

DUNGEON TALES

(PILOT)

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FADE IN...

A gorgeous night sky, clear and full of stars. The distant sound of a THUNDEROUS WATERFALL is heard. All appears well until, to the right of frame, GREEN GLOWING CLOUDS begin to seep in and overtake the stars. A SLOW PAN following the clouds while adjusting to eye level reveals a coming storm which spreads as far as the eye can see. We're - -

EXT. DARGARON OUTPOST/ DEADLAND OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

The RUINS of the once great outpost sit along a tall winding cliff which goes on for miles. A dense MIST covers the inside of the cliff, masking its underside. The pathway ahead of the outpost leads through a second arched cliff, set above the first and separated by a wide plain. The second cliff bears the towering waterfall we hear. It feeds a great river which pours over the lower cliff.

We are atop the INNER WALL of the outpost. A fastened ROPE lays over the wall's edge. It begins to wiggle. A HAND slams over the wall and a CLERIC dressed in brown robes pulls himself up. He hurriedly runs up the stone steps.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING QUARTERS/ DARGARON OUTPOST - NIGHT

The weathered building is not fully enclosed, allowing the gusty wind to creep in. The cleric enters the quarters and goes to a WOODEN COT in the corner, where another man lays asleep. He shakes him by the shoulder.

CLERIC

Lugus! Lugus you must wake!

LUGUS (loog-iss), LATE-THIRTIES, a former knight turned diplomat, awakens from an uncomfortable slumber.

LUGUS

What is it?

CLERIC

Another's taken ill.

LUGUS

Where is he?

CLERIC

He rode off in the night.

LUGUS

Who was on watch?

CLERIC

It's the watchman who's gone, sir.

Lugus jumps out of the cot.

CUT TO:

EXT. DARGARON OUTPOST ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

TWO CLERICS and TWO SOLDIERS sit around a fire. They appear worn and discouraged from their arduous journey. Lugus is fastening his SWORD BELT as he and the cleric descend the stairs to the entryway.

LUGUS

Why aren't you out looking for him?!

The men around the fire stand up as a soldier speaks.

SOLDIER #1

It's too dangerous. We've no idea how far he's gotten.

One of the clerics looks up at the green clouds.

CLERIC #2

It's never reached the outpost before.

LUGUS

Damned fools!

Lugus strides to his horse and removes its tether.

CLERIC #3

Fools?!

CLERIC #2

Fools for following a fool, perhaps.

SOLDIER #2

We're not crossing the fall.

Lugus mounts his horse.

LUGUS

Then you're cowards as well.

SOLDIER #1

He's gone, Lugus.

LUGUS

Open the bloody gate!

SOLDIER #2

Suit yourself, then.

The only cleric still loyal to Lugus prepares his horse as the soldiers remove the BRACE from the main gate. The other two clerics plead with their colleague.

CLERIC #3

It's beyond us. It always was.

CLERIC #2

Don't go with him.

The cleric defiantly rides past them and follows Lugus.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD TO THE FALL/ CLIFF - NIGHT

Lugus and the cleric swiftly ride along the cliff's pathway. The deeper they go, the denser the hue of the green shadow becomes.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FALL/ CLIFF - NIGHT

The two men ride through a cavity in the cliff, bracing through the deafening sound of the fall's plunge.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCKY VALLEY/ DEADLAND OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

There is no longer any blue in the sky. The fog and tricky labyrinth of rocks has forced the men to dismount and continue on foot. They cautiously walk their horses with little knowledge of what surrounds them.

CLERIC

We'll never find him in this.

LUGUS

We must go higher.

Suddenly, they hear a horse's neigh, compelling Lugus to follow the sound. He stumbles through the wet, slippery ground until he sees the shadow of a scared horse. Lugus grabs its reins and pets the animal.

LUGUS (CONT'D)

It's Veron's.

The cleric reaches him. They realize the fog is beginning to dissipate, revealing a BRIDGE OF BONES that crosses a deep ravine. Lugus walks to the foot of the bridge.

LUGUS (CONT'D)

He went this way.

CLERIC

Don't tell me we're crossing that thing.

Lugus tests the bridge's stability.

LUGUS

The horses won't make it.

CLERIC

I'll tie them off.

LUGUS

Don't. They're loyal. They'll stay if they can.

He begins carefully traversing the decrepit bridge. The fearful cleric follows.

CLERIC

This wasn't built to take a man's weight.

TIME CUT:

EXT. BONE BRIDGE/ DEADLANDS - NIGHT

The men are halfway across the bridge.

CLERIC

Why didn't you answer when I asked if you've seen one?

LUGUS

(2 beats)

I'm not sure if I was dreaming.

CLERIC

Some say that's how the illness
takes hold. It reveals your death,
then offers an alternative.

(no response)

Is that what you saw? You believe
you know where you'll die?

(no response)

Bodes well for me. I doubt you
would've come if it were here.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP/ DEADLANDS - NIGHT

The eerie swamp contains dead and poisonous vegetation. Lugus
treads through the mud while the cleric follows.

LUGUS

Don't look into the water.

As they move through the foggy wetlands, the cleric does his
best to avoid looking, but can't help taking a few glances.
The water reflects the glowing night sky rather clearly. In
the corner of his eye, the cleric sees the reflection of a
GREEN SHOOTING STAR in the water. He looks up to the sky, yet
the star isn't there. Lugus wades through the marsh and sees
boot-prints in the mud. He crouches down.

LUGUS (CONT'D)

These are fresh. He's close.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP/ DEADLANDS - LATER

They've passed another mile through the swamp. Lugus stops in
his tracks and places his hand on the cleric's chest,
ensuring he does the same. The cleric eagerly listens,
waiting to hear or see what has halted Lugus. We begin to
hear a man mumbling incoherently. The fog is still a
hindrance, but they go to the voice. It loudens as they press
on. A Shadow appears in the fog. The cleric gasps and is
about to call to it just as LUGUS CUPS HIS MOUTH and pulls
him behind a nearby DEAD TREE. The cleric knows to keep his
mouth shut as Lugus releases him. They keep low while peering
around the tree.

TWO GREEN APPARITIONS walk through the fog and encircle
VERON, who is clearly out of sorts. He is pale and sickly.
The apparitions appear female.

Their green essence exudes human features and holds together a real HUMAN BONE STRUCTURE which they could function without, but wouldn't be able to make significant physical contact with living beings.

APPARITION #1

We know your name...

APPARITION #2

He is Veron, son of Thornon.

APPARITION #1

We know what's in your heart...

Apparition #2 places her hand over Veron's heart as they continue to circle him. There is a green glint in his eyes.

APPARITION #2

Honor, strength, and love.

APPARITION #1

We know your thoughts...

APPARITION #2

They go to his family, fearful he may never see them again. A wife and child whose thoughts are, in turn, with him.

APPARITION #1

Such a man...

APPARITION #2

Such a man he is.

APPARITION #1

Then why does he come to us?

APPARITION #2

Because there is more. So much more, sister. I feel it.

APPARITION #1

Why does death seduce him so?

Apparition #2 places her hand in front of Veron's eyes and connects her essence to his.

APPARITION #2

There is lust in him. Insatiable lust. And fear. So much fear. He hides an unbearable shame.

APPARITION #1

We hold not your tongue Veron, son
of Thornon. Tell me, is it us whom
you truly fear?

VERON

I fear... A child.

APPARITION #1

What is a harmless child to a
proven warrior?

APPARITION #2

A bastard born of a whore.

APPARITION #1

And the brimming judgement of
others lays not dormant.

APPARITION #2

The child's mother threatens ruin
while his fatherly duties conflict
such an honest heart.

APPARITION #1

Despite the different paths you may
choose, in the end, you will lose
everything.

APPARITION #2

His fear turns, sister.

APPARITION #1

Where does it turn?

APPARITION #2

He may harm the child and mother.
But after these thoughts fester,
there is naught but shame.

APPARITION #1

Then it is guilt, not affection,
that stays his hand.

APPARITION #2

You wish to be free of this guilt.

APPARITION #1

And death will free him. That is
why he has come.

As the cleric watches the startling spectacle, he is allured
by a small POOL OF WATER next to him. He takes a glance at
the water and sees his reflection.

Remembering Lugus' advice, he quickly turns away. The unnerving desire returns and he slowly turns to look. To his shock, the cleric's reflection no longer mirrors his movements and has been STARING AT HIM. His reflection smiles, then extends a welcoming hand to the cleric who refuses to oblige. The reflection appears upset. He now scolds the cleric and as he does, the reflection's flesh begins to rot very rapidly. The ghastly reflection shrieks and jumps at the cleric, who screams. Lugus grabs the cleric by the shoulders and pulls him back.

LUGUS

I told you not to look!

It appears only the cleric heard his reflection's shriek, but the apparitions heard his subsequent scream. Lugus draws his sword and strides fearlessly towards the female apparitions.

APPARITION #2

Men have come, sister.

APPARITION #1

Why have you come to our lands?

LUGUS

Unhand him!

APPARITION #1

It is by choice he is here.

LUGUS

And I've chosen to take him back!

Apparition #2 backs away and holds her hand up to block the coming strike. Lugus swings down hard at her, breaking her hand and arm bones. He next attacks her rib-cage, shattering her bones. A second blow to her midsection renders much of her physical mobility useless as the bones fly from her essence. Apparition #1 shrieks at Lugus as he knocks her skull clean off. He holds his ground as she backs away. Apparition #2 begins to laugh, and the other does the same.

APPARITION #2

How foolish men are, sister.

APPARITION #1

How foolish indeed.

They back away and disappear into the mist. Lugus knows he's in trouble and goes to Veron, who can barely keep his eyes open as he stands there.

LUGUS

Veron! Can you see? Look at me!

Veron falls into Lugus' arms.

LUGUS (CONT'D)

Help him!

CLERIC

I can't mend him. Not here.

Lugus lifts Veron over his shoulder.

LUGUS

We haven't got long. Run!

They head back the way they came.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP/ DEADLANDS - LATER

Lugus carries a mumbling Veron through the misty swamp.

LUGUS

Don't give in, Veron. "So long as
there's a beat in your heart..."
Remember your oath. Say it with me.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP/ DEADLANDS - LATER

An exhausted Lugus drops to his knees and lays Veron on the ground.

LUGUS

He's so heavy.

The cleric scouts ahead. Veron struggles to speak.

VERON

Lugus...

LUGUS

Yes, I'm here.

BACK TO:

The cleric cautiously moves through the mist. He takes his next step and hears a loud crack beneath him. As he looks down, fear overtakes him.

CLERIC

Lugus!

BACK TO:

Lugus ignores the cleric.

VERON

They're going to take me.

LUGUS

No, I'm gonna get you out of here.

CLERIC (O.S.)

Lugus we have to leave!

VERON

(beat) I've chosen.

Veron's eyes roll back. He loses his ability to speak as the green essence glows brighter.

CLERIC (O.S.)

Lugus!

A dejected Lugus slowly stands and looks to the cleric.

BACK TO:

The cleric finally has his attention.

CLERIC (CONT'D)

We're in a boneyard.

From above, we see the cleric standing in a SEA OF BONES. A GREEN SHADOW moves across the mist. The cleric begins to back away. Several more shadows appear. We hear the clicking motion of bones forming as the shadows become SKELETAL. Even more apparitions arrive to surround Lugus and the cleric. Lugus unsheathes his sword. Their doom seems inevitable as the apparitions converge on them through the mist.

CUT TO BLACK:

TITLE CARD: DUNGEON TALES

FADE OUT/IN:

INT. BAPTISTERY/ KING'S KEEP - DAY

The eight-sided baptistery, a lone, tall structure in the town square, is centered about seventy yards from the main gate.

The floors are decorated with marble, the walls and columns with rich tapestries. The arched windows purposely allow the warm daylight in.

At the top floor of the structure, KING MARCUS MERICK, MID-FIFTIES, a rash, grandiose man with excessive eating habits, nervously paces about. His wife, QUEEN THALIA (tah-lia), LATE-FORTIES, a very calm and patient woman, sits at a TABLE. Also present are two of the king's main advisors, ALDOUS WENDT and JOSSON BECKER. Aldous Wendt, EARLY-SIXTIES, a balding military man, stands near the king. Josson Becker, LATE-THIRTIES, an intelligent weasel, looks out the window to the rambunctious CROWD OF HUNDREDS below in the square.

KING MERICK

I told you they wouldn't be here.

QUEEN THALIA

Patience my love.

KING MERICK

This is a disaster. What will the mob think when they realize their King can't muster his own sons for a simple bloody ceremony?! It's them they'd rather see, not I. And it's Argus they truly want.

QUEEN THALIA

Must you keep him waiting? And in this heat? The man deserves better.

KING MERICK

He'll wait as long as I require.

QUEEN THALIA

Aldous, speak some sense to my husband.

ALDOUS

Let's not forget the mob waits with us, my King.

QUEEN THALIA

Yes and once you lose them, you can forget extorting their excitement for your next series of theatrics.

KING MERICK

Theatrics you call it? And what would you say when I step out there on my own to an array of scowls and jeers?

Josson Becker, an expert on public opinion, speaks up.

JOSSON

I'm with you, my lord. Give the people what they want, or nothing at all.

KING MERICK

(3 beats)

Where the bloody hell are they?!

QUEEN THALIA

Just send for Argus, you fool. Once he's down there, you won't find a scoff or sneer in the crowd. Well I digress, there may be one when I come down.

The King returns to his pacing.

KING MERICK

No, I have it all planned out. And all I need is for my sons to be here. Aiden I always doubted but Callan wouldn't miss an opportunity to show that smug face of his.

QUEEN THALIA

Don't speak so ill of your children.

KING MERICK

It would've been perfect, Thalia. My boys at my side. We ride through the thick of the assembly, wreathes of flowers thrown about our necks. Yes they're good boys, I know. And the mob would see. How can they dislike a King who offers them such a handsome future? Then we make it to the gate, and the bridge is drawn. And across it stands none other than 'The Mighty Argus'. I'm first to greet him, then my boys. We bring him to the people. Show them their champion. I call an end to the great war. 'Languish no more shall they, as they rejoice in sight of the men who defended the great kingdom of Etiaron.'
(et-er-awn).

(3 beats)

IS THAT TOO MUCH TO ASK OF THEM?!

The Queen has just about had enough. Suddenly, the crowd erupts in cheers.

KING MERICK (CONT'D)

What on earth is that?

QUEEN THALIA

Perhaps they heard your wailing and do so out of pity.

KING MERICK

They'd much sooner laugh.

King Merick and Aldous head to the window to see what has enthralled the crowd. THREE MEN on horseback ride through the ecstatic crowd on their way to the main gate.

KING MERICK (CONT'D)

Callan?

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY SQUARE/ KING'S KEEP - CONTINUOUS

The three riders wade through the adoring crowd. Taking lead is PRINCE CALLAN MERICK, MID-TWENTIES, a strong, good-looking young man who embraces his royal position. With him is FENWICK TARKMANN, MID-TWENTIES, BLONDE, a member of a very prestigious family. The third is BARNARD VERRET, EARLY-TWENTIES, THIN, and comes from a humble upbringing. All three have experienced combat, though Fenwick and Callan more so than Barnard, who looks over his shoulder feeling an incensed gaze from afar.

