

Identification With the Weapon: *Sword Angel*

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For *Hannah*, the person I killed to keep living.

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Abstract

Within all forms of narrative media, objects that characters make use of often become emblematic of their identity. Within the action genre, this manifests as characters becoming synonymous with the weapons they carry. Section I of this thesis analyzes how the bound-weapon trope provides avenues for authors to introduce themes of reinvention, rebirth, and rite-of-passage into their stories. It discusses the historical origins of the trope and modern interpretations of it. It investigates why the trope exists, as well as dissects various literal and metaphorical applications of it. Section II of this thesis includes an original screenplay (*Sword Angel*) and supplementary reading materials. The main character of the screenplay participates in the bound-weapon trope by creating a bound weapon of their own.

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SECTION I: TROPE ANALYSIS

Introduction

Characters in media often make use of special objects that reflect some element of their personality, status, or talent. These objects become representative of the characters themselves, and lose meaning or usefulness if separated from them. This trope (the embodiment of one's personality as an object) occurs frequently in the action genre, where a weapon usually constitutes the object in question.

Some examples of character-bound identity-weapons in pop culture include King Arthur's sword Excalibur, Indiana Jones' whip, and Darth Maul's dual lightsaber. While these weapons seem to have personalities of their own, symbiotic with those of their owners, they remain insentient tools. In comparison, some weapons become "alive" as a result of interacting with their user. These weapons actually do have personalities of their own. For instance, characters in *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* develop "stands", or humanoid physical manifestations of their life energy, each capable of wielding immense power. Some of these stands react to their environments, and express unique temperaments the same way that humans do. Similarly, in the *Harry Potter* series, wands famously "choose the wizard", suggesting that they also possess a certain level of consciousness.

The bound-weapon trope has roots in world mythology and folklore, yet continues to evolve in order to suit modern tastes. It provides an avenue for authors to weave themes of reinvention, rebirth, and rite-of-passage into their stories. It gets reused because it satisfies the narrative necessity for protagonists to separate themselves from other less-exceptional characters. It can also imply the location of the protagonist on their hero's

journey. The intensity of the sentience of the weapon, and the level to which the weapon partners with/fuses to their user constitute the two main ways the trope varies from application to application.

History

Symbolism is one of the most powerful of the narrative devices. It makes sense then that storytellers have used weapons to symbolically represent their owners since the inception of narrative art. Primeval religious canons and cultural mythologies offer some of the earliest examples of these associations. To this day, the trope manifests in such modern masterpieces as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the *A Song of Ice and Fire / Game of Thrones*¹ series. It would seem that the trope has retained a high level of popularity over the millennia, and shows no sign of diminishment.

During the period of time that constitutes ancient history (approximately 3000 BCE-785 BCE), global religions overarchingly reflected reverent attitudes towards nature. Needless to say, this commonly resulted in deities wielding elements like wind or fire as their weapons (Macedo, 2). One of the most archetypal examples arises in Greek Mythology with the legend of Zeus. Depictions of Zeus almost never omit his identifier, the lightning bolt. In literature, Zeus' epithets either explicitly reference the bolt ("Zeus of the lightning bolt" [Macedo, 6]), allude to the bolt's use ("thunder-rousing Zeus" [Macedo, 19]) or create parallels between him and it ("Zeus who descends flying from heaven" [Macedo, 22]). Zeus' power over the bolt (a seemingly unpredictable natural phenomenon)

¹ *A Song of Ice and Fire* refers to the book series, *Game of Thrones* refers to the television series.

distinguishes him from the other Greek sky or storm gods, and designates his high position in the pantheon: without the bolt, the God Zeus would not be Zeus. Other early examples of symbolic deity-weapon associations emerge from Hindu mythology, like that of Lord Shiva and Pashupatastra. Shiva wields Pashupatastra, a formless metaphysical weapon of incredible power dischargeable using “the mind... the eye... words, [or a] bow” (Staszcyk, 188). Although artists sometimes visually depict Pashupatastra as an arrow or trident, one could interpret it more so as a type of spiritual missile. Importantly, the word “Pashupatastra” literally means “the weapon of Paśupata” (Shiva’s other name) indicating that its relationship to Shiva defines it better than whatever shape it supposedly takes (Staszcyk, 188). Considering that the improper use of Pashupatastra could result in the annihilation of the world, it seems only fitting that it belongs to and receives identification from Shiva, the God of destruction. In this case, without Shiva, the weapon Pashupatastra would not be Pashupatastra.

Beyond ancient history, two highly prominent legendary heroes who demonstrate the bound-weapon trope include King Arthur and Sun Wukong. Arthurian legend originates from Britain and developed during the Middle Ages, c.500 to 1500 CE. The Chinese novel in which Sun Wukong appears, *Journey to the West*, was published in 1592. According to the dominant tradition, King Arthur easily pulls the sword Excalibur out of a stone, where others had tried and failed to withdraw it. This act identifies him as the rightful ruler of England (Jackson, 208). Over the course of his life, Arthur uses the supernaturally strong and sharp sword to defeat his enemies. When he dies, he instructs one of his knights to throw it into a lake, returning it to a state of unusability by others (Jackson, 208-209). In *Journey to the West*, the Monkey King Sun Wukong extorts a magical size-changing staff

called Ruyi Jingu Bang from the Dragon King Ao Guang. The staff glows in anticipation of Wukong's arrival, suggesting that fate destined it to belong to him. The staff accompanies Wukong throughout his misadventures. Until Wukong laid claim to it, no other being could lift the staff due to its immense heaviness, nevertheless wield it. These folk tales significantly impacted popular culture within their areas of origin. To this day, spinoffs of these stories continue to get made, almost all of which include or at least reference the weapon-character relationships chronicled in the original versions.

