

FADE IN

INT. KITCHEN DAY - MORNING

SOREN, THEODORA, CELESTE and ELATHIL are sitting around a table eating breakfast. Soren is reviewing a ledger.

CIARAN enters holding a stack of LETTERS.

CIARAN

Mail call. El, your daily fan mail.

Ciaran hands Elathil a stack of colorful envelopes. Elathil sniffs one made of lavender paper.

ELATHIL

Matilda! Haven't heard from her in ages.

CIARAN

Theo, couple here for you too. Celeste, some stuff from the Green Assembly. And Soren, there's some stuff here for you from the Church of the Invisible Hand.

SOREN

I'm still on their mailing list? Credit where due, they're persistent.

Everyone starts opening their letters. Theodora scoffs.

CIARAN

Bad news?

THEODORA

(reading aloud)

"Let it be known that The Honorable Fellowship of the Rapier Armed and Witted will not stand for the insults issued by the League of Derring-Do. Anticipate contests of skill in the coming months as we teach these presumptuous curs, blah-blah-blah." Given how badly we whipped the League last summer, you'd think they'd have learned their lesson.

CELESTE

Hmm. The Hearth and the Imperators are getting antsy with each other again. The Imperators even sent me some "literature."

SOREN

Aren't you already a member of the Hearth faction?

CELESTE

That makes little difference to an evangelist. After last month in Serain I've lost my taste for politics, though.

Soren looks through his letters and furrows his brows.

SOREN

Huh. Apparently there are several new factions in the Church of the Invisible Hand. The Freed Men, the Randites... They don't much like each other either if this copy is any hint.

CELESTE

Does anyone else think this is odd?

ELATHIL

How so? No offense, but your race is pretty opinionated.

CELESTE

This much in-fighting out of the blue... The timing just struck me as weird.

THEODORA

Maybe the election year in Serain is just putting the neighbors on edge. Wouldn't be the first time.

Ciaran opens up a letter of his own. He reads it a moment and his eyes widen.

CIARAN

Okay, this is getting spooky. Remember I said I left the thieves' guild on the Deferred Adventurers Program? Apparently that doesn't get you off the mailing list.

SOREN

Welcome to my world. What's it say?

CIARAN

Propaganda piece. Sully the Sneak and Bad News Birok are fighting for the position of guild leader. One wants to focus on smuggling, the other on vice.

Beat.

THEODORA

Okay, yeah. Now it's weird.

CELESTE

You don't think magic's involved, do you?

SOREN

Hmm... Possibly? This scale of effect is super rare, but not unprecedented. To what end though? And how?

ELATHIL

I think you guys are being a little paranoid. It's probably just proof that the multiverse has a sense of humor. Anyway, shouldn't we be going?

SOREN

Yeah. We'll think this over later. The market will be opening up soon.

The party finish eating and exit.

TITLE SEQUENCE

EXT. ERINOL MARKETPLACE DAY (CONT.)

The marketplace is a large square on the edge of the elven ethnic district which is more like a park with architecture incorporated into the natural features. The market itself bustles with people of various races. People move in and out of storefronts and in the square merchants sell wares from their booths.

Soren has a floating disc of force energy hovering beside him stacked with several wares and is haggling with a GNOME MERCHANT while holding a bundle of MANTICORE SPINES.

SOREN

I'm afraid I can't part with the manticore spines for any less than 100 gold on the grounds that I had to remove three of them from my shoulder.

GNOME MERCHANT

I'm not sure I can get a decent return on investment if I pay more than 75.

Theodora walks up. She has several articles of clothing draped over one arm and a wooden case with a leather handle hanging from her other hand. She looks at Soren.

THEODORA

Give me a week, I can make the spines into hair accessories.

Soren puts the spines back on the disc and picks up a taxidermy STIRGE on a wooden display mount.

SOREN

Okay, moving on. I have five of these. Stuffed them myself after our last trip to the Southern Marches. I'm asking for 25 gold each.

