

FADE IN

**EXT. MARSHLANDS - DAY**

A murky forest of endless swamplands. A gang of BANDIT RATS pulls a rickety wooden wagon carrying large crates down a beaten path. The LEADER, a larger rat with an eyepatch, oversees their efforts.

A bandit trips over a root, forcing the cart's wheel to graze against a stone.

BANDIT LEADER

Watch where you're going, ya lil whelp!

FAT RAT BANDIT

Cut us a break, boss. We've been movin' this load all morning!

BANDIT LEADER

And they'll keep being sore till this job's done! If somethin' happens to this load, it'll be all our tails!

RAT BANDIT

How bout a break then? Our feet are sore!

BANDIT LEADER

You can stop when we're done! The last thing we need is for one of those greasy tubs to come on by and stop us!

ARION (O.S.)

Greasy, you say?

The rats flinch at the sight of ARION, a large, naga-esque leopard slug in a sapphire-colored suit of armor, as he slithers out of the shadows. An impressive GREAT AXE strapped to his back.

ARION (CONT'D)

With all due respect, I see it more as a healthy sheen. That's a heck of a load you got here. What are you boys hauling?

The Rat Bandit balls his hand into a fist, then gives a hand gesture to another rat that slips out of sight.

BANDIT LEADER  
What's it to ya?

ARION  
Easy there. I'm just making sure  
nothing contraband passing through  
these parts.

They remain tight-lipped. Arion raises his brow.

ARION (CONT'D)  
Of course, we can find out the easy  
way or the hard way.

From above, a rat bandit leaps at Arion with a dagger!  
Without looking, Arion catches him by the throat, then hurls  
him at the wagon.

A crate falls to the ground and shatters. It's full of salt!

BANDIT LEADER  
Get 'em!

Rats rush to the cart to grab a WEAPONS and charge at Arion.

ARION  
It's never the easy way.

Arion draws his axe. Challenge accepted.

A rat swings a sword at him. Arion blocks and shoves him  
back.

Another rushes at him with a club. Arion dodges limberly,  
then splits the weapon in half.

A rat WHIPS a flail through the air. Arion's head is gone!

FAT RAT BANDIT  
Nice swing, Bentley!

The 'headless' Arion grabs the bandits and CLANGS their heads  
together before slipping his head back out.

ARION  
Never gets old.

Arion turns to the last rat standing. It runs away in  
response. The rat leader faces palms.

BANDIT LEADER  
You idiots are making me look bad.  
Attack him all at once!

The rats charge together. Arion braces himself. A loud SPLURCH follows. The rats are now stuck in his slimy trail!

Arion's face turns flush, and he inches away, pretending nothing happened. He carefully makes his way to the cart and shoves it down the hill. It rolls down and SMASHES into the creek. Salt instantly dissolves in the water.

Among the wreckage, a SHARD OF WOOD with the insignia of a CRAB PINCER burned on catches his attention.

**EXT. MOLNOCK - LATER**

A muddy, yet humble cobblestone market town, crawling with gastropods and other invertebrates. Stone made buildings with a wooden support structure and moss-covered roofs. It looks like something straight out of the Middle Ages.

As Arion makes his way through town, a shabby-looking CRICKET with a worn violin catches his eye. He saws away on the same somber note in front of an empty basket.

Arion flips a gold coin. The music turns merrier!

**INT. CATALINA'S FORGE**

Arion arrives at an unkempt blacksmith shop. Tools and scrap metal are everywhere. Inside is CATALINA, a snail with a red kerchief around her head. She pounds away at an iron shield, completely absorbed in her work.

ARION  
You missed a spot.

Catalina looks up and glowers.

ARION (CONT'D)  
Kidding! I got jokes too.

CATALINA  
Don't you even start! I've been  
staring at this thing all day.

ARION  
Hey, I'm just trying to help. How's  
business been?

CATALINA  
Slow. Like *everything* in this  
village...

ARION

Come on, enjoy the peace. It's what  
true warriors strive for.

CATALINA

So I've heard...

Arion takes off his armor and puts on a linen shirt. He hangs  
his gear up with care, an outlier from the rest of the shop.

CATALINA (CONT'D)

You know, Samuel's been looking for  
you.

ARION

Of course he is...

CATALINA

He's saying it's pretty important.

ARION

Unlikely. I'm not interested in  
speaking with him. You wanna get a  
drink?

CATALINA

I thought you'd never ask. My hands  
are killing me!

