

BLOOD ROYAL

by

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extract: The Battle of Stamford Bridge

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EXT. RICCALL - DAY

Sunrise over Viking tents lining the banks of a river where dragonboats have been moored.

Hadrada bursts from the river, splashing water in his face, washing off the blood and grime of days of fighting.

Tostig emerges from a tent looking hung-over. He squints against the daylight, looking pale and nauseated, then is startled by the sight of Hadrada striding by, naked.

HADRADA

Norsemen's ale too strong for you?

Tostig nods, holding his head. Hadrada LAUGHS.

HADRADA (CONT'D)

We won't have time for breakfast.

Olaf approaches Hadrada in full battle dress.

OLAF

Father, only half the men are ready. They are complaining this English sun is too hot for their armor.

HADRADA

Then let them walk without it. You guard the fleet. It's a beautiful day for a march!

AT ANOTHER TENT

Young Viking men collect piles of chain mail as warriors file by, tossing down their helmets.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAY

The sun shines brightly as Viking warriors proceed along the river bank, some singing a Norse sailing song, most clad only in leggings and tunics.

Hadrada rides alongside Tostig, who is still looking unwell and perspiring from the heat, fully clothed in chain mail.

EXT. STAMFORD BRIDGE - DAY

Viking warriors swim and lay around on the grassy banks either side of a wooden bridge spanning the river.

Higher up on one bank, the unmistakable sound of vomiting comes from the bushes. Tostig walks out, wiping his mouth, armor now removed. He sits heavily at a table where Hadrada is seated, eating from a plate of greasy chicken.

HADRADA

Eat?

Tostig declines.

HADRADA (CONT'D)

Hostages are late.

TOSTIG

They'll be here.

Tostig tries to avoid the sight of Hadrada's food, notices a movement off in the distance.

ACROSS THE RIVER

Seen through the heat haze, a group of figures are appearing on the horizon, approaching the far bank.

Tostig stands, peering off across the river. Hadrada stops eating to also stand and look.

ACROSS THE RIVER

More figures continue to appear.

Tostig shields his eyes. Something is not right. Hadrada senses it too, but can't quite make it out.

ACROSS THE RIVER

As more figures appear, a metallic GLIMMER reflects the sun.

HADRADA

That's more than five hundred men.

TOSTIG

Perhaps the hostages have brought their families with them.

CRIES go up from Hadrada's men as they begin to notice the approaching crowd. Bathers scramble from the river, a few grab their weapons.

ACROSS THE RIVER

Harold's banner comes into view above the ENGLISH ARMY, marching resolutely forward, weapons glinting in the sun.

HADRADA

They are not hostages! That is an army!

Hadrada overturns the table. Hadrada's CAPTAINS run up, but keep their distance.

TOSTIG

This is not possible! How could this be?

HADRADA

Yes, how?

TOSTIG

You think this is my doing? I can't explain it! We must retreat immediately and gather Olaf's men.

HADRADA

No.

(to the captains)

Send three horsemen to the fleet. Have Olaf bring as many men as he can spare and all the weapons they can carry. We fight where we stand. Bring me my horse!

HIGH ANGLE

Vikings take position on either side of the river, flanking the bridge and facing their attackers.

Pikesmen point their weapons forward, axmen and swordsmen to the rear.

Hadrada's men help their king into his battle gear. Tostig finishes refastening his own chain mail, unassisted, then climbs onto his horse.

ON THE ENGLISH BANK

Harold's army halts and forms a shield wall facing the Viking troops. Harold, Gyrth and Leofwine view the battlefield from horseback, Edwin and Morcar behind them.

HAROLD

Do you see him?

GYRTH

Not yet.

HAROLD'S P.O.V.

Hadrada's men help their king onto his saddle. Hadrada's horse WHINNIES and rears, skittish. Hadrada slips and falls, landing with a crash.

HAROLD
Who's the big man?

