

WHEN LANTERNS DIM

- Keith Davidson 613.722.9230

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Dark and oppressive. An eerie wind howls through gnarled trees.

Hooves thump on sodden earth as two dozen riders snake down a winding path. Hulking figures. Faces hidden by cowls. Under fluttering dark cloaks, glimpses of twisted, unnatural bodies.

Shafts of light slice through the dense canopy, glinting off swords, black armor and shields embossed with a Red Eagle.

Glimpses of hideously deformed faces. Scaly skin. Warped limbs. Tufts of coarse hair. Each man a unique horror.

Mutants in shining armor.

The path spills into a sunlit clearing, and the lead rider signals with his claw-like hand. They fan out at the edge of the woods.

TUSKER, a monstrous knight in a majestic helmet, with two twisted lower teeth jutting grotesquely out, surveys the route ahead.

The trail into the mountains is guarded by a fortified log and stone outpost. Fluttering overhead, the Thorin flag -- a winged sword of gold on a green background.

The reinforced gates are wide open. Inside, a handful of people mill about in a small market, unaware of the danger.

From the woods, Tusker raises his battle-axe. His minions raise their weapons in unison. With an evil leer, he lowers his axe.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY (LONDON 1940)

A wooden pointer WHACKS a desk, startling TOBY.

Glaring down at the morose 12-year old, the ENGLISH MASTER confiscates the novel nestled in the large volume of Hamlet.

ENGLISH MASTER

And what have we this time?
"The Sword of Thorin". One of the
Bard's lesser-known works, is it?
Alas, no, it's by one Harry W.
Ucton.

Snickers from the other boys. He silences them with a look.

ENGLISH MASTER

You plead for a story with
excitement. I give you Hamlet.
Murder, revenge, sword play.
And still...

(he drops the book with a
thud)

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth
it is to have a thankless child."

Toby stares blankly back.

ENGLISH MASTER

King Lear, you ignorant lout.

Toby passively offers his palm, welts visible from previous
punishments. The Master raises his pointer...

But the bell rings. An explosion of grey uniforms as the boys
charge for the door. The Master turns on them.

ENGLISH MASTER

Walk, you miserable vermin!

He turns back to Toby -- but he's gone.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Boys stream out the school, laughing and play-fighting.
Oblivious, Toby walks out the gate. Head down. Alone.
He ignores the freckled FIONA falling into stride beside him.

FIONA

Hi Toby.
(awkward)
How's your Mum?

GILES charges between them, holding a plane over his head.
In pursuit, a boy with another plane makes machine gun sounds.
They circle Fiona, then Giles pretends his plane is shot down,
crashing on the ground.

FIONA

Giles!

Giles recognizes Toby, and is suddenly contrite.

GILES

Toby. Hi.

Toby stares at the plane upside down on the pavement, traumatized.
He turns and hurries away.

Fiona watches him, concerned, then hits Giles on the arm.

INT. KITCHEN, TOBY'S ROW HOUSE - DAY

Sitting at her kitchen table, Toby's mother, MAE, struggles to hold herself together. Her best friend, a NURSE, examines a Distinguished Flying Cross medal.

NURSE

It is something, all right.
You should be right proud.
(seeing Mae's reserve
cracking)
You have to be strong, pet.
I'll put the kettle on.

MAE

(snapping)
Yes, a cup of tea. That'll make
everything all right, won't it?

She's instantly apologetic. Her friend forgives her with a look, then gets up to fill the kettle. As Mae examines the medal, she spots Toby hovering in the doorway.

MAE

Toby...

Toby stares in horror, transfixed by the medal dangling from a ribbon. He turns and bolts up the stairs. Mae winces as his bedroom door slams shut. She looks to her friend in despair.

MAE

He'd be out playing all the time.
Now he hides in his room like a
hermit, reading those books of his.

NURSE

Don't you fret. He'll come 'round.

INT. TOBY'S BEDROOM - DAY

A meticulously-detailed Spitfire model hangs from the ceiling.

A cricket bat swings through the air and SMASHES it to bits.

Toby tosses the bat onto his desk, scattering medieval knights across a chess board. The black king wobbles, then falls.

Fighting tears, he sits on his bed and pulls "The Sword of Thorin" from his book-bag. His arms wrap around the book like a life buoy as he rocks back and forth.

Above him, a Union Jack hangs from a shelf filled with adventure books -- Robin Hood, Gulliver's Travels, The Hobbit, Treasure Island, The Lost World, a big 1939 Chums Annual...

