

The carriage clacks along the countryside road, houses passing by. The Crusader, the top knight of the king's order, brandishes his sword, and looks at his reflection in the blade. The Crusader is known as a legendary figure and protector of the Kingdom. Destroyer of armies, the generous savior. He is off on his daily debt collection. The kingdom is a quiet one, but a large one, spanning for miles through multiple biomes and wondrous lands. It is January 4th, 2019, melted snow is still layed on the ground. The Crusader arrives at his destination, a small cottage with a brick roof and few windows. He knocks on the door.

"Your monthly debt to the kingdom is due!" The Crusader says. There is no answer.

The Crusader bangs on the door louder. And the door opens.

"Leave my house, foul cultist of the king!" The Man says.

"Sire, you are required to pay your debt by law." The Crusader responds.

The man stands fern. He attempts to shut the door, but The Crusader wedges his sword in the doorframe before it can shut completely, and forces it back open.

"You are quite the fustilarian. Just pay and I will be on my way." The Crusader says.

"I will be damned to the pits of hell before I give that corrupt land a single coin of my fortune," The man says.

"Last warning or I will be forced to enact the law," The Crusader responds.

The man spits on The Crusader's helmet. He unseathes his sword, steps closer to the man, and swiftly impales him with his sword. The man coughs up blood, and collapses on the ground. The door opens behind the man, and a little girl no more than 5 years of age holding a stuffed dragon toy is behind him.

"Dad? D-daddy?" the little girl says.

The man coughs up blood, convulses, looks at his daughter and touches her face, before transcending the mortal realm. The little girl wails, and The Crusader stumbles a bit. He seathes his sword and walks away.

On the way back to the Capital, The Crusader thinks to himself "why do I feel terrible? I have done this deed many times. Such is the law, of thine cannot pay they shall be slayed." He arrives at the Capital. He is greeted by the citizens as he makes his way to the capital to report on his mission. He continues thinking on his way to the castle. He marches through the castle doors, as the royal guards bow down to him. As he enters the throne room, the air feels different.

"Sire... I have come to report on my debt collection. The client did not pay, and he was slain." The Crusader says.

"Any complications?" the King asks.

The Crusader pauses for a moment. He thinks about how he stole the life of the father of a little girl right in front of her. But he brushes it off as being stressed, nothing more. After all, break is coming up soon, he is probably just excited to get to break.

“No my lord. The execution was swift and clean.” The Crusader responds. He leaves the throne room.

On his way back home, he continues to think about the poor girl. That night, he is haunted by the girl’s wails. He dreams of the house again. But this time, the sky runs red, and the walls and ground are stained with blood. He walks up to the house once again. The man is there again, but he is a mangled corpse. He groans, and swipes at The Crusader. He dodge, and strikes the corpse down. Then two more appear. He strikes them down. More appear. He keeps killing and killing and killing, and he becomes knee deep in a pool of blood, but only more corpses are appearing. He quickly becomes overwhelmed with enemies, and they grab him and push him down. The cold, shriveled hands of the corpses tear him to shreds piece by piece. And he looks to his left, and sees the little girl crying, before being dragged into the unknown. He wakes up in a cold sweat. He grabs his sword and starts swinging it violently, before coming to his senses. He breathes heavily before seething his sword.

The next day while out on patrol, he thinks about his actions again. Was it really right to take the lives of those who cannot pay, despite the kingdom being so prosperous. But even if that is true, the law is the law, and there is nothing that can be done. What about the Witching laws? Anyone accused of Witchcraft is

immediately trialed, regardless of proof or not. Most of these trials end in death. But it's just to keep people safe! Of course it is? Right? He is interrupted.

"Sire! There is a siege at the castle walls!" a lower ranking knight exclaims.

"We must head there at once!" The Crusader responds.

They arrived on the upper west side of the Capital's walls, people are running and screaming for cover. A elderly woman trips and falls, and a giant piece of Castle wall comes crashing down, but before it flattens her, The Crusader slashes the stone to shreds in a half of a second. He asks if the Woman is ok, and she says "Thank you dearie" before walking away. The Crusader steps through the hole in the wall, and is met with catapults, cannons, giant crossbows, but only a few foot soldiers. It's the Phoenix rebellion. They have attacked the Castle walls a few times, and most of the troops are significantly injured from their last attack. He faces his adversaries.

