

FADE IN

EXT. STREETS DAY

TITLE: ORIS, CAPITAL OF SERAIN

The streets of the city are busy with people. An open CARRIAGE comes down the road carrying SOREN and the PARTY. Elathil is looking around with a smile.

CIARAN

El, you're being such a tourist. Your coin purse will be gone by sundown.

ELATHIL

Is there anything wrong with enjoying the scenery?

THEODORA

Define "scenery."

A pair of WOMEN in low-cut fine dresses giggle and wave at Elathil as he waves to them.

SOREN

Have your fun now guys. This may be the most challenging contract we've ever taken.

THEODORA

Honestly? I'm still surprised you signed it.

SOREN

A bit of a whim on my part. I've never been to Serain before.

THEODORA

Fair enough. Politics just reminds me too much of home. A bunch of wealthy heirs getting together to pretend they're actually doing something with their lives.

CELESTE

You probably shouldn't mention that in ear-shot of the client.

CIARAN

I'm not gonna complain. We make some speeches, shake a few hands, walk away with a nice purse. Simple.

The carriage exits down the street.

TITLE SEQUENCE

INT. CAMPAIGN OFFICE DAY - CONT.

The party enter. The room is buzzing with activity as people at desks review information and draw up posters, flyers and pamphlets. HARYA, an officious-looking dwarf woman with a quill pen and writing board walks up to Soren.

HARYA

Mr. Oraeus. Greetings, we've been expecting you. My name is Harya, Mr. Blackwood's personal assistant. Mr. Blackwood is in his office. Please follow me.

Without another word, Harya turns on her heel and walks away.

CIARAN

Twenty gold says I get her to crack a smile before this is over.

ELATHIL

A smiling dwarf? That I'd pay to see. You're on.

Soren shrugs to the party and follows after Harya.

INT. CAMPAIGN OFFICE - BLACKWOOD'S OFFICE DAY

Harya enters with the party. GILES BLACKWOOD is seated at his desk working. He looks up, smiles and stands. He has dark hair with a handlebar mustache and a thin scar on his right cheek. His clothes are expensive but tasteful.

GILES

Ah, good day! Mr. Oraeus, I take it?

SOREN

Soren, please. And these of course are my associates, Ciaran, Theo, Celeste and Elathil.

Giles crosses the room to shake their hands.

GILES

A pleasure to meet you all. Thank you, Harya. Go check in on Crispin. See how the pamphlets are coming along.

Harya exits.

GILES (CONT.)

Let's get down to business. The Senate elections are in two more months, and I intend to win.

THEODORA

Pardon me for asking what may be a stupid question...

Giles gestures for her to continue.

THEODORA (CONT.)

We're adventurers and merchants kind of. It's a very specific set of skills. What do you need us for?

GILES

Marinia and Serain both have an economy that's 20% adventure-based. Getting the adventurer demographic on my side is a major plus in this election.

CIARAN

I suppose as political strategies go that one is less cynical than most.

GILES

There's a bit more to it of course. Mr. Oraeus here placed in the top tier of his level bracket at Arcanapalooza. Celebrity endorsements go a long way.

CIARAN

(aside to Elathil)

And there it is.

SOREN

I don't know that I'd call myself-

GILES

And news of how Miss Everwyn created a new holy site and waypoint for religious pilgrims has recently reached Oris. That will be good for shoring up support from the faithful demographic.

Theodora puts a hand over her mouth and looks away but says nothing.

GILES

Mr... Ciaran's background will be very useful for keeping an eye on my opponents.

CIARAN

Do I even want to know how you found that out?

GILES

And Miss Kethrael and Mr. Caeldrelian will serve as excellent security with the bonus of making the campaign look more sympathetic to the local mercantile houses as well as the elven minority community.

ELATHIL

Should I be offended by that? I feel like I should.

GILES

No offense is intended, I assure you. In the realm of politics, you have to take advantage of every opportunity, no matter how crass it may seem at first blush.

There is an awkward silence.

SOREN

So... what precisely do you want us to do?

GILES

Go speak with our polling supervisor. First door on the left. He'll tell you the situation on the ground and go from there.