ARION

Not enough to leave me hanging?

Arion raises his fist.

Catalina rolls her eyes and smirks. Impossible to deny. They  
exchange a solid fist bump.

**EXT. MOLNOCK - THE MOSSY KNOLL - DAY**

Arion and Catalina arrive at a well-kept tavern/inn hybrid in  
the middle of the town.

CATALINA

Does Astrid know you're back home?

ARION

She's about to find out.

As Arion reaches for the swinging doors, a DRUNK SNAIL flies  
out to the sound of a RAUCOUS CHEER!

He spins in his shell like a top in the middle of the street.

Appearing at the door is ASTRID, a fat, green slug in leather corset. She's dusting her hands.

ASTRID

Touch me like that again, and see where I throw you next time!

DRUNK

Oh, come on! Just one more pint, love! I'm beggin ya!

ASTRID

Ain't happening! You're outta money, and I'm outta patience!

DRUNK

Whatever, you slimy old hag! Your stuff's swill anyways!

The drunk crawls away. Astrid takes a deep breath, then turns to Arion and pulls him in for a big hug.

ASTRID

It's so good to see you, hun.

ARION

You still got it, mom.

ASTRID

Eh, just short of my personal best.

Across the street, a sign is staked in the ground that reads: "ASTRID'S RECORD."

ASTRID (CONT'D)

Well don't be a door mat, come on in! Drinks are on me.

As Astrid slithers in, Catalina sneers at Arion.

CATALINA

Mama's boy.

ARION

Not another word.

#### INT. THE MOSSY KNOLL - CONTINUOUS

A quaint, yet full tavern bustles with a diverse range of GUESTS, from weary travelers to merry locals.

A large painted portrait of a WARRIOR SLUG wearing the exact same armor as Arion's hangs above a fireplace.

The nameplate "LIAM MY LOVE" is tacked on under it. Arion glances at it. He can't help but smile.

Astrid squeezes herself back behind the bar counter and slides a pair of Wooden Tankards to Arion and Catalina.

ASTRID

So how is it out there?

ARION

Pretty calm, give or take the occasional predatory road blocks.

CATALINA

Probably got scared by a tadpole.

Arion gives her a friendly shot in the arm.

ARION

Do you see what they turn into? I'm just glad to be home in one piece.

ASTRID

And perfect timing too! Your bedroom opened up. You might want to let it air out a for another night.

(quietly)

Last guest was a stink bug.

ARION

Oh, that's nice...

Astrid brings another tankard to the tap. It's sputters dry.

As she heads towards the back room, Arion leans over the counter and reaches for Astrid's wooden STRONGBOX. It's filled to the brim with gold. He grabs his coin satchel, then pours his savings contents into the strongbox.

Catalina notices, but doesn't say a word.

CATALINA

You know Astrid, I'm willing to refurnish this place for no charge. I'm just as good with wood as I am with iron.

Astrid lugs over a large barrel. It's just as big as her.

ASTRID

Oh hush! I won't have anyone do a single thing for free.

CATALINA

It won't be much work at all. You already do a great job keeping this place together.

ASTRID

Ol' girl is showing her age, but she's hanging in there.

Astrid DROPS the barrel into place, then pauses to catch her breath.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

Something we both have in common...

A crowd is gathered around a PARANOID BUG with a sign featuring a crude painting of a scary-looking goose. "THE END WADDLES NEAR" is written underneath.

PARANOID BUG

The honkening is upon us! Brace yourselves and heed this warning!

The crowd laughs and mocks him in response.

CATALINA

People here are getting crazier every day.

She turns back to Arion who is back to studying the insignia on the wooden shard.

CATALINA (CONT'D)

And now you're staring at a chunk of wood. Maybe I'm just the crazy one here!

ARION

Say mom, you've seen your share of lowlifes pass by this place, right?

ASTRID

Sure have! At this point, I know most of them on a first name basis.

Astrid glances at a table where a sketchy-looking WEEVIL is about to pickpocket an oblivious WORM.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

Hey, George!

George nervously waves back, then begrudgingly slinks away.

ASTRID (CONT'D)  
If there is some shady dealings  
going down around these parts,  
chances are I've heard of it.

ARION  
Any chance you've seen this logo  
before?

Arion slides the shard over to Astrid. She picks it up with a napkin and examines it.

ASTRID  
This one's new to me.

CATALINA  
Swamp scum are stirring trouble  
around these parts all the time.

ARION  
This was different. Theses crates  
were full of s-a-l-t.