Theodora walks into a fashion boutique with a shingle that reads "STORYBOOK BOUTIQUE."

Celeste is standing at a food vendor's booth. The VENDOR taps a barrel and tastes a small cup of the contents.

VENDOR

Hmm. Very unique flavors. A lot of body too. What did you see this was again?

CELESTE

It's my own special brew of mead. Flavored with blackberries from my garden and the honey comes from Celestial bees. See how it sells today, and if you're interested, I have three more casks I can sell you.

VENDOR

You've got a deal, little lady.

Ciaran and Elathil are walking through the marketplace. Ciaran points into the crowd.

CIARAN

Guy in the green tunic. Pickpocket. If he comes this way, make eye contact and don't look away.

ELATHIL

Why's that?

CIARAN

Never pick a mark who knows your face.

A SCREAM is heard toward the elven district. Ciaran and Elathil run over along with several other people to see what the trouble is.

EXT. ALLEY DAY

A small crowd has gathered around, murmuring in shock and horror. Ciaran and Elathil jostle their way to the front of the crowd and stop stunned.

Lying on the ground and covered in blood is a DEAD ELF. On the wall directly above him, scrawled in blood is a single word: "GORLOT"

ELATHIL

Silarin's oath...

A BYSTANDER points to the writing on the wall.

BYSTANDER

That word... What does it mean?

CIARAN

It's Orcish. It's a...

ELATHIL

It's a racial slur.

A DRUNK scoffs and Elathil glares at him.

DRUNK

Stuff 'em, honestly. Bunch of self-righteous tree humpers, all of 'em.

ELATHIL

You want to repeat that, gutter trash?

DRUNK

Whassa matter? Those big ears only for decoration? Or do I just need to talk slower so's you can understand?

Elathil makes a move to grab the drunk but Ciaran steps between them.

CIARAN

Whoa, whoa! Easy! Don't waste an attack roll on him.

Another ELF with a deep scar on his cheek steps forward.

ELF

Why not? How do we know he didn't do it? Just came back to admire his work?

DRUNK

Ha! If I knew who did this, I'd buy him a drink.

The crowd starts to argue and sneer at one another.

The guards arrive and upon seeing the murder scene start to break up the crowd.

Elathil storms off with Ciaran following behind.

DISSOLVE

INT. COMMON ROOM DAY - MORNING

The common room at the party's home has several chairs and couches, a fireplace, and a few rugs. Several taxidermy monster specimens are hung up on the wall along with souvenirs from previous dungeon crawls.

Elathil is sitting in a chair sharpening his knife and brooding. Soren enters.

SOREN

El, you okay?

ELATHIL

You need to ask?

SOREN

I get that, but you're starting to scare us.

ELATHIL

No, you don't get it. I served in the militia for longer than you've been alive. I've fought things that wanted my village dead for the crime of being born.

SOREN

We've been in dungeons together, El. Plenty of things in there have tried to kill us on sight.

ELATHIL

It's not the same thing and you know it. When's the last time you had to watch your back just for being human?

Beat.

SOREN

You're right. I'm sorry.

ELATHIL

I didn't think racism was that big a problem here. Shows what I know.

SOREN

This is actually the first crime like this we've had in years. There's not much violent crime, period.

Ciaran enters.

ELATHIL

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

SOREN

I didn't-

CIARAN

Soren's right. Whoever did this is probably from out of town.

ELATHIL

What about that slobbering trash yesterday?

CIARAN

That was Victor, former thieves' guild informant. He's like that to everyone.

Theodora enters through the front door.

THEODORA

Guys? I've got bad news and worse news.

SOREN

Not a strong start to the day, but alright.

THEODORA

Another elf was murdered.

Elathil slams his fist down on the arm of his chair and stares at the floor.

CIARAN

And what news is worse than having a spree killer on the loose?

Theodora hesitates.

THEODORA

Horg was the last one seen with the victim last night. They brought him in.

CIARAN

No! No, bullshit! I've known Horg for years.