Mae steps tentatively in, her shoe crunching on fragments of the plane. Realizing what he's done, her concern deepens.

She sits on the bed and strokes his hair. He pulls away.

MAE

It's okay to be angry, dear. Just not at me, all right? We need each other to get through this.

No response. She holds out the open case with the medal.

MAE

I think your father would want you to have this.

TOBY

He can give it when he comes back.

MAE

(weary)

That's enough, Toby.

TOBY

He parachuted out! I know he did! He's fighting with the French Resistance right now!

Toby bolts for the door. Too exhausted to run after him, Mae gazes at the medal, despondent. She snaps the case shut.

EXT. TRINITY SQUARE - DAY

Toby plops down on a bench, wiping his tears on his sleeve. He looks across at the Tower of London. Behind fortified walls, a five-story keep stands in the courtyard -- the White Tower.

Nearby, the famed Tower Bridge spans the Thames, its two pinnacled Victorian-Gothic towers silhouetted in the sunset.

Toby looks at his book's worn jacket cover -- a painting of a small castle and a sword with a gold medallion embedded in its hilt. He opens the book and starts reading.

EXT. FOREST - DAY (THORIN)

With an evil leer, Tusker lowers his battle-axe.

The mutants surge forward.

EXT. THORIN OUTPOST - DAY

Outside the gates, a girl plays with a half-melted armless doll. Behind her, people mill about a small market in the compound. The ground RUMBLES. The girl looks across the clearing.

A horde of dark knights gallop toward her.

She stands, frozen in horror. Her doll slips from her fingers.

SENTRY (O.S.)
Wastelanders! Wastelanders!

IN THE GUARD TOWER

A panicked SENTRY stares at the charging knights in disbelief, then cranks a big rusted siren with all his might.

The shrill SIREN stops people in their tracks. Bewilderment turns to panic. They scurry for weapons.

Green-tunicked knights race to swing the huge gates shut. A shower of arrows cuts them down. The siren wails.

EXT. TRINITY SQUARE - DAY (LONDON)

The air raid siren jolts Toby back to reality. Searchlights slice across the darkening sky. He stares at a formation of Spitfires roaring past, then closes his book and hurries away.

EXT. TOBY'S ROW HOUSE - NIGHT

Silhouetted in the light from her open door, Mae anxiously scans the streams of people heading to the Underground at the corner. The RUMBLE of a distant bomb increases her apprehension.

A BLACKOUT WARDEN breaks from the crowd and limps up to her.

WARDEN
Putting out a welcome mat for the
Fuhrer are we, Mae?

She looks at him, not comprehending. He reaches in, flicks off the lights and swings the door shut. He takes her by the arm.

MAE
I have to wait for my Toby.

WARDEN
He'll know where you are.

He leads her away. She pulls free and hurries back to the house.

FURTHER DOWN THE STREET

Fighting the current of people, Toby struggles toward his house. But he's swept away by the crowd, down into the Underground.

INT. LONDON UNDERGROUND - NIGHT

Toby picks his way through the crowded station. People play bridge, snooze, eat. He pauses at a group huddled by a radio.

CHURCHILL (on the radio)
 ... Victory at all costs, victory
 in spite of all terror, victory
 however long and hard the road may
 be; for without victory, there is
 no survival.

As Toby listens intently, the bombing grows nearer. Lights flicker as an explosion overhead knocks dust and small debris down onto frightened faces.

CHURCHILL (on the radio)
 ... I have nothing to offer but
 blood, toil, tears and sweat.

Toby wanders to an EMERGENCY box under the WHITECHAPEL STATION sign. He surreptitiously opens it, revealing a first aid kit, oil lantern, flares, matches... and his secret cache of sweets.

Toby opens the small tin of toffee, crams one in his mouth, then replaces the tin. He nestles into the corner and opens his book to a colorful picture of the outpost under attack.

EXT. THORIN OUTPOST - DAY

The girl's doll is crushed under galloping hooves.

The outpost gates are almost shut... but Tusker bursts through and hacks down a Thorin knight.

Mutants flood into the outpost. The outnumbered knights put up a ferocious defense, but are quickly overwhelmed in a brutal battle. The outpost is put to the torch.

Tusker observes the carnage with a look of perverse pleasure.

INT. LONDON UNDERGROUND - NIGHT

His nose buried in his book, Toby senses someone watching him. He looks up. Fiona, in a gas mask, stares down at him.

FIONA
 (muffled)
 We can go up now. It's the
 all-clear.

For the first time, Toby becomes aware of the all-clear siren. The station is emptying. He tucks his book away.

