

THE COURT OF



THE CARRION KING

In the land of sin, on the continent of vanity, sat a castle of shattered bones. The castle had once been respectable, the vague skeleton of its super-structure visible in places. However, much like the fabled ship of Theseus, much of the original castle had been replaced. Grinning skulls built its turrets, brittle ribs its ramparts. Blood ran in the moat around it and the drapes of its windows were gaunt, dry, flesh.

Inside this castle was The Court of the Carrion King, but none dared utter its true name.

He who was not called 'The Carrion King' sat on a throne of desecrated bones. Rings made of vertebrae sat on his fat fingers. A bloody patchwork of flayed skin was draped over his body like a cloak. A crown of severed tongues was perched atop his head. His skin was motely and pale. His teeth yellow. His eyes red. Platters of bloody meat were offered to him at all times, the fat king ripping through the raw flesh of the dead with ravenous glee.

In The Court of the Carrion King that was not, there were many lords and ladies. They stood around their master, sampling the cadavers that he left unfinished. Laughing along with his horrid laugh, and whispering in his ears, hoping they would get to stay in his court just a little longer.

The other denizens of the castle were legion. Each of them had come from far and wide, to a place that was not called The Court of the Carrion King. It was forbidden to say such a thing. This was a peaceful kingdom. A tolerant kingdom. A righteous kingdom. Not The Court of The Carrion King. Each of these people who lined the corridors were alike. They were jesters. The jesters of The Carrion King. They smiled and jigged and laughed among each other. They told their jokes, which were seldom funny, but each of them laughed and laughed. They laughed because these were jokes that The Carrion King would love.

And so the jesters lined up. They lined all the corridors of the castle of bones. Each of them craved their fifteen minutes in The Court of The Carrion King, which was not to be named so. They waited and worked their whole lives for such a performance. They traded their souls for but a chance to receive their king's laughter.

One by one, they would enter the court. The Carrion King would look up from his platters, fatty juices and blood dribbling from his jowls, and he would decree:

“Entertain me!” The voice of The Carrion King was like madness. Holy, righteous, madness. His red eyes would gaze at the jesters, and in turn each one would perform for him. They would sing, they would dance, they would juggle, and they would tell jokes. The Carrion King and his lords and ladies would laugh at this. Their cackles would echo around the castle of bones. They would jeer and laugh and sing along. These jesters were good. They were holy.

Because all of them were liars.

It was known that The Carrion King did not tolerate the truth. The truth was wrong. The Carrion King owned the truth, and if he did not agree, then he would decree:

“Seize them!” And the lords and ladies of the Carrion Court, which was not so, would obey. They would seize the jesters and they would never jest again. These bad jesters were forgotten about. Because they never existed. There were no bad jesters in The Court of The Carrion King. There was no truth in The Court of the Carrion King. There was no Court of The Carrion King. When the good jesters heard the truth, how they would weep. They would weep rivers. They would beseech The Carrion King. They would atone. And fifteen minutes later, a new jester would enter the court.

One day, somebody entered this castle, in the lands of sin on the continent of vanity. A lone man entered The Court of the Carrion King that was not so. He was dressed like every other jester, but he was not like them. This jester still sung. He still danced. He juggled, and jested, and joked. However, this jester was not like the others. This jester told the truth.

And so he waited. He saw dozens of other jesters fret their fifteen minutes in The Court of The Carrion King. He saw the King and his Court wail with laughter at the same jokes told again and again, until the end of time.

Finally, it was his turn to enter The Court of The Carrion King.

The Carrion King lounged atop his throne, his pudgy fingers gripping a bloody husk of meat and shovelling it between his misshapen teeth. His red eyes fell upon The Jester, and The Jester smiled and waved.

“What is your name?” The Carrion King shrieked.

“I have many, my lord,” The Jester said with a bow. “To the west they call me Veritas. To the east they call me Mara. To the north they call me Delphi. To the south they call me Dur.”

“Entertain me, man of many names!” The Carrion King demanded, spittle flying from his mouth and blood oozing down his chin.

The Jester smiled and began his routine. How that Jester did perform. He performed acts of magic for The King. He made sparks fly from his fingers. He made cards materialise from thin air. He conjured demons, and angels, and goddesses and showed The Carrion King the pleasures each could grant. The Carrion King cackled wildly, clapping his pudgy hands together. His Lords and Ladies gazed on in wonder, the other jesters in the halls outside desperately trying to witness this spectacle.

As his performance reached its crescendo, The Jester did smile widely, revealing his humourless grin. He pranced toward The Carrion King, looked around the room, and spoke the truth.

The castle of the land of sin, on the continent of vanity, fell silent. The lords and ladies looked at one another with horror. The jesters outside wailed and cried. The Carrion King froze and stared at the entertainer, his eyes twitching with malice. His teeth quivered with rage, bloody saliva drizzling over his lips. His hands trembled with fury.

“Seize him!” The Carrion King shrieked. “Seize him!” He thrashed on his throne, the many platters of rotting meat flung around the court. “Cut out his tongue! Put out his eyes! Bring me his head!”

But the lords and ladies were too stunned to react. The Jester took a bow.

“You asked me who I am?” he said with a grin. “I am an idea. And now, I am in their heads. You cannot kill me, my lord.”

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“I am The Carrion King!” The Carrion King did shriek.
“This is my court! I order you to seize this man!”

Then The Carrion King froze. For he had just spoken the truth. The Jester smiled, then turned on his heel and skipped away.

The other jesters watched on in shock and the lords and ladies gazed at their king. The Carrion King went to run, but they set themselves upon him. They seized him. They wrenched out his tongue. They put out his eyes. They severed his head. Then they feasted.

It has been many years since The Jester had visited the kingdom of sin on the continent of vanity. Legends tell of how the lords and ladies of that court did feast on each other, until but one clown remained, King of the Carrion.

For what that jester had asked them was this:

“If we are not in The Court of The Carrion King, where do the bones come from?”