

EXT. ERINOL DAY

The whole city is buzzing with excitement for the first day of Arcanapalooza. The scene outside of the Gygax Arena is thronged with people, vendors and performers. Craftsmen and mages alike are selling their wares along with traditional and exotic foods. Buskers put out hats and play music, eat fire or perform acrobatics for tips.

SOREN and COMPANY are buying lunch from a gnomish vendor and walk down the street amidst the crowds.

ELATHIL

You know, I wasn't in town for this last time.  
Kind of sorry I missed it now.

CIARAN

Just keep an eye on your purse. This is like a holiday for the thieves' guild. Personally, I stuck to busking. Less chance of a beating.

Ciaran draws a knife from his hip and casually jabs the hand of a pickpocket who was reaching for his coin purse.

Theodora takes a bite from a SKEWER of meat and vegetables and looks over a program.

THEODORA

Some interesting names on the list of competitors... Uh oh.

CELESTE

Something wrong?

AMBROSE (O.C.)

Soren! Over here!

Soren turns around and sees his father AMBROSE, his mother GWENDOLYN and his younger brother JOHANN. His father has brown hair graying at the temples and a neatly trimmed beard. His mother is gracefully aging with flowing blond hair and green eyes like Soren. Johann takes more after their father with brown hair in a ponytail tied with a ribbon. All of them are very well-dressed.

SOREN

Mom, Dad, Johann! You made it!

Gwendolyn pulls Soren into a hug.

GWENDOLYN

Of course we did! You've been dreaming of this for years.

Ambrose walks up to the party with a smile and extends his hand, which Ciaran takes first.

AMBROSE

I've already met half of you. Ciaran, thank you again for the poem.

CIARAN

(to the party)

When I still worked for Lion Eyes Mr. Oraeus commissioned me to write an epic poem about the missus for an anniversary gift.

AMBROSE

Celeste, you're looking lovely as always.

Celeste smiles and blushes.

THEODORA

Now I see where Soren gets his way with people from.

GWENDOLYN

My looks and his father's charms. You must be Theo.

JOHANN

Dad and I have been seeing some of your designs around town. What teeth did you use to make those earrings the duchess has been wearing?

THEODORA

Naga fangs, actually. Interesting story behind that...

AMBROSE

Elathil, is it? How does life in Erinol compare to elf lands?

ELATHIL

I grew up in the boonies. To call this an improvement is an understatement.

The RINGING of bells through the air cause the crowd to start moving toward the arena.

GWENDOLYN

Oh, we better go find our seats. It was so good to see you all. We'll talk more later.

Ambrose, Gwendolyn and Johann exit.

ELATHIL

Your mom is hot.

SOREN

El, you're my friend and you've pulled me out of the fire more than once. But here is where I have to draw a line.

ELATHIL

I know, look but don't touch. You just never mentioned it.

SOREN

She's a mystic theurge, an enchantment specialist, and worships the goddess of the moon. What did you expect?

ELATHIL

Point taken.

SOREN

Come on, I need to get ready.

The party exit.

TITLE SEQUENCE

EXT. GYGAX ARENA DAY

The stands are crowded to capacity with cheering fans from across the kingdom. Attendees of all races and classes are present. In the front row are Soren's family and the party.

The MC, a dusky-skinned mage wearing a sleeveless robe with gold embroidery and a shaved head with a long, drooping mustache flies in on a flying carpet. His voice is magically enhanced to be louder.

MC

Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to the Gygax Arena! Welcome... to Arcanapalooza!

The crowd cheers uproariously as wizards standing on the roof set off alchemical fireworks. The MC swoops low over the crowd, conjuring a shower of flower petals over the people as he goes.

MC (CONT.)

For the next four days, we will bring you the greatest magical games in six nations! Are you ready?

The crowd roars.

MC (CONT.)

Did someone cast a Silence spell over this crowd?  
Are you ready?!

The crowd roars louder.

MC (CONT.)

Then let us begin with the first event: the Spire  
Perilous!

The sands in the arena swirl and soon begin to coalesce into a tall,  
stone spire in the center.

The MC flies to the top of the spire and produces a large, red flag  
with a white starburst on it from within his robes despite it being  
obviously too large to fit in there, and plants the flag at the peak  
of the spire 100 feet off the ground.