BARNARD

I'm almost tempted to look.

CALLAN

He's watching, I promise you that.

FENWICK

He'll have your head for this one.

Callan hasn't a care in the world and takes in the moment.

BARNARD

We may finally see the end of that temper of his.

FENWICK

Just be sure to mention this was your idea from the start, Callan.

CALLAN

How is it that men I call my
friends, whose hands I've put my
life in no less, have so little
faith in me?

Fenwick and Barnard exchange looks.

FENWICK

Again, just be sure to mention it
was your idea.

They reach the gate where a TROUPE OF GUARDS await them. The
three men dismount and greet the head of the city watchmen,
TEBBEL SERKIN.

TEBBEL

Greetings, Prince Callan.

CALLAN

How long have they been out there?

TEBBEL

Nearly an hour.

Callan looks up at the blazing sun.

CALLAN

Poor bastards. And father didn't
want them in formal attire.

FENWICK

*"See the lion as he fought, not
collared and paraded about..."* as
it were.

They genuinely care for the soldiers outside.

CALLAN

See that it's drawn.

TEBBEL

Sire, your father...

CALLAN

(interrupts)
Do as I ask.

Tebbel nods and relays orders to have the bridge drawn.

CALLAN (CONT'D)

And now the fun begins.

Callan turns back and walks into the crowd, looking afar at the top window of the baptistery. He raises his hand as high as it will go.

CALLAN (CONT'D)

Father!

CUT TO:

INT. BAPTISTERY/ KING'S KEEP - CONTINUOUS

The crowd quiets to hear the prince.

CALLAN (O.S.)

Father! Up there, is that you?!

King Merick's eyes widen as the crowd turns. He quickly sidesteps to avoid revealing himself.

KING MERICK

How dare he? How bloody well dare
he do this to me?

Thalia chuckles as the King fumes.

QUEEN THALIA

He has you in a box.

KING MERICK

Thalia my vision's turned red with
anger, I'm not joking. If Callan
had any idea what I'll do to him...

QUEEN THALIA

(interrupts)

The people are waiting. You can't
hide here all day, Marcus. You only
look more the fool the longer you
do.

Marcus takes a few deep breaths to calm down.

KING MERICK

How do I look?

Thalia rolls her eyes. Marcus steps into the window with a hand raised and a big, phony smile to greet his son.

KING MERICK (CONT'D)

My dear boy!

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY SQUARE/ KING'S KEEP - CONTINUOUS

Callan lowers his hand.

CALLAN

Father I've just learned Argus has arrived!

The crowd cheers at just the mention of Argus' name.

KING MERICK (O.S.)

Wonderful news! Wait a minute, I shall come down to greet him!

CALLAN

You'd better hurry! I've sent word! He'll be here in a moment!

KING MERICK (O.S.)

Very good, my boy! You've done your father proud! A moment it is then!

CUT TO:

INT. BAPTISTERY/ KING'S KEEP - CONTINUOUS

Marcus steps away from the window and relinquishes his pretend smile to expel a growl.

CUT TO:

INT. THE SEER'S LABORATORY/ KING'S KEEP - DAY

The SEER'S TOWER is connected to the keep by a protracted WALKWAY. Inside the laboratory is an array of HERBS, CAULDRONS, CHEMICAL BEAKERS, and other scientific devices. PRINCE AIDEN MERICK, MID-TWENTIES, an intelligent introvert, leans on the windowsill and overlooks the keep. Sitting at a nearby table is ANDRASTE THE SEER, GREEN EYES, LATE-THIRTIES, an unpleasant nasally voice, he wears a cloth over his mouth to hide serious scarring. The cloth is currently lowered as he attempts to eat SLICED MELON, but we don't see his scars, only the struggle as it drips through his mouth.

AIDEN

I won't go.

ANDRASTE

Before the day is finished, you'll regret it.

AIDEN

Sometimes I think I'm the only one
in the capitol with a morsel of
shame.

ANDRASTE

Some just learn to hide it better.

Andraste finishes eating and covers his face with the cloth.

AIDEN

And I should do the same, yes?

ANDRASTE

You wear it as a badge of honor,
young Prince. For all to see.

AIDEN

So I'm as much a fraud as they are?

ANDRASTE

I'm not saying all that. But if you
don't bring yourself to play at
their game, they'll resent you for
it.

AIDEN

Why?

ANDRASTE

Because it will appear you think
too highly of yourself.

AIDEN

Well that's certainly not true.

ANDRASTE

Is it not?

Aiden smirks for a moment. Andraste stands, picks up the
leftover melon, and heads up the stairs. Aiden follows.

AIDEN

It's just so selfish of him. And
father never thinks it through.
What if Argus inquires right then?
The people will see him crushed.

ANDRASTE

The capitol hasn't been this
festive in years. Not even that
would stop them from having their
fill tonight.

AIDEN

Ah, tonight. A feast for the ages
in Argus' name. But I've a feeling
he'll be indisposed so the glory
shall then be seized by my father.

ANDRASTE

And yourself.

They reach the top. Andraste opens a narrow wooden door.

CUT TO:

INT. OUTMODED BELL TOWER/ KING'S KEEP - CONTINUOUS

The tower has been boarded off, all except a single window,
and is lit by dozens of candles. In the corner sits what
appears to be a CHILD. He is mesmerized by his FISH BOWL and
the SMALL ORANGE FISH continuously swimming in circles.
Andraste and Aiden approach him.

AIDEN

Sure, there's always a lineup of
royal ass-kissers and they'll be
the first to show tonight but
enough of them know I find no
pleasure in it.

ANDRASTE

You take your subjects for granted.

AIDEN

Do you not?

They reach the child.

ANDRASTE

I've brought you a treat, Castor.

CASTOR turns with a smile and grabs the plate. We see he is a
physical abomination. Different colored eyes, missing an ear,
scars from being stitched together. He speaks with an
impediment.

CASTOR

Thank you master.

Andraste pats what remains of his hair as he enjoys his
treat.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAISED STONE BRIDGE/ KING'S KEEP - DAY

Levers are pulled, chains are unlinked, and wheels are spun to begin lowering the drawbridge. The tall stone overpass, narrow and defensively sound, is separated from the keep only by the gap the drawbridge will soon close. Waiting on horseback atop the stone bridge is ARGUS, MID-THIRTIES, a man of strength and integrity, a legend to the people and military, and someone who wears his status with humility. With him are SIX KNIGHTS, including his right-hand man, ROLLAND DALVILLA (dal-via). Their hair is drenched in sweat as they've been roasting in the sun while fully armored.

ROLLAND

I'm willing to bet that pretty
little Prince will be waiting
across there with a big smile to go
along with an apology.

The knights chuckle. The bridge is now lowered, revealing Callan ready to welcome them. Argus and his knights dismount and approach Callan on foot.

ROLLAND (CONT'D)

Any takers?

KNIGHT #1

Never bet against a sure thing.

ROLLAND

Take me on it Argus?
(Argus grins)
Surely you think more highly of the
royal family than us.

ARGUS

As a matter of fact I do.

ROLLAND

Go on, take it then.

ARGUS

Enough of that, Rolland.

They reach a smiling Callan at the entryway.

CALLAN

Argus, my old friend. You look
fresh as the first day of battle.

ARGUS

Thank you. I hope your family's
doing well.

CALLAN

They are. Allow me to apologize for the wait.

Rolland smiles and turns to his men who quietly snicker.

ARGUS

Think nothing of it.

Callan endures the snickering. He turns to the crowd.

CALLAN

Come with me.

They follow Callan through the gate where the eager crowd bursts into cheers.

CALLAN (CONT'D)

They all came for you Argus.

The first few steps to the nearest route up the wall lead to a WIDE PLATFORM. Callan takes Argus to the platform so the people can see him and calls out with vigor.

CALLAN (CONT'D)

Etiaaronians! Your champion is here!

Chants of "Argus" echo in unison. Argus places his arm across his chest and bows. At the foot of the baptistery, King Merick and his personal guards ride through the crowd on horseback, heading for the platform. They are a nuisance to the crowd which is turned the other way. Callan continues.

CALLAN (CONT'D)

How many years has it been?! Had we forgotten the joys of peace?! Has any man or woman here not faced an agony they thought they hadn't the strength to bear?! When your sons left to fight! And the years you had not your husbands by your side! Day after day, wondering if they would return! But we triumphed! We won the war!

(crowd cheers)

What strength we mustered! What people I'm so proud to call my own! This victory is yours!

(crowd cheers)

I fought with Argus! 'The mighty Argus' they called him! 'Our brave protector' and so on! But every night he would sit amongst the wounded!

(MORE)

CALLAN (CONT'D)

Telling them they were the true
 heroes of Etiaron! For they gave
 everything in the name of their
 Country!

(crowd cheers)

They will forever live on in song
 and in our hearts! My people, I
 love you! And in the years to come,
 I shall give you all that I have to
 give!

The crowd is now split with chants of both "Argus" and
 "Callan". Fenwick and Barnard grin as they see his clever
 stunt come to fruition. King Merick has nearly arrived.

CALLAN (CONT'D)

For the glory of Etiaron! For my
 family! For my people! For the
 return of Argus! We shall feast in
 his honor! Fill the streets with
 joy this night! And let us leave
 behind woes of the war!

The crowd goes wild. Argus has a moment to speak with Callan.

ARGUS

A fine speech, Callan.

(Callan nods)

Might I ask where my brother is?

Callan solemnly turns to Argus.

CALLAN

Let's speak on it elsewhere.

Argus immediately knows something is wrong. Below the
 platform, King Merick dismounts and climbs the steps to join
 in on the glory. He waves to the crowd.

KING MERICK

It's good to see you Argus.

The king turns to realize Argus is quite distraught.

KING MERICK (CONT'D)

What's the matter, old friend?

ARGUS

Pardon me, I expected Lugus would
 be here.

Marcus acts shocked.

KING MERICK

Lugus? What do you mean? Oh dear,
have you not received word?

ARGUS

What has happened?

KING MERICK

We must get you to the keep. Come.

He puts a friendly hand on Argus' shoulder and walks him down the steps.

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN MANOR/ WOODREN VILLA - DAY

In the clearing of a DENSE FOREST is the WOODREN VILLA, a lavish estate with various levels and buildings connected by roped wooden bridges. Skuawking exotic birds fly about the compound. In the main manor sits LORD LETHODUS ILMARINEN, EARLY-FIFTIES, a hard man whom few could match in fervency. He is being shaved by THANTOS, LATE-TWENTIES, a small man and trusted slave. On the BALCONY stands KODRICKS ILMARINEN, MID-TWENTIES, son of Lethodus, an odd looking young man, far more a thinker than a fighter, someone whose thoughts have led him to dark places.

KODRICKS

He's a petty man.

THANTOS

Listen to your son, my lord. He attended the royal council many times while you were away. He knows what they whisper behind your back.

Kodricks enters the room.

KODRICKS

In Merick's eyes, you're just the arrogant lord who refused to reinforce his legions in the west. If you think he doesn't have his advisors working up every plot...

LETHODUS

(interrupts)

You think that bothers me? Those imbeciles among his circle of sycophants looking for ways to diminish my family name...

KODRICKS

Not looking, they have them decided on. The statehouse will set a new rate for the Sunderlands. And you haven't even told me what the collectors asked of you this time.

LETHODUS

I suppose you're right. They will hold it against us for some time.

THANTOS

Until we starve and they find you in the capitol begging their forgiveness, Lord Lethodus.

LETHODUS

And how angered will they be once they've learned I've just sent their collectors away empty-handed?

Thantos' hand slips as he hears this, leaving a CUT on Lethodus' jawline. He drops to his hands and knees, kissing his lord's feet.

THANTOS

Forgive me, my lord! Please! I'm such a fool!

Lethodus sits motionless as blood drips from his face. He then grabs a CLOTH and presses it against the cut.

LETHODUS

Out with you.

Thantos sobs as he backs away, too slow for Lethodus' liking.

LETHODUS (CONT'D)

OUT!

Thantos jumps to his feet and scurries out the room. Lethodus finishes the final strokes of the shave himself.

KODRICKS

Father... What were you thinking?

Lethodus washes his face using a nearby bowl of water.

KODRICKS (CONT'D)

(condescending)

In case you hadn't heard, the last man to refuse Merick his taxes was Lucius Ansger and not three years later his flayed corpse was hung from Castle Tarlow!

LETHODUS

I'm not starting a bloody war Kodricks, I'm trying to prevent the next one!

KODRICKS

Do explain how further provoking Merick at the worst possible moment helps us in any way.

LETHODUS

The revenue I withheld will offset their new tariffs. In the meantime, we hire more troops and reinforce the Sunderlands.

KODRICKS

How long do you expect that to carry us? Half a year at most?

LETHODUS

In half a years time the Sunderlands will be set on fire. Once Merick's had his fill of bluster, he'll come for me. He'll send a legion, or more if I provoke him enough. The other Houses won't lift a finger to aid us unless their homes were set ablaze by the raunts, but that won't happen until ours have been turned to ash first. We're all that's protecting his Kingdom, yet I have to force him to do what he must to save it.

Lethodus steps out on the balcony and looks to the forest.

KODRICKS

(condescending)

And once his men arrive, they ignore the reason they're sent and willfully enlist in the Sunder's guard? Do I have that right?

LETHODUS

These forests will burn, Kodricks.
The raunts are coming. And it may
be too late for us to stop them.

CUT TO:

INT. THRONE ROOM/ KING'S KEEP - AFTERNOON

STONE PILLARS support the ancient structure. BLUE and SILVER DRAPES give life to an otherwise dreary room. Seated in his THRONE is King Merick, his queen beside him. Close by are Andraste, Josson, and Aldous. They all face Argus who stands across from them, tears in his eyes.

ARGUS

Has it really been three months
since he passed?

QUEEN THALIA

I'm afraid so, Argus.

ALDOUS

My condolences, old friend.

KING MERICK

You should not have learned of it
this way. Someone is to blame. It
infuriates me.

ARGUS

That doesn't matter now. Where was
he found?

JOSSON

On the road to Brightwyn. It was an
ambush in the night. He must have
been alone and was severely beaten
to his end. Some wayfarers found
him in the morning.

ARGUS

An ambush you say?

JOSSON

Thieves, likely. His horse, most of
his belongings were taken. We've no
other motives to consider at the
moment.

ARGUS

Have his killers been found?

JOSSON

Not yet, I'm afraid. We've sent Silvius to investigate. He and the sheriff of Brightwyn are doing their best, I assure you.

QUEEN THALIA

We loved your brother, Argus. We mourn with you.

ARGUS

I thank you for your kind words.

QUEEN THALIA

I saw to it his remains were sent to Orbin for burial.

ARGUS

You honor me, my lady. I'm pleased to know he's not far from here. I shall visit him tonight.

QUEEN THALIA

Of course.