Catalina's antennas perk up.

CATALINA  
Can't get more contraband than  
that. And you said rats were  
responsible? That doesn't sound  
like their usual type of job.

ARION  
That's my issue. Something bigger  
is behind this and it's exactly why  
we need to bring bounties back to  
this joint.

He gestures towards a BULLETIN BOARD, now littered with personal lists and reminders for Astrid.

ARION (CONT'D)  
We should have never gotten rid of  
the bounty board.

ASTRID  
I hear ya, hun. As nice as it would  
be. Samuel has... reasons, but it's  
complicated.

ARION  
Yeah...I hear that a lot.

ASTRID

Molnock doesn't want to be held accountable for mercenary work.

ARION

It's what dad would have wanted.

Arion looks up and stares at the portrait of Samuel.

ASTRID

Believe it or not, your daddy would want you safe before anything else. If it's salt these guys are messing with I'd rather let Samuel and the town guard handle this matter.

ARION

Those useless grubs they couldn't catch a tankard if it was tossed right to them!

Astrid then slides a fresh tankard to Arion, who completely misses it. He pulls it over to him like nothing happened.

Catalina notices a TRAVELER in a damp BLACK CLOAK approach the bar. Eight RED LEGS is all you can see underneath.

CATALINA

(to Arion)

Check out the legs on that guy.  
When's the last time you saw  
someone with that many?

ARION

Can't say.

Astrid inches her way over to the cloaked traveler.

ASTRID

What can I get ya, hun?

CLOAKED PATRON

Saltwater will do.

ASTRID

Ha! You must be pulling my tail. We don't serve any of that here.

CLOAKED PATRON

That's okay. I brought my own.

The patron reaching for a small pouch in their cloak.

Arion rushes over and tackles them.

The cloak slips off, revealing BROOKE, an entrancing-looking crayfish. She wears a leather cuirass with the same CLAW LOGO branded on it. A pouch of salt tumbles out.

BARFLY  
She's packing salt!

Guests scramble out of the tavern as a brawl commences.

Arion rips a decorative WOODEN OAR from the wall, using it to block every oncoming jab.

ASTRID  
Careful, that's an antique!

Catalina rushes over and drags Astrid out of the fray.

Brooke lunges for another stab.

Arion parries, then grabs her arms and pins her to the ground.

She slips a claw free, scoops a pinch of salt and presses into Arion's forearm.

His skin sizzles. Arion clutches his arm.

Brooke tail-slams him into the wall, then skitters behind the bar and snatches Astrid's STRONGBOX. They lock eyes with each other.

ARION  
Who are you?

BROOKE  
Just a taste of what's to come.

Brooke drags her claw against the side of Liam's portrait, then smashes open a window to make her escape.

Her words persist in Arion's mind.

**EXT. MOLNOCK - TOWN CENTER - NIGHT**

A crowd gathers in the center of the village square, watching TOWN GUARDSMEN surround the Mossy Knoll like a crime scene.

Arion watches on as he flush out his salt wound with a jug of water and wrapping it with canvas.

Attention shifts to SAMUEL, large, soft blue, slug decorated in impressive armor. A GIANT SHIELD sheathed on his back.

He heads straight for Astrid.

SAMUEL  
Are you alright?

ASTRID  
Not the first time I've seen  
someone try the ol' pocket salt  
attack.

Her facade softens a bit.

ASTRID (CONT'D)  
Still... I appreciate you checking  
on me.

SAMUEL  
You can say this really pulled me  
out of my shell. If I had one, that  
is.

The two exchange a laugh, then an intimate smile. Arion  
squirms at the sight, glancing away from the scene.

A guardsmen then approach Samuel.

GUARDSMEN  
Whoever they were fled to the  
river. Based on the witnesses, the  
motive seems unclear.

ARION  
You want a motive? She said they'll  
be back!

GUARDSMEN  
Did you want to hunt down this  
assailant?

SAMUEL  
That won't be necessary. We're  
staying right here.

Arion stiffens.

ARION  
What? You give an enemy like this  
an inch, and they'll take a whole  
meter! We have to bring the fight  
to them!

SAMUEL

That seek-and-destroy tactic may work for the likes of Arbordale, but it's not who we are. At least, not anymore.

ARION

And if they return in numbers, we don't stand a chance.

SAMUEL

This isn't up for debate!

ARION

Let me fight!

SAMUEL

Dang it, Arion! We're not that kind of town anymore!