Beyond religious and mythological applications, one can easily recognize adaptations of the bound-weapon trope in modern media. As mentioned previously, the trope manifests within the incredibly popular *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, penned by J. R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin, respectively. First of all, every character in *Lord of the Rings* carries a weapon that befits their status or reveals information about their heritage (Whetter & McDonald, 5). Most weapons have names and histories, and “are celebrated as living personalities” in the fantasy world where the story takes place (Whetter and McDonald, 7). In terms of “bondedness”, the magical ring from which the trilogy takes its name belongs to the villain Sauron, the only person capable of bending it to their will: “even though others physically possess it, they cannot claim it for themselves in any real way” (Robinson, 411). Furthermore, the character Aragorn's sword Andúril “is symbolic of his kingship”, meaning that both him and it would lose their authoritative significance if separated from each other (Robinson, 408).

Weapons in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* / *Game of Thrones* franchise serve similar purposes. Swords belonging to specific noble houses function as symbols of their authority. Some of these ancestral swords are made of a fantastical metal called “Valyrian steel”, one

of only two materials that can kill “Others” (“White Walkers” in the television production), the undead antagonists of the series. These Valyrian steel swords are exceedingly rare, not only because they possess this ability, but also because the art of forging them has been lost. Besides bestowing prestige upon and giving special powers to their owners, swords also reveal facets of their nature. For instance, King Joffrey’s callously-named sword Widow’s Wail has a gold-decorated crossguard in the books and a silver and ruby-encrusted crossguard in the TV series. In both cases, the gaudy and opulent construction reflects Joffrey’s arrogant personality. In comparison, Jon Snow’s otherwise-unembellished bastard sword² Longclaw has only a simplistic white wolf on the handle in either edition of the story. For context, Jon Snow is a bastard child of the Stark household, whose sigil is a black wolf running across a white field. The inverted sigil colors on the pommel wolf and fairly plain construction of the sword reflect Jon’s complicated relationship to house Stark, communicating that he feels an allegiance to the house but also accepts that he doesn’t fully belong to it. Moreover, swords are not the only weapons within the *A Song of Ice and Fire / Game of Thrones* franchise that define individual characters and give them authority. The dragons of house Targaryen also fall into this category. The dragons bond with specific members of the Targaryen family and are used by them to pillage and conquer. The dragons function as extensions of their riders, and even compose the sigil of the Targaryen house.

Throughout history, stories that contain the bound-weapon trope refer back to older stories containing similar ideas. In this way, the genre is inherently self-referential. Both *Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* epitomize this practice: the authors of both

² “Bastard” is a sword class determined by the length of the sword handle

series created “epic fantasy worlds that rely heavily on medieval material” (Carroll, 3), and yet produced two stories vastly opposed to each other in tone and content. Tolkien’s weapon-lore draws direct inspiration from dark-age European mythologies to engender the described narrative relationships between weapons and owners, most notably the mythologies of Beowulf and his swords Hrunting and Nægling, as well as the previously mentioned Arthur and Excalibur (Whetter & McDonald, 7). Furthermore, George R. R. Martin has spoken publicly about his admiration for Tolkien and the similarities between their bodies of work. Undoubtedly, authors have found ways to successfully recycle the bound-weapon trope in order to produce unique content.

Purpose

Most of the examples of the bound-weapon trope referenced thus far simply prove the trope’s ubiquity and relevance within media. The following examples demonstrate why the trope exists: to provide an avenue for authors to differentiate characters from each other, indicate which stage a hero has reached on their journey, and introduce themes of reinvention, rebirth, and rite-of-passage into their stories.

Almost as a rule, in stories with ensemble casts, individuals will specialize in different types of weapons. For instance, Leonardo, Donatello, Michelangelo, and Raphael of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise use katanas, a bo staff, nunchucks, and sai, respectively. In *The Walking Dead*, three main characters (Rick, Michonne, and Daryl) use a revolver, a katana, and a crossbow, respectively. In *Lord of the Rings*, the three hunters (Legolas, Aragorn, and Gimli) use a bow, a sword, and an axe, respectively. Team

members solve problems for their team using their unique talents and perspectives. They fulfill a necessary niche within their team that allows it to achieve its goals. Authors diversify the weapons used by team members in order to illustrate this principle.

Stock weapon types also frequently get paired with stock character types. This phenomenon is well-documented in RPGs³ like the *Diablo* or *Baldur's Gate* video game franchises. In these RPGs, aggressive, brutish, and buff characters wield axes, clubs or other types of crude weaponry. Stoic, aloof, and lean characters wield bows or other long-range weapons. Honest characters use swords, while devious ones use daggers. These archetypes emerge from cultural expectations of what certain weapon wielders should look and act like. For instance, it might make sense to a gamer that an easily-provoked and physically large individual would wield a close-range weapon of substantial size and unrefined construction, considering that they would prefer to take out their anger melee-style on their target without requiring or desiring the elegance of a more sophisticated weapon. The format of these games also does not allow for characters of one class to use weapons meant for characters of another class. In other words, characters are literally hitched to their weapons.

In film and literature, characters generally receive their weapon during the departure phase of the hero's journey, in either the "call to adventure" stage or the "crossing the threshold" stage (Vogler). For instance, in *The Lightning Thief*, the monster Alecto attacks Percy Jackson almost immediately after he first receives his sword Riptide. This incident introduces Percy to the hidden world of Greek Gods and demigods. Similarly, in *A New Hope*, Luke Skywalker receives his lightsaber shortly before stormtroopers kill his

³ Role-playing games

aunt and uncle. This incident pushes the boy into a high-stakes political mission of utmost importance to the galaxy.

Sometimes a character must go through an ordeal in order to obtain their weapon, or the obtainment of the weapon itself serves as their rite-of-passage. An example of this arises within the *Assassin's Creed* video game franchise. Across each iteration of the game, the main character receives a "hidden blade" early on in the playthrough, operable with a flick of the wrist. Their reception of the weapon confirms their status as a member of the brotherhood, the order of assassins. In some versions of the game, the main character has to lose their ring finger in order to use it, a form of initiation which visually identifies their affiliation. In any case, receiving the hidden blade requires the character to commit to their mission and/or pass some sort of trial.