ARGUS

My king, there's something I must ask of you.

KING MERICK

What do you need?

ARGUS

I ask your permission to travel to Brightwyn and lead the search for those responsible in my brother's killing.

Andraste steps forward.

ANDRASTE

Good man, are you not exhausted from war?

ARGUS

There will be no rest for me, I'm afraid. Not till his killers are found.

ANDRASTE

I understand. I do. But as you know there are laws against this sort of thing.

ALDOUS

Now's not the time for this.

ANDRASTE

But it is, Aldous. It would be unseemly to send the brother of the deceased, no matter his status.

ARGUS

I understand your predicament. Were I a citizen, you would have no need to worry of such legal constraints.

ALDOUS

Now look what you've gone and done, Andraste.

KING MERICK

Stop your bickering. Argus I'll not have you leave the army because I couldn't allow you to avenge Lugus.

ARGUS

It may reflect poorly with the men but my services are no longer vital.

KING MERICK

But of course they are. You saw how the people came about to see you.

ARGUS

It's the farthest of my intentions to disappoint either them or you but I must do this. Your blessing would make it far less difficult.

KING MERICK

(3 beats)

You'll reach Orbin by nightfall. Pay your respects. We'll speak on this further when you return.

Argus nods, then turns to leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAPITOL ROAD/ KING'S KEEP OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON

A SMALL CARAVAN consisting of a CARRIAGE, SIX MOUNTED GUARDS, and a CIVILIAN RIDER treads along the capitol road. The rider is GARUS LARINNI, MID-TWENTIES, a fat, curly-haired and pompous young man with an effeminate disposition.

He is ahead of the carriages. A woman, LINETTE LARINNI, MID-FIFTIES, intelligent, hard-nosed and occasionally foul-mouthed, calls out the window of the carriage.

LINETTE

Garus... Garus come here!

Garus slows his horse and rides alongside her. Both are lavishly dressed, proudly flaunting their great wealth.

GARUS

We're only an hour from the capitol, mother.

LINETTE

There's a relief. My ass is killing me.

GARUS

That's a shame really but let's remember which of us wanted to come before the other complains.

LINETTE

Oh don't start with that. It's no thrill for me either but you needn't worry. This will be the last time we kiss his royal ass with nothing to show for it.

GARUS

What a hypocrite you can be. Think on how often you shun my vulgarity.

LINETTE

Hush now. This time we spend in the capitol will determine the entire future of our House. Tell me you see this. That you understand.

(beat)

Say it!

GARUS

(beat) As you say.

LINETTE

Merick will be so desperate to wed our Houses, I'd wager he'll retire sooner just to please us.

GARUS

I'll attempt to match your confidence when we arrive.

LINETTE

All this talk of heroes and champions... He won because he outspent the Ansgers. Simple as that. And now the bill's come due. I was patient and loyal, and the west hated me for it. I endured for this family. For you and your sisters. To give you this future. Are you listening to me?!

GARUS

So very intently, mother.

LINETTE

When we arrive, you'll watch those damn manners. And yes your filthy mouth too. For once, get over your habit of making enemies for sport, and get on with Merick's sons. And another thing, no flirting with the young servant boys. I can't deal with those rumors floating about while I maneuver half the country's influence.

GARUS

You're being unreasonable, mother. Not for the months you're forcing me to spend in the capitol.

LINETTE

You're not as subtle or clever as you think, Garus.

GARUS

Perhaps, but being more clever than royalty is a great deal satisfying.

LINETTE

The problem is you can be so damned unlikable.

GARUS

As often as you say it, it's never given me the desire to be liked.

LINETTE

(sighs)

What a dreadful time it'll be.

CUT TO:

INT. THRONE ROOM/ KING'S KEEP - AFTERNOON

Argus and Queen Thalia have left the throne room.

ALDOUS

What a right snake you are,
Andraste.

JOSSON

Settle down, Aldous.

ANDRASTE

I'm accustomed to it. There's no
need to stand up for me, Josson.

JOSSON

Don't presume that I was.

Andraste chuckles.

ALDOUS

You open that venomous mouth of
yours and not a minute later Argus
is threatening to leave the army.

ANDRASTE

This was bound to happen and our
King knows it.

ALDOUS

Does he? Or was it you who gave him
the idea?

KING MERICK

Quit your squabbling and help me
decide what's to be done.

ANDRASTE

Nothing will stop him from going.

JOSSON

He's right.

ANDRASTE

The way I see it... Either you send
him to Brightwyn on a separate
errand where he may perchance look
on Silvius and the investigation in
a lawful manner, or you threaten to
expel him from the army before he
has the chance to leave with his
honor.

ALDOUS

This is outrageous! You're a bloody worm!

ANDRASTE

So I am.

ALDOUS

You think the people would turn their backs on Argus?

JOSSON

There's no war to fight and they do love a good scandal.

ANDRASTE

No one knows the people better than Jossion.

Aldous steps towards the king.

ALDOUS

My king, you'll not consider this?

Merick keeps Andraste around for a reason, hence his hesitation to dismiss the idea.

KING MERICK

What errand would you allot him?

ANDRASTE

There's much to be done in the south. The baron Fedelmead has been a thorn in our side for far too long. He used the war to monopolize Linwall, Silverford, even Lochmeadow.

JOSSON

Fedelmead's a thug. His syndicate keeps them in line and they've no means to stand up to him.

ALDOUS

Why do I get the sneaking suspicion you two have discussed this beforehand?

ANDRASTE

Do try and keep up. There's a ways to go.

Aldous scolds Andraste.

JOSSON

He has them all bought. Local magistrates, statesmen, even the Southern Council bends to him. In turn, all the city-watch are loyal.

ANDRASTE

Nearly. We've bought our share of 'em. They'll be ready when the time comes.

ALDOUS

And what's coming?

JOSSON

Money isn't the issue. They're afraid. But with Argus at their side...

KING MERICK

Yes that's all well and good but how?

ANDRASTE

The sheriff of Brightwyn has his appetites.

JOSSON

We needn't divulge the unseemly details but we'll have him removed once Argus arrives. Argus oversees his duties in the interim and we take back Brightwyn. The first step in bringing down Fedelmead.

ALDOUS

You've had this planned for some time. To use Argus after his brother died.

ANDRASTE

We needed a more convenient way in.

ALDOUS

Shameful.

JOSSON

I know this bores you but a tenth of our trade has been disrupted.

ALDOUS

And this only works if you threaten Argus. His brother is dead.

(MORE)

ALDOUS (CONT'D)

He hasn't the mind for your games and misadventures, and he'll be willing to give up everything for what he believes is right.

ANDRASTE

That's why we'd like you to help him see what's best.

ALDOUS

You can't believe I'd help you.

JOSSON

It's the king's decision.

Aldous looks to the King, who hates what he is about to say.

KING MERICK

You'll be the one to tell him.

ALDOUS

With respect my King, it's my opinion these two have influenced you into a man I hardly recognize.

KING MERICK

I know what I'm asking of you but watch your tongue.

ALDOUS

Where's the honor in any of this?

ANDRASTE

Oh spare us, Aldous. The King's decided. You may resign if you can't fulfill your intended duties.

ALDOUS

And leave him to fend you off alone?

ANDRASTE

So you're staying. Very well.

ALDOUS

I'm not one of your subjects, Andraste. And I'm certainly no fool. There are things I know. I watch. Why does Prince Aiden spend so much time in your company?

ANDRASTE

He may seek counsel with whomever he wishes.

ALDOUS

Why was he with you during the ceremony and not with the King?

ANDRASTE

It's not within my power to command his presence. I implored he do as his father asked.

ALDOUS

Of all places my King, he chose to be with Andraste.

ANDRASTE

Do get to the point.

ALDOUS

I fear for anyone who seeks your counsel as often as he.

ANDRASTE

And you think our King doesn't know this? I apprise him of everything his son and I speak on.

ALDOUS

(sarcastically)
Of course you do.

KING MERICK

Every time I have you three in a room, you rip at each other like rabid dogs. That's enough for one day.

Merick looks tired. As he stands and leaves the room, his advisors continue to eye each other.

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON - SUNSET

An orange hue paints the afternoon sky with storm clouds not far off. Cracks of thunder are heard in the distance. The garrison, with tall defensive walls made of stone, is set amidst a dense forest. SOLDIERS patrol the walls and man the gate. In the yard, a NOOSE is being prepared at the GALLOWS.

From the enclosed hall to the PRISON emerges a GUARD named JEBSON, who is rudely shoving along a chained prisoner. The prisoner, BARBOTA, EARLY-THIRTIES, LONG BLACK HAIR, an EYE PATCH over his left eye, a tough and mean-looking man, appears calm.

Jebson, LATE-THIRTIES, an ugly man with very bad teeth, seems to have a deep hatred for Barbota. Under the stairs to the wall is a small holding cell. The guard opens the cell and shoves Barbota inside, then locks it. The gallows are in clear view as Jebson looks to the hangman.

JEBSON

You there! What's keeping you?
We've damn near lost the light.

HANGMAN

Cap'n wanted every inch inspected.
No funny business this time.

Jebson turns to Barbota who has taken a seat.

JEBSON

No, we only got so many tricks up
our sleeve, ain't that right,
Barbota?
(no response)
Just you and us, and a fresh noose.
(kicks the iron bars)
Look at me, asshole. Nothing clever
to say? I know you're scared. Part
of me's hoping your merry little
band shows up. We'll take care of
'em, then crack open a few barrels
of ale and watch you flop around
like a freshly caught fish at the
end of a string.

The guard chuckles at his own illustrations.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS/ KING'S KEEP - SUNSET

The streets outside the main keep are currently a festive, uproaring venue. Music is played so loudly, only a deaf person could sleep at this hour. Children run about as their parents indulge in the seemingly endless PLATTERS OF FOOD being brought out to them by royal servants.

SERVANT

Compliments of the King!

The rapacious mob cheers. They tear at ROASTED BOAR, SHEEP, and CHICKEN and wash it down with wine and ale. Night is coming, but the fun has just begun. A CARRIAGE makes its way through the congested streets.

CUT TO:

INT. CARRIAGE/ STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Inside the carriage sits FREDERIC OLERYs, LATE-THIRTIES, a stern politician and an honorable man. With him is his wife MARY OLERYs and their TWO SONS, ILIUS who is TWELVE, and LEON, NINE. Frederic slides back the curtain on the carriage window and watches the unattractive sight of the people eating as if they hadn't seen a plate of food in a week.

FREDERIC

How many estates do you reckon
Merick bought out to supply his
feast?

MARY

I'm not sure. A handful?

FREDERIC

Not near.

MARY

Twenty?

FREDERIC

Closer to a hundred.

MARY

That can't be.

FREDERIC

By the year's end, people will
starve because of this night.

MARY

That's a pity.

FREDERIC

Indeed.

He closes the curtain. The carriage stops at the guarded gate before the long, winding road up to the main keep. A ROYAL ATTENDANT approaches the window.

ROYAL ATTENDANT

Pardon me but your driver claims he
lost your...
(recognizes Frederic)
Master Olerys. Forgive me.

The attendant waves off the guards and the gate is opened.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL TO KING'S CHAMBER/ KING'S KEEP - SUNSET

We hear King Merick shouting from his chamber. Aiden storms out as his father continues to yell at him.

KING MERICK (O.C.)

*And if you even think of not
showing at the feast, I'll send you
to some desolate rock for a month!
You hear me, boy?! Try me once
more!*

CUT TO:

INT. TRAINING ROOM/ KING'S KEEP - SUNSET

The circular training room, laden with RACKS OF WEAPONS and WOODEN TARGETS, has a RINGED SECOND LAIR above for spectators. Below in the training area stands Callan, Fenwick, and Barnard. Fenwick paces as Callan and Barnard take turns firing a BOW.

FENWICK

The Murat family lost the entirety
of their holdings to us.

CALLAN

They got their comeuppance.

Callan is far more attentive to his little competition as Barnard counts his money and makes a bet.

BARNARD

Everything on me for this next one.
I've got ten silver pieces.

Barnard takes the bow from Callan and aims it.

FENWICK

My father tried to buy them out for
years but it never happened.

CALLAN

All it took was a war.

BARNARD

(sarcastically)
Yes, that's all.

FENWICK

We're bringing in so much at the
moment, we aren't sure what to do
with it.

BARNARD

That's wonderful. Now shut up.

Barnard takes a deep breath and fires the arrow. It lands only inches from the center of the target, an excellent shot. Callan takes the bow from a gleeful Barnard.

BARNARD (CONT'D)

Let's see you do better.

Callan takes aim and fires. The arrow misses the mark. He reaches into his pockets to pay up but realizes he's short.

CALLAN

Haven't got enough. I'll pay you later.

FENWICK

Don't bother.

Fenwick opens his SATCHEL and pays Barnard.

BARNARD

You'll take any opportunity to show off, won't you?

FENWICK

If you'd just listen for a moment...

BARNARD

Go on then.

FENWICK

My mother's insisting on marriage. Find a suitable wife, then take on the new provinces.

CALLAN

But you're not ready, is that it?

FENWICK

No, I'm perfectly comfortable with the idea. In fact we already have someone in mind.

BARNARD

Who's the poor girl you have in mind?

FENWICK

Well we haven't approached her yet, nor her family, so nothing's been determined.

BARNARD

You can afford damn near any girl
in Etiaron. What are you waiting
on?

FENWICK

Actually I plan on asking her hand
in the coming days.

BARNARD

And what's got brave Fenwick
looking so unsure of himself?

FENWICK

Her father's the King.

Barnard realizes he's been saying the wrong things.

BARNARD

Oh.

CALLAN

You want to marry my sister?

FENWICK

There was a time our families
discussed it.

CALLAN

Years ago. Before the war that was.

FENWICK

Still I'm quite fond of her. And we
get on well. I wouldn't be telling
you this if your blessing meant
nothing to me, Callan.

Callan sternly walks up to Fenwick, causing tension.

CALLAN

(3 beats)

I couldn't think of a better man
I'd adopt as a brother.

FENWICK

You'll have my back when I ask him?

CALLAN

Of course.

Aiden walks by the training room and peers inside. He enters
and approaches the three men.

AIDEN

Good to see you again, Barnard.

BARNARD

Likewise, sire.

AIDEN

You know I prefer my name.

BARNARD

Sorry.

Barnard smiles as Aiden turns to Fenwick.

AIDEN

I didn't know you were in the capitol.

FENWICK

Arrived this morning.

AIDEN

Ah, just in time for Callan's little stunt.

FENWICK

I couldn't miss it.

AIDEN

Apparently I could.

CALLAN

I was yelled at for being there and you for not.

AIDEN

I wouldn't have minded as much if you told me what you were planning. Better than seeing father bumble through one of his speeches.

CALLAN

In the end, we both got a speech from him.

AIDEN

I know. He made me sit outside for yours before I got mine.

CALLAN

You'll be skipping the feast, I take it?

AIDEN

He threatened to exile me for a month if I did.
(they chuckle)
Pretty sure he meant it this time.

CALLAN

Sounds like you got it worse than I did.

