

FADE IN

EXT. CITY DAY

The city of Erinol, capital of the kingdom Marinia. Everything is prosperous and peaceful. Outside a large, cathedral-like building a banner is hung reading "DungeonCon - All Weekend" on the front.

TITLE SEQUENCE

INT. CONVENTION HALL DAY

Inside the convention hall it's packed with adventurers. THEODORA the duelist buys a chainmail bikini from one of the vendors selling more of the same. She's wearing leather pants, bucket boots and a white poet shirt with a black vest with gold embroidery. A bandana holds her long, curly red hair back. CIARAN the bard walks up. He's wearing a blue shirt and black trousers and boots, his shirt partially unlaced. A lute is slung over his back. He has long, messy dark hair and a short-trimmed beard.

CIARAN

Never thought I'd see you with one of those things, Theo.

THEODORA

Come again?

CIARAN

I know duelists like to travel light, but that thing wouldn't stop a mouse with a toothpick.

THEODORA

(smirking)

What makes you think I'll be wearing it into combat?

CIARAN

(beat)

Oh. Kinky.

At a different booth, ELATHIL the elven scout is considering getting a portrait done in front of a fake dragon hoard. His long blond hair is tied in a braided ponytail slung over one shoulder. He wears earth tones with a cloak and black leather vest over his shirt.

CELESTE (O.C.)

Elathil!

He turns to face CELESTE the nature priestess. She's wearing a simple green dress with a long skirt and carrying her staff of polished,

gnarled wood. Her hair is woven in a set of long braids. She gets leered at by a guy at the next booth wearing shades and a doublet with a popped collar. His booth says "The Mackin' Magi".

ELATHIL

Couldn't stand to be apart from me for more than 5 minutes, eh?

She smiles and swats his arm.

CELESTE

I just wanted to tell you I found out that the Shooting into Melee panel starts at 3.

ELATHIL

Great, thanks.

(to the painter)

Put me down for a sitting at 5.

Ciaran and Theodora enter.

CELESTE

Ciaran! Theo! Over here.

CIARAN

Hey Celeste, El. Either of you seen Soren? The meet and greet is starting soon.

CELESTE

Not since we split up.

PA (O.C.)

Attention arcanists. The runway show is about to begin.

ELATHIL

That narrows it down.

Ciaran looks down the hall and winces.

CIARAN

Let's take the long way around.

THEODORA

What for?

Ciaran points to a particular booth down the hall: Lion Eyes Inc. The banner advertises it as a professional hagiography service. The man at the both has a greased up hairstyle, loud doublet, gaudy jewelry and a smarmy grin as he schmoozes a couple of knights, handing them brochures as he talks.

CIARAN

That's my old boss at the booth. We had... words when I quit. Let's leave it at that.

The group make their way through the hall toward a small stage and runway with a crowd of mages surrounding it and an MC announcing the models and clothes. The current model is wearing a blue dress with an icicle motif.

MC

Ilsa here is showing off the new winter line. As cold as ice, hotter than hell. Yowza!

SOREN the wizard is standing among the crowd watching when the other 4 enter. He has long blond hair and wears a long, red coat over black clothes with one ring on each hand. He smiles at seeing the rest of the party.

SOREN

Hey guys. Not really sure why I watch these things, but...

THEODORA

Nor am I. They're just vanity shows for the designers. Half of this will never appear for sale.

SOREN

Well that, yeah. But there's something else.

The next model that comes out is in an outfit of vaguely Indian design and doing stereotypical yoga poses.

MC

Rakesh shows us in this stunning saffron ensemble that deep enlightenment doesn't have to be drab. Sim sim sala-BAM!

SOREN

I always feel uncomfortable at fashion shows. Like this is wrong or should be offensive on some level. Just me?

AXERON (O.C.)

You always were the sensitive PC type.

SOREN

Oh, hell.

Soren and friends turn around to regard AXERON the necromancer. He looks unoriginally evil with long black hair and a goatee, yellow eyes and pasty skin. He dresses all in black, the sleeves of his shirt cut

off to show off his muscular, tattooed arms. His accessories all have a skull motif.

