that the events of three hundred years ago have bearing today, but their leader has claimed his ancestor's name and thus, Mordred seems to have returned and now believes that Excalibur belongs in his hands. He would want to be seen as the rightful king, with the true king's blood running in his veins. Fulfilling a prophecy, as it were, of the true king's return."

...

"But why not seek out Excalibur to begin with and take it from its resting place under Stonehenge?"

"The sword was protected. When the Descendants first decided they wanted to reclaim the sword, we sent out witch-warriors to kill those who got too close to the truth, which ignited their furious response upon us. We knew where the sword had been sealed away, but not how to re-open the vault. I have since learned that certain artifacts were needed to release the sword and believe that the Descendants simply could not obtain all of them. I am uncertain who originally took the sword and hid it, but I am certain Arthur died believing that no one should have the power of Excalibur. I have always assumed it was someone who wanted to honor his wishes."

...

"But we always have said that [Excalibur] was forged at Avalon. Is that not true?"

"We [the Women of the Mist] found it in the lake. It washed ashore, and when the Lady long before me picked it up, it glowed. Later, it was sealed in a stone until a rightful holder could come along to claim it."

"And that was Arthur," Niamh said breathlessly.

"It was. We believe it picks leaders for Mercia. That is why we need it, Niamh. We need its guidance to find the next Lady. And the one after that. We need it to find kings and queens. The sword knows who it can trust with its power, and it speaks that trust with the cues that we have been trained to look for."

Niamh was granted leave after her promise to restore the Sword to Avalon where it belongs, and quickly made for Ravensthorpe.

CH.13 TEMPORIZED

As easily as Hytham claimed, Niamh rode past Grantebridge to Ravensthorpe, and strode through the hamlet to tie Mathan off nearby Valka's hut. Calling for Valka from the doorway, she answered by calling back, but remained tucked away, leaving Niamh in jealous awe of her sense of safety in this town, to just have her whole house openly dedicated to her craft - a dream to Niamh. She confronted her on sight in the back with her proposition to aid her in going to the nunnery, and Valka thankfully agreed, while Niamh hoped she'd hear of Valka's "leader", Eivor, along their journey.

They arrived a half-day's ride east to the nunnery, noticing that neither of their faiths were seen represented anywhere nearby. This place was fully controlled by the Church. They attempted to blend in by banding together walking the street, but right as Niamh suggested they find someone to talk to before approaching the nunnery, Valka sensed an attack from behind. Niamh whirled around to catch a kid of about 12, and Valka chuckled, "Behold. Someone to talk to. Odin provides."

The little girl told them everything they needed to know after being bribed with safe passage out of the town and to Ravensthorpe. The priest that had been there a year had trapped all the women by forcing them into the nunnery, shoving the men - other than guards - entirely out of town, and leaving the children like herself to serve as spies telling of any strangers ever setting foot there for their daily bread, as he claims all others are unwelcome enemies, further proving the nefariousness he kept hidden.

Niamh then decides to infiltrate the nunnery silently by going solo, and leaves Valka to keep an eye - and sealed lips - on the kid that now knew they were here, just in case. Niamh reflected that despite the Lady's incessant tone that she focus on Excalibur, this mission felt just as right with the Goddess, like she was asked to fix this, and she wouldn't disappoint.

CH.14 TEMPORIZED

Niamh left Valka and the girl with the horses, and after not being able to make it through a crack in the wall of the compound, took to scaling a tree that branches to the roof. Overhearing two guards accosting women who weren't nuns for not working fast enough, Niamh slipped down into some bushes and waited for one of the guards to cross her path alone before finally testing her hidden blade, swiftly stashing the body and donning the man's uniform. Now she could blend in better, though the women she needed to talk to would be wary.

Niamh made her way inside, finding an array of 10 cells filled with trapped women. She wondered if this macabre place was not even known by the Descendants, but instead a hint of the Order of the Ancients attempting to usurp their power.

Niamh then walked back outside and over to a few women in the fields and quietly told them of how she could help them escape, saying to follow her like any other guard back to the crack she couldn't fit through. Two women made it through, but the remaining third said she'd find another way and spread the word to the other women that she was trying to help, thinking they had all been forgotten, but Niamh assured her she had heard of their plight from another nun in Lunden. Niamh saw Valka through the crack gesture for her to try and leave again, but she refused, intending to try and get the keys from the guardhouse.

