

FADE IN

**EXT. MARSHLANDS - DAY**

A murky forest of endless swamplands. A gang of BANDIT RATS pull a rickety wooden wagon down a beaten path. Large crates stacked on top.

The LEADER, a larger rat with an eyepatch, oversees the effort.

A bandit trips. The cart's side grazes against a stone.

BANDIT LEADER  
Watch it, ya lil whelp!

RAT BANDIT  
Cut us a break, boss. We've been at it all morning!

BANDIT LEADER  
If somethin' happens to this cargo, it'll be my tail, which means it will be your tails!

FAT RAT BANDIT  
But our feet are sore!

BANDIT LEADER  
And they'll keep being sore till this job's 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.  
(to Rat Bandit)  
How's it going? Name's Arion.

As Arion examines the wagon, the Bandit Leader gives a hand gesture to another rat, who slinks out of sight.

(MORE)

ARION (CONT'D)  
That's a heck of a load you got  
here. What are you boys hauling?

BANDIT LEADER  
What's it to ya, slug?

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

They remain tight-lipped. Eyes shift away from his.

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

The rat from before leaps at Arion with a dagger! Arion grabs  
him by the throat without looking, then hurls him at the  
wagon. A crate falls to the ground and shatters.

It's full of salt!

BANDIT LEADER  
Get 'em!

Rats reach for their WEAPONS, then charge at Arion.

ARION  
(to self)  
No one likes it the easy way.

Arion draws his axe. Challenge accepted!

A rat LUNGES, swings a sword. Arion BLOCKS, shoves him back.  
Another rat rushes at him with a heavy club. Arion dodges,  
splits the club in half.

A rat whips a flail over Arion. His head is now gone!

FAT RAT BANDIT  
Nice swing, Bentley!

The 'headless' Arion grabs the bandits, SMASHES their heads  
together, then slip his head back out.

ARION  
That 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 readies 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 makes his way to the cart, carefully pushes it into the creek.

Salt dissolves instantly in the water.

As Arion grabs a satchel of coins, he notices a SHARD OF WOOD with the insignia of a CRAB PINCER burned on. He takes it.

**EXT. MOLNOCK - LATER**

A quaint village of cobblestone and timbered architecture. A small creek runs through it. It's crawling with GASTROPOD and other INSECTS. Merchants peddle their wares. Inventors show off their marvels. CHILDREN play in the streets. They nearly collide with a FRUIT VENDOR and his lizard-drawn cart.

Arion slithers through town. He notices a shabby-looking CRICKET sawing away on the same somber note of a worn violin.

He drops some coins in the basket. The music becomes merrier!

**INT. CATALINA'S FORGE**

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

ARION

You missed a spot.

Catalina looks up and glowers.

CATALINA

Do I look like the kind of girl who misses a spot?

ARION

Hey, I'm just trying to help.

CATALINA

I'll remember that the next time I work on your axe. I might actually leave a dull spot.

ARION

Alright, alright! No need to scare me like that. So, how's business?

CATALINA

Slow. Like *everything* else in this town. I've only had this one shield to work on, and trying to perfect it has been driving me insane!

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)

Just so you know, Samuel's been looking for you.

ARION

Of course he is.

CATALINA

He's saying it's pretty important.

ARION

Yeah, I've been hearing that a lot. He can wait for all I care. You wanna get a drink?

Arion shows her the satchel of gold.

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 THE MOSSY KNOLL, a large pub in the middle of the town. It's rustic, but still going strong.

CATALINA

Does Astrid know you're back home?

ARION

She's about to find out.

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 entrance is ASTRID, a fat, green slug in a leather corset. She dusts her hands with a disgruntled look.

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 begging ya!

ASTRID

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

DRUNK

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

The drunk crawls away. Astrid takes a deep breath, turns to Arion, smothers him with a hug only a mother can provide.

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 doormat, come in! A spot at the bar *just* opened up.

As Astrid slithers in, Catalina sneers at Arion.

CATALINA

Mama's boy.

ARION  
Not another word.

**INT. THE MOSSY KNOLL - CONTINUOUS**

A tavern bustles with weary travelers and merry locals. Decor, artwork, and a mounted bullfrog head adorn the walls.

A large painted portrait of a WARRIOR SLUG wearing the 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  
Hey, do you see what they turn into?

CATALINA  
No, because I'm not stupid enough to look for one and find out.

Arion and Catalina exchange friendly jabs to the arm.

ARION  
I'm just thankful to be back home.

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

(quietly)  
The 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 free. 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, Catalina! I won't have anyone do a single thing for free.

