

DEAD STAR

by

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TEASER

OVER BLACK:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Eldaria...

ELDARIA, an Earth-like planet, spins as if a blue and green jewel in the empty darkness of a starless space.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Mother of the Heavens. Birthplace of magic and men. With her crown of eight gems the universe was her kingdom. And her rule meant life, and light, forever.

A small white moon, the SILVER STAR, orbits the planet.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But her silver son was jealous of her glory, and coveted the gems for himself.

Crystalline frozen oceans cover the star's silver surface.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Some believe it was he who shattered the crown, and froze the magic of the old world in an ice that never melts.

The RED STAR, a nearby sun, brings the light of day across the planet and its moon.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Only by the grace of her fiery daughter, did mankind survive without its magic.

A shadow overtakes the moon.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But throughout the ages of ice and sorrow war has plagued the remnants of men.

Larger than the planet of Eldaria, and held motionless above its North Pole, the DEAD STAR sits transfixed in space.

It is black and cratered, with a vexing violet aura that turns the pitch black North into a relentless purple night.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And above them all...
The Dead Star waits...
And watches...

FADE IN:

EXT. ICY CLIFF - DEAD NIGHT

A bare hand CLAWS at white snow as it searches for a GRIP. Black ash and cold stone lie beneath.

The hand finds a ROCK, but it slowly DISLODGES.

The rock SLIPS AWAY and FALLS to the icy depths below.

HAVIK DAVENPORT (30s) clings to the cliff. His noble face, with black hair and purple eyes, is marred by his frozen beard, and tempered with exhaustion, fear, and insanity.

He argues with his UNCLE, a voice born from fresh madness.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

Even if the beacon's lit, they'll kill you before you get there.

HAVIK

No... You're wrong... You have to be...

Havik looks DOWN at the jagged rocks beneath him, then UP to the summit that awaits. A cold wind BLOWS. He CLIMBS higher.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

Listen to reason! You must leave him behind! It's the only way!

HAVIK

Shut up, damn you! Why won't you ever be quiet? I made my choice when I entered the wastes! I can't leave him now! I'm sorry, uncle.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

Don't you understand? They've tasted the flesh of man, and now they hunger for it. What they want is blood!

HAVIK

But what if... What if they're really --

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

-- No! You mustn't think of it! Do not remember! You can cower in your cabin when you reach the ship, but for now you must not fear... Wolves can smell fear.

Havik PULLS himself to the summit, COLLAPSES to his knees, and desperately breathes hot breath onto his frozen fingers.

HAVIK

Just... Just a moment's rest...

Havik lies on the snowy floor, closes his eyes, and smiles.

FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Havik drags a make-shift sled across a wintery wasteland. Bundled within is the unconscious body of JHEV (50s), a gruff brown haired man, Havik's captain and friend. A wolf HOWLS.

B) Havik runs alone through a snow storm wielding a sword.

C) Havik glances every which way as the HOWLING approaches.

D) Havik turns, and a wolf LUNGES at him.

BACK TO PRESENT

Havik's eyes startle open and he CHUCKLES, which soon gives way to raucous LAUGHTER that ECHOES across the hills below.

HAVIK

Dear Goddess... I'm going mad...

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

They could have heard you. Now is not the time for rest.

Havik stands, and looks UP.

Far ABOVE him, above the forest and the wolves, above all the world, the DEAD STAR sits on its throne in the sky, watching.

TITLE: "DEAD STAR."

Between the sky and the star, countless mountains of rock drift forever in the Sea of Heavens. A SHOOTING STAR falls.

EXT. THE OPEN ROAD - NIGHT

A QUILL drags black INK across the page of an OPEN JOURNAL.

The words are being written by CLIQUE, who we'll meet later.

CLIQUE (V.O.)

For twenty years war tore through the Realm.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Terrible black storm clouds gather quickly, appearing as if from nothing. They cast dark shadows down upon the world.

In the forest below, DARRY (60s), a kindly farmer in a ragged robe, shifts his stance on his HORSE as he looks to the sky.

CLIQUE (V.O.)

And for twenty years the peace has held.

Darry watches the storm threaten, not with fear or worry, but with HOPE. His eyes tear, and he clasps his hands together while muttering a silent prayer, WISHING for rain.

BACK TO:

EXT. THE OPEN ROAD - NIGHT

A LANTERN'S light casts shadows on the journal.

CLIQUE (V.O.)

But peace is like the night. And all nights must end.

The Quill BREAKS.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Precious drops of water splash upon Darry's face, and for a moment he laughs in the rain.

His revelry is cut short when a patchwork of silent blue LIGHTNING cascades across the sky like a wave.