ELATHIL

You only know somebody until you don't.

CIARAN

Don't start with me!

Soren steps in.

SOREN

Everyone calm down! Gods above, what the hell has gotten into you?

THEODORA

How about we go down to the constable and see if we can talk to Horg? Get his side of the story.

ELATHIL

Why bother?

THEODORA

Because after all your complaining about racism, you're going to hear out the half-orc who's been nothing but a stand-up guy to you.

Elathil and Theodora stare each other down.

ELATHIL

Fine.

SOREN

You guys go. I have a batch of smokesticks I need to finish on commission by Friday. But let me know if you need me.

Everyone exits.

INT. JAIL DAY (CONT.)

Horg is sitting in a holding cell by himself. There are three other prisoners in the next cell over playing cards. Horg is staring out the barred window sadly.

Theodora, Ciaran and Elathil enter escorted by a JAIL GUARD.

JAIL GUARD

Here he is. Talk to him if you wanna. Just don't take too long.

The guard exits.

Horg comes up to the bars and offers a weak smile.

HORG

I don't suppose you guys are here to smuggle a file in.

CIARAN

It may come to that. What happened? We heard about... you know.

HORG

His name was Selwyn. He recognized me from when I played in The Complete Scoundrels. Bought me a few drinks, we talked for a couple hours. Split up after we left the tavern and... Here I am.

ELATHIL

Not exactly an air-tight alibi.

HORG

I'm sensing some hostility.

THEODORA

Elathil's in kind of a mood. You didn't see anything strange, did you?

HORG

Not especially. But I was pretty drunk at the time.

NOISE heard from outside indicates a crowd gathering. Theodora looks out the window and sees a mob arguing with the guards.

THEODORA

Whole bunch of people out there. And I don't think they're from the Humanoid Anti-Defamation Guild either.

HORG

Sometimes the worst crime you can commit is being born.

Elathil looks away.

THEODORA

We could post bail for you, but given how pissed that crowd looks, you might be safer in that cell for now.

CIARAN

Look, if this goes to trial, we'll be your character witnesses. I don't know how good my word is, but Celeste's has gotta count for something.

Horg manages a smile.

HORG

Thanks, buddy.

Horg and Ciaran fist bump. Ciaran, Theodora and Elathil exit.

EXT. JAIL DAY

The crowd are angrily chanting for the murderer to be hanged. The trio of heroes exit the jail and Ciaran scowls at them before doing a double take.

Among the crowd is the same elf from yesterday with the scar on his cheek. Ciaran watches him a moment.

The elf eggs on the crowd then turns and skulks off without anyone else noticing him.

ELATHIL

Ciaran? Hey! You okay?

CIARAN

Yeah. I'll meet you guys back at the house.

Ciaran exits in pursuit of the elf with the scar.

THEODORA

Wait a second, where are you going?

EXT. ERINOL STREETS DAY

The elf strides off down the street with Ciaran following behind, trying to blend into the crowd. The people jostle him slightly as he tries to avoid losing track of the elf.

The elf turns a corner and Ciaran hustles to catch up.

He peers around the corner and sees the elf turning down another corner across the street.

Ciaran crosses the street, narrowly avoiding a carriage as the driver curses at him.

Ciaran jogs over to the corner and sees the elf going down the street. He hustles a little until he's closer and starts walking to match the elf stride for stride.

The elf looks over his shoulder. Ciaran turns and peers into a storefront as if window shopping.

The elf keeps walking.

Ciaran turns and keeps following.

The elf looks back over his shoulder again and this time breaks into a full run.

CIARAN

Hey!

Ciaran follows in hot pursuit.

CIARAN (CONT.)

Stop! I just had some questions!

The elf turns down an alley and vaults over a brick wall.

Ciaran jumps up on a rain barrel and springs up to the top of the wall, climbing over it. When he lands, he resumes the chase.

The elf runs across an overpass and jumps off the edge to the collected gasps of the bystanders.

Ciaran runs up to the edge and looks over, but sees no sign of the elf.