MORCAR
That's Hadrada.

HAROLD
He's unlucky.

GYRTH
Yes, very.

Gyrth draws his sword.

HAROLD
Wait. Sergeant, give me your helmet.

The sergeant hands Harold his helmet, which Harold dons, half covering his face.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Leo. Twenty men. Follow me.

GYRTH
What?

HAROLD
Gyrth, stay. Leo, ride close and keep your mouth shut.

Harold and Leofwine ride out from the shield wall with a group of men. Grouped around Harold, the men are unidentifiable in their helmets and chain mail.

AT THE BRIDGE

Viking pikemen point their weapons as the Englishmen advance. The riders stop twenty feet away.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
(calling out)
Is Earl Tostig with you?

UP ON THE HIGH BANK

Tostig rides up beside Hadrada, who is now reseated on his horse, a young STANDARD BEARER with the Viking banner flying behind him. They view the horsemen below.

Hadrada turns to Tostig, seeking any flicker of recognition. Tostig reveals none.

TOSTIG
I'll see what they want.

Viking soldiers step aside as Tostig rides down the slope, then crosses the wooden bridge.

CLOSE ON TOSTIG

As he sees who has come to meet him.

CLOSE ON HAROLD

Seeing Tostig, he raises his helmet.

Their horses face each other - Tostig just beyond the bridge, Harold a little forward from his men.

HAROLD
Your brother sends you greetings.

TOSTIG
Why?

HAROLD
He makes you an offer. Northumbria is yours, if only you won't fight.

Leofwine looks shocked.

TOSTIG
Why would the King want his brother in Northumbria? He already has two weaklings ideally suited for the task.

HAROLD
Perhaps the King is willing to give his brother another chance for peace.

TOSTIG
(sarcastic)
That's very noble of the King! And if I accept, did my brother say what he would offer King Hadrada?

HAROLD
He did. He said he could spare him six feet of English soil -- maybe more, since he is such a big man.

Tostig scrutinizes Harold.

TOSTIG

Brother, you have humiliated me my whole life, and you will humiliate me no more. I've made a pact with these men. I'll be proud to fight with them today.

Tostig turns his horse and rides back across the bridge.

Harold watches Tostig ride away, pulls down his helmet, returns to Leo and his men, and they head back to their army.

UP ON THE HIGH BANK

Tostig rejoins Hadrada.

HADRADA

Who was that man?

TOSTIG

Harold.

HADRADA

(surprised)

Why didn't you tell me? He would never have escaped!

Tostig does not answer, but draws his sword.

TOSTIG

Let's get on with this.

ON THE ENGLISH BANK

Harold and Leofwine rejoin Gyrth, who is staring, rapt, awaiting their return. Harold is clearly shaken by the exchange.

LEOFWINE

You gave him a chance, Harold.
What brother could do more?

Harold removes his helmet, tosses it back to its owner and replaces it with his own.

HAROLD

Dismount.

WIDE ANGLE

The English army dismounts. On Harold's order, the army marches forward, pikes foremost. The Vikings stand their ground. The English break into a run and clash with the forward rank.

AT THE BRIDGE

A vicious hack and slash as the English make short work of pikemen then engage swords and axes at closer range. The Vikings are overwhelmed by superior numbers and armor. Injured warriors fall back and retreat across the bridge.

UP ON THE HIGH BANK

Hadrada and Tostig watch from their horses, the Viking banner flying behind them.

AT THE BRIDGE

An enormous Viking axeman is going BERSERK, swinging wildly and cleaving Englishmen left and right, allowing his comrades to fall back around him at the entrance to the bridge.

Gyrth sees the problem and sends in a group of pikemen to attack. They force the BERSERKER back into the middle of the bridge, but he fells them all until he is surrounded by a pile of bodies and broken pikes.

Leofwine starts forward, but Harold holds him back. Other Englishmen attack the Berserker one after another, but fall. The Berserker ROARS, defying the English to advance. A silence falls over the battle.