The world takes on a blue glow. Darry watches the spectacle in awe as the lightning SPIRALS into the center of the storm.

The lightning FADES, and sends the forest back to darkness.

Darry squints his eyes.

DARRY

That was strange --

KATHOOM! A massive, singular bolt of lightning erupts from the storm's center, and STRIKES the forest below with a fury.

The horse BUCKS in fear and throws Darry down into the mud.

He rises to his feet, uninjured, and curses his ill fortune as the horse races off into the forest.

Darry turns back to where the lightning struck. A red aura hints at some distant FIRE.

Darry looks to where his horse has fled...

Torn between the CHOICE:

The horse... or the fire...

With a heavy sigh, he makes his way towards the fire.

CUT TO:

Darry pushes through the foliage, and emerges into a wide glade where scattered fires are being slowly extinguished by the falling rain.

In the center of the ravaged clearing, the lightning's blast has left a pit of cinder and mud in its wake.

And there, lying naked in the pit, is the unconscious body of the STRANGER (30s), a blonde haired man whose body is muscled perfection. Steam rises from the scorched earth around him.

END TEASER

ACT ONE**EXT. FOREST - DAY**

Droplets of water SPLASH into puddles. Insects BUZZ and birds CHIRP. Wind rustles the leaves.

A light rain falls upon CLOSED EYES. They tremble and dream.

FLASHBACK**INT. WHITE WALLED ROOM - DAY****STRANGER'S POV -**

A single green eye shimmers with a nebula of colors.

OLD MAN

Do you know your designation?

The eye blinks, and becomes an OLD MAN in a white lab coat.

Red lights FLASH in the distance. Black smoke lingers.

STRANGER

Three four two.

OLD MAN

(anxious)

What is your primary objective?

STRANGER

My primary objective...

BRIGHT FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT**END FLASHBACK****EXT. FOREST - DAY**

Blue eyes flutter open. They belong to the STRANGER.

NOTE: The Stranger's V.O. appears as typed green subtitles.

STRANGER (V.O.)

Where am I?

DARRY (O.S.)

Dear Goddess!

The Stranger cautiously stands.

Darry emerges from the brush.

DARRY (CONT'D)
 Are you injured? You must be freezing!
 Here.

Darry removes his ragged coat and offers it to the Stranger.

STRANGER (V.O.)
 What language is he speaking? Why can't I
 understand him?

The Stranger takes the coat and realizes he's naked.
 GOOSEBUMPS rise along his arm. His fingers trace them.

DARRY
 Go ahead. It's alright. Put it on.

The Stranger covers himself with the coat, and looks around.

STRANGER (V.O.)
 This ground... It's not safe. But how do
 I know that?

The Stranger takes Darry's hand, and leads him away.

DARRY
 What's your name? Your name... Can't you
 speak lad? You don't seem hurt... Was it
 bandits? Took everything and no doubt
 left you for dead, eh? Must be the same
 ones that stole our animals. Rotten
 bastards to pick on a simpleton.

Darry stops and taps his hands against his own chest.

DARRY (CONT'D)
 Darry. I'm Darry. Who are you?

STRANGER (V.O.)
 Is he telling me his name?

STRANGER
 Darry.

Darry laughs.

DARRY
 No, I'm Darry. See. I'm Darry. And you?

STRANGER (V.O.)
 He must want to know my name. My name...
 It's... Why can't I remember? *Who am I?*

FLASHBACK - THE WHITE WALLED ROOM

Red lights FLASH. The OLD MAN stares.

OLD MAN
Do you know your designation?

BACK TO PRESENT

Darry waits for an answer.

STRANGER
Three four two.

STRANGER (V.O.)
Is that my name?

DARRY
What's that now? Treefort? Is that where you're from, lad? Treefort? Sorry, but I ain't never heard of it... Come on, you better come with me. That's my best coat, and I don't mean to have it run off and get lost.

Darry heads deeper into the forest, and the Stranger follows.

EXT. ICY CLIFF - DEAD NIGHT

Havik looks out upon rolling hills of white and dark forests. Distant mountains peak against the black purple sky.

HAVIK
I've made it this far, haven't I? In spite of you.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
You hasten only to your grave.

HAVIK
What difference will a few days make? I've already lasted a full week.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
A week of flight and fear...

FADE TO:

EXT. SNOWY HILLS - DEAD NIGHT

Havik groans with effort as he pulls the sled.

In the wastes of endless snow, Havik spots one spec of green. A solitary TREE in the valley.

SUPER: "FIVE DAYS EARLIER."

Havik makes his way towards the tree.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

They're coming for you Havik... Did you think you could outrun them with such a heavy sled? It's only a matter of time --

HAVIK

-- Quiet! I'll hear no more of it!