"T-t-t-that's The Crusader! But that's impossible" a Soldier stammers

"I thought he was out for debt collection!" Another Soldier says.

"Let's see.. I count 415 footsoldiers, 30 artillery pilots, and 15 catapult pilots. Lightwork." The Crusader says.

The Crusader vanishes. Deathly silence, only the chattering and shivering of teeth can be heard. An enemy catapult goes flying into the air, and crushes a few soldiers on it's way back down. It's the Crusader! Thousands of arrows are

fired at him, at blinding speeds, he weaves and dodges through the myriad of projectiles. More are fired, and he slices them to pieces, while the pieces are suspended in mid-air, he uses his shield to reflect them back at the enemy, killing a ton of soldiers. A soldier tries to hit him with an overhead slash from behind, but The Crusader vanishes and he appears behind him. He kicks the soldier so hard his spine shatters. They use the catapults to fire balls engulfed in flames. He swiftly dodges, but one hits him. A giant explosion, and then the battlefield is covered in smoke.

“Did we get him? Did we really get him?” a Soldier asks.

The battlefield grows silent as the smoke begins to clear. But there is nothing where the Crusader stood.

But that shouldn't be possible.. With armor as strong as his there should at least be some shrapnel! Suddenly, all the remaining soldiers' blood ran cold. The Crusader is towering over them, standing on a flipped catapult. He brushes his shoulder off, before beginning the extermination of the remaining soldiers. He goes on, killing and killing, like clockwork, he is just going through the motions, desensitized to all the killing. Then he remembers his dream. It felt just like his dream! He pauses for a moment, and is struck from behind by the captain, the only remaining enemy. He regains focus, and gets into a sword fight with the captain. The clashing of iron over and over, The Crusader overwhelms him with ease. He grabs him by the neck.

“So sad that you would waste your talent, fighting for a kingdom that takes everything from its citizens.” The Captain says.

“Stop spouting nonsense. You’re heathens, savages, terrorists. Whomever preys on the innocent shall be eradicated by law of the king!” The Crusader responds.

“Like how when you have to kill people who can’t fulfill their repayments to the kingdom, despite the kingdom already being prosperous? What benevolent king would order someone to be slayed for such a minor and miniscule thing. Some cannot afford to pay, they have families to support.” The captain says.

The Crusader pauses. He thinks about the girl and her father again.
The captain smirks.

“You know I’m right, your silence says it all” the captain says.

The Crusader is simply frozen, contemplating everything.

“It’s not too late. You can truly save the people in this kingdom, we are not the real threat. There was not even a single causality in this attack that we were responsible for. It’s not too late.. You can join us! Stand up to the Kin-” but before he can finish, his head is pierced by an arrow.

“You froze up out there! You ok?” The Archer asks.

“Yes... thank you. You will be rewarded kindly” The Crusader responds.

The Crusader begins to think about the world. How they never strive to make any improvements to society. Not technologically, not socially, not economically. How many years has it been since this lifestyle was established? Too long. Far too long. That’s when he decided. He will consult the king. He returns home early to prepare his proposition to the king.

The next day, he wakes up, brandishes his sword and prepares to visit the King. He walks downtown and is greeted by the people. He reaches the Castle, the guards open the door for him, and he treks to the throne room.

“My lord” The Crusader says, bowing in The King’s presence.

“Crusader? But it is your break time! You should be relaxing!” The King says.

“Yes my lord.. But I have come to ask you something.” The Crusader takes a deep breath “about the kingdom. I feel that most of the laws in place are unjust. Why do we kill those who cannot pay their debt to the kingdom?”

“If they cannot pay, then we have no use for them. Better yet, it stops them from starting uprisings like that foolish Phoenix Rebellion,” The king responds.

“You mean-”

“Yes. The Phoenix Rebellion was started because they could not pay their debt. And they attempted to take away our lovely Capital, with all its happy citizens. The truth is we are not as prosperous as we may seem. We spend lots of our fortune on weapons to protect us from threats.” The King bellows.