EXT. LONDON STREET - NIGHT

As the crowd pours from the Underground onto the street, Toby climbs onto a pile of sandbags and surveys the damage.

The German bombers found their mark -- houses are ablaze. The Fire Brigade works feverishly to put out the flames.

Toby gazes down the street. A look of horror washes over him.

He races breathlessly along the walk, his fears mounting.

He slows at his house. A bomb has reduced it to rubble.

He steps closer, staring at something as if in a trance. It's the medal. He bends down and reaches for it... then recoils -- his mother's leg sticks out of the rubble. Broken and bloody.

Toby stares in shock. Not breathing. The Nurse comes up behind him. She gasps, then hugs Toby close so he can't see the body. But he peeks through a gap under her arm. He can't stop staring.

INT. PADDINGTON STATION - DAY

It's a mass of grey blazers and beanies. Swarms of children with names and destinations pinned to school uniforms. Teary-eyed parents kiss sons and daughters goodbye.

In the midst of the pandemonium, Toby sits motionless on his enormous suitcase. Detached and gloomy. A SHRILL TRAIN WHISTLE sends children scurrying to get aboard.

The Nurse rushes up and pins a card onto Toby's jacket.

NURSE

Now, this has your uncle's name and telephone number on it.

Hoisting the heavy suitcase, she leads Toby to the train. Toby twists his head to read the name on his card -- Arthur Williamson. Conwy, Wales.

TOBY

But I don't know him. He doesn't even live in England.

Toby climbs on board, and she passes him the suitcase. As the train pulls away, Toby watches parents wave goodbye to their children. It's all he can do not to cry.

INT. TRAIN CORRIDOR - DAY

Toby drags his suitcase to the first compartment. Inside, a half-dozen boys enjoy a spirited game of cards.

Toby shuffles to the next compartment. Shrieks of laughter. He just stares blankly in.

INT. TRAIN WASHROOM - DAY

Perched on his suitcase in the tiny washroom, Toby is immersed in "The Sword of Thorin". The train lurches and brakes SCREECH.

Toby peers out as they pull into a station. He scrutinizes the people waiting anxiously on the platform. A handful of children burst from the train and are quickly swept up by happy relatives.

Toby returns to the solace of his book.

EXT. THORIN OUTPOST - DAY

The Thorin flag flutters to the ground. Above, Tusker ties on a new flag. The wind unfurls it as it's raised, revealing a Red Eagle grasping an arrow in its mouth. Eldritch's battle standard.

Satisfied, Tusker turns to watch the stream of mutants pouring from the forest.

Riding a black stallion is an imposing blond, blue-eyed non-mutant in burnished black armor. His supreme self-confidence gives ELDRITCH the unmistakable air of a true leader.

Surrounding him are the elite BLACK GUARD -- frightening, heavily armed mutants in black armor with red sashes.

As his army streams past the outpost, Eldritch spots Tusker.

TUSKER

My liege.

With a flourish, he gestures that the path ahead is clear. Eldritch acknowledges him with a nod of gratitude.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The army winds its way up the pass, hauling huge siege weapons.

EXT. RURAL WALES - DAY

Toby's train snakes its way through the lush countryside.

INT. TRAIN WASHROOM - DAY

Toby glances up from his book and observes the majestic Cambrian Mountains looming ahead.

Puzzled, he compares them to the drawing of the Thorin pass. They're identical.

Everything goes dark as they enter a tunnel.

The CHUGGING ENGINE reverberates loudly off the rock walls.

EXT. THORIN CASTLE - NIGHT

War drums beat into the night. Bonfires surround the castle. Siege towers and battering rams stand ready. Rows of heavily armed mutants stare silently at the battlements.

In the eerie stillness, the only movement is the Red Eagle battle standards flapping in the breeze.

Tents ring the lagoon. On a majestic throne in the middle of the encampment, Eldritch gazes at the castle with smoldering hatred.

EXT. THORIN CASTLE - NIGHT

Atop the battlements, KING GRIFFITH stares in dismay at the mutant horde. At his side, the younger, strikingly beautiful QUEEN ARWYN radiates poise and quiet nobility.

At her shoulder, in a green and gold uniform, is JUSTIN, solemn young Captain of the Guard.

JUSTIN

Why does he not attack?

QUEEN ARWYN

And send men to their deaths when all he need do is starve us out?

KING

We have the provisions to withstand a siege. This castle --

QUEEN ARWYN

-- will crumble as surely as a sand castle against the tide.