But, just as **she** rounded a corner within sight of the chapel, **she** spotted **him**: **Cyrus**, still alive but battered, was here - and more importantly, could identify **her**! Unfortunately, while **Niamh** contemplated **her** next move, **Cyrus** did just that, spotting **her** sword easily, and the compound was on high alert!

Outnumbered and overrun, **Niamh** almost lost hope, till the other **women** in the compound joined in, and in **Niamh's** second wind, led a handful of **survivors** to the crack in the wall as **she** clambered up and over, meeting up with **Valka**, **their child charge**, **another woman survivor** and **their horses**. **Niamh** hopped onto **Mathan** and helped the **woman** on with **her**, and **she** and **Valka** with the **girl** sped off while the other **women** that had followed scattered.

Valka asks what happened, and **Niamh** explains **she** saw **Cyrus**, and **Cyrus** saw **her**, but neither foe fell - again... In an act of solidarity, **Valka** offered that **Niamh** could've used some of **her** berserker mushroom brew, and **Niamh** asked if that got Danes to "see through the **veil**", to which **Valka** says no, but it helps them "commune with **Asgard**," and **they** share a moment while **they** escape into the dark.

CH.15 TEMPORIZED

Niamh and **Valka** got the **survivor woman** and **child** safely settled in as new **Ravensthorpe residents**, and **Niamh** returned to Lunden. Arriving around the same time as **Marcella**, **Niamh** and **Marcella** argue about **Niamh's** loyalties and lack of permission, and **Niamh** boils, removing and throwing back the hidden blade **she** was loaned, bubbling into a fight, which **Hytham** then has to talk **Marcella** down when **Niamh** spares **her** in victory.

Niamh and **Hytham** discuss what **she** learned on **her** clandestine trip with **Valka**, and **she** tells some of Avalons secrets to **him**, finally saying that the **Women of the Mist** would be **allies** in the **Hidden Ones'** fight against **both** the **Order** and the **Descendants**, and that **she** thinks the **Order** would betray the **Descendants** as soon as **they** got hold of **Excalibur**.

Hytham agrees, and tells **Niamh** **she'll** join **him** on a trip back to Caledonia to meet **Eivor**, offering **Niamh** a true place among the **Hidden Ones** with a ceremony on **their** return, but **Niamh** staves off any new oaths until **she** can reclaim **Excalibur** for **her Lady** in secret.

PROLOGUE TEMPORIZED

A wounded **Hytham** is traveling with **Niamh** over Hadrian's Wall and back to **her** homeland through Caledonia. **Marcella**, another **Hidden One**, had **them** head from Lunden to Caledonia. **Niamh** remembers the cruelty of **Old Mae** from **her** village who was mean to children. **The Mórrigan** was mentioned. Otherwise, it's a sorta unimportant cross-section of the middle of the story that shows **Niamh** is wracked with guilt, worried about lying to the **Hidden Ones**, to hook the reader.

CH.16 TEMPORIZED

Hytham and **Niamh** made **their** way over Hadrian's Wall, and **Niamh** followed **Hytham's** lead of making **their presences** known despite **her** better judgement, eventually meeting up with **Eivor** and the **Raven Clan** embroiled in a fight with **Picts**. **Niamh** was careful to incapacitate rather than kill, and was enthralled with how **Eivor** wielded **Excalibur** in battle. **She** almost considered that **it** might belong with **Eivor**, but **Niamh** emphatically pushed that thought away.

After helping Eivor move the Picts into a retreat, Eivor thanked Hytham for his help and gave them horses for the short ride back to camp. Niamh felt the sword calling to her, "like it knew that she was there to rescue it." But she knew she had to be careful, since Eivor had it sheathed to her hip.

Hytham and Eivor exchanged pleasantries, and Niamh looked away to lock eyes with a lone white stag, thanking Cernunnos for bearing witness. Hytham then spoke freely of how he had sent word for Niamh and that they're hoping to fight the Order, which shocked both Eivor and Niamh at his openness. Eivor explained her lands were gifted, not taken, and Niamh told her she'd visited Valka. Hytham and Eivor then left Niamh a lone Celt in the Danish camp while they took a walk to discuss.

Niamh asked a burly Dane man if Valka came, to which they said no, but this opened the camp up to invite her to drink. Soon she was off looking for her target, but was finding identical encampments. Finally, in one tent, she found a map and notes about the Order, one of which read:

"The Descendants of the Round Table seek claim of the sword known as Excalibur. We will pledge ourselves to the Order of the Ancients if you can bring us what is rightfully ours."