SOREN (CONT.)

Well you know me, Axeron. I may be a sensitive soul, but at least I've got one.

AXERON

I suppose these four are the meat shield in case your mouth gets you into trouble. Would the elf be more of a salad shield?

ELATHIL

Really? That's the joke you're going with?

SOREN

That's right, you never met my colleagues. This is Ciaran, Theodora, Celeste and Elathil. Guys, this is Axeron making a rare daylight appearance.

Axeron laughs and looks from one person to the next.

AXERON

They're part of your little venture, aren't they?

SOREN

Why do you ask?

Axeron smirks and exits.

THEODORA

He seemed nice.

CIARAN

That was the asshole from the academy? Is he always like that or was he just giddy from his latest virgin sacrifice?

SOREN

Eh, something like that. Charisma was his dump stat.

CIARAN

Emphasis on "dump," it seems.

CELESTE

Why was he asking about the business?

SOREN

Let's just say that being "That Guy" is his favorite hobby.

ELATHIL

If he's still holding a grudge, you may want to watch your back. Some types are better off dead.

PA (O.C.)

Attention con-goers. The tavern meet and greet is now open. Come on down all quest givers, rag-tag heroes, plucky underdogs and mysterious strangers. Find your next heroic deed by saving innocents from evil today.

SOREN

We'll worry about him later. Or never. Let's get going.

The party exits.

INT. CONVENTION HALL, TAVERN DAY (CONT.)

A fake tavern common room has been set up in the convention hall. Various adventurers are inside networking, forming new parties, and talking to quest givers. Quest givers have a table-tent with them showing a yellow exclamation mark. A job board is put up on the far wall and covered in postings. The lighting is visible, but rigged up to leave all the corners in shadow where cloaked figures sit with quest giver table tents and staring into their drinks or meals. Soren and company enter.

SOREN

Okay. Celeste, check the job board then look for any farmers or artisans. Ciaran, Theo, see what you can dig up from the kooky old guys.

CIARAN

You mean the mystics?

SOREN

Semantics. El, work some of that elven magic on the noblewomen. I'll cover the rest of the bases and we'll meet back in an hour.

The group splits up. Ciaran and Theodora start by talking to an old MYSTIC in fancy robes with stars on them at a shadowy table in the corner. A small candle in the center of the table gives them dramatic lighting.

THEODORA

So we have to be standing under a full moon to see the passage?

MYSTIC

Aye. That will lead you to the tomb of B'Tang, assuming you can pass the angry dead who guard it.

Theodora looks to Ciaran who thinks for a moment.

CIARAN

B'Tang... Warlord. Died four centuries ago. Supposedly buried with his sword and formerly mortal servants.

THEODORA

Hmm, legendary sword, you say? Let's see the contract.

Celeste is talking to a pair of farmers at a table in the middle of the room. As she speaks she's packing a pipe.

CELESTE

When did these strange lights first start?

FARMER

About a fortnight ago. The livestock started disappearing not long after that. And now these strange runes are appearing everywhere, burned onto surfaces.

The farmer produces a drawing of a symbol (a crude dollar sign).

CELESTE

Hmm, never seen that before. Are there any old ruins nearby?

FARMER

Oh yes, old temple to a forgotten god a few hours north of the village. Pretty standard.

CELESTE

Ooh, Soren was hoping for a temple raid. Yes, we can help you with this.

She lights a flame on a small flint and steel lighter and sparks up before offering it to the farmers.

CELESTE (CONT.)

You want a hit? Barrow Gold. Really takes the edge off.

The farmer hands over the contract and accepts the pipe.

Elathil is chatting up a young NOBLEWOMAN at the bar.

ELATHIL

The curse sounds truly awful. Where does this cult hang their hoods?

NOBLEWOMAN

They're holed up in the abandoned castle on the hill. We could just wait for the peasants to get the torches and pitchforks, but it's better to have professionals on hand.

Elathil takes her hand and kisses it.

ELATHIL

And I'm only too happy to help, my lady. I'll bring your dilemma to my employer at once.