CATALINA

Please, it's not much work at all. You already do a great job keeping this place together.

ASTRID

This 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, now 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 begrudgingly waves back, then slinks away.

ASTRID (CONT'D)

If there's any shady dealings going down around these parts, chances are I've heard of it.

ARION

By 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. These 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 reminders and musings for Astrid.

ARION (CONT'D)

We should never have 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 Liam's portrait.

ASTRID

Your father would want you safe before anything else. If it's salt these guys are messing with, I'd stay out of it. Let Samuel and the town guard handle this matter.

ARION

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

Astrid slides a fresh tankard to Arion. It slides right past him. Arion pulls it over to him as if 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 reaches 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 and blocks a flurry of pincer jabs.

ASTRID

Careful, that's an antique!

Catalina drags Astrid away from the fray.

Brooke lunges for another stab.

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

She slips an arm free, scoops a pinch of salt, presses it into Arion's forearm.

Arion's skin sizzles. He YELLS, clutches his forearm.

Brooke tail-slams him into the wall, skitters behind the bar, snatches Astrid's STRONGBOX. She locks eyes with Arion.

ARION

Who are you?

BROOKE

Just a taste of what's to come.

Brooke drags her pincer against Liam's portrait, then makes her escape through a window.

Her words persist in Arion's mind.

**END OF ACT I**

**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 flushes out his salt wound with a jug of water, then wraps it with canvas.

Attention shifts to SAMUEL, a 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, glances away from the scene.

A guardsman approaches Samuel.

GUARDSMEN

Whoever they were, they fled to the river. Motives remain 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 used to fight alongside you.

Arion storms off. Samuel and Astrid look to one another. Neither are 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. The door is wide open. It's 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 falls 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 grabs him by the scruff 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

Meatball?! Excuse me?!

RAT THIEF

What? Did that hurt your feelings?  
Two can play the name-calling game,  
butterball!

Catalina rolls her sleeves up and grabs a forging hammer.

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.

ARION

Like the crayfish from earlier?

NIKO

Yeah, she's a real piece of work.  
It's the big she works for that you  
should be worried about. Goes by  
the name Lord Dredge.

Arion ponders at the name, as if he's heard it before.

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 himself up and grabs his axe. He looks at his reflection on the blade's surface and smiles.

CATALINA

You really shouldn't be doing this alone.

ARION

Then come with me.

CATALINA

Me? You don't think I'll slow you down?

ARION

Come on, do you see who you're talking to? Besides, didn't you say you're tired of waiting for something to happen?

Catalina considers his words.

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.

NIKO

Well, you two meatballs have things figured out. I'll just get out of your business and--

Arion grabs Niko's tail.

ARION

You're coming with us.

NIKO

Pardon?!

CATALINA

What?!

CATALINA (CONT'D)  
Arion, you can't be serious!

ARION  
You really want to risk letting him  
steal from your place again?

SMASH CUT TO:

Niko, now in a harness, is attached to Catalina's shell.

CATALINA  
No funny business back there...

NIKO  
Way ahead of you.

Niko traces 'WIDE LOAD' on the back of Catalina's shell.

Arion shakes his head, then looks back at the branded shard  
of wood. He tosses it into the forge and watches it burn.

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

FADE TO:

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

Moonlight shines over a dark, dank riverside FORTRESS. Behind  
it sits 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 a looming SHADOWY FIGURE sits.

The other rats push their leader front and center.

BANDIT LEADER  
L-Lord Dredge...About your  
shipment...

The figure remains stoic. It's unnerving.

BANDIT LEADER (CONT'D)  
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, grabs the leader, hoists 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're sorry, Lord Dredge! 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  
Brooke. 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 nitwits 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

Rotten little shellfish! Perhaps I should have you back scraping for algae in the tidepools!

BROOKE

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

LORD DREDGE

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

Dredge looks to his anchor arm.

LORD DREDGE (CONT'D)

They've caught me off guard before...

Dredge's fury builds. He starts bubbling at the mouth. 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 just kill him, Arion?!

ARION

Tempting as it is, 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

After this, I'm 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!

CATALINA

Oh, I heard about these!

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

NIKO

A mushroom? Is food all you meatballs think about?

ARION

Usually, but this is different.  
Unbeknownst to many, mushrooms can  
do everything! And with the right  
tools, can listen to one.

NIKO

I'm not following.

CATALINA

It means we can find out who's been  
passing through these parts.

NIKO

Ohhh, like eavesdroppin! I like it!

