

Cÿd:  
Red Stream,  
Wet Dirt,  
and Scars



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David A. De Ryckere



In dedication to my son,  
Jeremy, my only true  
inspiration in *everything*  
that I do.



I watch as the glistening of a red stream flows, merging into the horizon. I lay in the cold wet dirt—unblinking, hypnotized, I watch the stream of red until it appears as an ocean flowing on forever.

My daze is wavered by the stinging of my eyes—the sweat tainted with my filth pooling and dripping like tears, falling and disappearing into the wet dirt—into the red stream.

My body resists as I command it to rise. Every muscle flames as if to tear through my flesh, but I plant my hands into the wet dirt—into the red stream—I claw my fingers, stabbing deep—so deep, I can feel the squirming life below, crawling and exploring their way through my fingers. I push myself to my knees, my spine ripping with pain through my body. I slip to my elbows, drunken by the sudden erection of my head and the over-flow of endorphins—my body’s own battle to fight against the pain.

I push myself back up. I feel the handle of my blade still beneath my palm, pushing against my hand until I am forced to grip my fingers around its leather wrap—a feeling so natural and familiar that I react to it by almost complete reflex. With my sword in hand, I rise to my feet as if powered by the feel of the cold steel as I clench it tighter, turning my knuckles to glow red to white to red.

I raise my eyes and gaze upon the man who stares down to me with such arrogance—as if he believed he had won before his sword was ever drawn. How long was I lying there since his last devastating blow—how long has he been standing there waiting

for me to get back up—was he waiting for the sake of honor, or because of his own swelling arrogance.

His bare sun-darkened chest, covered in thousands of scars of random ages and depths—as if he had been fighting endlessly since the beginning of time without a moment of peace. So many battles that he must have won, even if at the edge of his own death, he came out with some deciding trait above his opponents that declared him victor—be it skill, speed, strength, or just constant luck. How many of those faces could he still have in his head—if I fall, will he remember me, or will I just be another unnamed bloodstain splattered on his sword and clothes.

The sun gleams off the steel of my blade forcing me to squint my eyes to focus. Staring my opponent dead in the eye until all I see is him—his every movement, the slight involuntary twitching of a muscle, the slow rise and fall of his chest, the blade of his sword gleaming as if in response to my own—two swords signaling each other with their secret language, screaming for their craving to meet with flesh and blood.

The sweat of my flesh turns to vapor as the noon sun stabs into me. The sensation of the heat tries to make me lazy, and force me to surrender to my wounds. I force away the cloud in my head, and feel the sudden coolness of a breeze that seemed to come out of nowhere, as if sent by the gods themselves as a sign—a sign to begin attack. And so I brace the balls of my feet deep into the wet dirt—into the red stream—and I lung forward in a swift charge.

I hold my sword across me in guard, prepared for any move he could make against me as I charge. He's not moving—he's still

standing there with the same look of arrogance—is he really so confident in his ability to counter whatever I throw at him that he would just stand there unphased and wait for it to come—have those scars brought such experience; such sense of immortality—or does he wait for my own death dealing strike to end his life of steel, blood, and war.

It's too late to change my attack now, it would risk putting me off balance, leaving me open for even the simplest of blows to become deadly—is that his plan, to throw me off, to force me into his game so that he can defeat me as easily as a three year old child. No, I can not falter my own strategy; I must force him into my game if I am to win.

I reach him in range of my blade, and I raise my sword swiping for his exposed neck. It was so sudden—a flash of light, and a split second of a sharp pain that throws me to my side. I look up at him from behind—he never moved, he still stands as he did before. And the sharp pain returns—I look down to see a red stream flowing into the wet dirt—slashed deep across my body from collar bone to my waste, tearing apart the more I twitch in response to the pain as the red stream flows into the wet dirt.

He finally turns and looks down at me, I look up at him and strainfully force out my words that tear at me with each breath, “How... you never moved... how...?”

He holds up his sword against the light of the sun, and a red stream flows from it raining into the wet dirt—as if to respond showing that he must have obviously somehow... moved—moved

with the swiftness of the flashing lightning—there was never any thunder to follow but the sharp pain.

I stare into his eyes and see what I thought was arrogance. I stare until his face begins to haze and separate into distorted shapes, “Who... are you...?”

He crouches down, his sword held behind him—his movement so sudden, so fluid... or is it in my head. His lips move, but the words seem to take extra seconds to reach me, “I am the one who has sent you to the next life—you have no use of my name...”

“Your name... as I lie waiting for my end... as it is creeping unto me... please... tell me your name... so I may warn the spirits of my next kin...”

He simply smiles with a smirk of what I thought was arrogance. I see him move his hand to me—I think he laid it on my shoulder, but I can only barely feel the foreign pressure to indicate his touch. His hot breath blows across my ear and my mind slowly translates the vibrations in the air, “The spirits of your kin are soon to be gone from the world, for you are now the last... I am Cÿd... ..” His presents seems to simply fade away... or I never saw his movements.

His words echo in my head, “...the spirits of your kin are soon to be gone from the world...”—my eyes stinging as the sweat tainted with my filth pools and drips like tears, falling and disappearing into the wet dirt—into the red stream, “...for you are now the last...”

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