He rushes to the other side and looks down, but again no sign.

Ciaran leans against the wall of the overpass and pants to catch his breath.

CIARAN (CONT.)

Son of a bitch...

Ciaran exits.

INT. COMMON ROOM DAY (CONT.)

The party minus Ciaran are sitting around talking. Soren is pacing off to the side holding his chin in thought.

CELESTE

I agree. I don't think Horg did it.

THEODORA

Ciaran volunteered us as character witnesses.

ELATHIL

For whatever that's worth.

SOREN

That mob has me worried. Half-orcs get a bum deal every day, but this? A little extreme, don't you think?

CELESTE

I agree. The whole city seems to be walking on a knife's edge the last couple days.

Ciaran enters.

ELATHIL

Welcome back. You want to explain yourself now?

Ciaran flops down onto the couch next to Celeste with a heaved sigh.

CIARAN

That elf who accused Victor of being the murderer yesterday? I saw him in the mob at the jail. He was egging them on, then just left. I followed him, but he ran. He's up to something.

ELATHIL

So you made a big song and dance out of one shifty rabble rouser?

CIARAN

Remind me again which of us has more ranks in Sense Motive.

THEODORA

And let's be honest, El. Your people still have a casual racism thing going.

ELATHIL

Oh don't start. You humans are plenty-

Elathil cuts himself off as he realizes what he's saying and looks away.

THEODORA

That's zero for two today. Do you want to apologize or take another stab at it?

ELATHIL

Sorry.

CIARAN

For penance, come with me.

Ciaran stands up.

ELATHIL

Where are we going?

CIARAN

To make a Gather Information check. I'm going to ask around the elven district. See if anyone recognizes our mystery man.

CELESTE

Anything I can do?

SOREN

We could try our hand at some divinations. See what that turns up?

CIARAN

Every little bit helps. We'll be back by evening.

Ciaran and Elathil exit.

EXT. ELVEN DISTRICT - ENTRANCE DAY

The elven district is peaceful and idyllic. Houses are built into the sides of small hills and around and within the trees in the park. Only a handful of structures stand on their own. Elves come and go at a leisurely pace tending to chores and running errands while children play.

Ciaran and Elathil enter.

Ciaran approaches an ELF GUARD with a sword at his hip.

CIARAN

Excuse me. My friend and I are looking for someone, want to know if you've seen him around.

ELF GUARD

What's their name?

ELATHIL

No name, just a guy who was acting suspicious. Another elf, about yea tall, huge scar on his cheek.

ELF GUARD

Sounds a bit like Yafelik. He blew into the neighborhood about a week ago. What was he doing?

CIARAN

He keeps showing up at places trying to agitate a crowd. We're starting to think he has it out for a friend of ours.

ELF GUARD

That sounds like him. That man could carry a grudge harder than a dwarf.

ELATHIL

You know him?

ELF GUARD

Acquainted. He was a local troublemaker before he took off about fifty years ago to be an adventurer. Between us, he wasn't missed.

ELATHIL

Anything else?

ELF GUARD

Check the Thirsty Minstrel down that way. He's been pissing away his coin there ever since he got back.

CIARAN

Thank you.

(to Elathil)

Let's go.

Ciaran and Elathil exit.

EXT. ELVEN DISTRICT - THIRSTY MINSTREL DAY

The tavern has multiple levels and buildings built around a very large and old oak tree with several buildings tucked into the branches. A few elves are coming and going through the front door.

INT. THIRSTY MINSTREL DAY

Ciaran and Elathil are sitting at a table with a DRUNK ELF. Ciaran slides him another drink, which he gulps down.

DRUNK ELF

Yeah, I met Yafelic before. Real selfish. Always me, me, me, me, me with him.

ELATHIL

Sounds like a real prize.

DRUNK ELF

Ha! He sure thought so. He comes in here every night for the last week, gets a few drinks in him and pines, "How could she choose him over me?"

CIARAN

Proper nouns, please.