The noblewoman gives a flirty smile and hands him a contract. Elathil takes a moment to look over it and his eyebrows shoot up. He looks at the noblewoman who winks at him.

ELATHIL (CONT.)

Yeah, I can shuffle this one toward the top.

Soren is sitting at a table with a PRIEST in white robes with an ankh pendant.

SOREN

The Vespertine Vault? Never heard of it, but I like where this is going.

PRIEST

We need a company of adventurers, preferably a set of plucky underdogs with everything to prove, to go down in there and retrieve a special artifact. The Dusdan Tablets tell of an impending cataclysm that-

SOREN

Wait, tablets? Sorry, father. My team and I aren't interested in any prophecy commitments right now. You understand, I hope.

PRIEST

(sigh)

Yes, I understand. Prophecy quests can be a bit demanding of your time.

SOREN

There's a panel for Surviving Heroic Sacrifices later today. Maybe check there.

The group get back together at a table, each of them holding several applications. Elathil is distracted watching a busty sorceress in a corset walk by. Sifting through the paperwork, they notice a tall STRANGER in one of the dark corners with a great coat, a wide-brimmed hat, several knives and a crossbow slung over his back.

THEO

Hey, check out tall, dark and brooding over there. I don't see a quest giver sign on him.

CIARAN

Probably here to network.

CELESTE

Think we should talk to him?

SOREN

Why not? See what he has to offer.

They get up and approach him.

CELESTE

Hi there! You looking for a group?

STRANGER

Something like that. I'm also trying to set things right.

The group look at each other, then back to the stranger.

SOREN

Could you be more specific?

STRANGER

My family fell on hard times and I need help to restore our good name.

ELATHIL

(aside to Soren)

I'm not sure we can afford to get mixed up in family business.

SOREN

(aside to Elathil)

You're probably right.

(to the Stranger)

I'm sorry, but we already have a course of action we're following. Still, I wish you luck.

STRANGER

Could you just hear me out?

CELESTE

I suppose. What's the big quest exactly?

The Stranger pulls a handful of brochures out of his coat.

STRANGER

I represent Sterling Steel. We make a line of excellent utility and cleaning products for adventurers...

SOREN

Oh for the love of...!

The Stranger keeps talking as time elapses. Elathil just rolls his eyes and walks off.

CIARAN

(singing)

Why don't I just f-f-fade away.

Ciaran's form melts and ripples as it fades from sight. A few patrons and chairs are jostled to the side as he slinks off under cover of invisibility.

Theodora grabs someone's drink and splashes it on herself.

THEODORA

Oh wow! Some people, huh? I'll be right back.

Theo exits. Soren sees a RANDOM ADVENTURER and goes up to greet him, grabbing his hand.

SOREN

There you are you old so-and-so! What's new?

RANDOM ADVENTURER

Um... do we know each-

SOREN

(under his breath)

Just help me out here.

Soren looks back at Celeste.

STRANGER

And of course all of our products are green friendly, which I can tell would be a plus for you.

CELESTE

Uh, I suppose that's true.

STRANGER

So what do you say? Would you like to sign up with us?

CELESTE

Uh... Well I...

Soren sighs with guilt and pops back in.

SOREN

I'm afraid she has a non-compete clause in her contract with me. Sorry.

The Stranger clearly does not recognize that he just tried to pitch to Soren a moment ago.

STRANGER

Oh, you're her employer? Pleased to meet you. Perhaps we could JV?

SOREN

We'll think about it. Good day.

Soren takes Celeste's hand and they exit to their table with the others.

ELATHIL

Friggin' pyramid schemes.

SOREN

Now, now, El. They're not schemers, they're "multi-level merchants." Anyway, have you guys settled on our first quest?

THEODORA

Yeah, Celeste found us a good one. Ancient temple. Forgotten god. Spooky goings-on. What do you say?

SOREN

Hot damn, temple raid! Turn in the paperwork to the quest giver and let's roll. I've got a good feeling about this.

EXT. ANCIENT TEMPLE DAY

The party approaches the entrance to a temple complex in a clearing in the woods. Part of it is built into the face of a small cliff. Vines and creepers partially obscure the facade, but they look less healthy and green than the surrounding vegetation.