MC (CONT.)

Our first contestants are in the apprentice  
category. Their goal is to be the first to bring  
the flag back down to the ground. Let's bring  
out our competitors!

In the stands, Celeste turns to Theodora.

CELESTE

I'm sorry you got cut off earlier. Did you see  
anything wrong with the program?

THEODORA

Take a look.

Theodora hands Celeste her program. Celeste scans it a moment and her  
eyes widen.

CELESTE

Oh. This might be awkward.

INT. GYGAX ARENA - STABLES DAY

Soren and four other MAGES are preparing. Soren is meditating. A  
red-haired sorcerer with a heavy nose ring is feeding his HAWK  
familiar. A half-elf wizard with a high ponytail and a tattoo on the  
side of her face is tying up her sandals. A dwarf wizard with a long,  
forked beard is going through a checklist of his magic items. An elf  
with dreadlocks is brushing off a cloak before slipping it on.

AXERON (O.C.)

This is my competition, eh?

Soren's eyes snap open and he looks over to see AXERON enter the room.

AXERON (CONT.)

Pleased to soon be beating you all.

Everyone frowns at Axeron and decide to ignore him. He saunters up to the half-elven wizard.

AXERON (CONT.)

Rytiama! Haven't seen you since graduation!

RYTIAMA

By design, I assure you.

AXERON

Don't be like that. How about after my big victory today we go out for drinks and check out my Staff of Power?

Soren shudders.

SOREN

Ugh, I think I just had to make a Fortitude save.

Rytiama snorts a laugh and Axeron turns to Soren.

AXERON

Piss off, blondie. I'm running game here.

SOREN

What game? The restraining order relay?

RYTIAMA

I only date guys with a pulse anyway.

The crowd can be HEARD cheering uproariously through the ceiling.

A RAVEN flies into the room and settles on a small perch.

RAVEN

First round is over. You six are up next.

The mages exit. Axeron shoulder checks Soren to be first out.

EXT. GYGAX ARENA DAY

The MC is resetting the flag for the next round of the game.

MC

Now ladies and gentlemen we come to our intermediate bracket. Here's where the odds get a little higher. First, let's bring out the contestants. Rytiana Moonfire! Caleb Valic! Soren Oraeus! Yurgrim Bravehall! Dhosar Sylaslas! And Axeron Shadowborne!

Each mage runs out to greet the audience as they are called. Soren sprays a shower of sparks from his hands before bowing to all sides. Axeron flexes his muscles and kisses his biceps.

MC (CONT.)

Now, you all know the rules. No teleportation magic, no spells may be cast before the horn is sounded, and the winner is the first to reach the ground with the flag. Ready? Begin!

A HORN BLAST from the roof of the arena signals the start of the competition. Soren immediately casts a Fly spell on himself as does Rytiana, Dhosar and Caleb. Yurgrim summons a trio of AIR ELEMENTALS. Axeron stands by smirking but doing nothing.

Soren streaks up toward the spire but Caleb's hawk familiar dive bombs him, narrowly missing his face. Soren laughs it off and proceeds to spiral his way up and around the spire.

Rytiana grabs Dhosar by his boot and yanks him down a few feet below her, gaining an edge over him. One of the summoned air elementals slams into her, pushing her away from the spire.

Dhosar ducks beneath another of the air elementals but gets dive bombed by the hawk.

Yurgrim takes out a small dram with a piece of bitumen and a live spider. He swallows the two components with a grimace after completing an incantation and runs to the spire which he begins scrambling up with his hands and feet adhering to the sides effortlessly.

Axeron takes out a shaving of wooden root, voices an incantation and the root breaks into dust that surrounds him. With unnatural speed, he makes a sweeping gesture of his hands, voices another incantation and takes off into the air.

Soren reaches the top of the spire and is reaching out for the flag when one of the air elementals turns into a whirlwind, whipping him away from the spire. Dhosar and Caleb are also caught in the whirlwind and thrown around the arena.

Rytiama sees one of the elementals coming and casts a spell of her own, a blast of powerful winds issuing from her hands and pushing the elemental away.

Yurgrim is climbing the spire when the hawk begins swiping and pecking at the back of his head. He quaffs a POTION quickly and when the hawk tries to strike him again, its talons are deflected by a brief, shimmering shield of force.