Niamh stole the letter as evidence for the Lady and continued searching for Eivor's tent, eventually finding it littered with journal entries from both Hytham and Eivor, but soon heard the pair coming, and hid under the many fur covers on Eivor's bed.

Niamh overheard them talk of her briefly before leaving to allow Hytham to rest and get a drink, and was still hidden for a few moments before crawling out and being greeted by something surprising!

CH.17 TEMPORIZED

There, unguarded on the table in Eivor's tent, laid Excalibur stowed in its sheath. Niamh marveled at it, and reached for it.

The pommel was metal and silver that sometimes looked bronze and was decorated with a series of circles intercepted by gold crisscrosses. When she reached out and unsheathed it, the blade itself appeared melded from all kinds of other swords, forged into one strong being that glowed when held by the right bearer. Niamh felt a small pang of sadness when the blade did not glow for her. But she had known that she was only the messenger, a temporary hand that would take the sword back to its rightful place, not the actual person meant to hold its power.

Niamh weighed her options as she disguised her new sword to look as plain and unimpressive as the one she carried, then swapped its place with hers, praying the plain sword would stay disguised till she was long gone. She decided to leave now without word, making her way through the dusk-lit camp, but - as luck would have it - happened upon Eivor and Hytham on her way.

At first they spoke of the nunnery and Niamh was relieved, but Eivor was quick to notice the sword - even in darkness - and accused Niamh of planning to take it to the Order. Niamh and Eivor's swords clashed, and Niamh explained that this sword was not Eivor's to take, shoving Eivor away, and ran as fast as she could, while Hytham shouted questions after her.

Niamh made it to the horse meadow, swiftly jumping on one at the far end of the enclosure and riding away. She hid in the craggy hills, winding into the rocky outcrops till her horse would go no further, then hid in the shadows. Hytham managed to come close to her, finding the horse and freeing it to run off and make her escape harder, bitterness at her betrayal in his voice as he did so.

Niamh climbed down painfully when the coast was clear, then crossed around the outskirts of a small fen village. Finding some washerwomen, she spoke the truth and asked for help, to which one of the elder women gave her new clothes just as the northmen were approaching the gates at the front of the village. Without options, Niamh quickly changed and stashed her clothes with Excalibur inside a barrel, and followed the elderly woman to pose with the washers.

The northmen tried to get the Pict men to let them search for Niamh, but they turned them away, and Niamh saddled a horse to leave. The elderly woman stopped her, saying she can't, but Niamh told her she was a Woman of the Mist on a sacred mission to return Excalibur. Surprisingly, the elder let her pass, and Niamh promised to return the horse or an equal when she could, and headed south towards Avalon.

CH.18 TEMPORIZED

Niamh knew she had instantly made more enemies in a single moment than she thought possible, listened to the sounds of the forest and, despite her exhausted state, pressed on until she came to a small glade for the horse to graze while tied and she could hunt.

She fed on a wild rabbit, and meditated on her actions, wondering if she should have bared all her cards from the start, but perished the thought. She then made sure to bury Excalibur and cover it in fronds for good measure before settling down at last.

Just as she thought she'd get a moments respite while her meal cooked, a pack of wolves howled in the distance, signaling followers in the trees. Her fire had been a bad gamble. She made sure to get herself and the horse out of the area, but circled back to hear two men squabbling about "him" being angry, knowing Niamh had the sword.

Now knowing them not to be with Eivor's Raven Clan, she shot and killed one with a well-placed arrow through his throat. Niamh wrestled the second man to the ground, then flicked his own sword to his neck and demanded to know who sent them.

The man balked, and broke free, drawing a poisoned dagger. Dodging to the best of her limited waning strength, Niamh prayed that even if she didn't survive, that the Goddess would let Excalibur sink into the earth, obscuring its hiding spot never to be found. But she did survive, long enough to wedge her elbow under his chin from behind and squeeze with all her might till he passed out. She then searched the man and discovered a distressing note about herself and the Lunden Bureau on his person:

The woman you're looking for is named Niamh. She wears a cloak with ravens embroidered on the shoulders, and carries the sword known as Excalibur from the northlands of Caledonia. Whatever you must do to take the sword from her is within your power. She may still be working with the Hidden Ones, so I directed an attack on their little bureau in Lunden at the same time. – The Adder's Son, serving the Ancients.

However, in the heat of battle, their scrapes and blood from both combatants had flung freely, and Niamh felt woozy with poison. In a last ditch worry after not finding her herb kit, she decided to visit Valka and explain everything in the hopes that either the seeress would heal her, or if impossible, take up her cause and return Excalibur to its true owners.