Furthermore, a character can experience literal or figurative rebirth with the obtainment of a weapon. For instance, in the first *Thor* movie, the titular character receives a mortal wound after sacrificing himself for his friends. As he reaches the brink of death, the hammer Mjolnir flies into his hand and revives him. Prior to this event, Thor behaves in an arrogant and selfish manner, resulting in the fettering of his superpowers and the dispossession of his hammer by his father Odin. Due to Thor's selfless act, Odin allows Mjolnir to return to him and restore his strength and immortality. In effect, the egocentric weaponless version of Thor dies and the magnanimous Mjolnir-wielding version of Thor is born.

Granted, even if they do not "die", a character almost always changes or reinvents themselves when they obtain a weapon. For example, Jon Snow (*Game of Thrones*) grows into his authority upon receiving the sword Longclaw. He begins as an outcast within the

Night's Watch but develops into a charismatic figure admired by many of his compatriots. He initially refuses to accept the weapon, but eventually acquiesces, which marks a turning point from his previous identity as a naive boy into a self-assured man. In essence, authors can illustrate the maturation and growth of their characters by establishing relationships between them and their weapons.

Variations

Media that employs the bound-weapon trope generally falls into one of two categories: stories that follow the rules of reality, and stories that do not. Which category a piece of media belongs to determines if the weapon described within possess consciousness or not, and to what extent. It also determines the level to which the weapon can “fuse” with its user. If a story follows the rules of reality, the weapon described within cannot possess consciousness to any extent, and can only “fuse” with its user in a metaphorical sense. In comparison, stories that do not follow the rules of reality have many more avenues to go down when outlining how the relationship between a character and their weapon works.

Characters like Indiana Jones (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*) and Daryl Dixon (*The Walking Dead*) hold affection for and are highly skilled at using their respective weapons (the whip and the crossbow). Despite both of their stories containing fantastical elements, neither character bonds with their weapon on a metaphysical level, or receives special powers as a result of using it. If they break or lose their weapons, they could easily replace them with new versions that behave in the same way. Other characters could use their weapons freely without having to make the weapons accept their dominion. Essentially,

the fact that Jones and Dixon use the weapons is the only thing that makes them special. These principles hold true for most other bound-weapon stories wherein the narrative obeys the laws of reality.

Bound-weapon stories that defy the laws of reality often convey a level of physical or spiritual convergence between the character and their weapon. For example, different Greek traditions maintain different levels of assimilation between Zeus and the lightning bolt. In some traditions, Zeus physically manifests as the lightning bolt. In others, Zeus throws it like a heavenly spear. Others still suggest that he rides it down to earth like a charioteer (Macedo, 1). In this case, the bolt is an aspect of Zeus: while authors may depict it as performing duties for him, he and the bolt are actually one and the same. In general, fantasy weapons also only prove useful to one person. The weapons may work less effectively or not at all when other characters attempt to claim them. In addition, if one counterpart in the weapon-user alliance gets injured, so may the other. These premises hold true in *Lord of the Rings*, where use of the one ring by anyone other than Sauron “immediately seems like a precarious interruption of its rightful owner’s dominion over it” (Robinson, 411). The ring eventually corrupts whoever uses it until it falls back into Sauron’s hands. Furthermore, if one destroys the ring, Sauron will also die. This likens the weapon to a “heart kept outside the body” (Robinson, 412).

Finally, bound-weapon stories that defy the laws of reality also often relay to these objects a certain level of consciousness. In *Game of Thrones*, the weapons of house Targaryen (dragons) are literally alive. The animals have personalities which suit or complement those of their riders. A rider must prove their competence and worthiness to a dragon before it allows them to take advantage of its capabilities, meaning that it possesses

the ability to interpret information and make decisions. Similarly, wizards in the *Harry Potter* series must prove their affinity with magic and receive a character evaluation from a wand in order for it to “decide” if it will allow them to use it. They also perform and react to spellcasting in different ways, indicating that each of them have distinct personalities, despite their technical definition as inanimate objects. Other examples of weapons with personalities include some of the stands in the *Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure* franchise. As mentioned previously, stands are humanoid physical manifestations of their user’s life energy. The level of sentience of each stand depends upon the character quirks of the user. Users with greater will can possess more powerful, more animated, or more dimensional stands than others. For instance, a fully-sentient stand called Spice Girl belongs to a character called Trish Una, a considerable player within the franchise. Trish refers to the stand using “she” and “her” pronouns instead of the pronoun “it”, revealing that she recognizes the stand’s animate state. In any case, bound weapons can possess more or less dimensionality depending upon the preference of the author for realism or fantasy.

Conclusion

Characters in media frequently employ distinctive artifacts which reflect some aspect of their temperament, social standing, or ability. When these items get removed from their owners’ possession, they may lose their significance or utility. In the action genre, a weapon typically serves as the object in question. This trope—the embodiment of one’s personality as a weapon, appears within a multitude of incredibly popular franchises and historical narratives. Despite the bound-weapon trope’s origins in global mythology and

folklore, contemporary authors continue to modify it to accommodate shifting preferences. The trope gets reused frequently because it presents writers with a means to incorporate elements of reinvention, rebirth, and rite-of-passage into their works. It also fulfills the narrative need for characters to distinguish themselves from each other, and can indicate at which stage a character resides in their hero's journey. A weapon's level of sentience and how much it merges with its owner constitute the two primary ways the trope differs from application to application. Ultimately, the bound-weapon trope is well-loved by authors and audiences alike, and is unlikely to disappear from media anytime soon.

SECTION II: SCREENPLAY

Sword Angel

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INT. ABANDONED BARN - NIGHT

VALENTINE (18ish, female) kneels in the center of a damp, hay-strewn barn floor, an old broken sword clasped in both hands.