The party exit.

INT. CAMPAIGN OFFICE DAY

The party shut the door behind them and look at one another.

SOREN

That was... unexpected.

CELESTE

Did anyone else get a really... creepy vibe from him?

THEODORA

No more so than any of the other bureaucrats I've seen my father buttering up.

CELESTE

No, it was more like... Never mind.

ELATHIL

Well, let's get our marching orders.

The party go the first door on the left. They knock before Elathil simply lets himself in.

INT. CAMPAIGN OFFICE - POLLING OFFICE DAY

The room inside is cramped tightly with bureaucrats going over data, taking notes in ledgers and scrolls, and arguing points over a map of the city hung on the far wall. In the midst of it is HORG, a tall, burly half-orc wearing a fine blue, green and gold-trimmed tunic with silver caps on his tusks. He looks up from the ledger he's focused on and his eyes widen along with Ciaran's.

HORG

Ciaran?

CIARAN

Horg? Nine hells, you're the pollster?

Horg stands and crosses the room. He and Ciaran put their hands on each other's shoulders and headbutt one another in greeting. Ciaran shakes his head looking a little disoriented.

SOREN

Some introductions might be in order.

CIARAN

Guys, this is an old buddy of mine, Horg the Hirsute.

HORG

Smoothest half-orc bard in three nations.

CIARAN

Not like there's a lot of competition. Anyway, how'd you land this job?

HORG

Well, I came out to Serain a few years back. I was doing a show when that dour dwarf lady came up to me after and offered me this gig. Their coin spent as good as anyone else's.

Ciaran narrows his eyes a little.

CIARAN

We can catch up after work tonight. We're supposed to get our orders from you?

PAN up to the window with the sun in the sky.

IMAGE MATCH DISSOLVE

INT. CAMPAIGN OFFICE - POLLING OFFICE DAY - MORNING

The morning is early yet with the sun still climbing in the sky and the office is already full of staff, most of whom do not appear to be morning people. Horg and the party are already present.

Ciaran looks over a letter.

CIARAN

Huh...

Soren looks up from his work.

SOREN

Something up?

CIARAN

Take a look at this. One of the magistrates, Ashdale, is publicly recanting his criticisms of Blackwood.

HORG

So? Good for us, right?

CIARAN

Just strange is all. Ashdale's criticisms were totally legit. I was looking over them yesterday. And this morning he just up and changes his mind?

HORG

Third time this month, actually. Boss man's critics usually end up apologizing.

THEODORA

That never struck you as weird?

Beat.

HORG

I don't get paid to back sass the boss. But between us, he's got some people on staff I recognize from the thieves' guild. Everybody's trying to get dirt on everybody else.

CELESTE

That can't be legal.

HORG

Probably not. Soren? Do me a solid. A courier dropped this off. Orders are to check all parcels for bad mojo, just in case.

Horg slides a wrapped PACKAGE over to Soren.

SOREN

Sure.

Soren mutters an incantation, his voice resonating softly. His eyes glow silver for a moment before returning to normal.

He inspects the package closely.

Giles enters.

GILES

Good morning, everyone. Horg, how are things coming along?

HORG

Magistrate Ashdale did a 180.

GILES

Excellent. Soren, I want you to go out and ask some questions over in the arcane district. See how they're responding to my platform.

Soren turns to face Giles.

SOREN

Sure, I-

Soren stops when he notices a faint, green glow around the RING on Giles' hand.

SOREN (CONT.)

(clears throat)

Pardon me. I'll head out after lunch.

Giles turns to speak to Theodora and Elathil and Soren gives the ring another look. The glow begins to come into sharper focus. Pale motes of energy slowly orbit the ring. Soren's eyes widen slightly and he hastily returns to the paperwork in front of him.

GILES

Well, that will be all. Carry on.

Giles exits.

ELATHIL

Soren? You okay?

SOREN

Horg? I bet you know the best places in town.
How about we all go out for brunch together? I'm
buying.

Soren gives them all a look and a nod to go along with what he's
saying.

HORG

Sounds great.

