

TOBY'S WAR (by KEITH DAVIDSON)

FADE IN:

EXT. GLOOMY FOREST - DAY

WIND HOWLS through gnarled trees as two dozen riders snake down a winding path, HOOVES THUMPING on sodden earth.

Sporadic shafts of light slice through dense canopy, glinting off black armor and shields embossed with a Red Eagle.

Under dark cloaks, glimpses of twisted, deformed bodies. Hideous faces peek out from cowls. Mutants in shining armor.

The path spills into a sunlit clearing. TUSKER, a monstrous knight with two horn-like teeth jutting grotesquely out, gives a signal, and the men fan out along the edge of the woods, wary of being seen.

Tusker surveys the route ahead -- a fortified log-and-stone outpost guards the trail into the mountains. A green flag with a gold lion flutters from a tower.

The huge reinforced gates are wide open. Inside, peasants mill about in a small market, unaware of the danger.

Tusker raises his battle-axe. His men draw their weapons. With an evil leer, he swings his axe down.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY (LONDON 1941)

A ruler WHACKS a desk, startling its occupant, TOBY PENDLETON, 12. His heart sinks as his ENGLISH MASTER reaches past HAMLET and snatches a dog-eared BOY'S OWN PAPER magazine off his lap.

ENGLISH MASTER

And what have we this time, Master Pendleton?

He looks at the cover with disdain -- a vivid depiction of a fearsome band of knights in black armor. A banner reads "THE SHIELD OF THORIN - CHAPTER 7".

ENGLISH MASTER (CONT'D)

"The Shield of Thorin". One of the Bard's lesser-known works, is it? Alas, no, it's by one Ed Plonten.

Snickers from the other boys.

ENGLISH MASTER (CONT'D)
 Silence, you miserable vermin!
 You plead for a story with
 excitement, I give you Henry V.
 The Battle of Agincourt -- English
 knights fighting against
 overwhelming odds. And yet...

He swats Toby with the magazine.

ENGLISH MASTER (CONT'D)
 "How sharper than a serpent's tooth
 it is to have a thankless child."

A blank look from Toby.

ENGLISH MASTER (CONT'D)
 King Lear, you ignorant lout!
 Very well, finish Henry V as
 homework, and we shall spend the
 remainder of today's lesson on...
Latin.

Toby grimaces. Groans from the others. As the Master turns to the chalkboard, Toby is assaulted by a barrage of projectiles. He remains stoic, accustomed to the abuse.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Boys stream from the school, laughing and play-fighting. Toby runs out alone, carrying his book-bag and "flying" a model Spitfire. He rounds a corner and stops dead -- three large boys from his class are waiting for him.

EXT. LONDON BACK STREETS - DAY

Toby bolts down the street, the boys in pursuit.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Two boys pin Toby to a wall as the ringleader grabs his plane.

TOBY
 My dad gave me that! He's a pilot!

RINGLEADER
 Yeah? This is your dad flying!

He flings it in the air. It nosedives and SMACKS on the ground. The bullies run off, laughing. Toby stares at the broken plane, distraught.

INT. TOBY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Music plays softly on the radio. At the dining room table, Toby intently watches his DAD glue the plane back together.

DAD

...and these plates are so thick,
even flak can't damage the engine.
So don't you worry yourself.
I'm far more likely to get hurt
playing cricket with the lads.

Dad notices Toby's MUM hovering, spurring him on with a look.

DAD (CONT'D)

You know, Toby, when I was your
age, I didn't get along with some
of the other boys at school. I --

TOBY

There's a new display of medieval
armor at the Tower. Can we go?

DAD

Don't you ever tire of that place?

Toby shakes his head. Dad tries another tack.

DAD (CONT'D)

You know, I doubt Hitler would have
gone to war if he'd thought all the
other leaders would stand up to him
like Mr. Churchill has. And look
what's happened to them, trying to
appease the little monster. I
guess the lesson there is you've
got to stand up against bullies,
even if you don't think you'll win.