Arion's brow narrows. All he can do is shake his head.

ARION

What? One that stands up for itself? It's crazy to think my father use to fight along side you.

Arion storms off. Samuel and Astrid look to one another. Neither sure what to say next.

Catalina catches up to Arion.

CATALINA

I know that look when I see it.

ARION

They tried to salt my mom. It's personal.

CATALINA

I know you're a bit on edge over what happened. I am too. But maybe let's take a breather and figure out what to do next?

ARION

What we need to do next is anything but stay put. That old man will be the death of us if we sit here and do nothing--

Arion and Catalina stop at the forge. It's door wide open, the lock picked.

**INT. CATALINA'S FORGE - CONTINUOUS**

They rush in. The shop is oddly intact with very little out of place.

CATALINA  
Pretty lousy job for a thief.

A stack of barrels across the room fall over!

ARION  
Let's hope that's all it is...

Arion grabs a fire stoker and inches towards the pile. His grip tightens as he gets closer.

Without warning, a scrawny RAT bursts from the pile and jumps off Arion's head. The rat scurries to the front door. Catalina cuts his escape with her shell. Arion grab him by the scruffs of the neck.

RAT THIEF  
Hey, watch it! I bruise easily.

CATALINA  
Ugh, it's a filthy rat.

RAT THIEF  
Look who's talkin, you greasy meatball!

CATALINA  
Did you call me meatball?!

RAT THIEF  
Uh, yeah? Two can play the name-calling game, slimy.

Catalina rolls up her sleeves. Arion holds her back with a forearm.

ARION  
Aren't you one of those rats that tried to backstab me earlier?

RAT THIEF  
Was. I bailed on those jerks way before you sent them packing.

ARION  
Who were you working for?

RAT THIEF  
Can't say. Personal code of honor.  
Ever heard of snitches get  
stitches?

Arion brings him closer, giving him an intimidating glare.

RAT THIEF (CONT'D)  
Alright, alright! The name's Niko.  
And yeah, we were pushing salt for  
some mud-bugs down the river.

CATALINA  
They must have paid you well to get  
you guys working for them.

NIKO  
Paid? Lady, we were *voluntold*.  
These crabs don't mess around.  
Trust me, you meatballs are better  
off avoiding them.

ARION  
We don't have a choice if they're  
planning to flood this place with  
salt!

Arion drops Niko and slides to his wooden chest. He throws it open, suits up and grabs his axe. He uses it as a mirror to check himself.

CATALINA  
I'm still not sure if you should be  
going after these guys alone.

ARION  
Then come with me.

CATALINA  
Me? Go with you?

ARION  
Of course! We'll settle this  
ourselves! What's the worse that  
can happen? Besides, didn't you say  
you're tired of waiting around for  
some lousy slugs to drop off gear  
for you to fix?

CATALINA  
You mean slugs like you?

ARION

What? No, I-I mean... Look, you say things move too slow around here. Why don't we change that?

CATALINA

Well, I have been dying to try some of this stuff out.

Catalina slips into her shell, then re-emerges with a greatsword and light armor.

NIKO

How do you fit all that in there?

CATALINA

A snail never reveals her secrets.

Arion smiles, then looks back to the branded shard of wood.

ARION

Get some sleep. We got a full day ahead of us tomorrow.

He tosses it into the forge and watches it burn.

END OF ACT I

FADE TO:

**EXT. THE RED TIDE HIDEOUT - ESTABLISHING**

Moonlight shines over a dark, dank riverside FORTRESS. It oversees a DAM made of driftwood, fortified with mud, and armed with CATAPULTS. Seaweed and drenched cloths drape over, giving off a grimy, unwelcoming look.

**INT. THE RED TIDE HIDEOUT - CONTINUOUS**

Clumsy, simple-minded SHRIMP sort through sand and minerals for treasure. Strong CRAB GUARDSMEN with spears watch over them.

**THE RED TIDE HIDEOUT - THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Nervous rat bandits stand huddled together before a throne where an enormous shadowy figure sits.

BANDIT LEADER

It's just one job gone bad. Dime a dozen! Give us another chance. We'll deliver. I know a guy with a barge who'll--

A giant CRAB CLAW shoots forward, grabbing the leader and hoisting him into the air. The rats watch in terror as LORD DREDGE, a gargantuan mud crab with a rusted anchor for a left arm steps out of the shadows.

LORD DREDGE

To think this sorry lot of vermin is the best the Roots can offer.

BANDIT LEADER

We'll do better! Honest!