CH.19 TEMPORIZED

Niamh felt sorry for her horse, remembering her “promise to Epona, the goddess and protector of horses, that she would be kind to the animals that ferried her to and fro.” She promised the horse they'd stop at the next inn, as she clearly needed rest as well.

Arriving at a little town near Lunden, Niamh made for the inn and dried and tied off the horse before going inside. An old silver-eyed man inquired about her suspiciously, and she said she just needed a rest. Thankfully, the server woman saved her from further questions, placing a meal in front of her. Niamh paid what coin she had for the meal, and said she'd sleep outside with her horse, getting furs from the woman and some full-bellied sleep.

Her sleep was not long, however, being awoken by a gruff unknown man with a blade at her throat demanding she “give it”. Niamh made quick work of the young man, and threatened him with a blade of her own, seeing her belongings tossed, and said no matter who sent him or what his intentions were, he will not follow her, and that now he must answer who sent him. To her surprise, the young man – by now sporting a blown knee and a broken wrist – cracked like an egg.

“The Descendants of the Round Table,” he whined. Niamh was not used to them breaking so easily, but he was clearly terrified. “My great grandfather served the true king and my family has a claim to the sword that you carry.”

This made Niamh laugh, and she was about to leave him with the message of his defeat for his brethren, but he spat that they had already burned the Lunden Bureau to the ground, that her allies were never gonna help her now. She bottled her sadness and left the lad to stew in his story of failure to kill her in her sleep, escaping and contemplating more options along her goal to get to Valka, since the poison was setting further with each hour.

Finally she came to Valka's hut by instinct, outskirting everywhere else till she arrived. A murder of crows circled overhead.

Ambassadors of the Goddess, come to bear witness to Niamh. Or were they here as ill omens of her death?

Valka was home, and immediately grabbed Niamh by her throat, threatening alarm. Niamh choked out that she couldn't explain if she isn't healed, and Valka gave her a chance to talk while fixing a mix for the black ichor poison. Niamh's lies began to fade, telling Valka of her ties to the Women of the Mist and how the Descendants attacked her for it. Valka gravely accused her of what Marcella had thought: she was a spy. The poison clouded her short-term memory, but Niamh remembered to say the man said Lunden Bureau was burned, and admitted to taking the place of Nimue.

Valka questioned why she did all these things, and Niamh argued that Eivor should've never removed Excalibur from Stonehenge. She reasoned it was akin to the Hammer of Thor. She said Excalibur was

“meant to be wielded by those that the gods see fit to send us as protectors. The blade will not light up for me. It does not light up for many. But the legends say that when Arthur picked up the sword, the blade glowed gold with an inner power.”

Valka nodded. “An object of power. We do not have Thor's hammer hidden away somewhere for someone to hold, but if we did, we would guard it with the most powerful magics that we could, the strongest warriors that would volunteer. You are the warrior sent to collect it for your people. I do understand.”

Niamh was then led to a resting place, and allowed to sleep in Valka's hut. Though she felt uneasy, she knew she needed to allow Valka's medicine to take hold.

CH.20 TEMPORIZED

Niamh was shortly stirred awake again, this time to Valka speaking with none other than a very pissed-off Hytham, and though she hid while they talked (Valka even advocated her story that she admitted her true identity and maybe Eivor wasn't supposed to wield the sword), she noticed figures - Britons...Descendants! - pouring in from the trees.

Not wanting either of the two talking to lose their lives, she made herself known and gave what warning they had, grabbing Excalibur and wielding it against the enemies at their door. Begrudgingly, Hytham buckled, and back to back they fought all 8 of the assailants to the death in a flurry of blades and blood. When the fight was won, Hytham grilled Niamh for her betrayal.

Niamh argued the points Valka brought up from her own mouth, that she never intended to bring harm on the Hidden Ones, but that it was her mission to her people to restore the sword to them, and doing so would prove the Women of the Mist allies to the same cause of quashing the influences of these Orders and Descendants from spreading.

Valka then explains an idea they could use to both ensure this chase is ended publicly and ensure the sword is safely returned to the true owners: They'll “sacrifice” a duplicate fake Excalibur in a blót - a staged ritual to the gods - where they'll publicly “destroy” the fake Excalibur while returning the real one to Avalon. Niamh adds they could make it seem authentic by using the sacred site of the White Horse for their stage.