TOBY

But those countries were smaller.
And outnumbered.

DAD

As are we. But sometimes one must
fight regardless. The consequences
of not fighting can be even worse.

Toby doesn't want to hear it. Dad's attention is suddenly on the radio. He turns it up.

BBC ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 ...little is known of Hitler's
 mystery battleship, other than it
 is said to be larger and more
 powerful than any previously built.
 Locating the Bismarck --

A flash of surprise from Dad.

BBC ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 -- has become top priority for the
 Royal Navy. In other war news...

Dad switches it off. He and Mum stare at one another in
 disbelief. The RINGING PHONE jolts them. Mum answers.

MUM
 Hulloo?

Her expression darkens. She covers the mouthpiece and
 whispers:

MUM (CONT'D)
 It's him.

Dad hesitates, then takes the phone.

DAD
 Hulloo, Arthur. How are -- ...
 Yes, I've only just heard. ...
 But honestly, it was only a matter
 of time before they named a ship
 after him. ... Oh, all right,
 I'll call my friend at the War
 Office. But I seriously --

Arthur has already hung up. Toby watches, curious, as Dad
 deliberates. He starts dialing, but Mum pulls the phone away.

MUM
 Don't you dare risk your reputation
 on that man. I don't care if he is
 your cousin, he's barking mad.

Dad stares at the phone, not sure what to do.

INT. TOBY'S ROOM - NIGHT

A wood match flares and moves along a row of plastic knights,
 melting their faces. Toby blows it out, then adds these
 "mutants" to an impressive diorama -- black knights laying
 siege to a castle flying a green flag with a gold lion.

Toby hurries a knight along the battlements to the King.

TOBY
Your Highness, Eldritch has
reinforcements! Without the Sword,
we're doomed! Unless...

Toby ROARS his Spitfire over the castle and STRAFES the enemy.
A CREAK from above interrupts, arousing his curiosity.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

With a flashlight, Toby climbs the attic stairs. He sees his Dad rooting through a trunk under the glow of a lantern. Dad pulls a paper from a red folder and stares at it. Toby moves closer to see.

It's a sketch of a huge battleship. It's at an odd angle, as though half-sunk. Bold Germanic letters on the bow read BISMARCK. Details and measurements fill the side of the page.

TOBY
Dad?

DAD
Not now, Toby.

Clutching the sketch, Dad hurries out. Toby is drawn to the red folder. He opens it, revealing a yellowed newspaper clipping:

MISSING SIX WEEKS, LLYWYLN MAN FOUND

Local mason Arthur Pendleton, who disappeared forty days ago while working at Llywyln Castle, was this morning found wandering outside the castle grounds in a state of shock. When questioned by a local constable, Mr. Pendleton proved incoherent and was subsequently taken to the Cassandra Road Mental Hospital. His previous whereabouts are being investigated.

Toby hears his Dad talking excitedly downstairs.

INT. TOBY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Toby sneaks halfway down the stairs and peers through the bannisters at his Dad on the phone.

DAD
Yes, I realize you can't give out
that sort of information, so I'll
give it to you.
(MORE)

DAD (CONT'D)

As soon as I say something that isn't correct, you just hang up the phone.

(referring to the sketch)

She has eight 15" guns in four twin turrets, two forward and two aft. And three bow anchors. ... Two swastikas painted on the deck, fore and aft, in large red circles.

Still no response. He glances at Mum. She's spooked.

DAD (CONT'D)

There's a double catapult launch for two float planes. They look to be Arados. ... Are you there? ... No, it's not a photograph. You'd better send a car 'round.

He hangs up, staring at Mum in disbelief. As they talk in low voices, Toby can only make out snippets of conversation.

MUM

...But how could he have known? He sent you those fifteen years ago. ...hadn't been built yet.

