

FADE IN

EXT. FOREST - DAY

A murky forest of endless swamplands. A gang of BANDIT RATS pull 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!

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 slither on by and stop us!

ARION (O.S.)

Greasy, you say?

The rats flinch at the site 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's 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!

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 caught 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 dissolving 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, humble cobblestone farm town, crawling with gastropods and other invertebrates. It looks like something straight out the Middle Ages.

Arion makes his way through town, studying the wooden shard. He passes a shabby looking CRICKET with a worn violin. He saws away on the same somber note in front of an empty basket. Arion drops a few coins in. The music turns merrier!

Arion arrives at a **BLACKSMITH FORGE**. Inside is CATALINA, a snail with a red kerchief around her head. She pound 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 changes out of his armor into a linen shirt. He hangs his gear up with care, an outlier from the rest of the shop.