Soren is still being buffeted about by the whirlwind. He speaks a command in Draconic, and his MAGIC ROPE leaps from his hip, one end encircling his waist and the other wrapping around the top of the spire. He begins to reel himself in quickly.

Soren and Yurgrim reach out to grab the flag when Axeron begins reciting an incantation. A luminous humanoid figure with a large, serrated dagger in one hand appears above Soren and drops onto his back. Soren falls from the unexpected weight and the end of his rope swings him down to splat against the spire.

Axeron crests the spire and kicks Yurgrim in the face, knocking him down about ten feet before he regains his footing.

Axeron grabs the flag and casts another spell. The flag shrinks down to only a few inches in length, at which point Axeron swallows it and dives for the ground.

Soren shakes the luminous assassin off by kicking off the spire. The rope returns to his hip as he flies down to catch up with Axeron, but too late. Axeron hits the ground in a crouch, and the horn is SOUNDED, signaling the end of the game.

MC

And the winner is Axeron Shadowborne!

Soren and the other mages descend to the ground as the crowd cheers.

Axeron gags and coughs the flag back up. He ends the spell and returns it to normal size. He does a victory dance waving the flag over his head and thrusting his hips.

AXERON

(singing off-key)

I am the wizard king!

RYTIAMA

He always was an awful winner.

Soren scowls and turns to head back to the stables.

INT. GYGAX ARENA - STABLES DAY

Soren paces the room anxiously. Rytiana enters. Soren glances at her but doesn't make eye contact.

RYTIAMA

It's not like you to storm off like that.

SOREN

Just didn't feel like hearing him gloat.

RYTIAMA

He really does get to you, doesn't he?

Soren turns away and says nothing. The other mages sans Axeron enter and Soren exits the room. Rytiana follows behind him.

INT. GYGAX ARENA - HALLWAY DAY

Soren stalks down the hall and Rytiana jogs to catch up with him. She puts a hand on his shoulder to stop him.

RYTIAMA

Soren, don't get bent out of shape. It's only the first event.

SOREN

I know, it's not that, I just... Something about that guy. I just want to strangle him.

RYTIAMA

Nobody likes him, it's okay.

SOREN

I told myself after graduation I wasn't going to hold a grudge, it was over. But every time I run into him...

RYTIAMA

Everybody's got one person they can't stand. Just kick his ass in the next event.

Rytiana pulls Soren down slightly and kisses his cheek.

RYTIAMA (CONT.)

You want to get some dinner tonight? Like old times?

SOREN

I... kind of have my eye on someone already.



RYTIAMA

Oh? Well, we gave it a shot before. It's another girl's turn now.

Soren and Rytiana exit.

EXT. GYGAX ARENA DAY (CONT.)

Theodora is looking over the program in the stands with the others. The arena is being prepared for the next event. Several platforms, walls and obstacles are set up around the arena. Flying on their own carpets are four WIZARDS with a selection of wands and scrolls at their hips.

THEODORA

I think we'll skip tomorrow's necromancy event.

CELESTE

Agreed.

JOHANN

Who's Soren up against for this?

THEODORA

Same batch as before except for the dwarf Yurgrim. He's competing in a different event this evening.

The MC flies into view.

MC

And now ladies and gentlemen, let's begin our next event. This is... the Battlefield! Let's bring out our first contestant, Soren Oraeus!

Soren comes jogging out of the stables, waving to the crowd.

MC (CONT.)

Your only goal is to tell friend from foe long enough to survive. Now... Begin!

The four wizards immediately make sweeping gestures with their hands, speaking in resonant incantations and conjure phantom images of enemy SOLDIERS that charge at Soren.

Soren whips out a WAND with silver shod tips, speaks a command word, and fires off four brilliant red missiles shaped like birds, dispatching the four illusory soldiers.

The wizards are immediately casting more spells. Another troop of SOLDIERS appears. Then a MINOTAUR. Then a SWARM of hornets.

Soren casts a Fireball spell and dispatches the swarm first then runs through the arena as the illusory soldiers and minotaur chase him.

He speaks another command word and his rope lashes out. The ends wrap around two posts in the ground as he passes them, forming a trip wire that the soldiers fall over.

