

THE ROCKFISH BROADSIDE



THE BALLADS OF DEPUTY MURK · SUNG BY VALAERYS IL'THARANDIIR

OTARI · ONE COPPER

THE DEPUTY IN THE DARK

Valaerys set out to make a song of one ugly night below the Gauntlight — and found the truth only lands once you stop dressing it up.



Valaerys tries the first, loudest version on the Rockfish crowd — his pale elven silver hidden, for the stage, beneath a dark performer's wig and paint.

THE COMPANY



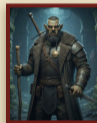
VALAERYS

Elf Champion · the teller



BRAN

Human Cleric · the lifeline



DEPUTY MURK

Orc Ranger · the blind blade



REIKO

Human Fighter · the opener

The room took Murk's sight — never his aim.

SAID ALOUD

“Valaerys — do not let that thing reach the surface.”

— **DEPUTY MURK** · *the breath before the door shut*

The Rowdy Rockfish has heard every kind of lie a person can sing. Sailor laments stretched a league past breaking, bounty boasts that gained a foot of height with every round, ballads that picked up a dragon somewhere between the second mug and the third. The room knows a tall tale, and mostly forgives it. But the night the pale elf folded onto the stool by the hearth, the laughter thinned, and every eye turned to the silver voice that had come up out of the Gauntlight with something to say.

Valaerys tried the night on the way a man tries on coats. First, the loud one — steel ringing in the black, heroic blows landing clean, the deputy unbroken while the dead thing came apart at his boots. It was a fine lie, and it sounded grand. Tankards hit the tables in time; the floor kept the beat. For a verse or two it was exactly the song a cold tavern wants, and the Rockfish gave it back twice as loud.

Then he let it slip — because a witness can only hold a lie so long. Before Chafkhem fell, before any clean stroke found its mark, the room at the bottom of the stair had already taken something off Deputy Murk it would not hand back: his sight. The beast blinded him early and meant to keep him blind, and Murk kept swinging regardless. Not fearless — only unwilling to lie down. *That* was the tale worth the singing, once Valaerys stopped performing long enough to find it.

VOICES FROM THE ROCKFISH

“I've forged finer steel than whatever the deputy swung — that much I'll say plain. But landing a blade blind takes a hand; I'll grant the orc that. My own line's found the mark in the dark for three generations. Strange, which feats get a song and which don't.”

CARMAN RAJANI — smith at Blades for Glades

“The elf wasn't half through the first telling and we were already pounding the tables for it. A grand loud song, that one. None of us knew yet he was saving the true one for last.”

TOBBLE MARSH — halfling, dock crew

Continued — the room that took his eyes, and the cut that found Chafkhem anyway.

BLINDED BY CHAFKHEM

The song only turned true when Valaerys quit calling Murk fearless and started reckoning what it cost a blind man to keep swinging.



Chafkhem fought at home — red warding script, despair thick in the air, and the deputy blinded in the middle of it all.

The first telling earned its cheers and the second its laughter, but somewhere in the third Valaerys set the music down half a step and stopped performing. Chafkhem had not fought fair, for the simple reason that he never fought anywhere he could lose. The chamber at the bottom of the Gauntlight was built to break the living: a doorway too cramped to run for, red script burning down every wall, despair hung so thick that brave people forgot the trick of being brave — and every line of the room bending toward the dead.

Murk lost his eyes in the opening breaths and never won them back. No faces, no distances, no floor he could trust beneath his boots — only grave-breath and the voices of friends shouting corrections he could half-believe. Bran bled light out of his open hands to keep the four of them upright. Reiko forced the openings and paid for each in her own blood. Valaerys answered fire with fire, if only to stop the walls from closing for good. And Murk — blind, hemmed in, planted in the one room ever built to unmake him — listened. He counted the footfalls, set his feet in the pitch, and swung at a mark he could only hear. He found Chafkhem where sight could not go.