Shivering violently, her ragged breaths create white clouds in the still air. Dirt and dried blood stain her tattered clothes. As her eyes slide over the dilapidated walls, scurrying rats, and partially collapsed ceiling, her face crumples in despair.

The night sounds dissipate as her focus turns to the weapon in her hands. Panting fast and shallow, she lifts the sword and rotates it towards herself.

Face screwed up in anguish, she drives it down into her chest.

Blood leaks from her mouth and spreads from the stab point. Her hands fall from the hilt, her head tilts back, and her eyes stare straight up.

Gold light seeps out of the wound.

Valentine looks back down in surprise at the sword in her chest, replacing her hands on the hilt.

Gasping, she pulls the sword out of herself. The missing pieces rematerialize out of light. The plain handle shifts and transforms into an ornate form.

Blood remains but the hole in her chest closes. Her body casts a shadow on the cracked barn walls.

Glowing sword in hand, Valentine falls to her side and passes out. The glow dims as a semi-transparent golden figure emerges from the sword.

Kneeling, the figure places Valentine's head in their lap. They rest their hand on Valentine's head. Valentine's breathing becomes slow and even, tension draws out of her face, and she stops shivering.

EXT. SNOWY CLEARING - SUNSET

Valentine stands in a snow-covered field, both hands gripping the hilt of an old sword (the same as before but unbroken). Wind whips through the rips in her snow, dirt, and blood-crusting clothing.

Four HUNTERS (male, 18-40), two DOGS, and PARTY LEADER (male, 30-40) encircle her. The hunters hold swords and torches.

In the distance, the abandoned barn pokes out of the snow. The sun sinks down on the other side of the clearing.

All of the Hunters (with the exception of Party Leader) and Dogs attack Valentine at once.

Valentine receives a number of punches, burns, bites, slashes and scratches, but ultimately emerges victorious from the whirl of blood and blades.

After she finishes off the fourth Hunter, she turns to face Party Leader, the final boss.

He advances, sword drawn.

Valentine uses the back of her hand to wipe blood off her face, then adjusts her stance to meet him.

His blows land with greater power and finesse than the other Hunters. He drives Valentine backwards, but she manages to block everything he throws at the last second.

Sensing an opening, Valentine knocks Party Leader back and clips his shoulder. The duelists separate and catch their breath.

Party Leader readjusts his grip, then charges at Valentine with renewed fervor.

He hacks at her unwaveringly until she stumbles onto her knees.

He almost skewers her with a vicious jab, but she parries his blade to the side, where it cleaves a gash in the ground. In the process, her sword shatters. Only a dagger-sized jagged fragment remains attached to the hilt.

Off-balance, Party Leader awkwardly lifts his sword again for another strike.

Opportunity spotted, Valentine lunges forward, stabbing the broken blade into his femoral artery and giving it a nice twist.

Party Leader howls in pain. The stabbing causes his backswing to change trajectory. The pommel of his sword slams into Valentine's head. Her hand wrenches the broken sword out of his leg as she falls backwards.

PARTY LEADER

You bitch.

He lurches towards Valentine, who lies on her back in the snow. She lets out a groan and lifts herself up onto her elbows. Blood gushes from her head wound.

PARTY LEADER

I won't die without you.

Towering over her, he drives his sword down towards her chest.

In a last-ditch effort, Valentine uses the crossguard of her broken sword to knock his to the side.

She manages to divert it just enough that it slices the outside of her arm. She lets out a small cry as it pierces her skin.

Hunched over her, Party Leader tries to pull the sword out of the ground/her arm.

Gritting her teeth, Valentine slides her arm up the blade and grabs on to Party Leader's hair. Her other arm swings the broken sword into his neck.

Party Leader gurgles. Valentine yanks the blade out again.

His body collapses on top of her.

Breathing heavily, Valentine stares straight up into the sky. Snow lands in her eyelashes as her breathing eases.

Slowly, painfully, Valentine rolls Party Leader's corpse off of herself and rises.

She ignores the destruction and turns to face the abandoned barn.

The last segment of the sun dips below the horizon.

Wrapping her arms around herself, Valentine staggers in its direction.

The falling snow rapidly erases the blood and death she leaves behind.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - SUNSET

A sea of evergreens sprawls on for what seems like forever. Falling snow settles onto the trees' branches and forms a blanket of white over the needle-strewn ground.

Valentine sprints through the frozen forest, mouth open and gasping for air. Her eyes well with tears. Snow crusts her bloody, dirty, and torn clothing.

SHOUTING and DOGS BARKING echo in the distance. Torch lights flicker through the trees.

Valentine's wide eyes glint in the encroaching darkness.

EXT. WINTER VALLEY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A layer of frost coats the withered vegetation poking out of the rocky soil.

HUNTER 1 (male, 18-40) screams at Valentine, his sword raised. No sound comes from his mouth. He advances toward her in slow motion.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - SUNSET (END FLASHBACK)

Valentine approaches the bank of a small river. Snow streams down from the sky.

She wades into the water without hesitation.

She gasps sharply and screws up her face but never stops moving.

EXT. WINTER VALLEY- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Hunter 1 advances toward Valentine in slow motion. A whistle/horn attached to a string hangs from around his neck.

The clean and uninjured Valentine uses one hand to push RUUS (male, 10-12) behind her. She holds her sword in the other hand.

Her actions also proceed at an abnormally slow pace. Her mouth moves as she shouts a command to Ruus, but no sound comes out.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - SUNSET (END FLASHBACK)

Scrunching her shoulders above her ears, Valentine attempts to keep her arms above the water. Blood stains the sleeve of her coat in the shape of a bite mark.

She crosses the river and resumes sprinting on the other side.

EXT. WINTER VALLEY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Hunter 1 advances toward Valentine in slow motion. HUNTER 2 (male, 18-40) stands behind him and to his side, holding the leash to DOG 1.

Dog 1 growls and barks (in slow motion) but makes no sound.