EXT. CAMPAIGN OFFICE DAY

The party and Horg exit the building. Soren is walking quickly and
looking around.

CIARAN

Alright, what the hell was that?

SOREN

Blackwood's wearing a ring of undetectable
alignment.

HORG

A what now?

Soren stops and looks to make sure they weren't followed.

SOREN

His ring conceals his alignment. There's only
one reason a politician uses that spell.

THEODORA

So we're doing PR work for some shadier than
usual power monger?

ELATHIL

That sounds like the long and short of it.

SOREN

Guys, something is going on here. The ring, the
critics reversing themselves, the kind of people
he hires...

(to Horg)

No offense.

HORG

None taken.

CIARAN

Soren, I agree that something weird is going on.
But take it from me, we need to come at this
sideways.

CELESTE

What do you suggest?

CIARAN

Give me a few hours. Tell Blackwood I'm
canvassing the neighborhoods.

(to Horg)

You suspected, didn't you?

HORG

Should have followed my gut but it was also
rumbling with hunger at the time. Mixed signals.

CIARAN

Alright. You guys go ahead. If I'm not back in
5 hours... keep waiting.

Ciaran turns and exits. Theodora moves to join him.

Horg puts a hand on her shoulder and shakes his head.

HORG

He'll be okay.

The party look the way Ciaran left.

HORG (CONT.)

I mean it. Ciaran's got a golden voice. He'll
get information.

SLAM CUT

EXT. ALLEY DAY (CONT.)

Ciaran is boxed into an alley and trying to avoid the swinging short
sword blade of an ASSASSIN in a black half-mask. He has several cuts
on his arms, one on his face and his knuckles are bloody. He
sidesteps another attack.

CIARAN

So that's a no on a date then?

Ciaran ducks beneath a thrust of the assassin's sword, slides a knife out of his boot and slashes her across the thigh.

The assassin thrusts her sword down to drive it through Ciaran's head but he rolls out of the way. He kicks her hard in the knee and the snap of a broken bone is HEARD. The assassin goes down.

The assassin gestures with her hands, speaks a single resonant word, and vanishes from sight.

CIARAN (CONT.)

And on that note...

(singing)

One step beyond the light!

Ciaran vanishes from sight. FOOTSTEPS fill the alley and the camera PANS to follow them to the mouth of the alley.

EXT. STREETS DAY

FOOTSTEPS run by until Ciaran reappears and leans against a street light catching his breath. Up ahead he sees a crossroads with more people and jogs over.

CIARAN

The gang are gonna love this.

Ciaran slips into the crowd and soon disappears among them.

INT. TAVERN PRIVATE ROOM DAY (CONT.)

The party and Horg are all gathered around a table in a small private room.

ELATHIL

Fantastic. You know we can't go back to that office now, right?

CIARAN

It crossed my mind.

SOREN

Guys, let's keep our cool here. We need a plan.

HORG

Back in the day, we usually fell back on the Universal Plan B. Get the hell outta town.

THEODORA

Not that easy. Blackwood is in a position of wealth and power. People with this much to lose do not just let these things go.

ELATHIL

Frankly, we only have one choice: hit him where it hurts before he has a chance to find us.

CELESTE

We can't just attack his office! Who knows how many innocent people are in there.

SOREN

To say nothing of the fact that it's his word against ours right now. Divination magic is inadmissible in Seraini courts.

ELATHIL

Then we need intel. Something we can take to a magistrate.

HORG

There is one place you could go...

SOREN

We're listening.

HORG

The Meadow. Halfling district. There isn't a secret in this town that doesn't go through there sooner or later.

SOREN

Can you take us there?

HORG

Does a druid crap in the woods?

Soren thinks for a moment. He reaches into his coat pocket and takes out a GLASS SPHERE. He hands it to Celeste.

SOREN

Ciaran, Horg and I will go out and see what we can dig up. If we're not back in 5 hours, use this to find us. The Locate Object ability should do the trick.

Celeste reluctantly takes the sphere.

Elathil stands.

ELATHIL

I'm coming with you. I hate waiting.