AIDEN

No. He was too tired after he was through with you.

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON - SUNSET

The hangman stands over the trap door as he tugs on the rope, testing its durability. Jebson ascends the platform and places his hand on the RELEASE LEVER.

JEBSON

What's this thing do?

The hangman fearfully jumps away from the trap door.

HANGMAN

Take your damned hand away from there!

Jebson gets a good laugh out of his reaction.

JEBSON

I'm only joking.

CUT TO:

EXT. EASTERN WATCHTOWER/ OAKTOMB GARRISON - CONTINUOUS

The watchman atop the eastern tower peers at the approaching thunderstorm. His gaze drifts to the forest. Half a mile in, a FLOCK OF CROWS scatter from the trees.

WATCHMAN #1

Third time in an hour.
(to the garrison)
Movement in the trees! Something's out there!

BACK TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON - CONTINUOUS

Jebson hops down from the platform and is near Barbota.

JEBSON

Looks like your friends made it
after all. This night just keeps
getting better and better, don't
it...

(to the watchman)

Keep an eye out! I'll get the
Captain!

He heads inside the main building.

CUT TO:

INT. QUEEN'S CHAMBER/ KING'S KEEP - SUNSET

Queen Thalia sits with her two eldest daughters as she holds her granddaughter, baby ELLORA who is asleep in her arms. The eldest daughter, ELISE, MID-THIRTIES, is a reserved and thoughtful woman who hides the lingering sadness of a loveless marriage. Her two boys, VINCENT, NINE, and DAYNE, TWELVE, play in the chamber after having been forced to spend time with their grandmother. The second-eldest daughter, AVINA, EARLY-THIRTIES, the stark opposite of her older sister, fun-loving and always smiling, and part of a very happy and successful arranged marriage. Baby Ellora is her daughter, and her son Cedric isn't currently present. Thalia finds it hard to look away from Ellora's beauty.

QUEEN THALIA

I know I shouldn't let it linger at
a time like this but knowing I
could've had you all here for these
past three years saddens me.

AVINA

Why on earth didn't you come,
Elise?

ELISE

He can be so stubborn sometimes.
And you know how he feels about
father. He saw it as a charity and
couldn't accept.

AVINA

We didn't have much choice when we
left Ashford. Even though my
husband was away, mother was always
there for me.

Thalia and Avina share a smile.

QUEEN THALIA

It must've been so cold in the mountains.

Elise adoringly looks over at her two sons.

ELISE

I don't mind the cold. It's the children who suffered. Vincent was only seven when he took ill. Dayne never left his side.

QUEEN THALIA

It's a special bond they have. If only your brothers were the same.

AVINA

Don't tell me they're still not getting on?

QUEEN THALIA

They stopped fighting years ago but it's as if that's all they had. There was nothing to take its place. They're strangers on different paths.

ELISE

Perhaps it's best for what's coming.

AVINA

Now's not the time to talk of such things.

Thalia looks back to the beautiful child in her arms.

QUEEN THALIA

You really have given me the most beautiful grandchildren.

CEDRIC, Elise's FIVE YEAR OLD son, a very chubby young boy, steps in the doorway eating a LARGE PASTRY.

QUEEN THALIA (CONT'D)

He shouldn't be having sweets before supper.

(to Cedric)

I told the kitchen to keep you away from the pastries.

CEDRIC

I told them father would give them
a lashing if they didn't feed me.

AVINA

Oh really?

CEDRIC

That's what you do, mother.

Avina extends her hand.

AVINA

Give it here, Cedric.

CEDRIC

Just let me finish it.

AVINA

Listen to your mother.

Cedric's eyes widen and he points behind his mother.

CEDRIC

Look, what's that behind you?!

Avina turns to look. Cedric turns tail and runs. Avina can't
help but laugh as she runs after her son.

AVINA

Get back here!

She exits the room.

QUEEN THALIA

These years have changed you.

ELISE

What do you mean?

QUEEN THALIA

I know my own daughter. What's he
done this time?

ELISE

Mother really, it's not...

QUEEN THALIA

(interrupts)
You'll not avoid the question.

Elise ponders the source of her unhappiness.

ELISE

The other women didn't bother me so much but it's become so blatant. It's humiliating.

QUEEN THALIA

I always knew he was a scoundrel but was the only one who saw it. I never wanted him for you. Your father will have a word with him.

ELISE

Don't mother. He'll only take it out on the boys.

Thalia aggressively inquires further.

QUEEN THALIA

What's he done to them?

ELISE

He has a temper mother, you know this.

QUEEN THALIA

Has he ever hurt them? Has he ever laid a hand on you?

ELISE

No, it's not like that.

QUEEN THALIA

Don't lie to me, Elise.

ELISE

I'm not lying.

QUEEN THALIA

Your father would have his entrails displayed if he found it to be true and I wouldn't protest. His family be damned.

We hear the king shouting from the hall outside.

KING MERICK (O.C.)

Thalia?! Thalia where are you?!

QUEEN THALIA

Dammit he'll wake her.

KING MERICK (O.C.)

Why is no one where I need them today?!

Elise turns to Dayne and Vincent.

ELISE

Fetch your grandfather.

DAYNE

Yes mother.

The two boys run to the hall as we hear their interaction with King Merick.

KING MERICK (O.C.)

There's my handsome grandsons. Tell me, have you seen your grandmother?

DAYNE (O.C.)

In here. She doesn't want you to wake Ellora.

Merick enters the room with his arm around Vincent.

KING MERICK

Elise my dear, I'm sorry we haven't had time to talk. It's so good to see you.

He kisses his daughter on the cheek.

ELISE

It's quite alright. If anyone has a proper excuse tonight, it's you.

KING MERICK

(to Thalia)

It's madness out there. They keep pouring in and I've forgotten half their names. I need you.

Thalia looks at Ellora and sighs.

QUEEN THALIA

Old fool.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD/ WOODREN VILLA - NIGHT

The large courtyard is well lit at night, illuminating the diverse gardens. A MUSICIAN slowly plays the HARP while Lethodus feeds his EXOTIC BIRDS. Thantos enters the courtyard and approaches Lethodus.

THANTOS

My lord, they've captured one near
Oaktomb. At the border of the
pines.

LETHODUS

How'd they manage that?

THANTOS

He was alone.

LETHODUS

That's odd.

THANTOS

And wounded, sire.

LETHODUS

Is that so...

THANTOS

Left for dead in the forest.

LETHODUS

Was there an unreported attack?

THANTOS

I don't believe so.

LETHODUS

And the wound? Fresh?

THANTOS

A day or two.

Lethodus goes to feed his PARROT.

LETHODUS

They'll be taking him to Morton
then?

THANTOS

As we speak.

LETHODUS

Ride out and catch them on the
road. Bring it to me.

The parrot chimes in.

PARROT

(squawk) Bring it to me.

THANTOS

Have it brought here?

LETHODUS

Here is where I am, is it not?

THANTOS

Sorry sire. Right away.

We follow Thantos as we hear the parrot behind him.

PARROT

(squawk) Bloody imbeciles.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN ENTRANCE/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

The grand entrance to the royal hall is quite busy as dozens of nobles and other guests shuffle up the stairs and into the building. VALETS receive and park their CARRIAGES and handle their belongings. The carriage of Frederic Olerys arrives. He steps outside and helps his wife and sons down. As he eyes the arrivals, Frederic notices an older man and his wife climbing the steps and smiles. He turns to his family.

FREDERIC

Give me a moment.

Frederic jogs up the stairs and catches up to the older couple on the elongated middle step.

FREDERIC (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Ivan Storbeck! My friend the years have not been kind to you.

IVAN STORBECK, MID-SIXTIES, THIN WHITE HAIR, has a reputation that encourages this sort of banter. His wife, BRISA STORBECK, is a decade younger. They turn to Frederic.

BRISA

Charming as ever, Frederic.

FREDERIC

Oh the old man can take it.

Ivan appears confused and squints.

IVAN

Have we met?

FREDERIC

Very funny, Ivan.

Brisa puts a hand on her husband's shoulder.

BRISA

It's no laughing matter, I'm
afraid. His mind has all but gone.

FREDERIC

(2 beats) My lady?

BRISA

His condition worsened this past
year. He wasn't able to recall the
people around him. I'm the only one
he still recognizes.

IVAN

Who is he, Brisa?

BRISA

He's an old friend of yours. Royal
Councilman Frederic Olerys.

IVAN

Do I like him?

BRISA

Of course you do.

IVAN

We are good friends?

BRISA

Yes Ivan.

Ivan leans into his wife.

IVAN

Ask him for some money.

BRISA

That's hardly appropriate.

IVAN

Is he my friend or not?
(turns to Frederic)
Are you a friend?

FREDERIC

I am, Ivan.

BRISA

We may have fallen on hard times
but that hardly means you can ask
men you don't even recognize for
money in the street.

Brisa realizes Ivan is blankly staring at her chest.

BRISA (CONT'D)

Oh you're impossible.

FREDERIC

If it's a loan you require, I'd be
happy to oblige.

IVAN

How much?

BRISA

You must forgive him. I've often
considered the stress of our new
debts may have been the cause of
all this.

Ivan begins to caress his wife's breast and she slaps his
hand away.

BRISA (CONT'D)

Stop that.

IVAN

How much can he give?

BRISA

Please just humor him.

FREDERIC

I can loan you a hundred and fifty
silver tablets. Would that suffice?

Ivan slowly turns to Frederic. His awareness suggests he's
been faking his condition.

IVAN

You're a real cheap bastard
Frederic, you know that?

FREDERIC

Ivan?! You miserable old fart!

Ivan begins to laugh and Frederic follows suit.

IVAN

You should've seen the look on your face.

FREDERIC

And you, lady Storbeck, you're as terrible as your husband.

BRISA

I often think he does it just to fondle me in public.

IVAN

Merely icing on the cake, my dear. I like to know what my so-called friends think I'm worth. Apparently this one doesn't think much of me at all.

(shakes head)

A hundred and fifty silver tablets...

FREDERIC

And with no intention of making good on it.

IVAN

Don't lie, Frederic. I could've gotten you to feed me by your hand if I wanted.

Ivan notices FOUR STATESMEN, PELLIO, GAILAN, EURIC, and ALDRIS, ascend the stairs wearing identical BROWN TOGAS.

IVAN (CONT'D)

What are they doing here?

BRISA

Since when do Statesmen attend royal parties?

FREDERIC

A lot's changed since you were last here.

Ivan heckles the Statesmen from afar.

IVAN

Bugger off you sods! If I wanted to eat with the likes of you, I'd head to a tavern and set my plate down with the dogs!

The statesmen know they are hated by Ivan and his ilk and embrace it. Statesman Pellio returns fire.

PELLIO

Careful lord, in just a few days we vote whether to continue the tax issuances!

Ivan steps forward and grabs his crotch.

IVAN

Tax this you miserable cunts! In case you haven't heard, the war is over! If you don't stop taking all my damned money, I'll double my prices and your constituents will know who's to blame!

GAILAN

That's not how you get on our good side!

IVAN

I showed your mother my good side last night!

(turns away)

Now, shall we indulge in the finest food our king has to offer?

FREDERIC

I'll collect my family and meet you inside.

IVAN

Give them my best.

Ivan slaps his wife's rear and they head inside.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAINING ROOM/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

Callan, Aiden, Fenwick, and Barnard still occupy the room.

AIDEN

Father might turn down the proposition just to avoid paying the dowry, the way things are.

FENWICK

Never mind that. My grandfather never received a coin for marrying and ever since he's not lifted a finger to help marry his daughters. Perhaps your father would be more inclined to bless the union if my family arrived with, say, a thousand gold pieces? A small gift that prove strengthening the bond between our two Houses really does suit us both.

The princes exchange glances.

AIDEN

That oughta' do it.

BARNARD

Sure sets a marvelous precedent for families who wish to marry into royalty.

CALLAN

Had hopes of your own, Barnard?

BARNARD

I'd never dream of it, my Prince. Not with my purse, and no matter how many times I prove I'm a better shot. I merely implied the very lucky ladies who marry Etiaron's princes will really have to open their purses for the honor.

AIDEN

True. After Fenwick's offer, few would dare suggest even half that.

BARNARD

Which leaves house Larinni.

The princes grumble at the name. Fenwick and Barnard laugh.

FENWICK

Their banners were spotted on the road.

CALLAN

Oh I'm sure they're here.

FENWICK

When you suddenly become the richest family in the west, you ought to make it known.

CALLAN

If only they produced women handsome enough to match their holdings. They'll prance those girls in front of us just to...

GARUS (O.C.)

(interrupts)

Actually my sisters didn't travel with us.

Garus Larinni peers over a baluster from the viewing area. All four men below snap their heads up.

CALLAN

Garus Larinni.

GARUS

Unless of course it was my mother you spoke of. Despite a difference in age, I think you two would make a fine match.

CALLAN

Have it arranged, Garus. I do like an experienced woman.

FENWICK

Just how long have you been there?

Garus speaks as he descends the stairs, ignoring Fenwick.

GARUS

It's no longer my sisters we want your royal highness to expect our intentions from. At least not for some time. You see, since our fortunes have largely remained intact these years, whereas with all respect paid due the same can't be said of your family, let's see how many of your true friends show tonight. Other than myself, of course. How much loyalty can a beggared king buy?

FENWICK

You fat bastard, you'll speak on the royal family with more respect.

GARUS

As you were just speaking of mine?

BARNARD

(quietly)

He has us there.

CALLAN

Garus my old friend, you haven't changed a bit. Always talking out of your ass.

GARUS

My mother once suggested the two maidens of our House ought to wed the two Merick boys. But we decided against it. There will now be only one marriage of our Houses. Can you guess which of you it'll be?

AIDEN

Well since you have it all planned, why don't you save us the trouble.

GARUS

(2 beats)

We don't know either. We're only interested in wedding the future king. A right quandary it must be, choosing a twin. And since he has yet to do so, you two can continue looking on wantonly at my family's fortune.

Garus and Callan share an intense stare, then BELLS TOLL.

GARUS (CONT'D)

Ah, I'm famished. It's good to see you again.

Garus turns and leaves. Callan tries to hide his anger.

CUT TO:

EXT. EASTERN WATCHTOWER/ OAKTOMB GARRISON - NIGHT

CAPTAIN VERRET, LATE-FORTIES, a short man with gusto to make up for his lack in height, enters the eastern watchtower. He isn't fully dressed as he has yet to assess the severity of the situation. Thunder cracks overhead.

WATCHMAN #1

Something's stirring in the trees,
Captain. Coming from the north.

The gusty winds have picked up and drown out his voice.

CAPTAIN VERRET

You sure?

WATCHMAN #1

It's on the move and getting
closer, I know it.

Verrett takes a good long look at the forest.

CAPTAIN VERRET

Right then.
(turns to the garrison)
Every man-at-arms! Half shift, full
rotation! Eyes to the trees!

The hangman interjects from below.

HANGMAN

All set for the prisoner, Captain!

CAPTAIN VERRET

Get on with it then!

JEBSON

I say we wait on his friends to
show! Let 'em see him just before
we break his neck!