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - SUNSET (END FLASHBACK)

The trees thin out around Valentine as she trudges onward.

She finds herself in a clearing, the sun slowly sinking on the other side. A derelict barn in the distance stands out against the flat white landscape.

She leaves behind heavy tracks in the thick layer of fresh snow.

EXT. WINTER VALLEY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Hunter 1 lunges at Valentine in slow motion.

His corpse lies on the cold grey ground.

Hunter 2 yells a command (no sound) and Dog 1 pounces (also in slow motion).

Their corpses also lie on the cold grey ground.

EXT. SNOWY CLEARING - SUNSET (END FLASHBACK)

Valentine doggedly plods on in the direction of the barn, chest heaving.

The SHOUTING and BARKING increase in volume.

She glances backwards to witness that the flickering torch lights have gotten brighter.

An expression of resignation settles onto her face as she turns back towards the barn. She slows to a walk and allows her breath to even out.

Four Hunters, two Dogs, and Party Leader emerge from the tree line in the distance behind her.

Valentine closes her eyes.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Valentine looks down at Ruus. Ruus sits flat on the ground, legs out, hands propping himself up as if he had just fallen down.

Valentine offers her hand to him. Ruus hesitates, then takes it and allows her to lift him up.

EXT. SNOWY CLEARING - SUNSET (END FLASHBACK)

Valentine opens her eyes.

The Hunters, Dogs, and Party Leader form a circle around her.

She unsheathes her sword.

EXT. WINTER VALLEY - DAY

In the center of a grey, rocky, and frost-covered valley, Valentine looks back towards the forest and tightens her grip on her sword. Ruus stands to her side.

Dead brown vegetation shivers in the breeze. Valentine dries her sweaty palms off on her clean and untorn clothes.

Hunter 1, Hunter 2, and Dog 1 melt out of the trees.

They slow to a stop within ten paces of Valentine and Ruus.

VALENTINE

You've been following us since we
crossed the Cut.

Hunter 1 steps forward. His sword hisses as he slides it out of the sheath.

HUNTER 1

You know what we want.

He tilts his head as he stares down at Ruus.

Valentine brandishes her own sword.

VALENTINE

I won't let you have it.

Hunter 2 and Dog 1 approach from behind Hunter 1. Valentine pushes Ruus behind her.

HUNTER 2

You can't fight us all.

Valentine eyes the opposition.

VALENTINE

Three versus one? I'll take my
chances.

Hunter 1 nods his head back towards the bluff.

HUNTER 1

You're not very good at counting.

Hunter 1 lifts the whistle (or horn) attached to the string around his neck to his lips.

Realization dawns on Valentine.

VALENTINE

(to Ruus)

Run. Now. I will follow.

Ruus hesitates.

A loud, eerie sound resonates across the valley.

Dog 1 barks and growls.

Ruus' eyes shine with worry.

RUUS

Can you take them?

Valentine grips her sword.

VALENTINE

Worry about yourself.

The jarring sound echoes out once more.

Valentine gives Ruus another push.

VALENTINE

(to Ruus)

Get out of here! They're coming!

Ruus takes off, fear stamped onto his face. Hunter 1 drops the whistle/horn to his chest and advances towards Valentine.

HUNTER 1

He won't get far.

Hunter 1 lunges. Valentine parries and swipes back. Hunter 1 dodges.

Hunter 2 unclips the leash from Dog 1's collar. It stares at Ruus' back as he runs away.

Valentine tangles with Hunter 1, but she glances over at Hunter 2 and Dog 1.

HUNTER 2

Attack.

The dog shoots off towards Ruus.

VALENTINE

No!

Valentine knocks Hunter 1 back, then tackles the dog. It growls and bites her forearm.

Valentine yelps in pain but stabs Dog 1 in the neck with the sword in her free hand. It whines and its jaw loosens on her arm.

Still partially kneeling on the ground, she shakes the dog off and parries the incoming slash from Hunter 1. The dog's body twitches in the hoary grass.

She stands and backs up. Hunter 2 reaches her. It's now 2v1.

Party Leader appears from over the bluff holding the leash to DOG 2. He sets it on Ruus- it runs towards him.

Valentine notices this happen despite her preoccupation with fighting off Hunter 1 and 2.

VALENTINE

NO!

Dog 2 reaches Ruus and bites his sleeve, dragging him to the ground. Ruus cries out, but draws his sword (it shimmers orange) and smacks Dog 2 away with it.

Valentine kills Hunter 1. She continues to fend off Hunter 2 but attempts to get closer to Ruus and Dog 2.

As Dog 2 engages Ruus, Party Leader approaches them both.

When he comes within range of Ruus, Party Leader calls Dog 2 off. He draws his sword and closes in himself.

Ruus attempts to repel Party Leader's attacks, but is easily subdued. Party Leader knocks Ruus' sword out of his hand and the boy falls to the ground. The sword lands to the side and out of immediate reach by either character.

It returns to looking like a normal sword as soon as it flies out of Ruus' hand.

Distant clangs resound as Valentine duels Hunter 2.

Ruus attempts to crawl away on his back.

Party Leader sheaths his sword and pulls a dagger out from within the folds of his cloak.

Terror takes over Ruus' face. He shrieks.

RUUS

EVA!!

Valentine sees everything.

VALENTINE

NO!

Valentine attacks Hunter 2 with vitality born of desperation. She kills him.

Dog 2 barks at Valentine and attacks, but she slashes it and it falls to the ground. She sprints towards the two remaining figures.

Party leader grabs Ruus by the back of his neck and lifts him up. Ruus flails and struggles uselessly.

Party leader holds him out towards Valentine.

She pauses.

VALENTINE

(under breath)

No...

More Hunters and Dogs emerge from over the bluff.

Party leader slices Ruus' throat.

Valentine wails.

PARTY LEADER

You're next.

He tosses Ruus' body to the side. He glances back at his comrades. He points at Valentine with his dagger.