DAD

I don't know!... can't have been a lucky guess... all those details... Of course I don't believe his story... Maybe he's psychic.

MUM

Psychotic, you mean. No wonder they locked him up. That wild fantasy of his --

DAD

Keep your voice down.

They lower their voices, and Toby can't hear. Then his Dad spreads something across the table. Toby shifts for a better view -- the stair CREAKS. He shrinks back from the light.

DAD (CONT'D)

Toby? Come here, Son.

MOMENTS LATER

Huddled over the map, Toby follows his Dad's finger to the east coast of Sweden, in the Baltic Sea.

DAD

She was spotted two days ago, here. Now, our best chance is to ambush her in the Straights of Denmark before she can reach the open sea. Only nobody knows where she is now.

TOBY

Is that going to be your next mission? To find the Bismarck?

Dad puts his finger to his lips and gives a wink.

TOBY (CONT'D)

Do you have to go? Won't it be dangerous?

DAD

It's war, Toby. Mustn't shirk our duty.

Dad leaves. Toby spots something poking from under the map. He pulls it out. The sketch of the Bismarck. There's also a sketch in the bottom corner -- Tusker. Toby is astonished.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Toby reopens the red folder and sifts through the contents. He pulls out a letter on Cassandra Road Mental Hospital stationery.

My Dear Mr. Pendleton,

I am writing on behalf of your cousin Arthur. Although his condition is much improved, he is still obsessing about a battleship that apparently played a major part in his hallucinations.

As Arthur mentioned you had connections in the Admiralty, I was hoping you might make an inquiry on his behalf. Obviously any inquiry from Arthur risks being treated with ridicule. I have enclosed some of his sketches.

Yours Very Truly,
Nurse R. Lipton

Toby looks under the letter and finds a letter from the Admiralty.

Dear Bill,

Regarding your recent inquiry, our records indicate there is no German battleship named Bismarck, and certainly nothing near the size nor armament you mentioned. Hope this puts your mind at ease. I'll ring soon to set up some bridge with the wives.

Cheers,
Bob

Toby checks the date -- 1926.

Underneath, more Bismarck sketches. Then he pulls out some pages bound with string. His eyes go wide as he sees the cover has sketches of Tusker and mutant knights from "The Shield of Thorin".

He opens it to find the first page crammed with tiny writing. Almost no white space. The scrawl of a madman. Flipping to the next page, a loose sketch slides out.

It's of a man standing in a reflecting pool -- a ten-by-twenty-foot pond enclosed by a two-foot high stone wall. Written at the bottom: "I was transported through the pool!"

Toby is wide-eyed with wonder.

INT. TOBY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Toby searches his collection of Boy's Own Paper magazines, pulls out an issue and lays it on his desk beside the sketch.

The cover has the same illustration of a man in a reflecting pool, only in color and more detailed. A banner at the bottom reads: "Featuring Chapter One of THE SHIELD OF THORIN."

He opens the issue he's now reading and runs his finger across the first page to "Story by Ed Plonten." He's puzzled. SQUEALING BRAKES outside get his attention.

Hurrying to the window, Toby sees his Dad kiss his Mum goodbye. Dad spots Toby at the window.

DAD

Back in a few days, Toby. Watch after your mother while I'm gone.

He climbs into a waiting army lorry. Toby tucks the sketch into his magazine and races out.

EXT. TOBY'S HOUSE & STREET - NIGHT

As the lorry pulls away, Toby charges out the door.

TOBY
Wait! Dad! Dad!

Toby chases it down the street until the tail lights vanish. He gives up, catching his breath. A shrill AIR RAID SIREN starts to wail. Windows go dark. People hurry into the street. Toby looks up as searchlights slice across the sky.

EXT. TOWER OF LONDON - NIGHT

A pair of Spitfires fly over the two pinnacled Gothic towers of the Tower Bridge.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Toby watches the Spitfires ROAR past, then he turns for home. As he fights the current of people heading for the Whitechapel Underground station, a Red Cross NURSE bumps into him.