JHEV

Havik? Did you say something Havik?

Jhev rustles within his bundles of furs and leathers.

HAVIK

There's a tree. We'll find shelter there.

JHEV

Good... Good...

EXT. THE LONE TREE - DEAD NIGHT

A mighty pine tree that once stood over a hundred feet tall has finally been felled by time. Its roots are up turned, and its massive branches provide ample shelter from the night.

Havik pulls the sled beneath a large branch.

INT. TREE SHELTER, THE LONE TREE - DEAD NIGHT

Havik hacks away branches with a sword.

CUT TO:

Jhev is asleep in the sled. Havik sits resting, when

A BEAM of WHITE LIGHT pierces the branches.

Havik peers out to the sky, where the Silver Star has appeared. His eyes go wide with hope.

HAVIK

Goddess... Even in this forsaken land, where the light of the Red Star never shines. Please... Hear my prayer...

The moon DISAPPEARS behind a cloud, and its light FADES.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

It is no sign. Only the black of night.

Havik pulls a SACK from the sled and rifles through it.

HAVIK
Ten rolls of bread. Five slices of hard
cheese. Four sausages...

Havik takes out a jar and uncovers Jhev. His sea blue eyes
open, face a cold sweat, and brown grey hair a mess.

Havik presses the jar against Jhev's lips.

HAVIK (CONT'D)
Easy now. No need to speak. Drink first.

Jhev swallows it down. When finished, he spits.

JHEV
It tastes like ash.

HAVIK
If you've strength enough to complain,
you've strength enough to eat. Here.

CUT TO:

Half eaten bread and slices of cheese sit between them.

JHEV
How far have we come, Havik?

HAVIK
Not far.

Havik presses his palm against Jhev's forehead. He sighs.

JHEV
Do you think they've lit the beacon?

HAVIK
They're your crew. Your men. You tell me.

JHEV
Yes. It's lit. It's there waiting for us.

HAVIK
Without that beacon, these wastes will
swallow us long before we find the shore.

JHEV
There's honor to be had, isn't there
Havik? When we return? Even though we've
so little star metal? Even though
everyone's dead...

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
He says too much.

Havik looks away from Jhev's entreating eyes.

JHEV
Will anyone even believe us, Havik?

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
Do not let him say the words.

JHEV
They'll think we went mad. I know what
I'd think, if someone told me that --

HAVIK
-- Shh. Do not speak of it. Save your
words for prayer. Mourn when we reach the
ship. Rest now. The Silver Star sets...
We've a long night ahead.

Havik pockets the remains of their meal, and covers up Jhev.

CUT TO:

Havik SHARPENS the sword with a piece of whetstone.

HAVIK (CONT'D)
Perhaps I've lost them...

Havik pauses... then continues sharpening the blade.

He stares up at the clouds, waiting for the light to return.

HAVIK (CONT'D)
They followed from the Barrens, that is
to be certain... But there's game beyond
the Gate. With the first scent of elk or
rabbit, they'll go off to hunt easier
prey... They're only animals, after
all... Only animals.

INT. CLIQUE'S CABIN, SHIP - DAY

Whetstone drags along the edge of a black steel scythe.

MARCUS (30s), a well composed brown haired man, enters.

MARCUS
It's time.

CLIQUE GRACIOUS (30s) wipes his long dark hair away from his darker eyes, and slides the stone across the scythe's nearly three feet of curved black steel. It comes to a wicked point.

CLIQUE

Then let's give them their show.

Clique grumbles as he rises to his feet.

MARCUS

Shouldn't it please you, m'lord? There's fame to be had. Your *first* slice after training the Devil's Guild! The sailors will sing songs of it.

Clique sighs as he affixes the scythe blade to the end of an iron-banded wood handle.

CLIQUE

It's not for their songs I do this.

Clique puts on a woolen cap, and carefully tucks in his hair.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

The methods of the Guild are not meant for demonstration... But to hell with them and their rules. Home is within reach, and I'll make sure to see these good sailors who've brought me here, entertained.

Clique hurriedly pushes past Marcus into

THE HALL

And Marcus rushes to follow.

MARCUS

When we reach Cliffwatch, I've been promised a ship of my own.

CLIQUE

Yes? And what shall you do with this ship once you have it?

MARCUS

I mean to sit it in harbor, until you or your lord father has use of it.

Clique STOPS in his tracks, and turns to face Marcus.

CLIQUE

Why? You could go anywhere.

MARCUS

Well, m'lord. I've always thought a ship would be a fine thing to have. But after six months of seas fetching you, I think I'll enjoy a taste of Midgard for a bit.

CLIQUE

Will you though? Such taste might be a bitter pill. My lord father's summons comes three years too soon... No. Make no mistake. Midgard is threatened, and the time for me to serve my family has come.