PARTY LEADER

After her.

Valentine turns and sprints off into the trees on the other side of the valley, choking back tears. Party Leader wipes down his blade and replaces it inside his cloak.

He picks up Ruus' dropped sword.

He considers it, then gently lowers it into a lacquered black box held out to him by one of his subordinates.

The subordinate closes the box and strides off back the way the party came.

A menacing grin spreads over Party Leader's face as he stalks off towards the tree line. Snow begins to fall.

EXT. WINTER FOREST - MORNING

Sunlight filters down through the forest canopy. Birds warble morning songs and flit through the branches.

Valentine and Ruus stroll leisurely through the snowless underbrush.

Ruus passes Valentine as she pauses to check her compass. The compass arrow points due east.

A bird chirps a warning call from above her head, the shrill sound contrasting sharply from the previous peaceful birdsongs.

Valentine glances up at it, then whips her head around to see a cloak vanish behind a distant tree.

VALENTINE

Ruus?

Ruus doesn't look back. Valentine speeds up to close the distance between them.

RUUS

What?

She puts her hand on his back, which makes him realize that something is off.

VALENTINE

We're being followed.

Ruus' eyes widen. He instinctively looks behind Valentine, but spots nothing. The two share an uneasy look, then pick up their walking pace.

EXT. WINTER FOREST RIVERBANK - LATER

A rocky riverbank cuts through the trees. Sunlight shines off the rapidly flowing water.

Valentine warily bends down to fill a canteen with water. Ruus shakes a stone out of his boot, then puts it back on, never taking his eyes off his surroundings.

Rising from the riverbed, Valentine takes a sip from the canteen. She almost drops it when she notices the dark-cloaked figure facing them in the faraway distance.

Ruus follows her gaze. With a sharp intake of breath, he takes a step closer to her.

RUUS

What do we do?

Without taking her eyes off the figure, Valentine retrieves her compass from her belt and flips it open again. The figure is standing due east.

VALENTINE

We go the other way.

She flips the compass closed.

She and Ruus trek onwards in a southeasterly direction.

EXT. WINTER FOREST - LATER

Out of breath, Valentine and Ruus pause as they reach the top of an incline.

Through the trees, two distant figures block their path forward.

Fear creeps onto Ruus face.

RUUS

Now there's two??

Valentine spits on the ground. She opens her compass. Sure enough, the figures have positioned themselves due east.

VALENTINE
They're corralling us.

Ruus chews on the inside of his cheek.

RUUS
What do we do?

Valentine grimaces.

VALENTINE
I don't know.

She shares a glance with Ruus.

VALENTINE
For now, we have no choice but to
keep going.

The pair continue fretfully down the trail.

EXT. WINTER FOREST - LATER

Valentine and Ruus pace on, faces tight with worry. Closer now, but still at a distance, two figures and a dog weave through the trees alongside them.

VALENTINE
(in between breaths)
They're pushing us into the
valley.
They're drawing us out for a
fight.

Ruus struggles to continue at the brisk speed-walking pace Valentine has set, a detail that she notices.

RUUS
How are they so fast?

Valentine frowns.

VALENTINE
I don't know.

RUUS
(in between breaths)
There's still only two. That's
good, right?

Valentine spits again.

VALENTINE
And a dog.

Ruus frowns. He glances back towards the figures, eyes
locking onto the new edition.

The edge of the forest approaches, beyond which lies an
open valley.

VALENTINE
Here, slow down.

Despite his confused expression, Ruus complies immediately.

He gasps for air.

RUUS
They're going to catch us.

Valentine takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly, then
adjusts her belt and cloak.

VALENTINE
I know. I'm going to give them
what they want.

She rolls her shoulders, then touches her sword.

RUUS
Will you kill them?

Valentine pauses.

VALENTINE
Yes. I'll have to.

Valentine and Ruus breach the tree line and head out into
the grey, empty valley.

VALENTINE
(to herself)
We can't run forever.

The two come to a stop at the center of the valley.

Turning back towards the forest, Valentine unsheathes her sword.

Passing it from hand to hand, she wipes her sweaty palms off on her clothes one at a time.

The two hunters and dog materialize from amongst the trees.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Moonlight glints off of dark, sleety cobblestones.

Valentine stands in the brighter part of an alleyway. She extends her hand down to Ruus, who sits on an obscured patch of ground as if he'd just fallen there.

Ruus hesitates, then accepts her help.

His face comes into sharp relief as she lifts him onto his feet and into the light

Doubt knits his brows together. Purple depressions line his undereyes. Children shouldn't be so skinny.

Valentine clears her throat.

VALENTINE

You hungry?

INT. VALENTINE'S LODGINGS - NIGHT

A flickering lantern lights Valentine's sparsely-decorated room. A small, well-kept bed fills up the space, a trunk at the edge.

Ruus sits at the top of the bed devouring hunks of bread and cheese. Valentine watches from her seat at the edge.

VALENTINE

You found the halation in the fields?

Ruus nods and takes another bite.

RUUS

The fallow side. I just started digging. I didn't know what I was looking for.

Valentine gets up from the bed and paces around the room.

VALENTINE

It called out to you?

Ruus touches the sword at his hip.

He swallows and then nods slowly.

RUUS

They came for me when they knew I had it. Said I stole it because it was on noble land.

His eyes prick with tears.

Valentine shakes her head.

VALENTINE

It was the same for me.

The boy jerks upright in surprise.

RUUS

You had a halation!?

Valentine winces.

VALENTINE

Had.

Ruus wipes his eyes.

RUUS

There's no way...

His face pinches with incredulousness.

Valentine shrugs.

RUUS

The last person who promised one died years ago...and the halation died too...

Valentine shrugs again, with more emphasis.

VALENTINE

Had.

Ruus shakes his head in confusion.

RUUS

But that was in Ninevar. You can't be that person. No one survived the blast. I was little, but I remember.