JUSTIN

The Queen is right, Sire. You must flee north tonight. The tunnel --

KING

I am King. I will not leave my people.

QUEEN ARWYN

You would make this castle your tomb?

KING

I would die with honor before I run from our enemy.

TRAVELLER (O.S.)

A dead king, no matter how brave,
cannot help his people.

A man with intense blue eyes steps from the shadows.
The TRAVELLER.

TRAVELLER

He will only give them the hope
that their next king may be less
heroic.

KING

These Wastelanders are not
soldiers. His is but an army of
farmers and tinkers. Their heart
is not in it.

QUEEN ARWYN

What they lack in heart, they make
up for in numbers.

KING

Slay Eldritch, and they'll run home
with their tails between their
legs.

Justin turns to the Traveller with disdain.

JUSTIN

Tell us, Traveller, is this the
role for which you were summoned?
To slay Eldritch?

TRAVELLER

Have you not eyes? What can I do
against a force of ten thousand?

JUSTIN

Have you not ears? We do not have
to defeat ten thousand men. Just
one. Or is your magic not even
strong enough for that?

TRAVELLER

I have claimed no magic.

KING

If you are the stranger in the
prophecy, then you must possess the
magic.

JUSTIN

And if you are not, then you have
deceived the King.

Justin puts his hand on the hilt of his sword as a threat, but the Traveller stands defiant. Justin finally turns away. The Traveller and the Queen exchange a furtive glance.

EXT. CONWY STATION, WALES - DAY

Brakes screech as the train pulls up to a deserted station. Toby peers out. Seeing the huge CONWY sign, he checks the card pinned to his jacket -- Conwy. He isn't happy.

Only one person waits on the platform -- a stern-looking man. Toby scans the platform, hoping for someone else to be there to collect him. Anyone else. His face disappears from the window.

Moments later, Toby reluctantly steps from the train.

The man stares across the platform at him.

Toby takes a deep breath, picks up his suitcase, and walks the last mile. As he nears, the man breaks into a warm smile and starts forward. Toby resigns himself to the inevitable hug.

But the man walks past him and into the arms of a woman stepping off the train. They embrace, then head off. The train pulls away, leaving Toby on the platform. Alone.

LATER

Toby reads on a bench. Above him, a clock ticks loudly.

EXT. THORIN CASTLE - DAY

The BLACKSMITH rhythmically hammers a sword on his anvil, under the Traveller's watchful eye. He sticks it in a trough, sending up a cloud of hissing steam, then holds it up in admiration.

BLACKSMITH

'Tis true I've never made a finer blade. But there is no magic in it.

The Traveller feeds the sword hilt-first into the fiery forge.

TRAVELLER

Then let me make a believer of you.

He removes a gold medallion from his neck and looks at it lovingly.

Using tongs, the Traveller pulls out the sword. He places the medallion atop the red-hot hilt, raises the hammer high...

...and POUNDS the medallion into the hilt. Sparks explode.

INT. STATION HOUSE - DAY

Engrossed in his book, Toby doesn't notice MRS. LIPTON bustle in. Stuffed in a frumpy tweed suit, she's a stiff-upper-lip type who won't let something as trifling as a war spoil her day.

At the sight of Toby alone, her mothering instincts kick in full throttle. She hurries over and smothers him with a hug. Swallowed up in a mass of brown tweed, Toby struggles for air.

MRS. LIPTON

Your poor uncle forgot what day it was. He's been so terribly busy, you see. But the sight of you will brighten his mood. Oh my, yes.

She lifts his suitcase, surprised at how heavy it is.

MRS. LIPTON

What in heaven is in here, an anvil?

She leads Toby away by the hand.

TOBY

Are you my Aunt?

MRS. LIPTON

(flustered)

My, goodness no. I'm Mrs. Lipton, your uncle's housekeeper. Goodness, what a question. It's enough to make a woman blush.

EXT. CONWY - DAY

Prattling on, she leads Toby through the picturesque village.

MRS. LIPTON

Why, I've looked after your uncle all these years, and I know enough not to pay any mind to his gruff behavior. And neither should you. He's glad to have you.

Toby isn't so sure. Mrs. Lipton steps into a butcher shop, but Toby lingers at a poster in the window -- a man gives blood to a nurse while a wounded soldier salutes a Union Jack. The caption: "Give Your Blood For England."

Toby puffs out his chest, mimicking the soldier. Then he spots a brooding castle down by a lagoon. Thunder rumbles.

EXT. THORIN CASTLE - NIGHT

Dark, ominous clouds gather over Thorin Castle. Thunder rolls across the hills, heralding an approaching storm.