DRUNK ELF

Eh? Sionna. She trains horses, lives near the temple.

CIARAN

You think she may know more about Yafelic?

DRUNK ELF

Maybe. I wouldn't bother her, though.

ELATHIL

Why's that?

DRUNK ELF

Didn't you hear? Her husband was the one murdered the other night.

Ciaran and Elathil look at each other.

CIARAN

I feel like there should be some creepy music playing behind us right now.

Ciaran slips the drunk elf a few gold coins and he and Elathil exit.

EXT. ELVEN DISTRICT - THIRSTY MINSTREL DAY

Ciaran and Elathil step out of the tavern.

ELATHIL

Now what?

CIARAN

We need to go talk to the widow.

ELATHIL

Not the best idea you've ever had. She'll be at the temple for most of the day, mourning. Kind of rude to interrupt that.

CIARAN

We don't have much else to go on. And if Yafelic is connected to the murders, she may be in danger.

Elathil paces conflicted.

ELATHIL

Okay. We'll warn her at least. Just let me do the talking this time. The temple doesn't get many humans.

Elathil and Ciaran exit.

EXT. ELVEN TEMPLE DAY

The temple is a large chapel made of masonry stone with large windows. Most of the temple grounds consist of a fenced in garden with statuary and small shrines to the various elven gods. Priests in pale green and white robes slowly move about singing softly in elven. A few parishioners offer prayers at several shrines. Butterflies and bees flit from one flowerbed to the next.

Ciaran and Elathil enter. Elathil scans the grounds and points to SIONNA who is kneeling in front of one particular shrine.

ELATHIL

That's her.

CIARAN

How can you tell?

ELATHIL

That's a shrine to Ansirilia. The... I guess you'd call her the goddess of death. It's complicated. Come on.

Ciaran and Elathil approach the shrine. The priests cast sidelong, skeptical looks at Ciaran but say nothing.

Elathil gestures for Ciaran to stand by. The two of them stand to the side of the shrine and respectfully wait.

Sionna opens her eyes and looks up. Her face is streaked with tears and her eyes are bloodshot.

SIONNA

Yes? Can I help you?

Elathil responds in elven.

ELATHIL

(subtitled)

May you dance among the stars together in  
Ansirilia's garden.

SIONNA

(subtitled)

Thank you.

ELATHIL

My name is Elathil. This is Ciaran. A friend of  
ours has been falsely accused of murdering your  
husband. We believe a man named Yafelic knows  
something. Can you tell us anything about him?

Sionna frowns and stands up.

SIONNA

He's a selfish little man. We... had a fling  
years ago. A foolish decision on my part before  
he left to become an adventurer. Ever since he  
came back he's been spending his days drinking  
and brooding.

Ciaran nods to Elathil.

CIARAN

Ma'am, we think he has some connection to the  
murders. And we'd like you to help.

SIONNA

How?

Ciaran begins to explain his plan.

INT. THIRSTY MINSTREL NIGHT

Ciaran and Elathil are sitting at a table sipping from tankards and  
watching the crowd. Ciaran has magically disguised himself as an elf.

ELATHIL

You sure he'll come by?

CIARAN

The bartender says he's been here every night for  
a week. If there's one way that a drunk is  
predictable... Hang on, there he is.

Yafelic enters. He avoids eye contact with anyone and goes straight for the bar where he takes a seat.

CIARAN (CONT.)

Let's go.

Ciaran and Elathil go up to the bar near Yafelic and gesture to the BARTENDER for another round.

He brings them their drinks and leaves a glass and a bottle in front of Yafelic. They start speaking in elven.

ELATHIL

(subtitled)

Shame about Sionna.

CIARAN

(subtitled)

Can't say I blame her for wanting to leave, though.

Yafelic glances at Ciaran and Elathil.

ELATHIL

(subtitled)

Yeah. Losing her husband like that. And then a neighbor. Orcs. No decency in them.

CIARAN

(subtitled)

When did she say she was leaving, anyway?