THEODORA

You were a sniper in the militia. That's a job that's 99% waiting.

ELATHIL

Never said I liked that part. Besides, you guys are going to need someone with a decent attack bonus.

(to Horg)

No offense.

HORG

None taken.

SOREN

El's also the only one of us with a Listen skill worth a damn. Probably safer with him around. I'll set an Alarm spell on the room before we leave.

CELESTE

Be careful out there, okay?

HORG

Aw, we care about you, too.

THEODORA

No, it's just Raise Dead spells are expensive as hell.

Horg laughs.

HORG

Sense of humor. Treasure that.

Soren, Ciaran, Elathil and Horg stand and exit.

Theodora and Celeste look to each other.

THEODORA

So. Cards?

EXT. THE MEADOW DAY (CONT.)

The halfling ethnic district is a small park with pastoral fields, fruit trees, and a pond. Halfling caravans, vegetable gardens and a

handful of small, folksy cottages dot the grass. The halflings themselves are moving about tending chores, playing music, or putting on small performances while the children play games.

Soren, Ciaran, Elathil and Horg enter.

HORG

This place drives the bureaucrats bonkers. The population stays steady at 165. Never changes.

ELATHIL

How is that frustrating?

HORG

The head count never changes. The names and faces do. Constantly. They don't cause trouble so the guards just look the other way.

CIARAN

And I thought my litany of aliases was clever. This is a work of art.

SOREN

It does beg the question of who we ask for information.

CIARAN

You kidding? Watch us rock.

Ciaran and Horg sidle up to an elderly HALFLING MAN sitting on the porch of a caravan and smoking a pipe. They talk with the man in the Halfling language.

After a brief exchange, the halfling man gestures with his pipe to another caravan down a winding dirt path deeper into the park. Ciaran slips him a few gold coins. He and Horg rejoin Soren and Elathil.

HORG

There's a guy who can help us out that way.

ELATHIL

How did you do that? What did you say?

CIARAN

We just asked. We speak Halfling so he knows we're on the level.

HORG

Halflings are picky about who they teach their language. If you know it, you earned the trust of at least one.

ELATHIL

I have to admit, letting a half-orc do the talking is kind of a switch, but lead on.

They four go further into the park. Ciaran and Horg knock on the door of the caravan the old halfling indicated. A HALFLING WOMAN with a long braided ponytail steps out. Ciaran and Horg begin speaking with her in Halfling while Soren and Elathil stand by.

Elathil nudges Soren with his elbow.

ELATHIL (CONT.)

I think we're being watched.

Soren turns to look around. Elathil stops him.

ELATHIL (CONT.)

Don't look, just keep your cool.

SOREN

How can you tell?

ELATHIL

I keep hearing the same footsteps following us around. Whoever they are, they've got an awful Move Silently modifier.

SOREN

You can tell the difference between different kinds of footwear?

ELATHIL

You can't? Human senses. Anyway, I think our erstwhile boss is keeping an eye on us.

SOREN

What do you suggest?

ELATHIL

Wait for them to make a move. Easier to claim self-defense that way.

Ciaran and Horg return.

CIARAN

A few halflings have spotted Blackwood trying to hide his face going in and out of a high-end brothel in the red light district.

HORG

I know the place. Lady Bella's House of Negotiable Affection.

ELATHIL

Classy.

SOREN

Should we head out?

CIARAN

Assuming El can contain his excitement.

ELATHIL

Hey, not all of us have to pay for our action.

HORG

Sabrina's probably working there today. She owes me one. I say we go.

SOREN

Well then gentlemen, and I use the term loosely, let's roll.

The group exits.

EXT. BROTHEL DAY

The brothel is a surprisingly clean building with stained glass windows and a shingle with the name "LADY BELLA'S HOUSE OF NEGOTIABLE AFFECTIONS" in a flowing script. The group arrive and head for the door.

SOREN

El, we still being followed?

ELATHIL

Yeah. Keep your guards up in there.

The group enter through the front.