Hytham tentatively agrees, and leaves Niamh to recover, to which Valka also brings her a warm meat-filled stew and grants her an uninterrupted sleep, as they'll need their wits to pull off this spectacle.

CH.21 TEMPORIZED

Niamh awoke to a fox blessing the doorway and beckoning her out of bed. She met up with Valka and Hytham, who kept their promises to help. The duplicate was ready [no word on the master craftsman that made it IN A NIGHT, presumably Gunnar?] and Valka presented it. Hytham tried to ascertain what Niamh's plans with the real one was, but Niamh didn't budge, sheathing the real Excalibur to her hip.

She would dress as a captive Caledonian priestess for their journey to the White Horse, then she would escape dressed in Norse garb, so either way, the location of the true sword would never be revealed if she met an untimely end.

Niamh questioned if Hytham would be betraying the Hidden Ones, but he argued not if removing this sword from the Order's reach saved more people from harm. The trio then prepared for the perilous journey ahead.

CH. 22 TEMPORIZED

Niamh took point in full priestess regalia riding a white horse, Hytham looked menacing but also not appeased by being so in view in the middle, and Valka brought up the rear. The trio traveled through the city, garnering followings of Pict and Northmen alike, allowing their appearances to weave with the onlookers' stories.

They crested a hill, and split up, Niamh giving Hytham hasty directions to the nose of the White Horse facing Lunden. Niamh started causing a scene, claiming loudly that the Women of the Mist will not take kindly to their sacrilege. Valka and Hytham played along, charging her and "chasing her off" while Hytham brandished the fake Excalibur, and the allies parted ways: Niamh with the real sword to Avalon, and Hytham and Valka to sacrifice the replica to Odin and Thor "for the Danes."

CH.23 TEMPORIZED

Valka and Hytham followed Niamh's directions, and had signaled ahead to have a pyre ready for their ruse, which they arrived at shouting about how the sword belonged to the gods, not men. Several people shouted, one man about wishing it was thrown in a lake, another about how it's not for the Danes, but Valka and Hytham continued lighting the pyre.

Just as Valka called upon the heat of Loki's flame and the strength of Thor to destroy this sword, she plunged the fake blade into the flames, and a black-cloaked Descendant sprang at Valka from the crowd, but was stopped by Hytham.

Distracted by Valka's Valkyrie-like screeches of joy at having allowed just long enough for the sword to melt, the man was stabbed and thrown down the hill, and the throng reacted in several ways. The woman that had yelled earlier tried rescuing the sword, but it was already awkwardly angled and pooling on a stone, some even adding more to the bonfire.

Valka resolved to tell Eivor that this was the fate of Excalibur as well, leaving Hytham and Valka the only two outside of the Women of the Mist that would know what truly happened to the real blade. They had built a myth of their own around its destruction, and the stories regaled by the onlookers would fuel it.

CH.24 TEMPORIZED

Niamh arrived at Avalon, and quickly made her way across the water with Excalibur in hand, ready to present it to The Lady once ashore. She was greeted by not just The Lady, but the whole of the Women of the Mist bearing witness to Excalibur's return.

It was only then that she saw that the blade glowed gold. She tilted the sword and brought the blade to rest flat side down on her left palm, preparing to hand it off to the Lady and present the sacred sword back to its owner.

Yet, her heart pounded. What could it mean, to have the sword glowing for her? What kind of power was it offering?

"I don't understand..." she whispered as she knelt in front of the Lady, but the Lady only smiled.

Avalon was in control of her sword once again.

And they had a new Lady to wield it.

CH.25 TEMPORIZED

A few weeks later, Valka and Hytham met Niamh by invitation to the shores of Avalon. Niamh asked about Marcella (still angry) and the Descendants (presumably disbanded after lacking clear goals without Excalibur), before leading them across the pond and up the trail to the Tor, deflecting questions along the way (like why she was wearing Excalibur), and stopping only briefly for Hytham's condition.

Finally they reached the top, and The Lady called Niamh to her side, speaking with Hytham of a tentative alliance with the Hidden Ones in the face of the Order of the Ancients.

"Niamh has a choice to make – she can either become the liaison to your people – if you're willing to work with her, that is... or she can stay here to become my Lady in Waiting. She'll become the next Lady either way. The sword has chosen her to be my successor, that much is clear. But she can choose what kind of Lady she wants to be. One who wields the sword, and works from the shadows, or one who works as I have done, in the rituals of our people."

Valka and Hytham agree their not-so-new ally is quite an interesting one, but hope filled Niamh, as at last they could build bridges, rather than burning them.