Celeste, now wearing baggy pants and a matching shirt with a leather breastplate holds out a hand toward the temple and shudders a moment later. Elathil notices and nocks an arrow in his bow. Theodora draws her blade as Ciaran fingers one of his knives. Soren is unarmed but approaches Celeste and puts a hand on her shoulder.

SOREN

Getting some bad juju already?

CELESTE

Yeah. Whatever's causing the trouble is in there, no question.

SOREN

Alright then. Theo, take point. El, watch our backs.

The group take formation with weapons drawn and enter the temple.

INT. ANCIENT TEMPLE DAY

It's pitch black within the temple. Soren picks up a PEBBLE from the entrance. He reaches into one of his coat pockets and takes out a chunk of purple moss. He rubs it on the stone gently and speaks a single word, with his voice taking on a strange resonance. The pebble absorbs the moss and glows with white light. Soren holds it above his head and illuminates the area. Several columns are covered in carvings and writing, but all badly weathered.

SOREN

Ciaran, what do you make of all this?

Ciaran goes to the wall and inspects it.

CIARAN

Draconic script, but it's pretty badly worn. This place doesn't look that old so I'm guessing it was built on the cheap. Try not to sneeze too hard.

THEODORA

Aren't bards suppose to inspire courage?

SOREN

Stay frosty, guys. Let's keep moving.

At the end of the chamber, they see an open arch covered in badly weathered runes. Soren and Celeste take a closer look.

CELESTE

Ohh, bad vibes here.

SOREN

There was a spell matrix in here at some point.  
Abjuration, I think.

THEODORA

Trap? Alarm system?

CELESTE

Ward, sort of. It wasn't for keeping people out.  
It was for keeping something else in.

ELATHIL

Ominous.

A SHADOWY FORM darts past the edges of the light. Everyone starts at the sight and sound of it.

CIARAN

Back-to-back?

SOREN

Agreed.

The party all stand with their backs to one another and weapons ready. Soren is unarmed but speaks with a magical resonance to his voice and his hands crackle with electricity.

The air is still and everyone is waiting. Elathil lifts a brow, looking off to the left and fires into the darkness. An inhuman roar comes up out of the darkness and a BARGHEST charges into the light toward the party who quickly move to try and surround the monster. Theodora holds out her rapier in time for the beast to stick itself on the blade and Elathil ducks out of the way of its claws.

The barghest begins speaking in Infernal, the resonance of its words indicating it's casting a spell.

SOREN

Oh no you don't!

Soren leaps onto the Barghest's back and grabs it by the neck, activating his Shocking Grasp spell. Arcs of lightning dance across its form and its bluish fur stands on end. The barghest howls with pain and falls backward, landing on top of Soren and rolling off of him.

Elathil nocks a pair of arrows and fires both of them into the barghest's flank as Theodora slashes it across the face. It raises a claw to strike, but Ciaran throws one of his knives and impales it

through the back of the hand. Celeste swings her staff in a wide arc, connecting the end with the barghest's jaw and knocking several of its teeth out.

The barghest casts another spell and blinks out of sight, reappearing a short distance away near Elathil. It swings at the elf, hitting him hard in the chest and sending him flying backward into a nearby wall.

Soren casts another spell while still on the ground and rays of green light shoot from his outstretched fingers, hitting the barghest. The beast is surrounded in a halo of shimmering emerald light. Celeste begins a chant, holding her staff before her. It sounds as if he's speaking in multiple octaves and the party members are surrounded by faint halos.

THEODORA

Ciaran, give me an opening!

Ciaran attacks the barghest from behind, stabbing it in the flank with one of his knives, causing it to rear up and roar in pain. Theodora leaps in and uses the opportunity to stab it through the throat. It lets out a death rattle and drops to the ground.

Soren and Elathil pick themselves up and Celeste begins healing them. The others put away their weapons and catch their breath. Theodora inspects the corpse of the barghest. Soren is the first to be fully healed.

CELESTE

What made you think jumping on that thing was a good idea?

SOREN

I had a Shocking Grasp ready and I didn't have the right counterspell. Seemed like a shame to waste it.