NURSE
Hullo, Toby! No time to waste!

TOBY
But my mum --

She half-pulls him into the entrance.

EXT. TOBY'S ROW HOUSE - NIGHT

Silhouetted in the light from her open door, Toby's Mum scans the people streaming past. A BLACKOUT WARDEN limps up.

WARDEN
Putting out a welcome mat for the
Fuhrer are we, Mae?

She looks at him, not comprehending. He reaches in, flicks off the lights and shuts the door. He takes her by the arm.

MUM
I have to wait for my Toby.

WARDEN
He'll know where you are.

He leads her away. She pulls free and goes back to the house.

INT. WHITECHAPEL UNDERGROUND STATION - NIGHT

Toby picks his way through the throngs of people playing cards, eating, sleeping. People grow apprehensive at the RUMBLE OF DISTANT BOMBING. At the WHITECHAPEL STATION sign Toby nestles under an EMERGENCY box and opens his magazine.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Tusker lowers his battle-axe. Mutants surge forward.

EXT. THORIN OUTPOST - DAY

Outside the gates, a girl plays with a half-melted doll. Behind her, families buy goods at a market in the compound.

The ground RUMBLES. The girl looks across the clearing.

A horde of dark knights stampede toward her.

IN THE GUARD TOWER

A SENTRY panics.

SENTRY

Wastelanders! Wastelanders!

He cranks a rusted siren. The WAILING ALARM sends people scurrying for weapons. Green-tunicked knights race to swing the gates shut. A shower of arrows cuts them down.

Frozen in terror, the girl clutches her doll. Tusker rides past, swinging his axe.

The doll's head bounces onto the ground.

The outpost gates are almost shut -- but Tusker bursts through and hacks down a Thorin knight. Behind him, mutants flood in.

The battle is brutal and short. The knights are overwhelmed.

As the outpost is put to the torch, Tusker observes the carnage with a look of perverse pleasure.

INT. WHITECHAPEL UNDERGROUND STATION - NIGHT

Toby looks up from his magazine as the bombing grows louder. Card games stop. People put down books. Boom. BOOM. BOOM.

Lights flicker. Dust and debris drop onto frightened Londoners. The tunnel seems on the verge of collapse. Then, silence.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The ALL-CLEAR SIREN fades as people pour from the Underground. Toby climbs onto a pile of sandbags and surveys the damage. German bombers found their mark -- houses are ablaze. The Fire Brigade works feverishly to put out the flames.

Toby gazes down the street. A look of horror washes over him. He races breathlessly along the walk, his fears mounting.

He slows at his house. All that's left is smoldering rubble. Something holds his gaze --

-- sticking out from under a pile of debris is his mother's arm. As men rush to uncover her, Toby stares in horror.

INT. PADDINGTON STATION - DAY

A SHRILL TRAIN WHISTLE echoes through the station. Children with names and destinations pinned to school uniforms kiss teary parents goodbye. In the midst of the pandemonium, Toby is an island of gloom.

The Nurse pins a hastily-written card to his blazer --
ARTHUR PENDLETON, LLYWYLN, WALES.

NURSE

...You know your mum can't take care of you until she's well. Once they locate your father, he'll sort it all out. Until then, you'll be safe with this cousin of his.

TOBY

But I've never even met him.
(reads the card)
He doesn't even live in a proper town -- there's no vowels in it.

Hoisting his suitcase, she leads Toby to the train. He climbs on board. As the train pulls away, Toby watches parents wave goodbye to their children. It's a struggle not to cry.

END OF SAMPLE PAGES. TO READ THE ENTIRE SCRIPT, CONTACT KEITH DAVIDSON: keith@keithdavidson.com 613-722-9230

TO READ OTHER SCRIPT SAMPLES, VISIT KEITH'S WEBSITE: www.keithdavidson.com