Soren turns and casts a Magic Missile spell with five missiles and takes out the soldiers, but the minotaur keeps advancing. The wizards are creating more illusory foes.

Soren recalls his rope to his hip and jumps out of the way of the minotaur as it charges him. An illusory CHILD appears before him, and he almost fires off another spell at her, but stops himself and instead picks himself up and dashes off.

The minotaur charges after him and is joined by two illusory GHOULS.

Soren climbs up a wooden ramp onto a platform 10 feet up and kicks the ramp out, preventing any of the enemies from following him. From the higher ground he sends out another blast of magic missiles that take down the minotaur.

An illusory GARGOYLE swoops down and almost catches him but he ducks down out of the way. He sees an illusory GIANT EAGLE and almost blasts it but instead turns and fires a Scorching Ray spell at the gargoyle, defeating it.

Soren fishes a gray pearl out of his coat and recites a resonant incantation as winds whip his hair and coat. He throws the pearl down and it transforms into a swirling gray sphere of mist and winds on the ground beneath him.

The winds from the sphere whip one of the ghouls off its feet and high into the air.

The second ghoul struggles against the powerful winds, but is also swept up and rag-dolled.

Soren sets his jaw and thrusts his hands out, directing the sphere to move across the arena as the crowd cheers. The sphere catches and throws into the air an ORC...

It moves to the left and snares a GIANT SPIDER...

A HAG...

The sphere swerves to miss a KNIGHT on horseback...

Sweeps away a swarm of CENTIPEDES and SPIDERS advancing on him...

Narrowly misses a PRIEST with a sunburst holy symbol...

And catapults a WEREWOLF into the sky.

The sphere dissipates and Soren glimpses an illusory SUCCUBUS diving straight for him. He casts a final Magic Missile spell that destroys the illusion just as it's about to collide with him.

HORNS BELLOW signaling the end of the event.

MC

Ladies and gentlemen, this is truly a rare feat!  
Soren Oraeus as completed the Battlefield with a  
perfect score! All hostiles neutralized, no  
friendly targets harmed!

Soren triumphantly holds up his fists. He waves his hands and recites an incantation and four spheres of shining red light appear spinning in a circle around him. He thrusts his hands up into the sky and the lights fly straight into the air, still spinning before extinguishing themselves with a flash. The crowd roars.

Soren takes a bow then hops off the platform and exits.

INT. RESTAURANT NIGHT - EARLY EVENING

Soren, his family and the rest of the party are seated at a long table having dinner.

ELATHIL

I see why they have you only do two or three  
events a day. You burn through spells faster  
than Ciaran goes through drinks.

CIARAN

I have simple tastes.

SOREN

Even at high levels it's like a marathon.

RODY enters with his FAMILIAR riding on his shoulder.

GWENDOLYN

Rody, over here!

Rody strides over to the table and puts a hand on Soren's shoulder with a broad smile.

RODY

You did good out there today.

SOREN

Thanks. Could have done better in the first event.

RODY

Don't beat yourself up over it.

AMBROSE

Won't you join us?

RODY

I would be delighted, thank you.

Rody takes up an empty seat beside Johann.

RODY (CONT.)

The next three days are going to be interesting.

GWENDOLYN

There's a lot of talent on the roster this year. And I'm not just saying that because my son is competing.

AMBROSE

You recall the family motto, my dear.

SOREN

Disvix verutyak.

CIARAN

"Challenge accepted," in Draconic. This confirms it, your family has been crazy for generations.

AMBROSE

One man's crazy is another's extraordinary. What you can't argue is that we get results.

ELATHIL

Ha! I'll drink to that.

Elathil raises his cup in toast and the others follow suit.

CELESTE

So, what's the first event tomorrow?

SOREN

Well...

SLAM CUT

EXT. GYGAX ARENA DAY

The arena floor has been converted into a large labyrinth and the contestants are all running through the passages, each one trying to reach the center before the others.

Soren reaches into one of his coat pockets and takes out a crystal SPHERE held in his palm.

Soren waves a hand over it and the inside of the sphere fills with mist. A glowing shape like a compass needle appears inside and points down the left passage. Soren immediately heads down that way.

He comes to a dead end and is about to turn back when he holds up the sphere again and it begins glowing a pearly white.

