

INT. DUNGEON DAY

SOREN and CREW are fighting in a dungeon against an OTYUGH. It has Ciaran lifted in one of its tentacles and he's desperately stabbing it with one of his knives as the others try to damage it enough to make it drop him.

CIARAN

(in time with stabbing)

Damn it, damn it, damn it, damn it!

Celeste is knocked aside by one of the otyugh's tentacles and slams into a wall.

Theodora, now wielding a dagger along with her rapier slices the tentacle holding Ciaran up and the beast finally drops him.

Elathil fires two arrows but the monster seems largely unaffected.

ELATHIL

Friggin' aberrations, friggin' immunity to skirmish attacks and critical hits!

Soren pulls out a WAND from his belt. He speaks a word in Draconic but instead of casting the spell, the wand backfires and a small explosion knocks him over.

THEODORA

Gods above, that's the third time today!

Ciaran takes a small flask out of a pouch on his belt and chucks it at the otyugh, which catches it in its mouth and bites down. The liquid contained inside bursts into flame. The otyugh roars and flails around before dropping dead.

Celeste gets up, slightly dizzy and goes over to Ciaran to heal him as Soren picks himself back up. His eyebrows have been burned off. Ciaran stands up and dusts himself off.

CIARAN

Soren? You, uh...

Ciaran gestures toward his eyebrows. Soren feels for his own and sighs.

Celeste comes over and places her hands on either side of his face as she chants. The scratches and burns heal up and his eyebrows grow back in.

SOREN

Thank you. As for this thing...

Soren takes out the wand and examines it.

ELATHIL

Why did you even buy that? Didn't you take Create Wand as a feat when we leveled up?

SOREN

Yeah, but I don't have this spell yet. Seemed like a good temp fix. Not looking forward to talking to the merchant though.

THEODORA

Why, was the receipt torched along with your eyebrows?

SOREN

The name Tony Two-Horns ring any bells?

CIARAN

Him? Oh, that's going to be fun.

THEODORA

There's a story behind that.

CIARAN

He's a tiefling who peddles rare magic and spell components. Good inventory, but he gives me douche chills.

THEODORA

Douche chills?

CIARAN

It's like mummy rot. Every time he speaks, something inside of me withers and dies.

The party exit.

TITLE SEQUENCE

EXT. ERINOL DAY

The bustling streets of the capital city of Erinol. There's a shingle up in the market district for a purveyor of magic items called Random Encounters. The window in front has bars in front of it but still allows passersby to see some of the merchandise within. Arguing is HEARD from inside.

INT. RANDOM ENCOUNTERS DAY

Soren and Ciaran are inside the shop standing in front of the counter. The shelves are all stocked with magic items such as wands and potions as well as various jars and canisters of labeled spell components and alchemical reagents. An entire cabinet contains grotesque pickled specimens of unknown origins. Standing behind the counter is TONY TWO-HORNS, a sharp-dressed tiefling with greased up hair forming a tight widow's peak, red eyes, and a pair of small horns growing out of his forehead just below the hairline.

SOREN

No, I'm asking for a refund because it blew up in MY face three times. I don't like to complain, I'm just not fond of burn wounds.

TONY

You came all this way just for me to have to remind you of my store policy?

Tony points to a sign that says, "ALL TRANSACTIONS ARE FINAL."

SOREN

Tony, I'm not here to fight. If you can't give me a refund, how about an exchange of equivalent value or store credit?

TONY

You may or may not be aware of this, blondie, but I'm trying to run a business here and I'm not giving out free swag just because you mumbled your incantations.

CIARAN

Does the phrase "criminal negligence" mean anything to you?

TONY

Excuse you? Do you know who I am? I'm Tony fuckin' Two-Horns! Do you know who my father is?

SOREN

No, no we don't. We're leaving, okay?

Soren turns to leave with Ciaran following behind.

EXT. ERINOL DAY

Soren and Ciaran walk out of the store.

CIARAN

I hate that guy. We take this to a magistrate,  
he'll cave.

SOREN

Before we do, I-

Another WIZARD with her robes singed and soot on her face marches past them and into the store.

Muffled shouting is HEARD from inside the store. Soren and Ciaran look at each other.

SOREN

Once is an isolated incident...