Arion attached the mechanism to the rim of the cap, throws it  
around. The mechanism circles the cap as its stylus runs  
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 now fill the air.

BANDIT (V.O.)  
 Look at the size of that thing!  
 Every rat for themselves!

A Godzilla-esque roar follows as the echo cuts off.

CATALINA  
 Well, that was a morbid ending.

The BOOMING return. Each step louder than the last.  
 They look to each other with a passing beat until...

A shadow looms overhead. An enormous BOX TURTLE raises its head over the tall grass. It looks 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 of the stump.

The turtle claws its way after him. It reaches out with jaws wide open, but stops before him. Below, its hind legs wobble under its weight. He loses balance, falls back towards 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 over to Catalina's shell and drags her out of the mud.

ARION (CONT'D)  
You guys alright?

Niko pops halfway out, gasping for air.

NIKO  
I think I'm gonna puke...

CATALINA  
(inside shell)  
Not in here you ain't!

Catalina shoves him out.

Arion sighs in relief, then helps Catalina onto her foot.

They look to the turtle. It helplessly lies upside down in the mud. No longer a threat.

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

ARION  
A little bit. Nothing we couldn't handle.

CATALINA  
I don't think--

ARION  
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 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, I'm... kinda regretting that  
now...

**EXT. THE MOSSY KNOLL - DAY**

Samuel slithers his way over to a quiet, deserted tavern. The Paranoid Bug continues to doomsay in front of it.

**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.

SAMUEL  
Want me to get rid of the nutcase  
outside?

ASTRID  
Nah. I like the white noise.

SAMUEL

No kidding. The Honkening. What a joke.

He rubs his temple.

Astrid leans over the counter, mirroring his mood.

ASTRID

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 a 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. His tension vanishes.

ASTRID

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

SAMUEL

I promised him 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 needs to know someone's trusts him that he can do the right thing too.

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

SAMUEL

Perhaps I've been looking at it all wrong. I'll talk to him about it.

ASTRID

Wish I could tell you where he went. I haven't seen him all day. He's probably toiling away at the forge with Cat.

SAMUEL

The forge? But it was closed--

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

ASTRID

Love you!

**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

(mutters)

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 might awkward. Cause I got 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 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 planning on leveling my home. You think we'll roll over for you?

LORD DREDGE

Don't take it personally. Us crabs have to do what we must to survive. This 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. Sword and claws CLASH together! Brooke knocks Catalina's sword out of her hands. Catalina retreats into her shell.

Brooke starts to wail against it.

BROOKE

Face it, Sweetie. You can't beat me!

CATALINA

Maybe not. But I can outsmart you!

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

Niko leaps on Brooke's back, yanks her antennas like a pair of reins. Brooke 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. As she collects herself, Catalina's fist CLOCKS her across the face, knocking her out cold.

NIKO

That makes us even.

Catalina smirks at Niko.

Arion and Samuel continue to fight off an endless horde of crab guardsmen and rat bandits.

SAMUEL

Arion, about your mother and I.

ARION

You want to bring this up now!?

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. That won't stop me from protecting and honoring 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!

Dredge makes another swipe.

Arion vaults over it and SLAMS his axe into his arm, pinning him into the earth.

Dredge thrashes to no avail. He's trapped!

LORD DREDGE

What the?!

ARION

(to Samuel)

Now!

Samuel pulls the lever, launching himself straight towards Dredge. He hoists his shield and 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. Crab bandits, the hideout, and the stash of salt, all swept away in the current!

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 is they tend to cling around.

A glimmer from the river catches Arion's eyes. Astrid's  
strongbox sits on the riverbank.

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 of the tavern. She keeps going back to  
mop up the slimy trail she leaves behind.

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 did you bring the rat again?

CATALINA  
He owes me for messing up my shop.  
Don't worry. I'll put him to work.

Arion presents Astrid with her strongbox. She hugs him and Samuel in return.

SAMUEL

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

ARION

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've been a little thin on numbers. Seeing that being a guardsmen isn't your thing, I'd be open to allow for a vigilante board. Y'know, for those one off job.

Arion looks at Catalina and Niko.

ARION

We'd like that.

SAMUEL

Then it's settled! I have a 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 peck at buildings, attack civilians. It's unlike anything they've seen before.

PARANOID BUG

(running past)

I told you the end was near!!!

A goose confronts the, HISSES at them.

Arion and Catalina look to one another, sharing a go-get 'em smirk. They draw their weapons, bump fists, then leap forward with a mighty BATTLE CRY!

**THE END**