BROOKE (O.S.)

He's no good to you dead.

Brooke slides down from the rafters.

Lord Dredge tosses the Bandit leader to the side.

LORD DREDGE

Bold of you to crawl back here after your incompetence. I should be boiling you right now!

BROOKE

Hey, don't blame me for these nitwits.

LORD DREDGE

These rodents were under your watch that you left unattended, then you cause a ruckus at some slimy dive!

BROOKE

I was sending them a message. My pride's on the line too.

Brooke tosses Astrid's strongbox onto a pile of treasure, then makes her way over to a grindstone where she sharpens her pinchers.

LORD DREDGE

Perhaps I should have you back scraping for algae, you spoiled little shellfish!

BROOKE

Why are you so worked up about  
these slowpokes? There was like one  
guy who could put up a fight, and  
he still folded.

LORD DREDGE

Don't take *slowpokes* kind lightly.  
They're tougher than they look.  
They have to be to survive.

Dredge looks to his anchor arm. His fury builds up. He starts bubbling at the mouth.

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)

They've caught me off guard  
before...

He SMASHES a stack of barrels with his claw.

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)

Tell the shrimp to start preparing  
another load! Tomorrow, I want  
Molnock to be nothing more than a  
simmering puddle!

**EXT. MARSHLANDS - DAY**

Morning dew glistens as Arion slices through tall grass,  
clearing a path. Catalina trails behind with Niko lounging  
atop her shell.

NIKO

A hoard of treasure.

CATALINA

No.

NIKO

Portal to another dimension.

CATALINA

No.

NIKO

A personal garden of the *forbidden*  
greens?

CATALINA

For the last time, will you cut it  
out?

NIKO

Come on! Tell me what junk is in  
your trunk.

CATALINA

You're not gonna find out what's in  
here, so quit asking!

Niko fidgets with his fingers as a quiet beat passes.

NIKO

It's really a big butt, isn't it?

CATALINA

(to Arion)

Can we ditch this little rat  
already???

ARION

We need him to make sure we aren't  
being lured into a trap.

NIKO

Looks like you're big butt stuck  
with me!

CATALINA

When we're done with him, I have  
dibs on throwing him into the first  
flytrap I see.

Arion stops before a tall RED-CAPPED MUSHROOM on the side of  
the road.

ARION

Cat, check this out! Talk about a  
lucky break!

CATALINA

Oh, I heard about these!

Arion climbs the side of the mushroom, then grabs a WOOD-  
WHITLED MECHANISM with wheels and a long stylus from his  
pocket.

NIKO

A mushroom? Is food all you  
meatballs think about?

ARION

Mushrooms can store sound, and with  
the right tools, can be played  
back.

CATALINA

It means we can hear who's been  
around this area.

NIKO

Ohhh, like eavesdroppin! I like it!

Arion attached the mechanism to the rim of the cap, then  
throws it around.

The mechanism circles around the cap as its stylus run  
through the gills like a needle on a record player. A dust of  
spores sprinkles as an ECHO of voices begins to play.

BANDIT LEADER (V.O.)

Keep it moving! We gotta get this  
shipment down the river before that  
spoiled little crab comes back!

RAT BANDIT (V.O.)

I think she's a crayfish, sir.

BANDIT LEADER (V.O.)

Shut up! It's the same thing!

Arion smiles at Niko, who looks in awe.

ARION

Sounds like your boys to me.

CATALINA

What do you know? It can shut its  
mouth.

NIKO

What can I say? I'm impressed.

CATALINA

(to Arion)

Wasn't it Samuel who told you this  
was a thing?

ARION

Huh. I guess I did learn it from  
him...

BOOMING footsteps and SCREAMS of terror begin to play.

BANDIT (V.O.)

Look at the size of that thing!  
Every rat for themselves!

A Godzilla-esque roar follows as the echo cuts off. The group  
exchange horrific glances.

CATALINA

Well, that was morbid ending.

The BOOMING return. The ground shakes in unison.

A shadow looms overhead as an enormous BOX TURTLE emerges from the tall grass. It glares down at them and unleashes a mighty ROAR!

NIKO

What in the world is that?!

ARION

I'm not staying to find out!

Arion leaps off the mushroom as the turtle lunges forward. It charges after the fleeing group.

CATALINA

How can something that big move so fast?!

#### **PULL BACK**

From a distance, the chase is comedically slow.