Soren runs his hands across the wall, soon pressing a panel in that causes the wall to slide away revealing another passage of the maze.

Caleb comes down from another passage, spots Soren and takes off. Soren gives chase.

Caleb steps on a large tile and his form quickly turns into a ghostly silhouette before vanishing in a small flash of light.

SOREN

Huh. Scattering Trap. Didn't know they were using that.

Soren looks behind him hearing another mage approaching.

He quickly runs ahead and leaps over the trapped section of floor. He turns around to see Axeron behind him.

They make eye contact for a moment.

Axeron runs after Soren. Soren just smiles and waves before taking off around the corner.

Axeron steps on the trapped tile and like Caleb finds himself being teleported elsewhere in the maze.

AXERON

Son of a-

Soren laughs to himself but is cut off when the floor and wall rotate on an axle, flipping around and dumping him into a passage on the other side.

SOREN (CONT.)

That's what I get for not paying attention.

Soren hears Yurgrim chanting a resonant incantation and looks over in time to see the dwarf wizard thrust his hands out and unleash a blast of wind.

Soren is blown backwards by the force of the winds and lands on his back. The plate of ground he lands on glows and a blast of force shoots him into the air.

Soren turns in the air and gets a view of the labyrinth below and the glowing orb on a marble pedestal in the center.

A GIANT EAGLE with gold and silver plumage swoops down and grabs Soren's arms in its claws. It soars over the maze and drops Soren in a new passage where he lands in a heap.

He picks himself and dusts off his coat as HORNS BELLOW over the arena and the crowd roars in excitement.

SOREN (CONT.)

I was wondering when they were going to send the monsters in.

Soren takes off running down the passageway.

He rounds a corner and slams right into Dhosar. The two of them collapse onto the ground, but Soren scrambles to get up and runs past the elf sorcerer.

Further down the corridor, a GIANT SPIDER skitters into view. Soren skids to a halt and takes the nearest left passage before the spider sees him.

Dhosar curses OFF-CAMERA and an incantation is HEARD followed by the FIERY WHOOSH of a spell.

Soren takes out his crystal sphere again and waves his hand over it. The mist fills it again and the glowing arrow points toward the wall to the left.

Up ahead is a split with passages going left and right. Soren takes the left path.

He quickly scrambles back ON-CAMERA and runs back the passage he came down before turning right down another with another giant SPIDER chasing after him.

Up ahead Soren recognizes one of the trapped tiles. He jumps over it and looks over his shoulder to see the spider launched into the air and falling back down in a random passage of the maze.

Soren proceeds down the hall and turns the corner and comes face-to-face with Caleb, who looks rather angry with him.

Caleb pulls out a wand and Soren retreats back around the corner before Caleb has a chance to fire.

Soren looks at the trapped ejection plate and smiles. He runs up to it and jumps on it. The magic instantly activates and launches him into the air.

Soren looks down and sees the center of the maze. He quickly casts a Gust of Wind spell, blasting him closer to the center before the giant eagle can grab him in its claws.

He casts a quick Feather Fall spell as he descends and lands safely in the center of the maze just as Axeron enters from the opposite side of the chamber. The two look at each other in surprise.

Soren's voice resonates with power as he reaches into his pocket for a chunk of butter and throws it out.

Axeron speaks his resonant incantation and reaches into a belt pouch, throwing a clump of spider webs at Soren.

The butter lands on the floor of the chamber near Axeron and melts and expands into a shimmering pool of grease that coats most of the floor.

Axeron steps back reflexively and slips and falls.

The ball of webs erupt into a tangled mass of sticky filaments that adhere to the walls and catch Soren up in them.

Rytiama enters the chamber through another passageway and upon seeing both mages indisposed makes a dash for the orb.

Soren shouts a command word and his enchanted rope lashes out from his hip, wraps around the orb and yanks it toward him just as Rytiama reaches out to grab it.

Soren tears one of his arms free of the sticky webbing and catches the orb to his chest.

The horns SOUND to signal the end of the match. The crowd roars.

RYTIAMA

That is a nifty trick. Any chance you could make me one?

SOREN

We'll talk.

AXERON

Cheap shot! That shouldn't count!

Axeron tries to stand up but slips and falls again. Soren and Rytiana roll their eyes as the MC descends on his flying carpet.