CAPTAIN VERRET

He hangs now!

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON - CONTINUOUS

Jebson turns and unlocks Barbota's cell.

JEBSON

Get up. Time to go.

He pulls Barbota to his feet and walks him to the gallows.

CUT TO:

INT. ROYAL HALL/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

The ornate hall's current arrangement will seat nearly a hundred people. The majority of guests have already found their seats while the others stand in line to greet and pay their respects to King Merick and Queen Thalia. Many have brought TRINKETS as a customary gift on such an occasion. The king's table is small and one sided, facing the long hall and his guests. The other tables are being filled with food which the people have yet to touch. Members of the royal family and their extended family sit at the tables nearest the king.

Callan, Barnard, and Fenwick enter from a side hall. At the end of the table they approach sits LENEINE (luh-neen), NINETEEN, an intelligent and beautiful girl, and King Merick's second youngest daughter. Beside her sits Merick's youngest, the TWELVE YEAR OLD ISMEY, sassy and adorable. Fenwick approaches them as Callan and Barnard take a seat.

FENWICK

My two favorite princesses.

ISMEY

And the least favorite of my brother's friends.

FENWICK

I see your tongue is still sharp as ever, Ismey.

Fenwick ruffles her hair, angering her.

LENEINE

Each year she worsens.

FENWICK

Leneine, it's been so long.

He takes her hand and kisses it. Ismey scoffs at the gesture.

LENEINE

Likewise, Fenwick.

FENWICK

I'll be speaking to your father soon. After, I hope we can take one of those walks through the gardens like we used to.

LENEINE

I should like that.

They are clearly fond of each other. Fenwick takes his seat further down the table.

King Merick continues to greet his line of guests. Next up is OSMOND BOGAARD, a hefty fellow in his FORTIES with an unkempt beard and an insufferable personality when drunk. He holds a BRONZE EAGLE SCULPTURE.

QUEEN THALIA

Osmond of house Bogaard, it's no wonder so many mistake you for your brother.

OSMOND

He shan't be joining us my lady, so you needn't worry about any confusions tonight.

KING MERICK

Osmond, how do you do?

OSMOND

My King, this eagle was formed the day the Vezihl mountains were liberated. It belongs to you now.

KING MERICK

You mountain folk are such a generous people. It's a wonderful gift. Please do take your seat.

Osmond nods. A nearby SERVANT takes the eagle away. Next in line is the notorious Ivan Storbeck. Merick knows he's in for a witty ride and gladly embraces it.

KING MERICK (CONT'D)

If it isn't Ivan of House Storbeck.

Ivan bows.

IVAN

My liege.

KING MERICK

How typical of him. He bows, dare I say with a hint of cynicism, and doesn't bring an offering.

IVAN

Oh no Marcus, you've misjudged me. The gift I've prepared is simply far too large and impossible to carry.

KING MERICK

Oh?

IVAN

I've commissioned a sculptor to whittle your likeness in Gracian marble which stands nearly as tall as this room.

KING MERICK

Marvelous! Where will it be staged?

IVAN

Just north of Brea. The temple near the coast.

KING MERICK

Brea? You know, I'm going to be so busy these coming weeks. It troubles me to say I don't think I'll have time for a sitting.

IVAN

There's no need. He'll simply take the likeness from your effigy in Linden.

KING MERICK

I never felt the Linden monument looked much like me.

IVAN

No?

KING MERICK

The jaw was too wide. My head looked like a great big pumpkin.

QUEEN THALIA

I always thought the Linden sculpture was quite handsome.

IVAN

Ah, maybe it doesn't look like him after all.

They chuckle.

KING MERICK

You know Ivan, I never told you but I've often thought of having your likeness engraved in stone.

IVAN

I can hardly believe that.

KING MERICK

No it's true. And you needn't worry about the sittings either. We already have the perfect replica to draw on.

Merick can hardly hold his laughter.

IVAN

Seeing as my likeness has never been taken, where might you get it from?

KING MERICK

We found a shrivelled old potato. The resemblance is uncanny.

The king bursts into laughter and Ivan smiles.

IVAN

I can only hope to match your wit someday, sire.

QUEEN THALIA

Our guests are waiting, my dear.

KING MERICK

Yes yes, we'll talk later Ivan.

IVAN

If I may, where might Argus be? I expected he'd be here. The feast is in both his and your honor after all.

KING MERICK

A personal matter kept him. I do believe he'll show later on.

IVAN

For him I actually have brought a tangible gift. A Thessian orator. The best in the land they say. It cost a fair sum to bring him. I was hoping he can perform for the hall after we've eaten.

KING MERICK

That sounds wonderful. What will he perform?

IVAN

A song in tribute to the final battle at Answorth.

KING MERICK

Oh I should like that. Where is he?
He's welcome to dine with us until
we're ready.

IVAN

He takes his craft very seriously
and only drinks warm water before
he performs. The salt impedes his
voice. He'll avoid even simple
aromas he finds pleasing.

KING MERICK

Fascinating. I look forward to it.

They smile and nod, and Ivan looks for a seat. Next in line
is Frederic Olerys. He steps forward and is about to speak
when Linette Larinni pushes her way through a few people to
speak with the king.

LINETTE

I can't bloody well stand here all
night.

It's difficult for the king and queen to force this smile.

KING MERICK

Lady Linette. How good to see you.

LINETTE

A marvelous feast you've prepared,
well done.

QUEEN THALIA

Thank you so very kindly.

LINETTE

Forgive me for not having a small
token worth bestowing. We'll
discuss proper gifts in the near
future, I'm sure.

QUEEN THALIA

Of course.

KING MERICK

Yes, the time will come.

The fake smiles continue as Linette turns and leaves. Merick
leans in to whisper in his wife's ear.

KING MERICK (CONT'D)

I'm getting hungry.

(to Frederic)

Ah Frederic, my good man.

Frederic steps forward and nods.

FREDERIC

Sire.

QUEEN THALIA

In the interest of time, let's
continue this after we've eaten.

KING MERICK

Are you sure, my dear?

QUEEN THALIA

Yes Marcus. The food will get cold.
And I, as well as many of our
guests, am awful hungry.

KING MERICK

If you insist.

(stands up)

Everyone to your seats, please.

The guests take their seats.

KING MERICK (CONT'D)

My friends, as my father once told
me, "Marcus my boy, the people
don't want to hear you speak. Just
let them eat." Enjoy!

He gets a good laugh out of his guests and they dig into the
food. Merick sits and does the same. He raises his head from
his meal. Aiden is nowhere in sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD/ ORBIN OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

Argus rides his horse through a STONE ROAD surrounded by DEAD
TREES which intertwine above, obstructing the moonlight. The
road leads through a wall of worn PILLARS AND ARCHWAYS.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORBIN - CONTINUOUS

The pillared wall surrounds ORBIN, an enormous enclosed tomb shaped like a pyramid that has been flattened a third of the way up. Argus continues along towards the main entrance of the majestic structure. He dismounts, tethers his horse, and walks down the long, narrow hall to enter Orbin. The walls consist of symmetrical engravings.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Argus enters the dimly lit foyer. Only one office currently exudes candlelight, prompting Argus to approach. He peers through the uncovered window to see the head keeper of Orbin, RADIVH (ruh-deev), LATE-SIXTIES, a frail and often delirious old man with a voice so hoarse simple words and sentences take effort. He sits at his DESK writing on PARCHMENT.

ARGUS

Not one guard stands watch outside.

Radivh doesn't raise his head.

RADIVH

Who would dare dishonor Orbin when
'the mighty Argus' walks her halls?

ARGUS

You knew I was coming?

RADIVH

(ignores the question)
It was not my idea, for they were
recalled to the King's keep. To
honor you, no less. A very strange
night indeed. But we shall be
alone.

Argus realizes Radivh isn't all there in the head.

ARGUS

I'm here to see my brother.

Radivh places the quill down and picks up a LAMP.

RADIVH

I must take you to him. Follow me.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ LABYRINTH OF TOMBS - NIGHT

The inside of the structure maintains its pyramid-like shape which inverts and extends further into the ground than above. A nearly twenty-foot drop separates each level from the next, with individual walkways and connected stairways. Radivh walks Argus to the edge of the first drop as he marvels at the craftsmanship of Orbin.

RADIVH

They will continue to dig til we
can not see where the dead end.

Argus looks to the bottom of Orbin, which can barely be seen from his level.

RADIVH (CONT'D)

Fit for a king and given to a duke.
We will find him below.

ARGUS

I'll manage on my own. You can
return to your work.

RADIVH

Very generous. But if you become
lost or take a tumble, I will not
hear.

ARGUS

I can manage, friend. I'll have
questions when I return.

RADIVH

(correcting)
If you return.

Argus furrows his brow but takes the lamp from Radivh and begins his descent.

CUT TO:

EXT. EASTERN WATCHTOWER/ OAKTOMB GARRISON - NIGHT

TWENTY GUARDS now stand prepared at Oaktomb. They should be keeping watch but their eyes are peeled on the gallows as Captain Verret speaks his final words to Barbota atop the platform, the noose around his neck. Watchman #1 looks up at the storm clouds and sighs as rain begins to fall.

WATCHMAN #2

Was hoping it wouldn't pour till
after our shift.

WATCHMAN #1

Weren't we all...

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON - CONTINUOUS

Captain Verret has finished reading from the SCROLL.

CAPTAIN VERRET

A remarkable series of crimes. I offer you your last words, Barbota.

BARBOTA

Get on with it, short-ass.

CAPTAIN VERRET

Gentlemen, we carry ourselves to a standard this man wouldn't. Justice must always prevail! If there is no justice, our purpose is lost! The oaths we took would be meaningless! Tonight we remind every raider, every criminal, what justice really is!

The men cheer.

CUT TO:

EXT. EASTERN WATCHTOWER/ OAKTOMB GARRISON - CONTINUOUS

The watchmen in the tower aren't as amused as the others.

WATCHMAN #2

The man really loves the sound of his own voice.

Watchman #1 turns to the main road. He squints to see a FIGURE in the distance step into the road from the trees.

WATCHMAN #1

Look. Down the road.

Watchman #2 turns.

WATCHMAN #2

Who's that?

WATCHMAN #1

Damned if I know.

Watchman #1 turns to the captain below.

WATCHMAN #1 (CONT'D)

Captain, there's someone out there!

CAPTAIN VERRET

What do you see?!

Watchman #1 looks to the figure.

WATCHMAN #1

Can't see much!

The figure is still, then leans its head back and UNLEASHES AN ORC-LIKE SQUEAL! The watchmen's eyes widen, fearful. They turn to the men.

WATCHMAN #1 (CONT'D)

RAUNTS!

The guards scramble as the squeals multiply from within the forest. Several more figures step through the trees. They are still difficult to see.

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON - CONTINUOUS

Captain Verret barks orders at his frightened men.

CAPTAIN VERRET

To your posts! Bar the gate!

Archers at the ready!

(to Jebson)

Secure this man!

Jebson removes the noose from Barbota's neck.

BARBOTA

Don't lock me in there! You know
what they'll do when they find me!

JEBSON

Quiet!

Jebson pushes Barbota down the platform to the small cell.

BARBOTA

Give me a sword! I'll not fill the
belly of a raunt!

They wrestle and Jebson pushes him to the ground, then locks the cell. The raunts continue to squeal.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD/ ILMARINEN'S VILLA - NIGHT

Rain pours inside the courtyard as Lethodus waits under a covered patio, his arms crossed. The main door to the villa opens and FOUR SOLDIERS led by Thantos walk a chained creature to Lethodus. It is dark beyond the patio as one of the soldiers speaks his mind.

SOLDIER #3

No easy task getting this one in irons. Hope you have good reason making us come up here.

LETHODUS

Bring him.

They step into the light under the patio and we get a good look at the creature. The creature, MEDRAUT, is a raunt pig-man, a humanoid being with dark red skin, pronounced facial bones, and a snout-like nose. Medraut is thickly boned and muscled and stands over six feet tall.

LETHODUS (CONT'D)

What is your name, creature?

(no response)

Do you know who I am?

(no response)

I'd be hard pressed to find a raunt who hasn't heard of Lethodus, or Lord Ilmarinen they call me as well.

Medraut snarls when he hears the name. Lethodus looks to the bleeding wound across Medraut's side.

LETHODUS (CONT'D)

There's no greater enemy of the raunts than I. As it stands, I could have had you whipped and thrown back in whichever camp you escaped, however long ago it was. Hard labor with a wound like that, you wouldn't last long. But there's a reason I brought you here. Wouldn't you like to know it?

(no response)

Speak creature! I shan't speak to myself all night!

Medraut growls, his gaze intensifies as he leans forward and responds with his deep, unpleasant voice.

MEDRAUT

What do you want?

LETHODUS

(3 beats)

The raunts will win this war.

Kodricks comes down the stairs to the courtyard.

KODRICKS

What are you doing, father?

Lethodus ignores his son and raises Medraut's right sleeve, revealing a TATTOO on his shoulder shaped like an '8' without round edges which opens and extends on opposite sides from both ends.

LETHODUS

They told me you had a chieftain's markings. Left for dead in the forest and it was your own who did it. Am I wrong?

(no response)

I thought not. Mutineers?

(no response)

I thought so.

(Medraut snarls)

What, are you too smart for your own good? They thought you weak?

Why did they leave you to die?

(no response)

Give me what I want and I'll set you free before the night is over.

MEDRAUT

(2 beats) I was betrayed.

LETHODUS

It wasn't a formal challenge?

MEDRAUT

No.

LETHODUS

Unfinished business, eh?

(to Thantos)

Fetch the doctor. And bring water.

Thantos hurries off. Medraut continues to eye Lethodus.

CUT TO:

INT. ROYAL HALL/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

The feast is in full swing. Music and laughter fill the hall as the king and his guests fill their bellies. Fenwick speaks with young Ismey from further down the table.

FENWICK

Callan told me you were notorious
for your teasing.

ISMEY

I just don't think he was as brave
as you say.

Callan finds this amusing and doesn't take it personally.

FENWICK

But you weren't there and I was,
young lady.

ISMEY

He'd scream like a girl when he
found a spider in his room at
night. Besides, you're his best
friend. How can I take your word
for it?

BARNARD

I'll vouch for him.

ISMEY

No one cares about you Barnard.

Barnard sarcastically sulks while the others laugh.

FENWICK

Few men were as eager as your
brother to lead men into battle.

ISMEY

I don't think my father would allow
that.

FENWICK

Callan would proudly ride with the
vanguard when he could.

ISMEY

That's not what I heard.

LENEINE

That's enough, Ismey.

ISMEY

Aiden told me... Ouch!

Leneine secretly pinches Ismey and leans in, dead serious.

LENEINE

I said that's enough.

It has now become personal for Callan.

CALLAN

What did Aiden tell you?

ISMEY

(beat) Nothing.

GO TO:

Ivan's table seats Osmond Bogaard, along with Frederic and his family, among others.

IVAN

Really we thought you were him.

OSMOND

Happens every time I visit the capitol.