CIARAN

Twice is a coincidence...

A SORCERER walks down the street, also looking furious. His hair is standing on end as if electrified, his clothes are burned, and his right arm has been turned into that of an ape. He stomps into the Random Encounters storefront.

SOREN

Three times is a pattern.

CIARAN

Tony's a prick, but I didn't think he'd want this  
kind of heat.

Soren looks at the defective wand in his hand.

SOREN

Let's get back home. I think some tests are in  
order.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS DAY

The party's headquarters is a two-story building with an attached tower and an iron fence around the backyard on the edge of a large park. Two apple trees in the yard have a hammock slung between them.

Elathil and Theodora are out back running through fencing drills with practice foils.

Celeste is tending her garden which has a mix of flowers, vegetables and pots of pot.

A small explosion goes off and black smoke starts coming out of the windows on the top floor of the tower. Celeste rushes into the house.

INT. STUDY DAY

Ciaran is sitting at a writing desk in the study inside. He's looking up from the scroll he's working on to the door.

CIARAN

Soren? You okay in there?

Soren opens the door and comes out without his coat on with smoke following. There's some soot on his face and in his hair. He's coughing but appears uninjured.

SOREN

Well, that was instructive.

Celeste enters.

CELESTE

Anyone need healing?

SOREN

No thank you, I'm good.

Soren waves a hand over his front as he speaks and all the soot drops from his body and clothes. A broom floats over and cleans the mess off the floor before retreating back into the tower.

SOREN (CONT.)

Tell everyone to gather out back in a few minutes. There's something you should see.

Soren exits back into the tower.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS DAY

Soren has rigged up the wand onto a stand. The rest of the party are standing by as Soren finishes the setup.

He walks over to Ciaran, Theodora and Elathil and hands them a fist-sized LENS from his coat pocket.

SOREN

Take this, but be very gentle with it. Can you all see the wand through it at once?

They huddle around and nod when they've figured out an arrangement. Through the lens they can see a red aura surrounding the wand.

SOREN (CONT.)

Okay. Celeste? Cast Detect Magic.

Celeste raises a brow, but touches her holy symbol and mutters a prayer. Her eyes glow with silver halos for a moment then return to normal.

ELATHIL

So, what are we looking at?

SOREN

Just a second.

Soren walks over to the wand and touches one fingertip to it carefully. He speaks the command word and immediately pulls his hand back. As he does so, through the lens the three non-casters can see a flash of green light with orange tendrils that wrap around the wand and then vanish in a small detonation like the one from back in the dungeon. After the explosion, the red aura returns.

THEODORA

What the hell was that?

CELESTE

Whatever it was, I don't think it was supposed to do that.

SOREN

Strictly speaking, no. But that was no accident.

ELATHIL

Meaning?

SOREN

I mean it's been rigged to do that. That aura you saw, it's a dual school effect deliberately woven into the wand that activates along with the original spell. The spell matrix is similar to Slashing Dispel in that it severs the *genesis arcana* at the attack event creating a powerful inversion discharge. But rather than piggybacking an evocation matrix onto the discharge in order to focus it and prevent the dissipation, there's a planar fold similar to that used in the summoning sub-school. What's weird is that it's been altered to create an enervation well instead of a binary transference gate. There's still enough field bleed to cause the feedback we keep seeing, but most of the...

SOREN (CONT.)

...discharge is funneled to an unknown prime material spatial coordinate. One the one hand I'm impressed by the ingenuity, but the fact that the termination results in a class 2 detonation is just plain sloppy.

The party just stare at Soren a moment.

CIARAN

Just so you know, I speak nine languages and I didn't get a word of that.

SOREN

Sorry. The wand is dispelling its own spell then siphoning off the magical energy to... somewhere else, I don't know yet.

THEODORA

Well, what are you waiting for? Get a magistrate to throw the book at him. Or a rock.

SOREN

Tony's not a caster. Someone else must have created that spell. The question is to what end?

CELESTE

What now? I'd help, but this is a little outside my expertise.

SOREN

Unfortunately, mine too. But I know someone who may be able to help us. Come on.

The party exits.

EXT. WINTER MOON ACADEMY DAY - CONT.