EXT. BATTLEMENTS - NIGHT

Flanked by Justin and the Traveller, the King hefts the Sword, pleased with its balance. He runs his fingers across the medallion embedded in the hilt.

TRAVELLER

This is all the magic I possess.
And all that you need. You can
ride straight into the heart of the
enemy camp and slay Eldritch.

Uncertain, the King stares across at the encampment -- a sea of black armor glinting in the orange glow of bonfires.

TRAVELLER

With one thrust of this sword you
will be legend. No one need know
my magic made you invulnerable.
In the people's eyes you will be a
hero.

The King suddenly presses the Sword to the Traveller's throat.

KING

My only concern is protecting my
people from annihilation. You
would do well to remember that,
Traveller.

The Traveller stares back, unyielding. The King turns and marches back into the castle, Justin at his heels.

The Traveller puts his hand to his throat and discovers blood on his fingers. He's startled by Queen Arwyn's sudden appearance.

QUEEN ARWYN

Do not rush to judgement. Any who
think my husband a coward would be
gravely mistaken.

TRAVELLER

I do not blame him for wanting to
remain behind these walls, for this
is where you are. It would be the
choice of any man. But he is king.

QUEEN ARWYN

A good king, have no doubt.
 (a tinge of sadness)
 Just what the people need. And it
 is not Death he fears, but dying by
 Eldritch's hand before his people.
 That would cause them to lose hope.
 And without hope, all would be
 lost.

TRAVELLER

And if he stays hidden within these
 walls, all is lost. He must slay
 Eldritch.

She searches his eyes for some sign to ease her darkest fear.

QUEEN ARWYN

Why were you summoned here? Was it
 to save Thorin? To save her King?

TRAVELLER

Perhaps it is not her King who
 needs saving.

Unable to meet his gaze, she turns and looks at the enemy
 encampment. Tears well up in her eyes. Sensing an opportunity,
 he tries to penetrate her protective walls.

TRAVELLER

This is not my war, Arwyn. These
 are not my people. What I do is
 not for them. Nor for their King.

Her royal reserve crumbles. For one brief moment she's very
 human. Very vulnerable.

QUEEN ARWYN

How I envy you. To have the
 freedom to follow your heart.

TRAVELLER

It would serve you well to follow
 your own heart. Is that so much to
 ask?

QUEEN ARWYN

Of a Queen, yes. And my people
 need saving far more than I.
 It is their fate we must be
 concerned with on this eve.
 And they need their King. Alive.

TRAVELLER

And what of your needs?

He waits, hopeful. But she's reserved again.

QUEEN ARWYN
I need to know what this night
holds.

Under her probing stare, he realizes what she is implying.

TRAVELLER
Your fears are unjustified.
I would not send him blindly to his
death. He has all the magic he
needs.

Relieved, she offers her hand.

QUEEN ARWYN
For this, we thank you.

Resigned, he bows and kisses her hand. But unable to bear the pain any longer, he turns and walks away.

QUEEN ARWYN
Traveller...

It's a moment before he finds the courage to look back.

QUEEN ARWYN
A Queen's heart must beat for her
people, never herself.

They gaze longingly at one another. With heavy heart, the Traveller withdraws into the castle.

EXT. CONWY - DAY

Toby looks up from his book as Mrs. Lipton marches out of the shop, proudly displaying a package wrapped in butcher's paper.

MRS. LIPTON
Since today's a special day...

Toby follows her into the street, dragging his suitcase behind.

DOWN THE STREET

Nearing the decrepit castle, Toby slows, apprehensive.

A once-proud stronghold ravaged by time. Portions of the walls have collapsed over the centuries.

Toby starts to follow Mrs. Lipton across the small drawbridge, but stops abruptly. He stares at a pile of stone rubble.

His mother's twisted leg sticks out of the debris.

He can't breathe. Panic in his eyes.

MRS. LIPTON
Come along, then. It's perfectly
safe.

Toby looks at her, then back at the rubble -- the leg is gone.

He hurries across the drawbridge and into the castle.

EXT. ARTHUR'S CASTLE - DAY

He wanders the eerie ruins. Bags of mortar piled high. Rusted scaffolding. He climbs through a hole in a wall into a grassy courtyard, where sections of the castle have been restored.

Toby is drawn to the REFLECTING POOL. Its foot-high stone wall has been meticulously repaired. He stares into the water, curious. There's something magical about it.

He catches the reflection of a face, and looks up to see a man in a second-floor window. The man quickly withdraws.