Valentine traces over an old burn scar on her hand.

VALENTINE

And I was the same age as you are now.

Ruus frowns.

RUUS

I don't believe it. There's no way you could-

Valentine steps towards Ruus.

VALENTINE

Listen. I can take you as far as Varis Vayce. From there you should be able to disappear.

Ruus doesn't relax his face.

RUUS

Why are you helping me?

Valentine hesitates.

VALENTINE

Because I wish that someone had helped me.

Ruus doesn't look satisfied with that answer.

Valentine pulls the bed covers back.

VALENTINE

Go to sleep. We need to be gone by
the morning.

Ruus begrudgingly tucks himself into the blankets.

Valentine takes a seat on the floor at the edge of the bed.
She blows out the lantern, relaxes her head against the
side of the mattress, and closes her eyes.

Ruus stares up at the ceiling.

RUUS

If you hadn't found me by chance,
would you have looked for me?

Valentine opens her eyes.

VALENTINE

I... don't know.

Ruus rolls to his side.

RUUS

I see.

He closes his eyes and sinks into a fitful sleep. Silent
tears run down his face as he dreams.

Valentine stares off into the distance, lost in thought.

EXT. CITY STREETS - MORNING

Fog envelops the roads and buildings. The sun just barely
emerges from the horizon. Valentine and Ruus pick their way
through the back alleys until they reach the edge of town.

A forest sprawls out before them.

Valentine and Ruus vanish into the trees without a
backwards glance.

EXT. WINTER FOREST - DAY

Valentine and Ruus trek through the woods. Their breaths
turn to fog in the freezing air.

Ruus breaks the silence.

RUUS
How did your halation die?

Valentine winces.

RUUS
I mean, I guess I already know how
it died- but how did you survive?

Valentine focuses on her next footfalls.

VALENTINE
I got lucky.

Ruus wanders a bit closer to her.

RUUS
Is that all you're going to tell
me?

VALENTINE
Look, it's a long story and I
don't want to tell it to you.

Ruus disregards her uncooperative response.

RUUS
But you knew how to use it, right?
The girl in the story knew how to
use it.

Valentine marches on as if she hasn't heard him.

Ruus purses his lips, gathering his courage.

RUUS
Can you teach me?

Valentine bristles.

VALENTINE
No, I can't.

RUUS
But you haven't even seen Tiago!

Ruus starts to withdraw his sword from the sheath.

Valentine's eyes widen. The sword emits a conspicuous orange glow.

RUUS

I haven't pulled him out since-

VALENTINE

Stop! Put him back!

Ruus flinches and removes his hand from the hilt. The sword slides back into place with a little click and the glow disappears.

VALENTINE

Do you want us to be found?

Ruus scowls.

RUUS

It wasn't that bright. And no one's watching.

Valentine smacks the back of his head.

RUUS

Ow!

She grabs him by the collar.

VALENTINE

You don't know that.

Ruus looks down, cowed. Valentine drops him.

VALENTINE

It would be best if you just got rid of Tiago entirely.

Angered, Ruus stomps through the underbrush.

RUUS

Easy for you to say when you got to use your sword! The girl in the story was really good.

Valentine shakes her head bitterly.

VALENTINE

Then she and her sword both died.

Guilt ripples across Ruus' face.

RUUS

Well what if we get attacked?
What's the point of having one if
I can't use it?

Valentine ignores his question.

VALENTINE

You should throw Tiago in the
river when we get there. Owning a
halation only ever brings
suffering.

Ruus kicks at a pinecone.

RUUS

You know I can't do that.

He touches his sword hilt again.

RUUS

You of all people should
understand.

He drops his hand back to his side and meets Valentine's
eyes.

RUUS

Tiago is my friend.

Valentine softens.

VALENTINE

...I know.

BEAT

Ruus kicks around at other pinecones. He shoots a
discerning glance towards Valentine.

RUUS

...Would they stop chasing me if I
got rid of him?

Valentine pauses. She shakes her head.

VALENTINE

I had to die for them to stop.

Ruus nods.

RUUS

Then don't ask me to do it again.

Valentine pauses, then nods.

BEAT

VALENTINE

...I guess...

Ruus looks up. Valentine clears her throat.

VALENTINE

The first thing you should know is
that your dominant hand goes under
the crossguard and that your
nondominant goes above the
pommel...

Ruus blinks in surprise at the speed of her turnaround.

VALENTINE

...Assuming Tiago is a two-handed
sword, that is...

Instinctively, he motions to pull him out.

VALENTINE

No no nononono....

Valentine catches Ruus' elbow before he fully withdraws
Tiago.

VALENTINE

That's enough for today. I can
teach you something else tomorrow.

Ruus grumbles, but obliges.

RUUS

Fine...but you still have to tell
me what your sword was like.

Valentine hesitates.

RUUS
...If you can.

She sighs.

VALENTINE
Well, I didn't find him the
fields, if that's what you're
wondering...

The party of two plod on, sharing stilted but comfortable conversation.

EXT. WINTER FOREST - NIGHT

The forest vegetation takes on a different appearance.

Valentine and Ruus sleep under a rocky overhang, rain drizzling down just outside where they lay.

EXT. WINTER FOREST - DAY

The forest vegetation takes on a different appearance.

Ruus slips on some mud. Valentine catches him by his collar and yanks him upright.

He flashes her a sheepish smile.

EXT. WINTER FOREST - NIGHT

The forest vegetation takes on a different appearance.

Valentine sparks up a campfire while Ruus collects firewood nearby. He drops off an armful of sticks and twigs beside her just as she manages to get it going.

She mouths thank you to him and he nods back before turning to find more.

EXT. WINTER FOREST - MORNING

The forest vegetation takes on a different appearance.

Birds chirp peacefully above Valentine and Ruus as they stride along.

RUUS

Your name is kind of long. Do you have any nicknames?

He yawns.

RUUS

My name is long too, which is why my brothers call me Ruus.