UP ON THE HIGH BANK

Tostig glances at Hadrada as the Viking king YELLS in Norse. Other Vikings start to yell out too, jeering at the English.

AT THE BRIDGE

The Berserker fells Englishman after Englishman. A big SWORDSMAN emerges from the English ranks, cheered on by his fellow soldiers. The Berserker sneers, raises his axe.

The Swordsman charges. The Berserker swings and hand to hand combat ensues. Yells and taunts from both sides, like a prizefighter match.

UPSTREAM

An English PIKESMAN stands away from the main conflagration and notices a discarded half-barrel swill tub floating in reeds nearby. An idea occurs to him. Keeping low to the water, he untangles the tub, tests it for buoyancy, then climbs in and uses his javelin to pole his way downstream. The pikeman in the barrel slowly approaches the bridge.

ON THE BRIDGE

The big Swordsman falls, crashing to the planks, a mortal wound in his neck. The Berserker ROARS in victory and the Norsemen respond with a CHEER. Another enraged Englishman rushes forward to take his comrade's place.

ON THE RIVER

The Pikesman paddles closer, still unnoticed. The shadow of the bridge falls over him, blood dripping down through the planks. The Pikesman looks up. Through the chinks between the planks, the Berserker continues to repel blows.

The swill tub continues to drift forward. The Pikesman grabs reeds to stop himself sailing out from under the bridge in full view of the Vikings. He almost drops his javelin, steadies himself, aims it up.

The Berserker swings and clashes blades a few feet above. Blood drips into the Pikesman's face, but he holds his aim. The Berserker steps directly overhead. The Pikesman thrusts his javelin upwards.

ON THE BRIDGE

The Berserker stops in mid-swing, sways, looks down, realizing that he has been impaled.

BELOW

The pikesman strains to push the javelin further up into Viking gristle.

ON THE BRIDGE

The Viking sways and struggles in vain to free himself.

BELOW

Blood runs down the javelin. The pikesman gives a final almighty thrust.

ON THE BRIDGE

The Viking grunts, then topples back, snapping the javelin in two. A moment of shocked surprise, then the English surge forward. English feet trample the Berserker's body. Somebody grabs the Berserker's axe.

ON THE HIGH BANK

Hadrada YELLS and leads the charge, the Viking banner flying. Tostig follows with equal gusto.

The two armies join. The English hack into the unarmored Vikings. The Norsemen fight back bravely and brutally.

Hadrada is thrown from his horse, but scrambles to his feet CURSING and fighting, berserk.

Tostig clashes swords from his horse, felling Englishmen all around.

Harold parries blows, Gyrth and Leofwine close by.

Tostig's horse is toppled and he falls into mud. His opponent comes in for the kill. Tostig scrambles for his sword, skewers his opponent, then gains his feet and slashes at the fallen man.

Hadrada chases two men into the river, knee-deep, then turns, smiling at his standard bearer. Hadrada is SPEARED THROUGH THE CHEST.

The boy with the Viking banner stares, horrified, as Hadrada splashes into the river and drifts away.

Tostig leads other Vikings to attack the English with a new ferocity.

Across the field, Olaf rides up with reinforcements, but halts, seeing the bloodbath at the bridge below. The Vikings are being decimated. Olaf's men join the conflict but make little impact.

Men slip and fall, English and Vikings barely distinguishable in the mud.

Harold turns in the midst of battle.

HAROLD'S P.O.V.

An Englishman with the Berserker's axe runs at Tostig, who turns too late to block the blow.

The axe almost SEVERS TOSTIG'S HEAD.

Harold sees Tostig fall.

The Viking banner is trampled underfoot.

LATER - DOWNSTREAM

The sun is low on the horizon as Hadrada's body bobs in the river, tangled in reeds. The corpse of the young standard bearer floats by.

[END EXTRACT]

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