The Winter Moon Academy is the college of mages in Erinol. The party walk through the quad. Two of the towers are floating in the air connected by bridges. One building changes from a red brick facade to stone masonry. One mage is sitting on a blanket playing a lute and glancing around to see if anyone is noticing him. Most are moving on to the dorms or their next class. One STUDENT with messy black hair, eyeliner and a nose ring passes by them and hands them a flyer advertising a bardic troupe playing on campus named Bigby's Fist Bump.

STUDENT

This Friday, man. Check it out.

CIARAN

Ah, this takes me back.

ELATHIL

I didn't know you played in a bard troupe.

CIARAN

A new one every couple of months for a while.  
Crown of the Grave, Hag Sweat, No Saving Throw,  
The Arquebusiers, The Complete Scoundrels, The  
Greyhawk Crossbows, Regdar's Funeral, Faustian  
Bargain...

INT. WINTER MOON ACADEMY - RECEPTION HALL DAY

The party enters a large reception hall with vaulted ceilings. Sitting at a desk is a deva with a nametag that reads KAMIRAEEL who appears as a beautiful, ageless woman with milky white skin, silver hair and feathered wings growing out of her back. She's wearing a fine blue dress with a gold armband on each arm. The party approach her desk as she slowly waves her hand over a crystal ball and gazes into it with her brow knit.

CIARAN (CONT.)

...The Creeps on the Borderland, Troll Breath,  
Dungeon Dogs, 30 Seconds to Sigil, The Barrow  
Wights, Eyes of the Beholder, and a brief stint  
with The Dead Henchmen.

Kamirael smiles and nods to the crystal ball before turning to regard the party. Her face lights up in a smile when she sees Soren and waves him over.

KAMIRAEEL

Soren! It's been ages.

SOREN

Hello, Kammy. Sorry I haven't come by to visit more often. I've been keeping busy since graduation.

KAMIRAEEL

So we've been hearing. This is your team I assume?

SOREN

That they are. All of them legends in the making. Anyway, is Rody in? I've hit a problem I could really use his help with.

KAMIRAEEL

Oh, yes. He's in his office. Don't take too long, though. He has a planar cosmology lecture this evening.

SOREN

Thanks, Kammy. Take care of yourself.

KAMIRAEEL

You too.

The party exits as Kamirael returns to her work, though Elathil lingers a moment.

ELATHIL

Quick question. When you do you get off work? Maybe we could go for a drink?

KAMIRAEEL

I'm sorry, I'm currently seeing a hound archon.

ELATHIL

I think I better take the hint, then.

KAMIRAEEL

No hard feelings?

Elathil shakes his head no and strides to catch up with the party. Kamirael returns to her work.

INT. WINTER MOON ACADEMY - HALLWAY DAY

The party pass through a long hallway until they come to a large door with a name plaque on it that reads "RODAGNABAR DORSTAMÁD, PROFESSOR OF DIVINATION."

Soren knocks on the door.

RODY (O.C.)

(from behind the door)

Come in.

Soren opens the door and the party enters the office beyond.

INT. RODY'S OFFICE DAY

RODY is sitting at his desk. He is a middle-aged dwarf with an elaborately groomed beard and graying curly hair with an off-center

part. Curled up in a pet bed in the corner is his badger FAMILIAR, which is happily snacking on a chicken drumstick.

RODY

Soren! This is a surprise.

SOREN

I surprised a diviner? I'm flattered.

RODY

Are these people your adventuring company?

SOREN

Yeah, this is Ciaran, Theo, Celeste and Elathil. Guys, this is Rody, one of my old mentors. I'm hoping you can help us out.

RODY

Oh? And what help do you need?

SOREN

Well...

TITLE: 10 MINUTES LATER

Everyone but Soren and Rody look incredibly bored and are having a hard time remaining standing.

SOREN (CONT.)

Naturally, without a recall agent I have no way of finding the well's termination coordinates.

RODY

Indeed, that is problematic. Do you happen to have the wand with you?

Soren takes out the wand and hands it to Rody, who studies it intently.

SOREN

Ciaran and I noticed I'm not the only caster having problems. I doubt Tony himself is behind this though.

RODY

Hmm... I don't think we need a spell for this one. Have you ever heard of a conjurer named Bucephalus?

SOREN

Ciaran?