#### **BACK TO SCENE**

They make their way to the edge of a hillside cliff. Nowhere left to run. Arion faces the turtle and draws his axe.

CATALINA (CONT'D)

What are you doing? We can't battle this thing. It'll tear us apart!

ARION

No, but we can outsmart it!

Arion slithers to the side, then cleaves the earth. A plume of dirt catches the turtle's attention. He vaults himself onto a ROTTING STUMP and scales its wall.

The turtle slams its head against the trunk, then claws its way up, starting to stand on its hind legs.

Arion crawls his way to the top as the beast rises before him. It reaches out with jaws wide open, but stops before him. Below, its hind legs wobble under its weight. He loses balance, then topples over Niko.

Catalina pulls Niko into her shell and rolls down the hill as the turtle crashes behind. They SPLASH into thick mud below.

Arion rushes to Catalina's shell and drags her out.

ARION (CONT'D)  
You guys alright?

Niko pops halfway out, gasping for air.

NIKO  
I think I'm gonna puke...

Catalina shoves him fully out.

CATALINA  
Not in here you're ain't!

Arion sighs in relief, then helps Catalina up. They look back at the turtle, watching it helplessly flail upside down, unable to flip over.

CATALINA (CONT'D)  
That was cutting it close.

ARION  
A little bit. Nothing I couldn't handle. Let's keep moving. Sunlight is not on our time.

Arion continues down an unbeaten path. Catalina starts to envision a tidal wave of SALT rising before him. It startles her. She reaches out as he gets further away.

NIKO  
Hey! You good?

She snaps out of her trance.

CATALINA  
Yeah... Yeah, I'm fine.

NIKO  
Listen, thanks for saving my tail back there. I kinda owe ya one.

Catalina smiles.

CATALINA  
Don't worry about it. Guess you got to see what's in a snail's shell after all.

NIKO  
(chuckles)  
Yeah... wish I didn't now...

**EXT. THE MOSSY KNOLL - ESTABLISHING**

Samuel slithers his way over to a quiet, deserted tavern as the Paranoid Bug continues to warn of the coming "apocalypse."

**INT. THE MOSSY KNOLL - CONTINUOUS**

Samuel peers in. The entire bar is empty. An unusual site.

SAMUEL

Hello? Anyone home?

A plume of dust sprinkles over him.

PAN UP: Astrid is sticking to the ceiling, sweeping the rafters.

ASTRID

Whoops, sorry about that, hun! Just cleanin' this place up here while I have the chance.

Astrid slithers back behind the bar and brings him over a tankard of ale Samuel's way. As he rubs his temple, Astrid leans over the counter, mirroring his mood.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

Busy night, huh?

SAMUEL

You don't know the half of it. On top of preparing for the unknown, I've been thinking about what Arion told me yesterday.

ASTRID

Don't think about it too much. Arion's stubborn, but he cares. In a way, he's a slice of his father.

SAMUEL

So I've been told...

Samuel swigs his drink and looks up to the portrait of Liam above, hoping it would give him some kind of sign.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

So many years ago, and I still can't help but feel shell-shocked whenever he's brought up. It's been so long, and I didn't mean--

Astrid places her hand over Samuel's and smiles at him. The tension seems to vanish

ASTRID

You can't blame yourself for what happened, and he certainly wouldn't want you dwell on it.

SAMUEL

I made a promise to him that I'd watch over you two. And I never expected the two of us to... well, you know...

ASTRID

No one said it would be easy. But we're making it work. And eventually, Arion will see that. He just needs to know someone's got his back.

Samuel looks back at the bulletin board. He slides over to it, removing the leaflets and runs his hands against the worn board.

SAMUEL

Perhaps, it would be good to speak with him.

ASTRID

I'll let you two handle it. I just wish I knew where he went off to. Haven't seen him all day. He's probably toiling away at the forge with Cat.

SAMUEL

The forge was closed today...

Realization settles in. Samuel down the rest of his drink, grabs his shield, and hurries off. Astrid is taken aback.

**EXT. THE RED TIDE HIDEOUT - OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON**

Arion and Catalina peer down at the hideout from cliffside bushes. They watch crabs prepare their weapons while worker shrimp lower large pallets of salt onto a train of tarp-covered wagons. A full operation in motion.

ARION

See that? All of that is heading to Molnock if we don't do something about it.

CATALINA

That's more salt than I wish to see  
in my lifetime.

ARION

And the sooner Niko gets back, the  
sooner we can make a plan to  
infiltrate this group.