He pauses.

RUUS

Called me Ruus...

Valentine considers his question.

VALENTINE

You can call me Eva.

Ruus hops along the trail, grinning.

RUUS

Ok, Eva.

Valentine suppresses a small smile.

She flips open her compass. The arrow points due east.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Lanterns hanging from wall sconces light up a dirty barroom. PATRONS converse and take long draughts from mugs of ale.

Valentine hovers around a notice board at the very back of the room. Dog-eared, dated drawings of wanted men cover all available space. She tilts her head sideways and prods at one of them, squinting her eyes.

Conversation abruptly diminishes.

Noticing the change in air pressure, Valentine turns around to witness a number of uniformed KNIGHTS (male, 18-30) enter the tavern.

Conversation resumes as the knights sit down and order a round of drinks.

One of the knights takes a swig from his mug, plunks it back down, and rises from his seat. He brushes past Valentine to tack a fresh poster made of thick, expensive paper to the wall.

The picture is of Ruus.

The script below Ruus' image says "wanted for theft of a halation belonging to house Innisbröde. Reward: 6,000 golds".

Valentine scrutinizes the new poster, then snatches the one she had already been looking at off the wall.

She shares a nod with the barkeep and then strides out of the tavern.

EXT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Sleet sloshes underfoot as Valentine steps outside.

DRUNKS wander the streets, stumbling their way back home.

Another regiment of knights stamps past, dogs trailing by their side.

KNIGHT 1

Clear the way!

An unaware DRUNK almost gets run over.

KNIGHT 1

I said, OUT of the STREET!

The Drunk falls haplessly onto his back, and the regiment continues on their way.

Valentine pulls her hood lower and slinks through the alleyways.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Moonlight glints off the cobblestones. Valentine's shoes make no sound as she slips through the darkness.

Valentine hears another group of knights approach.

Looking around, she ducks into the shadowed arch in between two buildings.

She steps on the foot of the person already hiding there. They intake a sharp breath.

VALENTINE

What the hell!?

Valentine jumps backward into street, in full the view of the oncoming knights. Ruus (the other person in the arch shadow) falls flat on his butt.

His panic-stricken face briefly emerges from the darkness as he looks up at Valentine.

KNIGHT 2

Clear the road!

His eyes widen in fear.

Valentine purses her lips, then turns to face the knights, pretending to be drunk. She totters backwards and leans against one of the buildings.

KNIGHT 2 (male, 18-30) stares at her as he rides past, but Valentine just rolls her head back against the wall as if tired.

She waits until she can't hear them anymore to return to the alleyway.

Ruus hasn't moved from the shadowy spot he where fell on the floor.

They stare at each other for a moment.

VALENTINE

You're the one they're looking for?

Ruus nods slowly.

Valentine extends her hand down to him.


Ruus hesitates, then reaches up to take it.

END

Sword Angel Plot Timeline

Chronological Order

1. Younger Valentine works as a maid in a noble household
2. She finds and promises (bonds with) a halation (a sentient sword)
3. Her employers discover that she has a halation
4. They imprison her and take the sword
5. An ally frees her, then she steals the sword and runs away. The ally gets killed.
6. Nobles corner her, but the sword self-destructs so she can get away
7. Presumed dead, Valentine travels to a different town and constructs a new identity.
8. She works menial jobs at first but then becomes a member of a mercenary company
9. She completes mercenary missions, trains with regular swords, and ages up



Backstory referred to but not included in screenplay


10. Young-adult Valentine meets Ruus (a child on the run) by accident
11. She decides to help him because they share similar pasts
12. Hunters tail Valentine and Ruus as they try to skip town
13. A showdown occurs and Ruus dies because Valentine can't protect him
14. Valentine gets chased by the remainder of the hunting party
15. A huge fight occurs which culminates with Valentine killing the party leader
16. On the verge of death, Valentine creates her own halation



Events described in screenplay

Written Order

1. Younger Valentine works as a maid in a noble household
2. She finds and promises (bonds with) a halation (a sentient sword)
3. Her employers discover that she has a halation
4. They imprison her and take the sword
5. An ally frees her, then she steals the sword and runs away. The ally gets killed.
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9. She completes mercenary missions, trains with regular swords, and ages up



Backstory referred to but not included in screenplay

10. On the verge of death, Valentine creates a halation (a sentient sword)
11. Valentine is attacked by a hunting party. She kills them all, including the party leader.
12. The hunting party chases Valentine as she experiences flashbacks to her first confrontation with the hunters and first impression of Ruus
13. Valentine fails to save Ruus during a confrontation with the hunters. He dies.
14. Hunters tail Valentine and Ruus as they try to skip town.
15. Valentine decides to help Ruus (a child on the run) because they share similar pasts
16. Young-adult Valentine meets Ruus by accident



Events described in screenplay

Personal Reflection

The image of a girl pulling a glowing sword out of her chest in a cold and dirty barn came to me sometime in my sophomore year of college (2022), probably as a reflection of my love for swords, fantasy media, and imagining myself out of painful scenarios. I liked the idea that a person's hopes and dreams and desires could manifest as a weapon they could use to confront a cruel world. At the time, I didn't conceptualize the mechanics of how the girl's sword was created, and I probably won't ever try to explain whatever magic caused it to come into existence. I just knew that by befriending this weapon the girl would be befriending a version of herself.

Despite wanting to develop the image into a story, I didn't try to do that until I was tasked with writing this thesis. I originally conceptualized the narrative as much longer, but condensed some events for the purposes of this submission. I didn't get to develop the friendship between Valentine and her sword in this version of *Sword Angel*, but I hope that an opportunity for me to do that will arise in the future. I'm not sure if I want to keep calling the sentient swords "halations" or say that a person "promises" them when they enter into a partnership with them, but overall I like what I came up with, even if I end up changing elements of it. *Sword Angel* isn't over for me, but I'm glad that I got to share a part of it with you.

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