Ciaran thinks for a second, then shrugs.

SOREN (CONT.)

No, I haven't. Not to be crass but if he's a conjurer, I assume he's not very neighborly?

RODY

To put it mildly.

CELESTE

I don't understand. Why do you say that?

RODY

Conjuration requires a strong will, Miss Celeste. Many conjurers are inveterate egomaniacs.

THEODORA

Here's a chicken and egg question: do you have to be a jerk to be a conjurer, or does becoming one turn you into a jerk?

CIARAN

Deep.

RODY

I've often wondered that myself. Bucephalus was a student here years ago, but was expelled for poor conduct and a disregard for the rules resulting in a higher than average number of explosions.

ELATHIL

Define higher than average. Soren causes something to blow up at least once a week.

Soren looks at Elathil with a raised eyebrow.

SOREN

I'll let that one slide and put it this way: practical spell research has a higher mortality rate for mages than adventuring.

CIARAN

So why do you think this guy is connected to the wand?

RODY

A very good question. Bucephalus was imaginative but careless. He liked to tinker and experiment, but his work rarely met minimum safety standards. The spell matrix on this wand is a textbook case of his bad habits.

THEODORA

Can you scry on him or something?

SOREN

Fifty gold says he's already shielded himself from divinations. When you meddle with planar forces for a living you make a lot of enemies.

CIARAN

And now he's selling faulty magic items, too. Casters are scary people to have angry with you.

(glances at Rody)

Er... So I assume.

THEODORA

Well we've got a name. I vote we go down to that store and see if it gets a reaction.

ELATHIL

Agreed.

CELESTE

It's the only lead we've got.

Soren hesitates.

RODY

Your friends have a point, Soren. But be careful if you do. Bucephalus was prickly at the best of times. It's no coincidence that he was expelled the same day he met my husband.

SOREN

He's one of those types, huh?

(sigh)

Alright. We're not getting any closer standing around.

Soren reaches for his coin purse but Rody shakes his head.

RODY

I didn't cast any spells so consider this on the house.

SOREN

Thanks, Rody. Let's roll.

The party exits.

INT. RANDOM ENCOUNTERS DAY (CONT.)

Tony is weighing material components on a scale and making notes when the party enters. He looks up and puts away the scales while rolling his eyes over-dramatically. Soren walks up to the counter while the rest of the party look around.

TONY

You again? I already told you to hit the bricks.

SOREN

I want to talk to Bucephalus.

Tony is about to speak but stops surprised.

CIARAN

That touched a nerve.

TONY

How the hell did you get that name?

THEODORA

We found what's wrong with the wand you sold our friend here and we know Bucephalus made it. Where the hell is he?

TONY

Sorry, toots. Professional courtesy. I don't snitch on my suppliers.

THEODORA

Oh good, we're doing this the hard way.

Theodora approaches the counter but Ciaran holds a hand out to stop her. He winks at her without Tony seeing.

CIARAN

(to Tony)

Our friend here would prefer a little less conversation, a little more action. Not that I blame her. It's been a long day for all of us, but all we want-

TONY

Unholy shit, are you actually playing good cop/bad cop? Like I haven't seen that a thousand times before?

ELATHIL

Please, keep talking. It's making you sound so much more trustworthy.

TONY

Look, I don't know what you heard, but I keep my nose clean.

Soren picks up another wand from the counter and examines it next to the one he purchased.

SOREN

This one's made by Bucephalus, too.

TONY

Hey, you break it, you bought it!

SOREN

Tony, Bucephalus is selling you faulty merch. These things are rigged to siphon off spell energy.

TONY

And why in the 9 Hells would he cross me like that?

SOREN

You're not a caster. He probably figured you wouldn't spot the ruse until it's too late.

CIARAN

You're just the patsy if this goes south, and you're not exactly a sympathetic defendant. Do the math, Tony.

Tony looks at every member of the party, weighing their words, and finally slams his fist on the counter.

TONY

That double-crossing son of a were-whore! I'll kill him!

ELATHIL

Ladies and gentlemen, a successful Sense Motive check. In the future, consider trying that on your suppliers.

TONY

Eat me, tree humper.

ELATHIL

Racial slurs? That's how it's going to be?

TONY

You want to take this outside?