CATALINA

(mutter)

Or, y'know, maybe we... don't.

ARION

What was that?

CATALINA

Ever since that turtle, I've been  
asking myself why we are out here.

ARION

Come on, this isn't my first song  
and dance.

CATALINA

And you want THIS to be your last?  
I don't know about you, but I've  
had my fill of near-death  
experiences today!

ARION

Seriously, it won't be that bad!

CATALINA

Be honest with yourself! Do you  
seriously want to take all those  
guys ourselves?

Arion glances back at the base. A look of disappointment  
sweeps his face as he begins to weigh his options.

ARION

Well, what if we don't get caught?  
We can pick them off one at a time  
and then make a break for it--

CATALINA

I know you're not this stupid.

Catalina gestures to their lower torsos and the slimy trail  
they leave behind.

CATALINA (CONT'D)

Maybe Samuel is right on this one.

Niko reappears from the brush.

NIKO

Geez, who sucked the energy out of this place?

ARION

Get your things. We're leaving.

NIKO

We are? Well, this is sort of awkward. Cause I might have some bad news.

CATALINA

What bad news?

NIKO

They might have found me...

Brooke and her guardsmen drop in and surround the trio.

NIKO (CONT'D)

At least they'll take us alive.

**END OF ACT II**

**EXT. THE RED TIDE HIDEOUT - CONTINUOUS**

Arion, Catalina, and Niko are escorted to the base with their hands bound.

A sly grin tugs at Brooke's face as she looks at Arion's forearm.

BROOKE

How's that burn treating you?

ARION

As if you care.

BROOKE

Not about you. I want to see how good of a mark I left on you.

CATALINA

You couldn't snip through rope with those prissy little claws.

BROOKE

Keep running your mouth, and we can find out!

LORD DREDGE (O.S.)  
Enough! We don't play with our  
prey.

Lord Dredge trudges into the room and stands over Arion.

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)  
So you're the greaseball disrupting  
my business.

ARION  
Didn't realize running a shadow  
cartel counted as a business  
venture these days.

LORD DREDGE  
It puts food on the table, and then  
some. Who's the real baddie here?

ARION  
You're planning on leveling my  
home! You think we'll just roll  
over for you?

LORD DREDGE  
Don't take it personally. The world  
isn't made for your sluggish kind.

Shrimp minions push in a crate of salt. He stretches his arm  
like a pitcher warming up.

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)  
Now, as much as I enjoy discussing  
trade routes, I'm not one to dawdle  
when execution's on the table.  
Which of you to kill first?

Lord Dredge extends his claw out towards Arion--

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)  
Let's start with...

--then turns to Catalina.

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)  
...you!

He clamps down on her shell and peels her off the ground,  
bringing her to eye level.

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)  
I've always wanted to see what's  
inside a snail's shell.

His claw begins to squeeze Catalina's shell. It's pure torture! Arion struggles to break free.

CATALINA  
Trust me, you don't!

NIKO  
Trust her, you don't!

A speck of sunlight glimmers above. Samuel drops in and SLAMS Dredge's claw with his shield.

Catalina falls out of Dredge's grip and flattens a helpless shrimp worker below.

Dredge stumbles back and trips over a cargo net. It lifts him into the air like a giant pinata.

As guardsmen watch in awe, Arion elbows his way free. As a crab charges at Arion, Samuel cuts in front and flips him over.

SAMUEL  
Looks like you could use a hand.

Samuel tosses Arion and Catalina their weapons.

ARION  
How did you find us?

SAMUEL  
Give me some credit. Who taught you how mushrooms work?

Dredge continues to flail in the netting.

LORD DREDGE  
CRUSH THEM!!!

Crab Warriors and Rat Bandits charge at the group. A battle commences. Weapons clash! Arion and Samuel fight off crabs and rats alike in near perfect unison.

Amid the action, Brooke approaches Catalina. They clash sword and claws together. They trade blows until Brooke knocks Catalina's sword out of her hands. Catalina recoils and retreats into her shell.

As Brooke begins to wail against it.

BROOKE  
You can't beat me, blacksmith.

CATALINA

Maybe not. But I can outsmart you!

A plume of soot puffs out of Catalina's shell and covers Brooke's face.

As Brooke staggers back, Niko leaps on her back and yanks her antennas like a pair of reins. She rears in the air like a horse.

NIKO

You need to simmer down, Lobster girl!

BROOKE

Get off me, you little weirdo!

Brooke bucks Niko off and collects herself as Catalina's fist CLOCKS her across the face and knocks her out cold.