IVAN

In that case we've never had the pleasure. Ivan Storbeck.

Ivan extends a hand and Osmond shakes it.

OSMOND

I know who you are.

IVAN

Through your brother?

(Osmond nods)

And what does he say about me?

Osmond chuckles, which says enough and prompts Ivan to smile.

FREDERIC

Such an unlikely friendship,
wouldn't you say?

OSMOND

Very odd, yes.

IVAN

I should like to visit him soon.

BRISA

The mountain air does you good. And
it gives me much needed respite
from you.

GO TO:

The table nearest Callan's seats his elder sisters and their families. Elise sits next to her husband RENFORD QUENSEL, a stern man who rarely smiles. Across from them is Avina and her husband ORSON VAERWYCK. Their marital relationships resemble complete opposites as Orson and Avina feed each other and seemingly can't keep their hands off one another, making Elise and Renford uncomfortable.

BACK TO:

Callan appears distracted while the others talk and laugh. Aiden enters the hall. King Merick notices him as he looks for a seat at Callan's table. He appears frustrated with Aiden, as does Callan, but for different reasons.

KING MERICK

Aiden my boy, I'm planning a trip
for you. Would you like to guess
where you'll be going?

AIDEN

Sorry I'm late, father.

KING MERICK

As you can see, everyone else
managed perfectly well. I wonder
why it is you couldn't do the same.

AIDEN

(under his breath)
He's insufferable.

CALLAN

He didn't ask a whole lot of you
though, did he?

Aiden is surprised to hear this from Callan and ignores him.

ISMEY

Late again, Aiden. Is it really so
terrible to dine with your family?

AIDEN

It's only you I can't stand, Ismey.

ISMEY

You won't have to worry about me
when father sends you away.

The table laughs.

AIDEN

That'll be the best part. Getting
away from you.

LENEINE

Quit being so rude.

AIDEN

Please don't tell me you meant me.

LENEINE

She's a child for heaven's sake.

AIDEN

(sarcastically)
And what a sweet child she is.
Takes after you, Leneine.

CALLAN

Why don't the lot of you shut it
and eat your food.

AIDEN

That's nice, Callan. Nothing smart
for him, Leneine?

LENEINE

He didn't denigrate his twelve-year-
old sister.

AIDEN

(sarcastically)
I know. I'm a monster.

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON/ BATTLEMENTS - NIGHT

Captain Verret stands atop the battlements over the main
gate. He overlooks the dozens of raunts which have collected
at a safe distance from his archers. XANTHE (zanth), a
vicious raunt walks to the gate and speaks to the men above.

XANTHE

Who is the captain?

CAPTAIN VERRET

I speak for the men. Captain Verret of Oaktomb. What is it you want?

XANTHE

(chuckles) We want Oaktomb.

CAPTAIN VERRET

You can't have it.

XANTHE

Leave now, with your men, and we let you live.

CAPTAIN VERRET

It's our duty to defend Oaktomb to the bitter end.

XANTHE

Then you will all die tonight.

CAPTAIN VERRET

The raunts have never breached these walls. Do your worst, vile thing.

Xanthe exudes confidence as the soldiers look down at him.

XANTHE

You have a prisoner, yes? A man with one eye?

The soldiers whisper of Barbota to each other.

CAPTAIN VERRET

Quiet.

(to Xanthe)

We have many prisoners. What concern are they of yours?

XANTHE

Give us the one-eyed man.

CAPTAIN VERRET

Why?

XANTHE

Give us the one-eyed man and we leave Oaktomb.

CAPTAIN VERRET

What do you want with him?

XANTHE

You ask too many questions,
Captain.

CAPTAIN VERRET

I ask what I must know. You claim
you want Oaktomb and would now
settle for a prisoner? Don't think
that sits well with anyone who
hears it.

XANTHE

Better then to die?

CAPTAIN VERRET

(to Jebson)
Bring me Barbota.

Jebson hustles to the holding cell, unlocks it, and pulls
Barbota out and up the stairs to the main wall. He now stands
beside Captain Verret.

CAPTAIN VERRET (CONT'D)

Prisoner Barbota, this raunt has
offered me a truce in the event I
hand you over to him. Why?

BARBOTA

(beat) I don't know.

CAPTAIN VERRET

You don't know him?

BARBOTA

I don't.

CAPTAIN VERRET

(to Xanthe)
The prisoner claims he knows
nothing of you.

XANTHE

We are old friends. Tell the
Captain.

BARBOTA

I don't know you, raunt.

CAPTAIN VERRET

Don't think I believe either of
you. Take him back.

(to Xanthe)
There will be no trade.

XANTHE

But Captain, you haven't heard my final offer.

Verret waits. Xanthe turns and signals his compatriots, prompting them to bring forward FIVE HUMAN PRISONERS in chains. They appear worn and beaten as TWO RAUNT GUARDS pull them to Oaktomb.

XANTHE (CONT'D)

Five prisoners for the one-eyed man.

Captain Verret looks on the prisoners with true empathy.

CAPTAIN VERRET

What's your business with Barbota?

XANTHE

NO MORE QUESTIONS, CAPTAIN!

CAPTAIN VERRET

I won't release one murderous heathen into the arms of another!

Xanthe walks to the prisoners and smells them.

XANTHE

Their lives for his.

CAPTAIN VERRET

You have my answer. I must do my duty.

Xanthe waits, then waves off his guards with the back of his hand. They all retreat to a safe distance, Xanthe still in clear view of Verret and the rest of Oaktomb.

XANTHE

Bring me a prisoner!

The raunt guards unshackle a prisoner, a shivering and whimpering, scrawny man.

XANTHE (CONT'D)

Who's hungry?!

(sparks some enthusiasm)

I SAID WHO'S HUNGRY?!

The raunts squeal in excitement. Xanthe brutally grabs the prisoner's arm and extends it.

XANTHE (CONT'D)

SO AM I! SOMEONE CUT ME A PIECE!

One of the guards comes forward, axe in hand, and swings down on the prisoner's shoulder, severing his arm. The prisoner drops to his knees screaming so loudly his echoes can be heard in the forest. Xanthe takes a bite of the flesh from the dismembered arm he holds, then tosses it to his raunts. The men of Oaktomb look on in both horror and fury.

CAPTAIN VERRET

YOU SWINE! YOU ANIMALS! I'LL HAVE
YOUR HEADS FOR THIS!

XANTHE

FACE ME CAPTAIN! I CHALLENGE YOU!

CAPTAIN VERRET

YOU'LL WHITHER AND DIE AT THE WALLS
OF OAKTOMB!

Xanthe lifts the prisoner by his neck and throws him into the herd of raunts who proceed to tear him to pieces.

CUT TO:

INT. ROYAL HALL/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

As the feast carries on, the music has slowed but the guests continue to eat and converse. Callan doesn't appear to be having a good time as he stares off in the distance.

ISMEY

Why do you look so angry, Callan?

Callan slowly meets her gaze but doesn't respond.

ISMEY (CONT'D)

I told you he was angry.

CALLAN

Shut it, Ismey.

ISMEY

Father! Callan told me to shut it!

KING MERICK

Callan, don't dare talk to my
little princess like that.

Ismey gives her father big doe-eyes.

ISMEY

Thank you father.

He absolutely adores her and sends her a kiss.

KING MERICK

I love you darling. You tell me
whenever they talk to you like
that. I'll set them right.

She looks back to Callan, grinning.

CALLAN

Well done.

ISMEY

Ugh, why are you so boring tonight?
(ignored, turns to Aiden)
Aiden?... Aiden?!

AIDEN

Yes, sweet sister?

ISMEY

Never mind. You're always boring.

AIDEN

You'd really call my name just to
insult me, eh?

Ismey giggles. At the end of the table sits ORDIN MENDELLE, LATE-TWENTIES, a clean-cut man and cousin to the royal family. He appears inebriated and is quite obnoxious as he boasts and laughs with his nearby friends. A beautiful SERVANT GIRL, AELA, walks by Ordin holding a pitcher of wine. He grabs her and pulls her to his lap.

ORDIN

Hello gorgeous. Where are you off
to? Our cups need filling.

AELA

Of course, my lord. Apologies.

As she refills their cups, Ordin smells her hair.

ORDIN

You're too pretty to be working in
the kitchens.

AELA

Thank you, sir.

Callan turns to see what is happening. His eyes sharpen.

ORDIN

I mean it. Come to my chambers
after the feast.

AELA

And why would I do that, my lord?

CALLAN

Ordin, let the girl go.

ORDIN

She's more than happy to sit right here on my lap, aren't you darling?

Aela smiles.

CALLAN

I'll excuse your drunkenness for now. You're not yourself.

ORDIN

I'm perfectly fine, cousin. She and I were just discussing...

CALLAN

(interrupts)

Girl, get back to the kitchens. I apologize for his behavior.

AELA

Yes, lord.

Aela stands but Ordin grabs her wrist.

ORDIN

Just a minute here...

Callan gets to his feet.

CALLAN

Touch her again and I'll have you thrown out of here.

ORDIN

(2 beats)

I don't think the guards would dare, Callan.

CALLAN

I'll do it myself.

Ordin has no response. Fenwick intervenes.

FENWICK

Leave it be, Ordin. Really.

A moment passes. Ordin releases Aela's wrist.

ORDIN

Fine.

Aela exits the hall. Callan sits, still very much on edge. Those around him feel the same. Realizing he doesn't want to be there, Callan leaves the hall.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN HALLS/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

Aela walks down the empty hall, frustrated. Callan turns the corner and catches up to her.

CALLAN

Aela, I'm sorry.

AELA

You only made it worse.

CALLAN

What?

AELA

You came to apologize?

CALLAN

For my cousin, not me.

AELA

(sarcastically)

Oh, because I've never dealt with unruly nobles before.

CALLAN

Stop with that.

AELA

Don't make me out to be some helpless victim in front of all those people. It's humiliating.

CALLAN

Alright I didn't like seeing him touch you. Is that better?

AELA

You think you can tell me what to do, is that it?

CALLAN

You're no slave but you do work for me.

AELA

I work for the royal House. Should I lay with them too?

CALLAN

That's not what I meant and you know it.

AELA

Then I should play the part? Is that what you expected?
(flirtatious tone)
Oh my darling prince. What ever would I do without you? The way you protected my honor in there. How ever shall I repay you, sire?

CALLAN

Stop it.

AELA

(sarcastically)
I mean it. I need a big strong man to protect me. And I'll do anything in return.

Callan grabs her by the shoulders.

CALLAN

Seems like everyone's questioning my manhood today. I don't like it.

Aela can tell he's down and eases on the sarcasm.

AELA

What's the matter?

CALLAN

I don't know. I'm sorry.

She grabs his crotch.

AELA

You feel like a man to me.

They passionately kiss as Callan pulls her inside a SMALL STORAGE CLOSET nearby.

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON/ BATTLEMENTS - NIGHT

They look on in horror as two of the human prisoners are being eaten alive. Their screams are disturbing.

XANTHE

ARE YOU AFRAID, CAPTAIN VERRET?!
STAND FOR YOUR MEN! FIGHT FOR THEM!

Near Verret stands RENIC, a large and brave soldier who has seen enough and steps forward.

RENIC

I'll face you!

CAPTAIN VERRET

Get back I say!

XANTHE

(chuckles)

This is your brave captain who
hides behind his soldiers?!

Renic turns to Verret.

RENIC

We'll hear their screams all night
till we're exhausted. They only
need half the sleep we do, you know
that.

CAPTAIN VERRET

You trust that creature to keep his
word?

RENIC

I trust he'll fight me. Give me the
chance to cut him down and I will.

Verret hesitates, then give a reluctant nod. Renic turns to Xanthe.

RENIC (CONT'D)

Face me raunt!

XANTHE

I challenged your Captain, not you!

RENIC

Coward! Your axe will wilt against
hardened Etiaaronian steel!

XANTHE

For what prize?!

RENIC

The prisoners go free!

XANTHE

And the one-eyed man?!

RENIC

(to Verret)

You won't have to give him up. I can save them.

Verret hesitates, then nods.

RENIC (CONT'D)

He's yours if you beat me!

XANTHE

I accept!

Renic backs away.

RENIC

Whatever happens, don't let them use me to get inside.

CAPTAIN VERRET

We're with you, brother. Slay the bastard.

The men pat him on the back as he heads down the steps.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ TOMB NETWORK - NIGHT

Argus enters the lower levels. The walls are covered in artistically designed ONYX MARBLE. He passes room after room, each containing the coffin of once important men and women. He then reaches a tomb with an ENGRAVED PLAQUE written in a form we don't understand.

INT. ORBIN/ LUGUS' TOMB - CONTINUOUS

Argus enters the tomb. After a moment, he places his hand on the STONE COFFIN as his eyes swell with tears.

ARGUS

I was hoping it was all a bad dream. I almost thought it wasn't real until just now. I'll miss you dearly, Lugus. You were the best man I ever knew.

Argus kneels and sits against the coffin.

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON - NIGHT

The gate to Oaktomb cracks open and Renic steps outside to meet Xanthe. Neither of these two contenders exude fear.

XANTHE

I'll keep you alive before we eat you. The meat's juicier when the blood's still pumping.

Renic unsheathes his sword.

RENIC

You don't frighten me. You're not the first raunt I've faced. Beyond your strength and fear-mongering, the truth is, none of you are very skilled with a blade. And I've practiced all my life. You made a mistake accepting my challenge. I reckon this will be an easy bout.

Renic smiles and Xanthe realizes there is doubt in his heart.

RENIC (CONT'D)

Come on then.

Xanthe snarls and charges at Renic, swinging his axe down hard at him. Renic sidesteps, knocking Xanthe off balance for a moment. Xanthe again charges and their weapons meet multiple times with Renic largely playing defense. He has yet to attack as Xanthe rages for the kill early in the fight. They clash and shove and Xanthe punches Renic in the nose, bloodying him. Xanthe growls at his first real connection and gains confidence. He continues swinging heavy shots with his axe, missing and being parried.

XANTHE

Where are you skills now human?

RENIC

You look tired. Would you like to rest?

The insult enrages Xanthe further and he overextends on his next swing, leaving an easy parry for Renic who then kneels and slices Xanthe's left calf. Renic backs away to gloat.

RENIC (CONT'D)

That leg's useless now. Shall I
take the other or your arm next?

Xanthe furiously stands but can hardly put weight on his injured leg. He limps to Renic and continues swinging. Renic surprises him with some aggression of his own, knocks him back, and cuts his right arm leaving a nasty gash. It takes a moment for Xanthe to realize Renic is toying with him at this point. Renic swings at Xanthe who blocks the oncoming attack, then pushes his axe to the ground and kicks it out of Xanthe's hand. He kicks his knee and Xanthe falls, only to look up and see Renic's blade at his throat.

RENIC (CONT'D)

You wanna live? Crawl back to them.

(Xanthe refuses)

Too proud for that, eh? They
wouldn't accept you as chief
anymore, would they?

(no response)

I'll give you a clean death. But
first have them send over the
prisoners.