ELATHIL

Any time, widow's peak.

Celeste steps in between the two of them with a scowl.

CELESTE

Knock it off, the both of you.

TONY

Do you know who I am? I'm Tony fuckin' Two-Horns! Do you know who my father is?

THEODORA

Oh gods. Men.

TONY

You want some of this, too, girlie?

THEODORA

Don't flatter yourself.

Soren hangs his head and rubs his temples.

SOREN

Tony, enough. I'm asking nicely. Can you please tell us where Bucephalus is? That's all we want to know.

Tony and Elathil stare each other down. Celeste is casting Elathil a warning glare. Tony steps back with a snort.

TONY

He lives in a tower about 5 miles south of the city limits. Look for the "private property" signs and follow those. Can't miss it.

SOREN

Thank you. We're done here.

Soren turns and exits. The rest of the party follow with Elathil casting one last glower over his shoulder at Tony before exiting.

EXT. ERINOL DAY

The party all leave the store.

ELATHIL

I hate that guy. I just met him and I want to cut his throat.

SOREN

Forget him. We know where Bucephalus is holed up. Let's roll.

CELESTE

Are you sure you want to do this?

ELATHIL

If nothing else, he's dangerous. That's reason enough to shut him down.

The party exits.

EXT. ROAD DAY (CONT.)

The party are all walking down the main road out of Erinol. Trees dot the landscape and hills line the horizon. A merchant caravan passes them by on the way to Erinol.

THEODORA

Celeste? If you don't mind me asking, how come you joined the Green Assembly instead of the druidic order?

CELESTE

The druids were a little too hardcore for me. I love nature, but indoors are nice to have when it's raining. Or winter.

The party stops when they spot a wooden sign staked in the dirt by a small side road that reads, "PRIVATE PROPERTY AHEAD."

SOREN

We must be close.

They follow the small road and encounter more signs.

MONTAGE

The next sign reads, "PRIVATE PROPERTY."

Another sign reads, "SOLICITORS WILL BE EATEN."

The sign after that reads, "GO AWAY!"

THEODORA

Anyone else sensing a pattern?

END MONTAGE

EXT. TOWER DAY

The party approach Bucephalus's tower. It abuts a small cottage and the area is a mess. A rusted chariot with a missing wheel is propped up on a set of bricks. Weeds choke the grounds. Numerous warning signs are scattered about in various states of disrepair.

CIARAN

I'm guessing he doesn't entertain much.

Soren peers in the window as the rest of the party draw weapons.

SOREN

Nobody home.

Soren looks around. He tests the door and finds it locked. He touches the keyhole with the tip of his finger and utters a resonant incantation. The tumblers inside the lock turn and click and the door gently creaks open slightly.

ELATHIL

Getting nostalgic yet, Ciaran?

CIARAN

Most of my marks didn't lock up at night.

THEODORA

Kind of how we met. Story for another time.

Soren pushes the door open and creeps in.

INT. COTTAGE DAY

The cottage is a mess. Dirty dishes cover the small table, clutter lies on the floor, and it looks as if the place hasn't been dusted in a while. A flag with two wolves fighting one another on a blue field is hung up over the bed.

CIARAN

A Volgardian flag. Figures.

Soren walks over to the door to the tower. He puts his ear against it, but hears nothing.

He tests it and find it's unlocked. He pushes it open slowly.

INT. TOWER DAY

Inside the tower the first floor is dominated by lab equipment and a trio of spellbooks. In the middle of the room is a tall, metal GOLEM that appears to be inactive. The craftsmanship appears very rough and unrefined. Set in its chest are a set of stones of various degrees of brightness and colors. Three are red, three are orange, one is green and one is blue. Each stone is about the size of a fist. The red ones appear the brightest with two of the orange ones around the same brightness.

THEODORA

What the hell is that?

SOREN

Fifty gold says it's some sort of golem.

Soren steps closer to inspect the golem and in particular the stones set in its chest.

SOREN (CONT.)

Judging by the mana field channels-

ELATHIL

In Common or I slap you.

SOREN

Hostile. But, uh... I think this solves the mystery of where the spell energy is going.

Celeste approaches the golem and touches the stones.

CELESTE

These stones are... some kind of container?