NIKO

That makes us even.

Catalina smiles at him.

Arion and Samuel continue to fight off a horde of crab guardsmen. No sign of it stopping.

SAMUEL

Arion, about your mother and I.

ARION

Now you want to bring this up?

SAMUEL

I was never trying to hurt you. It just happened that way.

ARION

I thought you were his best friend?

SAMUEL

I was! Believe me, this was hard for both of us. We wrestled with this for weeks. But the fact remains, she hasn't been this happy in a long time!

Arion stiffens as Samuel tosses another crab guardsman into several others.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

I'll never be the man your father was.

(MORE)

SAMUEL (CONT'D)  
That won't stop me from protecting  
and honouring what he loves. Even  
if you don't see that, you're  
family to me.

As Arion considers his words, Lord Dredge cuts himself free of the netting. He's foaming at the mouth as he glares at Arion and Samuel.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)  
Now, how are we going to stop that?

Arion spots an unmanned catapult. He grabs its sides and then loads himself into the bucket. He looks to Samuel, perplexed.

ARION  
Get in the bucket. When I give you  
the word, launch yourself.

SAMUEL  
Look, I know I've put on a little  
weight, but I--

Arion slithers forward without answer.

ARION  
Just trust me!

Dredge charges at Arion, who rolls out of the way of a swinging claw. Axe and claw clash in spectacular fashion.

Samuel watches on impressed.

LORD DREDGE  
Why. Won't. You. Just. DIE?!

ARION  
Slugs never die!

As Dredge makes another swipe, Arion vaults over it and SLAMS his axe down, pinning Dredge's arm into the earth

Dredge thrashes about to no avail. He's trapped!

ARION (CONT'D)  
(to Samuel)  
Now!

Samuel yanks the lever, launching himself straight towards Dredge. He SMASHES Dredge in the face. The force rips his claw from his arm!

Dredge flies back into the dam. Streams of water poke out as it cracks.

LORD DREDGE

Oh no...

The dam BURSTS open! Water gushes through the riverbank, sweeping everything in its path. The remaining bandits, the hideout, and the stash of salt, all swept away!

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)

You haven't seen the last of me!!!

Dredge shakes his hook in rage as the torrent carries him away.

Arion helps Samuel up.

ARION

Are you alright?

SAMUEL

Yeah. Good thing I'm spineless.

CATALINA

Can't believe the four of us just took down an entire cartel. Like, is that normal?

SAMUEL

They'll be back. One thing about crabs, they tend to cling around.

A glimmer from the river catches Arion's eyes.

Astrid's strongbox sits on the riverbank. It's still full of her savings to his relief.

ARION

A little souvenir never hurts.

NIKO

I wouldn't say little...

Niko points towards a mountain of washed up pile of gold across the way.

CATALINA

Before anyone asks, this trunk is full!

**EXT. MOLNOCK - THE MOSSY KNOll - AFTERNOON**

Astrid mops the front steps of the tavern. It's a struggle as she keeps going back to mop up the trail she leaves.

She stops at the sight of Arion, Catalina, and Samuel dragging back Lord Dredge's claw and a hoard of treasure.

Niko sits atop it like his own personal throne.

NIKO

You know, I gotta say. We make a pretty good team!

SAMUEL

Why bring the rat with us?

CATALINA

He owes me for messing up my shop. I'll put him to work.

Arion presents Astrid with her strongbox. She gives him and Samuel a huge hug in return.

SAMUEL

Sorry for not trusting you. You made the right call today.

ARION

Yeah, well... I shouldn't have been such a bump on a log about, well, a lot of things. I tend to wear my emotions on my sleeve.

SAMUEL

So did your old man.

Arion smiles.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

I was thinking. We have admittedly been a little thin on numbers. Perhaps we should bring back the bounty board. It might help us in the long run.

Arion looks to Catalina and Niko with a smile.

ARION

We'd like that.

SAMUEL

Then it's settled! I got a good feeling that Molnock's best days are--

Without warning, a gigantic GOOSE scoops up Samuel and swallows him whole.

Across town, an entire gaggle of geese are pecks at buildings and attacking civilians.

It's unlike anything they've seen before.

PARANOID BUG  
(running past)  
I told you the end was near!!!

As the goose HONKS in their face, Arion looks to Catalina. They share a go-get 'em smirk with each other.

They draw their weapons, bump fists, then leap forward with a mighty BATTLE CRY!

THE END