FROM THE BALLAD

♪ *His good arm cut the empty air, his best chance slipped the dark — and still he set his boots and swung toward a half-heard mark.*

— *WHAT THE DARK COULDN'T TAKE* · the first telling

HOLLERED

“*Left! — no, your other left — that's a wall, Murk, that's also a wall —*”

— *REIKO & BRAN* · steering a blind swing

THE NIGHT IN THE ROOM

- ♦ *Despair thick enough to taste.*
- ♦ *Red warding runes, wall to wall.*
- ♦ *A deputy blinded in the first breath.*
- ♦ *Two cuts, struck blind, that found their mark.*

VOICES FROM THE ROCKFISH

“*I've worked a ship's hold by feel, black as pitch. Hauling crates blind is one thing. Swinging steel blind and landing it — that's another creature entirely.*”

HALGRA BRINEPICK — dwarf, dock crew

“*I count crates off the boats by sound — footfall, footfall, footfall. That's how he did it. By the count. The little teller got that part right.*”

SKRITT VELLOW — ratfolk, cargo-tally

Next — how the Rockfish cheered the first telling, laughed at the second, and fell silent for the last.

THREE TELLINGS, ONE TRUTH

The Rowdy Rockfish cheered the first version, laughed itself hoarse at the second, and believed only the third.



By the final telling the mugs had come down, and the Rockfish — Grandma Brindy and Old Tankard Bill among them — listened as though to testimony.

Three times Valaerys took the stage. Three times he sang the same night, and three times it came out a different song. The first telling made Murk a giant — the deputy became thunder in the dark, the blade that hunted the beast down and never once doubted. The room loved it, because that is the song a tavern is built to roar back at you.

The second telling leaned all the way into the absurd. Murk tripped over his own legend, Bran bled like a choirboy three cups past his limit, Reiko threatened to throw hands with a fish, and Valaerys cheerfully confessed the fire had been mostly on purpose. Laughter rolled through the Rockfish like spilled ale across a slanted floor.

But the third telling, he did not polish. He let the silences stand where they belonged — a deputy stepping forward with no eyes left to lose, a cleric pouring life into a fight already lost on paper, a fighter who would not fall, and a bard burning everything he had because someone had to keep the walls from closing in.

When he sang the blind cuts honestly — the fear, the pain, the hand that would not let go — the room came apart the other way. It stopped cheering a hero and started believing a witness. Mugs lowered. Voices stilled. Grandma Brindy wiped her eyes; Old Tankard Bill nodded, slow and certain; and a few hard cases at the back found something worth studying on the floor, as if the truth had a weight they had not expected to carry home.

THREE CUTS OF THE SAME TALE

THE HEROIC VERSION

bold, loud, cheered.

Murk made larger than life — the blind strike polished into pure legend.

THE LAUGHING VERSION

swagger and gallows humor.

Terrible ideas, a great deal of blood, and Valaerys insisting the fire was mostly intentional.

THE TRUE VERSION

fear, endurance, one blind stroke.

The wounded kept their feet, and the man who couldn't see found the kill anyway.

FROM THE BALLAD

♪ Spare me your candles, spare me your light: the blind keep the faith when the faithful lose sight.

— PAID IN FULL · the bridge

VOICES FROM THE ROCKFISH

“ I read the stars that sent them down those stairs. I could never have followed — a room with no air, no light, no way back to the open. That he kept his feet where the dark would have unmade me? The Caravan was watching that one close.

WRIN SIVINXI — astrologer, *Wrin's Wonders*

“ Otari keeps the names of those who keep it standing. Whatever else this town argues over, it will not misplace the deputy who held the dark without his eyes.

OSEPH MENHEMES — Mayor of Otari

STILL OPEN

Killing Chafkhem did not end him — the circle on his floor pulls him back no matter how cleanly he dies. Before Otari is rid of the paper king, the room itself must be unmade: a holy fixture, a name-knot, a breath-glyph, a returning gate, and three unbroken days of prayer over consecrated ground, with someone on the door the whole while.

Chafkhem's body fell to dust. The room remembered. And the song would not let Otari forget.