MC

The winner of the Labyrinth Run is... Soren Oraeus!

Soren holds up the orb with a triumphant smile.

DISSOLVE

EXT. GYGAX ARENA NIGHT

TITLE: THE FOLLOWING NIGHT

TITLE: THE GRAND ILLUSION

Rytiana, Yurgrim, Caleb and Soren are all standing in the arena. Rytiana is making gestures with her hands as she casts her illusions. A green and silver tree grows from a sapling to a towering giant. Flowers of pink and purple blossom and from them emerge fairies that fly out and over the crowd, leaving trails of sparkling green light, much to the crowd's delight.

The tree slowly dissipates into wisps of light that fly up and over the arena before disappearing from sight.

Five JUDGES stand off to the side and murmur amongst themselves.

The judges whisper their verdict to the MC

MC

Miss Rytiana Moonfire is awarded a 9.2 out of ten by the judges! This puts her in the lead. Our final competitor for the Grand Illusion is Soren Oraeus!

Soren steps up as Rytiana returns to her corner. The two smile at each other.

SOREN

Ladies and gentlemen, magic is often considered a tool of the elite. The ultimate art accessible only to a privileged few. But while not all are interested in or have the discipline to pursue the art, that does not mean they cannot benefit.



Soren waves his hands and speaks his incantation.

The first ghostly shapes appear and form into the image of eager students listening in rapt attention to a lecture by a professor in wine red robes.

SOREN (CONT.)

With every generation we grow better than we were before. Learning from those who came before us. Travelling with my friends, I have learned how much we all have to give.

The students stand and age into adults as the professor fades away. Their scholarly robes change into new outfits. Several become wizards. One wears the white tunic of a healer. Several wear fine clothes with capes and symbols of public office.

SOREN (CONT.)

Imagine then what we can accomplish working together.

Soren begins adding to the illusion with waves of his hands. The figures in his illusion are negotiating with one another, tending the sick and wounded, researching new magic and tinkering with fanciful inventions.

The arena is soon filled with images of buildings being constructed in mere seconds. Gleaming towers, majestic temples, comfortable homes, libraries, hospitals. The crowd murmurs in awe.

The illusory figures from the beginning of the illusion shrink to the scale of the fanciful city Soren has conjured along with numerous other inhabitants. An illusory sun hangs over the city, slowly changing to a full moon. The lights in the city come on, showing tiny street lamps lit with magical flame. There is no crime or garbage in sight.

The moon turns to the sun again and the streets of the illusory city bustle with activity.

SOREN (CONT.)

This is no idle fantasy. This is a world we can attain. Perhaps not overnight. But like any good dream, it's worth it.

The people in the illusory city are pulled along by carriages with phantom horses. Flying carpets move from one tower to the next. A festival is taking place in the market square.

SOREN (CONT.)

This is the future we deserve.

The miniature inhabitants of the illusory city fly up and out of the city along with the sun as it turns into the moon once again. The people and the moon rise high above the arena and burst into a series of colorful fireworks. Glittering dust rains down the arena to the cheers of the collected audience.

In the stands, Soren's family and friends are giving a standing ovation.

The judges convene... and give their verdict to the MC.

MC

The judges award Mr. Soren Oraeus... a 9.4 out of 10! Soren Oraeus is the winner of the Grand Illusion!

Soren and the other mages wave to the crowd as they head back to the stables.

EXT. GYGAX ARENA - STABLES NIGHT (CONT.)

The mages enter.

RYTIAMA

Congratulations. Of course, you and Axeron are tied now. He had quite an advantage in the necromancy events.

SOREN

Yeah, I know. I'll have to face him tomorrow in the spell duel event.

RYTIAMA

Just keep your cool, okay?

SOREN

When have I not?

Rytiama playfully swats his arm and laughs. They exit.

DISSOLVE

EXT. GYGAX ARENA DAY

TITLE: FINAL DAY

The crowd is cheering as Axeron and Soren cross the arena to meet one another in the center. The MC and judges stand on the sides.

AXERON

A shame about the nonlethal damage wards on this place.

SOREN

If you want me dead that badly I must be a threat.

Axeron's smirk disappears and is replaced by a cold scowl.

SOREN (CONT.)