Xanthe motions to the guards holding the three remaining prisoners. They are released and run to Oaktomb. The gate is cracked open and they hurry inside to safety.

RENIC (CONT'D)

To the next life.

He runs his sword through Xanthe's gut. The raunt slumps over, dead. Renic looks on to the small raunt army, wondering what they will do next.

RENIC (CONT'D)

You were to disband! Off with you!

A moment later, a spear whizzes over his shoulder, emboldening the irresolute raunts who begin marching forward. Renic backs away, then runs to the gate as the raunts prepare GRAPPLING HOOKS and SHIELDS for a siege. They walk over Xanthe's corpse, showing little respect or discretion.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD/ ILMARINEN'S VILLA - NIGHT

Ilmarinen's PHYSICIAN is cleaning and sewing Medraut's wound.

LETHODUS

Ever wondered how many raunts we
have working the mines?

(no response)

Half a million. Now there's
something you weren't privy to. And
how could you be? You escaped yours
and whatever path led you to this,
it's likely not far from home. Half
a million, think of it. That number
will double before my life ends.
And by then it'll be too late. I
won't allow it to happen.

As he looks out into the rain, we realize Lethodus truly does
see this as a coming scourge. He turns to Medraut.

LETHODUS (CONT'D)

You will return to your people with
a message from Lethodus Ilmarinen.
Luck appears to be on your side. We
have a King who doesn't trouble
himself with the problems facing
the eastern provinces, not knowing
soon they'll spill through the
Sunderland. It took everything I
had to hold the east while he
fought his petty war with the
Ansgers. I can't reinforce the
border and the raunts will pour
through like a dam that's just
broken. The Trenshire provinces are
ripe for the taking, if only you
knew. And that'll hurt us more than
any of your skirmishes have. We
deal with one confined uprising
after another, each worse than the
last. You breed like rabbits and
grow twice as fast. I want to stop
this war before it begins. There
are lands to the north. Untamed
lands, but they'll suit you. Rally
every chieftain you find. A truce
can be made.

Medraut steps towards Lethodus.

MEDRAUT

If the raunts win the war, why
would we want peace?

Lethodus intensifies as he steps in front of Medraut.

LETHODUS

Because I will slaughter every
Sunderland raunt in shackles before
I give you the satisfaction of
setting them free.

The cut on Lethodus' jawline from his shave earlier has
opened up and is dripping blood.

LETHODUS (CONT'D)

You can save your brothers and
sisters and your children if you
complete this task. Relay the
message. Do we understand each
other?

MEDRAUT

(beat)
I'll tell them.

Lethodus wipes the blood from his chin and looks to Thantos.

LETHODUS

And you won't go alone.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ TOMB NETWORK - NIGHT

Argus is halfway up the lurid walkway back to the top. He
looks up to find Radivh watching him. Radivh turns and walks
out of sight.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ TOMB NETWORK - LATER

Argus has reached the top. Torches have been extinguished.

ARGUS

Radivh?

He squints to see a CLOAKED FIGURE approach.

ARGUS (CONT'D)

Who goes there?

Argus turns to the right to see a second cloaked man
approach, and a third to his left as well.

ARGUS (CONT'D)

Radivh?! Who are you?! Speak!

Argus backs away and realizes he is dangerously close to the steep ledge. The three cloaked men quicken their pace. Argus throws his torch at one of them. They knock it away and crowd Argus as they grab him, kicking and shouting. They appear to be three large men as they DRAG HIM TO THE LEDGE AND PUSH HIM OVER! He first lands at the edge of the first staircase, a ten foot drop, then falls another eighteen feet to a flat platform below. The cloaked men watch as Argus thuds.

CUT TO:

INT. KING'S HALL/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

The feast has quieted as the guests recover from their excessive eating. The musicians are taking a break as well. Callan enters the hall looking much more upbeat.

BARNARD

Where the hell have you been?

CALLAN

Needed some air.

Leneine, Fenwick, and Ismey know exactly what he was up to.

FENWICK

Looks like it did you good.

CALLAN

Why's the music stopped?

No one cares. Callan walks to the musicians.

CALLAN (CONT'D)

It's too quiet in here.

KING MERICK

Not now Callan. We all need a rest.

CALLAN

Father, the feast is meant to last the night.

KING MERICK

It appears we've eaten ourselves into an early slumber.

The hall appears to agree. Ivan Storbeck interjects.

IVAN

Might I suggest we bring in my Thessian friend?

(MORE)

IVAN (CONT'D)

Although I'd hoped Argus would be present, after what I paid it'd be a shame to miss it.

KING MERICK

Oh yes that's a wonderful idea.

Ivan snaps his fingers at a nearby servant who knows what to do. He leaves the hall for a moment and returns with THE THESSIAN, a BEARDED man in his SIXTIES. He is hooded as the servant takes him to the king. The servant relays his messages as the Thessian won't speak directly to him.

SERVANT #2

My lord, I present to you the Thessian.

KING MERICK

I see that. Does he have a name?

SERVANT #2

For the sake of his craft, he's relinquished his own identify for whatever character or part he may play.

KING MERICK

How interesting. A zealot of the stage.

SERVANT #2

With respect, he demands the light be arranged to his liking.

KING MERICK

Very well.

The Thessian mumbles something inaudible. Servant #2 leans in to hear, then relays it to the king.

SERVANT #2

Also, with respect, he says if a single guest should interrupt him, he will immediately end the performance and return home.

KING MERICK

(chuckles)

Well I think we can manage to keep quiet for a short while.

(to his guests)

No one is to say a bloody word while he performs!

The Thessian bows and walks to the center of the hall. Servant #2 directs his coworkers to extinguish half the torches in the room. He then hands a lit torch to the nearest servant, takes one himself, and they stand at a distance over both the Thessian's shoulders. The Thessian stands there, his head bowed and hands folded together, as the guests wait.

THE THESSIAN

Etiaaronians!

He draws a few gasps from the room and removes his hood.

THE THESSIAN (CONT'D)

Have you not heard tales of the Great War? Of Argus? Of House Ansger and the battle for Tarlow? Then let justice be done! But I, a mere Thessian Thespian possess not such gifts. For if my words were swords I could pierce your hearts, and this tale of lions and men would echo through the hall! Let your hearts tremble in fear, in triumph, on this past summer's eve Argus charged the ramparts of Tarlow! And from above, the four proud Ansger brothers spat curses upon your armies! "Curse Argus and his ilk! Curse all of Etiaaron! In the name of our forefathers, we shall never again bend the knee!" Among them, Lucius Ansger, a foe too formidable for even Argus some said, held the wall. Those he'd beaten were beginning to pile, becoming trophies mounted at the foot of Tarlow. Argus had seen too many of his brethren fall. He beckoned Lucius to a duel and the two titans clashed atop the wall! This was no mere battle, for the victor would determine the future of Etiaaron, and the men knew it. Where morale was weak, Argus held firm their will. And should Lucius fall, they feared the walls of Tarlow would hold no longer. Their steel clashed with thunderous force! The weight of the Kingdom on their shoulders! A duel for the ages!... And the victor? Who stood triumphant?

(3 beats)

For it was Lucius of house Ansger.

He elicits confused murmurs and gasps from the room.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ TOMB NETWORK - NIGHT

CLOAKED MAN #1 takes a torch and drops it near the place Argus had fallen. It's currently very difficult to see him due to the restrictive light. The torch lands a few feet from Argus, revealing him to be laying completely still on the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. KING'S HALL/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

The Thessian continues to command the hall.

THE THESSIAN

There Argus lay, Lucius' axe embedded in his chest. "All is lost!" Many had shouted. "For Argus has fallen! Our great protector stands with us no longer!" Those closest to Argus fought to protect his body. "None of you are to touch him! He retains his honor!" The horror on your faces mirrors the men who fought that day. How is it possible?... But remember this, friends. A lion never quits.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ TOMB NETWORK - NIGHT

Argus lays still. Then suddenly, he exhales a puff of breath and his hands begin to shake. He can hardly move.

CUT TO:

INT. KING'S HALL/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

The Thessian continues.

THE THESSIAN

Like a lever on his soul, his armor pinned to his chest, the axe was pulled and Argus breathed life once again!

(MORE)

THE THESSIAN (CONT'D)

A divine miracle they called it.
 And perhaps so. "He lives!" They
 cried! The men rallied and stormed
 the gate! They knew the tide had
 turned. Or rather a flood. A flood
 of Etiaronian lions as the gates
 came crashing down and the Ansgers
 retreated to the citadel! Argus led
 the charge, fresh as he was when
 the battle began!

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ TOMB NETWORK - NIGHT

Argus reaches ahead, mustering what strength he can to pull himself forward. Cloaked man #3 is still watching as the other two are leaving.

CLOAKED MAN #3

You're not gonna believe this...

The other two return.

CLOAKED MAN #1

Finish it. Has to look like an
 accident.

Cloaked man #3 nods and calmly heads down the steps.

CUT TO:

INT. KING'S HALL/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

The Thessian continues.

THE THESSIAN

One by one, the Ansgers fell.
 Domran and Siig in the lower
 levels, fighting side by side the
 two brothers embraced their fate as
 Etiaron's sons took vengeance.
 Lucius and Guile knew the end had
 come. Further up the citadel, they
 set fire to the great treasures of
 their forefathers. But unbeknownst
 to Argus, there were more than
 family heirlooms being made rid of.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ TOMB NETWORK - NIGHT

Argus gets to his knees. Cloaked Man #3 looks down from the level above as he descends the stairs.

CLOAKED MAN #3

The time has come, Argus.

ARGUS

Who are you?

CLOAKED MAN #3

It's miraculous you survived. I'll send you further this time.

He makes his way to Argus.

ARGUS

Who are you?!

CLOAKED MAN #3

Why does it matter? Need something to think about on the way down?

He grabs Argus under the arm. In a surprise show of strength, Argus grabs the cloaked man behind both heels, causing him to lose his balance, then pulls him over and willingly TAKES A SECOND TUMBLE WITH HIS ASSAILANT! Argus lands on top of the cloaked man who is winded and in shock. The two cloaked men above immediately begin making their descent after seeing this. Argus groans in pain, but has luckily avoided a serious injury this time around. He frisks the cloaked man's belt, finds and unsheathes a DAGGER, then stabs him in the neck. Argus then holds the torch up to the man's face but doesn't recognize him. He struggles to stand and heads inside the nearest tomb.

CUT TO:

INT. KING'S HALL/ KING'S KEEP - NIGHT

The Thessian continues.

THE THESSIAN

Guile Ansger stood his ground, tricked by Lucius to protect his eldest brother's final mission. Argus threw Guile to the flames! In a rabid state, Guile found himself at the edge of the balcony, and what a tragic end it was. Then, a cry from above. A woman's voice. Argus raced to the tower's summit.

(MORE)

THE THESSIAN (CONT'D)

To his horror, he found Lucius had murdered his own sister, whom he kept locked away. "No other man shall have her!" He cried through tears in the embrace of his incestuous lover. Argus gave him a soldier's end. More than he deserved. With the stroke of his blade, the west had fallen. Tarlow again belonged to Etiaron. Red and black had turned to gold and blue. And the course of history was forever changed.

(3 beats)

I ask you now, what tales have you heard of the Great War? With reverence they must be remembered. In the splendor of your Houses and for the glory of Etiaron, I ask you to remember. For the dead can not.

The Thessian bows his head in conclusion. The king begins clapping and the hall follows suit.

KING MERICK

Marvelous, my friend. Truly wonderful. Thank you.

The Thessian bows to the king and leaves the hall. The guests really enjoyed his performance.

KING MERICK (CONT'D)

Ivan that was really something!

IVAN

It was, my King.

KING MERICK

Any of us would be hard pressed to find a better way to end the feast, wouldn't you say?

IVAN

I would say so, my King.

KING MERICK

You're rather agreeable tonight.

IVAN

I am, my King.

The king and Ivan's wife chuckle. Fenwick has something on his mind and stands up.

FENWICK

Perhaps I could interject before we adjourn, sire.

KING MERICK

Very well, young Tarkmann.

FENWICK

In light of this wonderful feast, I would profess the bond we Etiaronians share is truly special. My mother and father would likely disapprove but since they've yet to arrive, I hope you see my veritable intentions.

(looks at Leneine)

I wish to strengthen the bond our Houses share. Through marriage.

Women in the hall, including Leneine, adore his approach. Aiden cringes while Callan fully supports his friend.

ISMEY

No thank you.

People laugh at Ismey's joke, although the king does not.

FENWICK

Well if not you my dear, then who else?

KING MERICK

While your sentiment is appreciated, now's not the time. It's rather late.

CALLAN

C'mon father, it was bound to happen. I'd be proud to call him my brother.

KING MERICK

I know you would, son.

CALLAN

Remember what was said of their union before the war?

KING MERICK

Many things were said then.

CALLAN

No House has been a closer ally and we can all vouch for his character.

KING MERICK

I never doubted his character, but she was never promised to him.

CALLAN

Yeah of course but...

KING MERICK

(interrupts)

That's enough.

The hall is silent. Fenwick hides his humiliation and sits down. Callan stands up for him.

CALLAN

Why would you do this to him?

KING MERICK

(2 beats)

They can not marry because she is promised to someone else.

LENEINE

What? To who?

KING MERICK

I won't have this in front of our guests.

LENEINE

(insistent)

Father, who am I to marry?

KING MERICK

We'll speak on it elsewhere.

LENEINE

So it's to be a secret our friends in this hall can't know?

KING MERICK

(3 beats)

Very well. You are to marry Thomas Ansger.

CALLAN

(furious)

What?!

Murmurs, gasps, and confusion fill the hall.

LENEINE

I'm to marry one of the Ansger brothers?

ISMEY

I thought they all died.

CALLAN

His entire family was killed at Tarlow. All except him.

KING MERICK

He wasn't at Tarlow because he spoke out against the war and stood up to his brothers.

CALLAN

That means nothing in the face of what we did! And you'll marry him to Leneine?! If he did to us what we did to his family...!

KING MERICK

(loudly interrupts)

And if I didn't keep the only survived Ansgar as steward of the west, we'd still be fighting and the death toll would be twice what it was! This is my kingdom! And the west are still my people! If I didn't make sacrifices for them, why would they follow me?!

CALLAN

There has to be another way!

KING MERICK

(condescending)

This is how you make peace, boy! You make it with the people you're fighting!

Aiden looks around at the dismayed faces in the hall, then buries his face in his hands and laughs, angering Callan.

CALLAN

Is this amusing to you?

AIDEN

Don't you think you've done enough for one night?

CALLAN

Do you ever have anything useful to say?

AIDEN

Nothing more for father so now
you're coming after me, is that it?

CALLAN

When I have something to say, I say
it to the man's face. Not behind
their backs.

Aiden knows what he's referring to and has to hit back hard.

AIDEN

What did you tell Argus then?

CALLAN

What?

AIDEN

I watched everyone in this hall
listen to that Thessian's drivel
and thought, 'what does the truth
matter to anyone'? We're very
different in that regard. Take this
morning for example. You
shamelessly paraded Argus in front
of that mob, then stuffed your
arrogant face with food in his
honor while he mourns his brother.