“Threats that you made!” The Crusader shoots back.

“Excuse me? After all I do to keep these people safe and happy?” The King angrily remarks.

“It is a happiness built on lies and the corpses of the innocent,” The Crusader stands up, “Please reconsider. The people are suffering.”

“The people are none of my concern. As long as I keep them safe, they like me, which means I get to stay in power for longer,” The King says “And there’s nothing you can do or say at this moment, for I am the king!”

The Crusader grips his sword tightly. “Looks like the king-” He jumps into the air, sword over his head, “IS ABOUT TO BE DETHRONED!”

The royal guards block his strike, the recoil sending him flying backwards. He hits the wall so hard it makes a crater. He recollects himself, and using his speed, dashes at the guards. Iron clashes, a high octane battle ensues, The Crusader is being brutally beaten by both of the guards. But by a stroke of luck, he is able to make one of the Guards lose his footing. He slashes him and he is sent flying out the window. The next guard attempts to slash from behind.

“I guess they never learn.” The Crusader remarks.

He disappears then reappears behind the guard. He slashes his back open, then kicks him to the side. He runs at the defenseless king full force.

Shing.

The Crusader’s momentum is halted midair. He feels a sharp pain in his stomach. He sees The King with a long silver blade. The blade starts to turn red as blood runs on it. He looks down to see the blade has pierced him.

“W-what?” The Crusader stammers.

“You didn’t think that I would be defenseless without my guards did you?” The King chuckles, “This sword hasn’t been used in ages.”

“You know I had a feeling that this would happen. Despite my best efforts to prevent it” The King says.

“You made me kill that poor girl’s father!” The Crusader says.

“Ah yes. Your debt collection. So this confirms my suspicions. There was a complication. I guess you never questioned why you were sent out so far away?” The King asks.

“Huh?”

“The man I sent you to collect from, he was an old friend of mine from many years ago. His name was John Kamtz. He was also a part of the Order like you were, Crusader. But one day, he found out about my ulterior motives, stole the evidence and disappeared into the night. But recently I found his location. I guess his funds from being an ex knight could only get him so far” The Crusader coughs in pain, blood seeps from his helmet. The King continues speaking “I sent you to kill him, because I saw him in you. If he could show you what I’m truly up to, and convince you to join his cause. This is why the debt system is truly in place. The people who can’t pay are usually people who know of my crimes. So that they can’t stop me. Alas, even though you did kill him, my plan failed.”

The Crusader is motionless. He grabs the silver blade with his hand.

“YOU BASTARD!” He yells, crushing the blade with his hand. He slices The King’s arm off. He kicks him off his throne, and beats him viciously, The King retaliates, using what’s left of the silver blade to stab The Crusader’s leg. The Crusader yells and stumbles backwards.

“Foolish.” The King says.

“Maybe. But it’ll be saving so many people.” The Crusader responds back. They charge at each other. The King goes for the head, The Crusader dodges, then impales him. The king coughs up blood. He falls off the blade. Then stumbles.

“S-spare me. I will change, I promise!” The King pleads.

“Pathetic. You never spared a single soul. And now you beg for your life. Now you will know how it feels, when you can’t pay.” The Crusader says.

He, as always, swiftly beheads The King. A door opens behind him.

“Who’s there?” A Young Woman says. She looks over to see the mangled corpse of The King.

“Oh my god! GUARDS!!!” She yells.

She feels a cold gust blow over her. A chill runs down her spine. She looks over to see someone in the window, covered in The King’s blood. He jumps before she can even speak, Disappearing into the night. Never to be seen again.

10 years later

It is the 10th anniversary of the Murder of the old king, by none other than his own top knight. He disappeared and was never seen, and was forgotten. Some even question if he was ever as good as people would say. The New King has made many changes to this land. No more debt collection, for one. He is a warrior from a far away land, so horrible and corrupt, But he saved it. Liberated it. He is loved by everyone. He is the greatest peace keeper of his time, and a battler of evil. Some may even call him.. A Crusader.

The End.