Huh. This may be the first time I'm the one who made things awkward.

MC

Gentlemen, take your positions.

Soren and Axeron bow to one another, turn and take 10 paces away before turning to face each other.

MC (CONT.)

And... begin!

Soren begin by casting Mage Armor . A shimmering silhouette surrounds him before vanishing. Axeron casts a Shield spell

Soren casts a Fly spell next. Axeron casts Haste.

Axeron thrusts his hand out and casts Magic Missile. A set of 5 purple and red energy missiles fly from his fingertips, each one with what looks like a screaming face on the front, and crash into Soren as he lifts off the ground.

Soren fires off his own Magic Missile spell, but the Shield blocks it.

Axeron whips out a scroll. He shouts the incantation and the writing on the scroll glows with green light before seeming to burn away off the scroll as Axeron points to Soren.

Soren stumbles in the air before plummeting back down to the ground.

Axeron takes out a small leather pouch, a candle, and a carved finger bone and recites another incantation. In a flash of indigo fire, an OGRE SKELETON appears behind Soren as if rising from the flames.

As Soren manages to regain his footing the skeleton backhands him, knocking him down again.

In the stands, Soren's friends and family are worried. Theodora is watching intently.

THEODORA

Something's up here.

JOHANN

How do you mean?

THEODORA

Axeron is fighting like he knew what spells Soren was planning to use today. What strategies he uses.

CELESTE

You think he's cheating?

THEODORA

My money's on spying. Either way, I don't think Soren can win this one.

Down in the arena, Soren speaks a resonant word and in a flash vanishes from sight and immediately reappears 50 feet away outside of the skeleton's reach.

Axeron reaches into a pouch at his side and produces a human skull. He makes a few subtle gestures with his hands as he speaks the resonant incantation and throws the skull at Soren.

The skull lands in front of him and detonates with a blast of purple smoke and indigo energy. Soren howls in pain and drops to his knees with his skin pale and cheeks sunken.

He staggers to his feet in time for Axeron to blast him with another volley of Magic Missiles and Soren drops to the ground. This time, he doesn't get back up.

There is a hush over the arena for a moment before the horns BELLOW to signal the end of the duel.

Soren's friends and family stare in mute shock even as the crowd cheers around them.

A healer is by Soren's side, sprinkling diamond dust over him and reciting a prayer. The color and fullness returns to his face and he sits up obviously groggy.

Axeron is parading around, kissing his biceps and thrusting his hips.

Soren looks away with a frown.

AXERON

Why the long face, man? Don't be such a... Soren loser!

Axeron laughs at his own joke. Soren stands, bows, and returns to the stables.

INT. GYGAX ARENA - STABLES DAY

Soren is sitting on a bench holding his chin in his hand and staring into the distance.

Rody enters followed by Soren's family and the party.

GWENDOLYN

Sweetie, I'm so sorry.

SOREN

It's okay, mom. I won't lose next time.

THEODORA

Isn't there anything we can do? Axeron wasn't playing fair. He had to have known what Soren's prepared spells for the day were.

RODY

Miss Kethrael, divinations can be blocked but it is significantly more difficult to prove that they took place. I agree with you, Axeron did appear to have some insight into Soren's spell list, but there is nothing we can do about it.

SOREN

So he cheated?

RODY

Technically divinations are not illegal. They are not encouraged as it is bad sportsmanship, certainly. And we cannot prove that Axeron was scrying you anyway.

Soren sighs in defeat.

SOREN

They don't give out the awards until tonight. You guys want to get something to eat? Kinda hungry.

AMBROSE

Yes, let's. Gwen and I are buying.

CIARAN

Just curious. What was the first place prize for this level bracket?

RODY

This year? A rare wondrous item. A Mirror of Moods. There are several enchantment spells woven into it.

SOREN

Enchantment is one of Axeron's prohibited schools. Can't see him getting a lot of use out of it.

RODY

Perhaps he simply wants it for vanity. Axeron was always a bit predictable in that regard.

SOREN

Whatever the case, I'd rather not dwell on it. Let's go.

Everyone exits.

Axeron enters with a smirk on his face. He's looking at the door where everyone exited.

AXERON

Vanity. That's one way of putting it.

He laughs to himself and exits.

FADE OUT