ELATHIL

Soren's death wish aside, what was that?

CIARAN

Barghest. Nasty piece of work that feeds on blood and souls. Still, narrows down who this temple could have belonged to.

THEODORA

How do you figure?

CIARAN

Barghests are Lawful Evil outsiders. Probably summoned ages ago to serve as a guard dog, so to speak.

CELESTE

But there are at least half a dozen Lawful Evil gods. Which one was this place dedicated to?

ELATHIL

Who knows? You humans go through gods faster than you do governments.

Celeste applies a healing spell, but gives Elathil a hard pinch when she does so, making him jump slightly. Soren picks himself up and dusts off his coat.

SOREN

Regardless, we're not done here. We've got an evil temple carved into a hillside, which means there's at least a 75% chance of there being vaults or catacombs. Better than even chance they contain a bunch of XP and treasure just lying around going to waste.

THEODORA

(smiling)

Because we really needed the hard sell.

SOREN

I roomed with an enchanter in my senior year at the academy. Let's keep moving.

Soren picks up the light pebble again and they move further back into the room and find a stairway leading down.

CIARAN

Keep an eye out for traps.

They begin to descend when the stairs turn into a slide underneath them and they go plummeting down into the depths, screaming.

INT. ANCIENT TEMPLE - CATACOMBS DAY (CONT.)

The party are running down a catacomb with fire and dart traps going off behind them.

SOREN

I would like to say right now I apologize for suggesting the temple raid first!

THEODORA

Shut up and keep running!

ELATHIL

Pit!

An open pit lies ahead. Elathil is in the front and gracefully leaps over it with a forward flip. Ciaran bounds off the edge and lands on the other side in a roll. Theo springs back and forth between the walls to clear the pit.

Soren slips on a rock and falls face-down in front of the pit. Celeste grabs him and tries to pull him up. The flame traps are closing in.

Soren wraps his arms around Celeste.

SOREN

Jump!

She looks from him to the approaching flames and the two of them leap over the pit together. Soren turns them around in mid-air, holds his hands out behind her and casts another spell. A powerful blast of wind bursts from his palms and propels them across the pit. They land on the opposite side, tumbling end over end once before settling in a crumpled heap together. Celeste blushes, but smiles and picks herself up. Soren laughs in relief as he gets up.

THEODORA

Next time we stay above ground.

SOREN

Hey, this makes for a cool story.

CIARAN (O.C.)

Guys? Check this out.

The group turns and looks to the end of the catacomb to see it ending in a pair of tall, stone doors covered in carved writing. Ciaran is already inspecting them, but the light is poor since Soren's pebble is left behind on the other side of the pit.

Soren walks up to a torch holder that still has an old torch in it. He cups his hands around it, blows and a flame flickers to life at the end of the torch. He brings it over to where Ciaran is inspecting the writing. It's the same sort of markings as they saw earlier, but in better condition.

SOREN

More Draconic script.

CIARAN

Yeah. Little easier to read but the syntax is... off.

CELESTE

An old dialect, maybe?

CIARAN

No, it's just bad. Probably outsourced the carving job. Like I said, cheap.

ELATHIL

Figures. Can you read it?

CIARAN

Sort of. I think this is the high priest's tomb. Something about a curse... and I can't tell if this word is referring to blood or taxes.

ELATHIL

What, like a typo?

CIARAN

No, the words in Draconic for blood and taxes are homophones. I forget which one is which.

SOREN

Any info on how we open it?

CIARAN

There should be a trigger on here somewhere...

Ciaran depresses a segment of the writing into the door. A faint rumble comes through the walls and the doors part and slide into the wall.

The chamber beyond is a large, vaulted room with piles of treasure stacked up and several large, empty braziers. In the center on a small dais is a sarcophagus. The party move in to get a better look.

SOREN

A little lacking in XP perhaps, but otherwise score.

CIARAN

No more monsters? I'm copacetic.

The braziers flare to life. The lid of the sarcophagus grinds as it begins to slide off.

THEODORA

You had to jinx it. More XP at least.