ELATHIL

(subtitled)

Tomorrow I think.

Yafelic throws down a few coins, downs his glass and exits.

Ciaran and Elathil sip from their drinks and nod to each other. They pay and exit.

EXT. ELVEN DISTRICT - THIRSTY MINSTREL NIGHT

Yafelic leaves the tavern and strides off down the road.

Ciaran and Elathil leave the tavern after him and see him walking off into the distance.

Ciaran drops the illusionary disguise. The two of them walk over to a GUARD wearing a green cape on patrol.

ELATHIL

He's on his way, just like we said.

GUARD

I saw. Let's go.

Ciaran, Elathil and Ciaran proceed down the road after Yafelic.

EXT. SIONNA'S HOUSE NIGHT

Sionna's house is three buildings tucked into the branches of an oak tree with a garden at the base. A set of stairs wrapped around the trunk of the tree lead to main unit. Sionna walks through the garden and pitches a bucket of wash water out onto the grass.

She turns to go back inside when Yafelic enters.

YAFELIC

Sionna? Are you really leaving?

Sionna turns with a start and backs away from Yafelic slightly.

SIONNA

Y-yes. I don't want to stay here anymore. It's too painful.

YAFELIC

But they caught the murderer. You're safe.

SIONNA

It's not about being safe.

YAFELIC

You should think about this.

SIONNA

Think? You of all people are the last to give me such advice.

YAFELIC

I know exactly what I'm doing.

SIONNA

Do you? You did me a favor by leaving before. It let me see what kind of person you are. I have nothing else to say to you.

Sionna turns to leave. Yafelic strides up and blocks her path.

YAFELIC

You don't need to leave. I'll be there for you!

SIONNA

You had that chance before. Corevar was here and now I've lost him along with Selwyn. What could you possibly do about that?

YAFELIC

More than they ever could!

SIONNA

Go away!

Sionna tries to shove past Yafelic but he grabs her arm.

YAFELIC

What did you ever see in Corevar anyway? He was just a carpenter!

SIONNA

He was my husband!

YAFELIC

And what good did it do him? He couldn't stop a man with a knife coming up behind him, you think he could protect you? He died a pathetic coward!

Sionna looks at Yafelic in shock.

SIONNA

What are you...?

Yafelic steps back. Beat.

YAFELIC

You belong to me! He didn't deserve you!

SIONNA

Murderer!

YAFELIC

And why should I hang for that? Let that half-orc mongrel get what's coming to him! I deserve better!

SIONNA

Is that why you killed Selwyn? To frame someone else?

YAFELIC

Only the clever deserve to live.

CIARAN (O.C.)

Now!

Ciaran, Elathil, and two GUARDS drop out of invisibility and rush for Yafelic.

Yafelic narrowly dodges the guards' attempt to grab him and races off.

Elathil nocks an arrow to his bow and fires, hitting Yafelic in his calf and causing him to drop to the ground. The guards rush over and grab him as he screams in rage. Ciaran runs over to help subdue Yafelic as the guards arrest him.

Sionna stares at the whole scene crying. Elathil puts a comforting hand on her shoulder. She nods in thanks to him. Elathil goes to help bring Yafelic in.

DISSOLVE

INT. COMMON ROOM DAY

The party minus Soren are gathered in the common room with Horg who is packing a sack with clothes and supplies.

HORG

Thanks for everything. I owe you guys.

CELESTE

You sure you don't want to stay a little longer?

HORG

Nah, Erinol's too high-strung these days. I'm going to sunbathe on the coast for a while.

Soren enters.

SOREN

You can tag along if you want. We're heading out that way.

THEODORA

News to me.

SOREN

Yeah, I just came in to tell you guys. We've got a new job with a huge pay-off on completion.

CIARAN

Sounds good. What is it?

SOREN

We're going after the bounty on The Tyrant's  
Hand!

Ciaran and Horg look at Soren in shock. They look at each other.

HORG

Your boss is officially loony.

CIARAN

I know.

FADE OUT