SOREN

Battery to be more precise. I think he's using them to give the golem extra hit dice. Or possibly spell-like abilities. Hard to tell.

THEODORA

Super iron golems. I wouldn't be surprised if he went "MWA-HA-HA!" while he was building it.

Ciaran approaches and raps on one of the arms with the flat edge of one of his knives.

CIARAN

Not iron. Tin. The cheap bastard.

Elathil's ears twitch.

ELATHIL

Crap. We've got company.

Everyone turns to the door as Bucephalus enters. He's wearing dirty clothes, the sleeves cut off of his shirt, with a thick beard and a mullet.

BUCEPHALUS

What the hell are you doing on my property?!

SOREN

Would you believe I'm here for customer service?

Bucephalus takes out a wand and speaks the command word. A trio of sparkling missiles shoots from the tip and strike Soren in the chest, singeing his shirt and coat.

As the party draw weapons Bucephalus holds a hand out to the golem and utters a commanding word in Draconic. The golem's empty eye sockets glow with red light and it begins to move.

The golem turns to look at Ciaran, who's closest to it and backhands him, sending him crashing into a table of alchemical equipment. It lashes out with the other arm and bats Theo aside into the wall.

The golem takes another swing, this time at Elathil who ducks out of the way. The golem's fist slams into the wall, punching a huge hole to the outside in it.

BUCEPHALUS

No damn it, don't break the walls! Kill them!  
Get the one in red!

Soren's eyebrows go up in alarm and he quickly casts another spell, holding his hands out at Bucephalus. All of his clothes immediately change to the color red. Soren changes his coat to black with a gesture. The golem turns away from Soren and advances on Bucephalus.

SOREN

Who says Prestidigitation is a useless spell?

Bucephalus panics and ducks back into the cottage with the golem following, smashing through the doorway as it goes.

The party escape through the hole the golem punched in the wall.

EXT. TOWER DAY

The party regroup outside and prepare to fight as Bucephalus rolls out of the way of the golem swinging a fist at him.

BUCEPHALUS

Not me, you son of a tea kettle! Kill the intruders!

The golem turns back toward the party and advances on them.

CIARAN

If you guys have any fire-based spells, now's the time to use them!

SOREN

Why fire?

Theodora backflips out of the way of one of the golem's swinging fists. Elathil fires two arrows at Bucephalus, hitting him in the shoulder.

BUCEPHALUS

I'm gonna kill you!

Bucephalus fires another volley of magic missiles from his wand, striking Elathil.

CIARAN

Tin has a low melting point.

Ciaran dives out of the way as the golem swings a massive fist down at him, creating a small crater in the dirt when it impacts.

Soren recites an incantation and thrust his hands out. Two beams of red light with fiery coronas blast forth and hit the golem's knees, which glow from heat before warping and buckling.

Celeste chants to herself as her voice takes on multiple octaves of resonance. There's a gleam of white light from the sun and a column of flame descends from it a second later, engulfing the golem which begins to warp and fall apart. The jewels in its chest begin to crack and release sparks of colored energy.

SOREN

Oh, that's bad.

CELESTE

Huddle!

The group all gather around Celeste as Bucephalus casts a spell himself and teleports away. Celeste begins chanting and the ground splits open with vines with long, wicked thorns in a wide circle and intertwine into a dome around the party.

The golem detonates in a large fireball taking out part of Bucephalus's tower and cottage.

As the rubble settles, the Wall of Thorns recedes and the party are unharmed.

ELATHIL

Soren? Sorry about the explosions remark earlier.

SOREN

Apology accepted.

CIARAN

Could I get a cure spell? I think I'm bleeding internally.

EXT. ROAD DAY (CONT.)

The party are walking back to Erinol. Celeste takes a hit off her pipe and passes it to Theo.

ELATHIL

Did anyone else notice that mullet-head got away?

SOREN

Yeah. Celeste and I will set up some wards and alarms around the house, just in case.

ELATHIL

You're not even a little more concerned about that?

SOREN

I figure there are worse people to have pissed at us. Assuming he doesn't blow himself up or get eaten by something from the lower planes.

Soren accepts the pipe and lights it up with a flame on his thumb.

ELATHIL

Fair enough. And don't hog the herb.

Elathil takes the pipe as the party exits.

FADE OUT