CALLAN

It's not my fault he has a brother
worth mourning.

Aiden stands.

AIDEN

Why didn't he know his brother had
already passed?

Callan is beyond angry as he glares at his brother.

KING MERICK

Enough! Not another word from
either of you!

AIDEN

You threatened to send me away
because I couldn't stomach what you
did to Argus.

KING MERICK

You have never shamed me more than
this night!

AIDEN

All this time, you knew his brother
was dead and kept it from him!

KING MERICK

He had a war to fight!

AIDEN

No! You did it just so he'd stand
there with you in front of a mob!

(to Callan)

And you were just as much a part of
it! I'm nothing like you and I'm
proud to say it! If these people
knew half the things you do...!

Before Aiden can finish, Callan storms over to him and punches him square in the jaw! Aiden slips and hits his head on the edge of a table, then falls to the ground. He grabs the side of his head. Blood drips through his fingers. Callan is startled by the unexpected outcome. The king and queen jump to their feet. Thalia runs to her son. Aiden gets to his feet, looks around the room with all eyes on him, then pushes her away and leaves. His mother follows. You could hear a pin drop at this very moment.

CUT TO:

INT. ORBIN/ RADIVH'S STUDY - NIGHT

Radivh is quickly writing things down on parchment with a fearful look in his eyes. Suddenly, a knife is held at his throat. Radivh begins crying.

RADIVH

Please... There are so many
secrets. I must not die with them.

ARGUS

That's why I'm here, old man.

It appears Argus has made his way back to the foyer.

RADIVH

Argus?

ARGUS

Who are those men?

RADIVH

More secrets I had to keep.

ARGUS

Radivh, who are they?

RADIVH

I don't know.

Argus presses the knife harder at his throat.

ARGUS

If you're of no use to me, I'll end this now.

Radivh pleads for his life. Argus looks down at the freshly scrawled parchment. His eyes widen as he grabs it and reads.

ARGUS (CONT'D)

You had Lugus exhumed? Why?!

RADIVH

Sceptuli poison dissolves the innards. We burned it all.

ARGUS

You're saying he was poisoned by the sceptus plant?

RADIVH

Yes, yes.

ARGUS

And you dug him up and burned him in case I chose to look?

RADIVH

They told me if I didn't, then I would spend what is remaining of my lifetime in the dungeons, and tales of my disloyalty would echo with mere mention of my name. They...

Radivh is in tears and too emotional to finish.

ARGUS

Don't be afraid.

RADIVH

(3 beats)

They did so in the name of the royal family.

ARGUS

That's not possible.

Radivh hands Argus an official order on parchment.

RADIVH

We can't perform such tasks without the royal seal.

Argus is at a loss for words and struggles to breathe.

RADIVH (CONT'D)

Forgive me, Argus. They'll come for me. You must go.

Argus leaves with the parchment still in hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON/ BATTLEMENTS - NIGHT

Renic valiantly fights off the raunts climbing the walls of Oaktomb via grappling hooks. Covering their ascent from below are raunts armed with CROSSBOWS. Captain Verret fights alongside Renic as watchman #3 calls to him from afar.

WATCHMAN #3

Captain! The eastern wall's breached!

Verret looks to see the raunts overwhelming his men across the wall.

RENIC

I'll reinforce them!

Renic realizes his captain is uncharacteristically forlorn.

RENIC (CONT'D)

Captain? What is it?

CAPTAIN VERRET

You need to free the prisoners.

RENIC

You're worried about the prisoners?

CAPTAIN VERRET

We won't last the night and can't doom them to this fate.

RENIC

Barbota?

CAPTAIN VERRET

Don't let the raunts take him.

RENIC

I won't run, sir.

CAPTAIN VERRET

That's an order. Go now. We'll do what we can. I'm trusting you with my final command.

Renic apprehensively nods and turns to the stairs. He grabs Jebson and they run to Barbota's holding cell.

RENIC

Open it.

Jebson is somewhat confounded but doesn't have time to argue. Barbota stands in the cell.

RENIC (CONT'D)

Wait.

(Jebson stops)

What do the raunts want with you?

BARBOTA

I don't know.

RENIC

This is your last chance.

BARBOTA

(beat)

They hear the same stories you do. I don't have what they want. I never found it.

RENIC

(beat) Open it.

Jebson unlocks the cell.

CUT TO:

INT. OAKTOMB GARRISON/ JAIL CELLS - NIGHT

Of the FIVE HOLDING CELLS, two are currently occupied. The two men, REFTIN and VAECRON, are dangerous thieves in their EARLY-THIRTIES. They hear the ongoing battle, including the squeals of the raunts.

REFTIN

Which of us you reckon they'll eat first?

VAECRON

Shut up.

REFTIN

You'd make better eating.

VAECRON

I'd trade a few more moments just
to get it over with.

Renic, Jebson, and Barbota enter the prison. Jebson opens
their cells and they exit.

RENIC

We're getting out of here. There
isn't much time.

Barbota's hands are still shackled.

BARBOTA

Move a hell of a lot faster without
these.

RENIC

You'll have to make due.

Jebson grabs two more pairs of WRIST SHACKLES and binds
Vaecron and Reftin.

REFTIN

Oh come on. Not with those things
out there.

RENIC

Move.

They head through the prison.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORBIN/ MAIN ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Argus has been having a rough night and he looks it as he
exits the main entrance of Orbin.

ALDOUS

Argus?

Argus turns sharply in surprise to see Aldous Wendt waiting
by his horse. He pulls out his dagger and points it at him.

ARGUS

Stay back!

ALDOUS

What's happened to you?

Behind Aldous is Argus' horse, now dead and laying in a pool of blood.

ARGUS

My horse.

ALDOUS

I found him like that. What's going on?

ARGUS

What are you doing here?

ALDOUS

I've a message from the King.

ARGUS

Think I got the message in there.

Aldous steps forward.

ALDOUS

What are you on about?

ARGUS

Stay where you are!

ALDOUS

I'd never do you harm, Argus.

ARGUS

Did you know he was poisoned?

ALDOUS

Who's been poisoned?

ARGUS

Don't lie to me!

ALDOUS

If I've lied, then put that blade to my throat and be done with it.

ARGUS

My brother's remains were destroyed on the King's orders. They tried to have me killed.

ALDOUS

(flabbergasted)

Why?

ARGUS

Did they send you to kill me?

ALDOUS

Of course not!

ARGUS

What's the King's message?

Aldous pulls a letter out of his coat.

ALDOUS

You're to go to Brightwyn. A conditional leave. They have a mission for you.

ARGUS

Merick granted this?

ALDOUS

I was there. I heard every word. Andraste and Josson had his ear.

ARGUS

(3 beats)

Someone doesn't want me in Brightwyn.

ALDOUS

Argus, come with me. We'll go straight to the King.

ARGUS

I can't. There's no one I can trust.

Aldous sees something behind Argus.

ALDOUS

Argus...

ARGUS

What?

The two cloaked men are behind him. Aldous pulls his SWORD from his horse.

ALDOUS

Argus! With me!

Argus decides to put his trust in Aldous and goes to him. As the cloaked men approach, they unsheathe their massive swords and charge.

ALDOUS (CONT'D)

You're no use like this! Get out of here!

Argus struggles to mount Aldous' horse. Aldous helps him.

ALDOUS (CONT'D)

Go or we'll both end up dead!

Aldous places the royal letter in the horse's satchel.

ARGUS

I shouldn't have doubted you!

ALDOUS

Go!

He gallops away and turns to see Aldous clash with the cloaked men. It's a valiant fight for a man his age against two dangerous opponents. Aldous is cut down and the cloaked men watch Argus ride off.

CUT TO:

INT. OUTMODED BELL TOWER/ KING'S KEEP - DAWN

Andraste sits in the corner reading a book. Castor is nearby, sitting next to his fishbowl. He appears saddened and is holding his now dead fish in his hand.

CASTOR

Master?

ANDRASTE

What is it, Castor?

CASTOR

Was the fish like me?

ANDRASTE

How do you mean?

CASTOR

The fish was stuck in the bowl until I let him out.

ANDRASTE

And you are to remain here unless I decide otherwise, is that it?

CASTOR

Yes, master.

ANDRASTE

Tell me, Castor, were you his master or his friend?

CASTOR

He was my friend.

ANDRASTE

Did he wish to dwell in the bowl?

CASTOR

I don't know.

ANDRASTE

If I took him to the river and placed him in the water, as with his bowl, what would happen? Would he have returned to the bowl or swam away?

CASTOR

(beat)

He would have swam away.

ANDRASTE

Then you were his master, as I am yours.

CASTOR

Yes, master.

ANDRASTE

(3 beats)

I have masters of my own, you know.

CASTOR

You do, master?

ANDRASTE

We all have them.

CASTOR

Do you like your masters?

ANDRASTE

(chuckles)

I do what I must.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIDEN'S CHAMBER/ KING'S KEEP - DAWN

Aiden sits on his bed as the DOCTOR finishes stitching the cut on the side of his head. His mother sits very sternly in a chair nearby.

DOCTOR

I'll be back to clean it tomorrow.
In the meantime, no riding. Keep
away from anything overly physical
or stressful.

QUEEN THALIA

Anything else to worry about?

DOCTOR

Wounds like this are never to be
taken lightly. The good news is the
bone's intact and the bleeding is
only external. Just take great care
the next few days.

QUEEN THALIA

Leave us.

The doctor bows and leaves. Thalia coldly stares at Aiden.

AIDEN

It's been a long time since you
looked at me like that.

QUEEN THALIA

What you and your brother just did
to this family may never be mended.

AIDEN

Spare me. Worse things could've
been said.

QUEEN THALIA

We expect children to be selfish,
but you... You're something else.

AIDEN

(sarcastically)
I'm feeling great mother, thanks
for asking. Blood was pouring from
my head just a few moments ago.

QUEEN THALIA

It's the only reason I haven't hit
you myself.

AIDEN

There's my kind mother. Will you be talking to Callan this way?

QUEEN THALIA

Why would I?

AIDEN

I recall him getting into it with father long before I did.

QUEEN THALIA

Callan was only worried for his sister. He shouldn't have spoken to his father in such a way, but he was just trying to protect his family. On the other hand, what were you doing? Everything you said was with the intention of hurting your brother and father. See the difference?

AIDEN

I was telling the truth. That's the difference.

QUEEN THALIA

And what did that get you? What did it bring to our family tonight?

AIDEN

(2 beats)

Did you know he would marry her to the Ansger? Who am I fooling, of course you did. Chances are it was your idea.

QUEEN THALIA

What would you have done?

AIDEN

I would've forced the Westerners back into the sea.

QUEEN THALIA

It couldn't be done. We would've lost the war. Starved or gone bankrupt. Whichever came first. But Thomas Ansger and the barons didn't know. Do you have any idea what the marriage brings this family?

AIDEN

Fenwick had a suitable dowry too.
How much did the Ansger offer?

QUEEN THALIA

Half his coffers were carted over
to us after the negotiations.

AIDEN

Half?

QUEEN THALIA

And we won't see a coin. It's
barely enough to pay the armies.

AIDEN

I suppose I'd sell my child off for
that much, too.

QUEEN THALIA

It was never easy to give my
daughter away to an Ansger, you
best believe that. But I had to.
For this family. For you and your
brother, and the future of this
House. I've made sacrifices all my
life. When are you going to do
right by your family? Is it even in
your ambition to be king?

AIDEN

We all know he'll choose Callan.
I'm not stupid, mother.

QUEEN THALIA

Why would he choose Callan?

AIDEN

He's his favorite.

QUEEN THALIA

Why is he his favorite?

AIDEN

Because he's just like him.

QUEEN THALIA

How so?

AIDEN

They're arrogant. And vain.

QUEEN THALIA

I thought you were honest. What are you avoiding telling me? What else do they share?

AIDEN

I don't know.

QUEEN THALIA

They're strong.

AIDEN

And I'm not?

QUEEN THALIA

If you were, you wouldn't ask.

Thalia stands up and approaches her son. She holds his face in her hands.

QUEEN THALIA (CONT'D)

I'm hard on you, I know. But if your brother goes off to be king, will you live in his shadow all your life? What do you want? What do you stand for? What will you fight for? Who will you be in ten years time?

(3 beats)

Rest now.

She exits the chamber. Aiden is left with his thoughts.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIDEN'S BALCONY/ KING'S KEEP - LATER

Aiden can't sleep and watches the sunrise from his balcony with tears in his eyes.

ANDRASTE (V.O.)

There are those who do not serve a master. Upon these poor souls, they serve only their own torment. You see, you can not break what is already broken.

CUT TO:

INT. OUTMODED BELL TOWER/ KING'S KEEP - DAWN

Andraste looks out the small round window.

CASTOR

I do not understand. What lesson is taught?

Andraste turns to him.

ANDRASTE

We all serve. It gives us reason to wake each morning.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROYAL ROAD - DAWN

Argus, currently a very determined man, is riding hard.

ANDRASTE (V.O.)

It fuels our spirit. A purpose is sought in each being. And it must be discovered, or else you shall never find peace.

FADE TO:

EXT. OAKTOMB GARRISON - DAWN

The raunts have won the battle. The remaining handful of human soldiers are on their knees, all except Captain Verret, who defiantly refuses to submit. A raunt grabs him by the collar and walks him to the already prepared noose, placing it around his neck.

ANDRASTE (V.O.)

Many are borne into their aspirations. They serve their masters and ideals with a conviction that is deep within their bones. That is why they can not escape their destiny.

The raunt pulls the lever, and Verret's neck snaps.

FADE TO:

INT. CALLAN'S CHAMBER/ KING'S KEEP - DAWN

Callan sits in his chamber. He appears sick with guilt and regret. Aela walks into frame and embraces him at his weakest. He needs her right now.

ANDRASTE (V.O.)

To be free without purpose, you are lost. One of the great ironies of this world is that freedom will trap you, for we are bred to be pawns.

FADE TO:

INT. OUTMODED BELL TOWER/ KING'S KEEP - DAWN

Andraste now stands near Castor.

ANDRASTE

To question this is to question our very nature. Life itself. As if we were in search of something else.

From below the tower, we hear a door open and shut.

AIDEN (O.C.)

Andraste!

ANDRASTE

Do you hear that?

CASTOR

I do, master.

AIDEN (O.C.)

Andraste!

ANDRASTE

My master beckons me. I must heed his call.

Andraste very calmly pets Castor and heads for the door.

CUT TO:

INT. THE SEER'S LABORATORY/ KING'S KEEP - DAWN

Aiden is panting from a swift, hard climb up the tower.

AIDEN

Andraste!

Andraste opens the door from the bell tower.

ANDRASTE

What is it, young master?

AIDEN

I wish to be king!

Andraste waits, expecting more conviction and receives it.

AIDEN (CONT'D)

I will be the king of Etiaron.

ANDRASTE

Yes my prince, I believe you will.

He bows. Even while masked, we know Andraste is grinning.

CUT TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.

END.