INT. BROTHEL DAY

The inside is opulently decorated. A front desk has a large, open guestbook with a young REDHEAD standing by with a smile. The prostitutes and their clients are of every race and mill about the common room, coming and going to other areas of the brothel. An ELF in a corset top and skirt with slits up the side sits on a stack of pillows in the corner playing a lyre.

The four walk up to the redhead.

REDHEAD

Welcome to Lady Bella's where no one needs to feel alone. What can I do for you gentlemen?

SOREN

Hello there. We're looking for Sabrina. Is she available?

REDHEAD

You're in luck. She's upstairs in her room right now. Just sign into the guestbook and we'll get you set up.

CIARAN

We just need to ask a few questions.

Ciaran slips the redhead a small coin purse. She takes the purse and tucks it into her cleavage.

REDHEAD

As I was saying, up the stairs, third door on the left.

The four head for the stairs.

SOREN

Is it always that easy?

HORG

The ladies love a man with class.

INT. BROTHEL - UPSTAIRS HALL DAY

The four men come up to the door the redhead told them about. Soren knocks on the door.

SABRINA (O.C.)

Come in.

The four enter. As they do, a HOODED FIGURE peers out from another door, looks back into the room and nods.

INT. BROTHEL - SABRINA'S ROOM DAY

SABRINA is a slender human woman with flowing, curly brown hair and wearing a gauzy cream dress lounging on a luxurious feather bed.

Several candles are lit about the room. A washbasin stands in the corner.

Sabrina smiles at Horg as the men close the door behind them.

SABRINA

Horg! It's been ages. Who are your friends?

HORG

Old friend of mine Ciaran and two of his adventurer buddies. They need some help and I wanted an excuse to see your pretty face again, so I thought I'd call in my favor.

SABRINA

Flatterer. So what do you need?

SOREN

We're wondering if you've seen a particular man come through here recently. Dark hair, fancy mustache, scar on his cheek, snappy dresser?

SABRINA

Oh. I really wish you hadn't asked me that.

The four men look at her strangely.

The door flies open and two HOODED MEN step in with wands. They fire off blasts of shimmering light at Horg and Ciaran who drop to the ground unconscious.

Soren and Elathil turn to fight.

Sabrina pulls a WAND of her own from under a pillow and activates it.

INT. TAVERN ROOM DAY (CONT.)

Theodora looks out the window as Celeste meditates on the floor.

THEODORA

Okay, it's been long enough. Let's go pull their asses out of the fire.

CELESTE

Do you really think they're in trouble?

THEODORA

If they're not then I still want to hit one of them for taking their time.

Celeste stands and takes out Soren's crystal sphere. She waves a hand over it and concentrates. An image of Soren's coat flickers inside the sphere for a moment before the inside fills with mist and a glowing arrow points toward the outside.

The two women gather their weapons and exit.

INT. BROTHEL - CULT LAIR NIGHT

Soren, Ciaran, Elathil and Horg come to and find themselves chained to a wall. The room around them has luxury furnishings and decor with a wicked looking altar at the far end of the room stained with blood. Multiple candelabra light the room. Soren is gagged. Giles, Sabrina and a small group of CULTISTS and Harya are gathered.

GILES

Ah, you're awake. A shame you had to go snooping, but I'm afraid the stakes are a bit too high to let you interfere.

CIARAN

You want to qualify that statement?

GILES

You know how it is, favor for a favor. Our fiendish benefactor is advancing my political career. In return, I use that influence to steer things in a direction more... amenable to his long-term goals.

ELATHIL

What, like mandatory Thirsty Thursday specials?

SABRINA

Something like that. Also, sorry Horg. I thought about enlisting you, but this is a job that requires more subtlety than you can offer. No offense.

HORG

Blow me.

CIARAN

So what's next for us? Are we meant to just stay here and add some color to the decor?

ELATHIL

They do seem to be lacking in the sort of roguish charms we can supply.

HORG

I'd be okay with an oath of silence on pain of death myself.

SABRINA

Actually, we're a little behind schedule on our next sacrifice. The boss is particular about that.

CIARAN

Joke's on you. We're not even Good aligned. Handing a fiend a sub-par sacrifice. Yeah, that'll go over well.