Everyone draws their weapons. The lid finishes moving aside and a MUMMIFIED CORPSE sits up and looks directly at them.

## MUMMIFIED CORPSE

Who dares to disturb the tomb of Vathrix the  
Uncouth? I will-

## SOREN

Ah! That's a proper noun. Bardic Knowledge  
check.

Ciaran rolls his eyes and pauses to think. Vathrix is stunned at  
having been interrupted and snarls.

## CIARAN

Hang on. Vathrix, Vathrix...

## VATHRIX

Excuse me.

## SOREN

Sir, please. My colleague is making a class  
feature check. We'll get back to you in a  
moment.

## VATHRIX

I will not be insulted so by-!

## CIARAN

Oh yeah! Vathrix the Uncouth, high priest of  
Rae'gahn, the god of avarice. Disappeared  
centuries ago.

## VATHRIX

Disappeared? I've been here since I was first  
interred!

## CIARAN

No, not you. Your god.

## VATHRIX

(beat)

What?

## CIARAN

A few centuries ago some epic level heroes  
fulfilled a prophecy that banished a bunch of  
dark gods and sealed others away for future  
apocalypses. Your church folded not long after.

## VATHRIX

Well... This is awkward.

Celeste walks straight up the dais and smiles at Vathrix.

CELESTE

Hi!

VATHRIX

Er... Hello?

CELESTE

Don't take this personally, but my order is pretty strict about undead.

She takes out a small BOTTLE and sprays a mist from it directly into Vathrix's face. His skull bursts into flames and he lets out an inhuman scream before the skull is burned away and the body slumps lifeless into the sarcophagus.

Celeste takes out her pipe and packs it as she rejoins the others.

SOREN

Was that a perfume bottle?

Celeste takes the bottle out of her pocket and hands it to Soren before sparking up. It's a small spray bottle with a clear liquid inside and a handwritten label on the front that says, "MADE FROM CONSECRATE." Celeste exhales a hit.

CELESTE

Your mom taught me that trick. Victory toke?

She offers Soren a hit off her pipe, which he accepts before passing it to Theodora.

SOREN

Okay. Celeste, you hallow or consecrate anything that needs it. Theo, watch her back just in case.

Theodora hands the pipe to Ciaran and goes to the dais with Celeste to inspect the sarcophagus.

SOREN

Ciaran and El, you guys inventory the treasure. Anything that isn't nailed down or on fire. I'm on magic item duty so I'll start with what is on fire.

Elathil takes his hit and snuffs the cherry.

CIARAN

Actually... Do you mind if I take some rubbings of the carvings first? There's some history to this place.

SOREN

Sure. We're in no hurry.

EXT. ANCIENT TEMPLE DAY (CONT.)

The party emerges from the temple. All of them are carrying magic bags holding treasure and Soren is transporting a pile of it on a floating disc of magical energy.

SOREN

So the barghest hide can make a handsome cloak. I'm sure you can find a buyer, Theo?

THEODORA

Easy. I guarantee at least one necromancer will make an offer. Goth never went out of style with that crowd. What about the evil altar?

SOREN

Consecrate it, sell it as an exotic planter for a lovely herb garden.

CELESTE

Did you find anything interesting in those carvings, Ciaran?

CIARAN

Sort of. I haven't made a proper translation, but I caught a couple of references to A'Dahm Sumet.

CELESTE

The god of commerce? Why was he mentioned?

CIARAN

Don't know yet. I'll work on the translation on the side.

ELATHIL

That's the Church of the Invisible Hand, right? Soren, aren't you a parishioner?

SOREN

No, I just got on their mailing list somehow. Besides, Ciaran already said the cult that built this place is long gone. I doubt it's a big deal anymore.

CIARAN

Yeah, you're probably right.

The party exits. CAMERA lingers on the dark entrance to the old temple as SINISTER MUSIC PLAYS.

ELATHIL (O.C.)

Any chance we can flip the real estate?

CIARAN (O.C.)

Given how cheaply Rae'gahn's cult built the place, it probably isn't up to code.

SOREN (O.C.)

Oh well. Still a net profit.

FADE OUT