HORG

Just like a politician, huh? Follow the letter of the promise only, if they deliver at all.

SABRINA

Nice try, but we know your mage friend there is Neutral Good.

Soren leans toward Ciaran and mumbles something through his gag.

CIARAN

He says his ghost will retain all of his spellcasting abilities.

GILES

Nice thing about sacrifices is they don't tend to come back.

Elathil's ears twitch.

ELATHIL

It's official. We need to start dealing with a higher class of villains.

GILES

And just what is that supposed to mean?

ELATHIL

This isn't our first dungeon crawl, handlebars. First that Carston guy-

SABRINA

Carston? You were responsible for what happened to him?

CIARAN

Well, that was anti-climactic.

ELATHIL

More to the point, we kept you talking for a reason.

The door smashes open and Theodora and Celeste storm into the room.

Theodora is upon the cultists immediately with her rapier and dagger. She runs one of them through with her sword and turns to stab one trying to flank her from behind in the throat with her dagger.

THEODORA

Looks like there's more than one kind of penetration going on around here.

Celeste swings her staff and cracks one cultist in the head, then spins around to deliver a second swing that brains Harya.

Sabrina draws a dagger and lunges at Theodora who sidesteps and draws her dagger across Sabrina's arm.

GILES

Stop fooling around and kill them!

Celeste swings her staff in an upward arc at Giles. It connects with his stomach, but he grabs hold of it and tries to wrench it away from Celeste. They struggle a moment before he rips it out of her hands.

Celeste brings her hands together.

CELESTE

(in octaves)

Tharello's damnation!

A blast of yellow-white light streaks from her hands and hits Giles in the face. Some of his hair, eyebrows and mustache are burned off and his face is bright red. He screams and staggers blind with his hands over his eyes.

Celeste grabs a candelabra and brains him with it.

Theodora parries another thrust from Sabrina. She gets close enough to headbutt Sabrina in the face, making her stagger back.

SABRINA

You'll pay for that, you bitch!

Celeste smashes the candleabra base into the back of Sabrina's skull, dropping her.

CELESTE

Don't call her that, you... diabolic hussy.

THEODORA

Was that your first fight banter? That was good.

Theodora quickly searches Giles for a key to the shackles. She finds it and releases Ciaran.

CIARAN

Marry me? Either of you?

Theodora playfully punches Ciaran's shoulder.

Ciaran helps to free Horg and Soren. As they're releasing Elathil, Giles stirs, springs up and runs.

HORG

Our ex-boss is pulling a Universal Plan B!

The party free Elathil and chase after Giles.

EXT. BROTHEL NIGHT

Giles bursts out the door, knocking over two other brothel patrons as he goes. The party follow after him, though only Theodora and Celeste are armed.

Elathil puts on a burst of speed and starts to gain on Giles. Just as he's about to jump to tackle him, a statue falls from the roof of a building above and crushes Giles. Elathil skids to a halt with the party not far behind.

CIARAN

What the fucking hell?! What are the odds?!

Soren sniffs.

SOREN

Apropos choice of words and pretty good, actually. I smell brimstone.

Everyone turns to look at Soren.

SOREN (CONT.)

Blackwood was part of a diabolic cult. Now we've exposed him, killed most of his fellows, scattered those we didn't, and know where their lair is. The fiend he answered to is probably pulling damage control.

ELATHIL

That's... good right.

HORG

Yeah! Case closed and bar open! Let's go!

CELESTE

I don't think it's that simple.

SOREN

No. I'm pretty sure we just made that devil's
shit list.

CIARAN

Are... are you actually worried?

SOREN

A smidge.

Everyone looks at one another.

HORG

Well... that brought the mood down. I think I'm
gonna hoof it out of town for a while.

SOREN

I think we all should. Horg, you're welcome to
tag along back to Erinol. We're just going to
inform the constable before we leave.

The party exit. The CAMERA LINGERS on the smashed statue with Giles'
arms and legs sticking out from under it.

CELESTE (O.C.)

Hey, Soren? I've got an idea for a magic item we
might want to work on.

FADE OUT