EXT. MAIN DECK, SHIP - DAY

Clique shields his eyes from the bright sunlight as he and Marcus emerge from below. SAILORS take notice and gather.

A massive spotted brown and white SHARK is strung by rope from a boom overhead. Its head lays flat, where a stream of guts and half digested fish has spilled out.

Clique approaches, and takes note that its FINS are missing.

CLIQUE

What's happened here?

A WIRY SAILOR with a GREEN BANDANA pats the shark.

WIRY SAILOR

The fins are the best part for eating!
Mullbo's cookin' them up, Lord Gracious.
You'll see! Fins are very tasty indeed.

CLIQUE

Marcus! Fetch Captain Fryer.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Darry and the Stranger walk through the rainy forest.

DARRY

My son Gerry's gone to Tansville for work. But his wife Keeli and their children'll be home. I'm sure to get it something fierce for bringing back a stray, but I can't rightly have left you there like that, all bare to the wind.

STRANGER (V.O.)

Am I in a foreign land? Did I come from someplace far away?

DARRY

Can't say there'll be much to feed a big lad like yourself, but we've got onions sure enough. I'm sure we'll find some way you can make it up to us. Truth is, we're desperate for the help.

Each cloud, each tree, each gust of wind, all seem a NOVELTY of WONDER to the Stranger. His hand brushes the leaves.

STRANGER (V.O.)

I like this place. Is that why I came here? To get away from the smoke, and the flashing lights, and the panic?

FLASHBACK - THE WHITE WALLED ROOM

OLD MAN

What is your primary objective?

BACK TO PRESENT

STRANGER (V.O.)

My purpose? I can't remember my purpose...

Darry FREEZES in his tracks.

DARRY

(soothing voice)

Don't make any sudden movements now, lad. She'll tear those strong limbs of yours apart like bark off a tree.

A large brown BEAR digs its snout at a pool of water. It groans, sniffs the air, and looks in their direction.

DARRY (CONT'D)

Now just back away slowly. And whatever you do, don't look her in the eye.

Darry slowly retreats, but the Stranger does not.

The Bear takes a few lumbering steps forward and snorts.

The Stranger looks on curiously.

STRANGER (V.O.)

I like this mammal. Its color is like the tree, and it is a handsome thing.

DARRY

Boy! What are you doing? Boy!

The Bear RUSHES forward, stops short, and rears up on its hind legs. It ROARS fiercely, and waves its paws in the air.

The Bear opens its wide fanged mouth not one foot from the Stranger, and roars again. It kicks its paws at the dirt.

The Stranger stares into the Bear's eyes...

WHACK! A rock hits the side of the Bear's head, and it looks to Darry, who stands shouting and waving his arms.

DARRY

Bear! Over here! Bear!

The ruse works, and the Bear turns away from the Stranger and starts lumbering towards Darry.

Darry shrieks and runs.

The Bear gives chase.

The Stranger watches as Darry flees from the Bear.

STRANGER (V.O.)

Darry seems concerned. I'll set the kindly man at ease.

Darry's shoe catches a root! He falls flat into the mud.

He turns onto his back and comes FACE to FACE with the Bear.

Darry scrambles away, pressing himself up against a tree.

The Bear inches closer, its eyes glazed over with bloodlust.

DARRY

No! No!

Darry prepares himself for his inevitable death, but when the Bear opens its hungry mouth, instead of a roar, wet BLOOD SPATTERS out and covers Darry's face with hot, sticky, flesh.

The Bear drops DEAD...

And reveals the Stranger, who stands calmly over the Bear's lifeless body. He flicks gore from his hand in disgust.

STRANGER (V.O.)

This sensation displeases me.

The Stranger kneels at a pool of water, and washes his hand.

Darry wipes his face clean, then, still catching his breath, looks to the Bear's corpse. The back of its thick skull has been caved in, leaving only a crater of bone and brain.

Darry takes the Stranger's hand and examines it. He marvels over his uninjured fingers and knuckles.

Darry's warm concern soon turns cold and solemn.

He stares at the Stranger, his eyes heavy with indecision.

Finally, he releases the Stranger's hand, and turns away.

DARRY

Let's go.

Darry walks off into the woods. The Stranger follows.

EXT. MAIN DECK, SHIP - DAY

CAPTAIN FRYER (20s) is a typical GULGARI man of the sea, and has brown hair and blue eyes, just like the rest of his crew.

He approaches Clique, who stands admiring the shark.

CAPTAIN FRYER

Are you ready, Clique?

Fryer holds up a silver HOURGLASS with blue sand.

CLIQUE

I'll have words first.

CAPTAIN FRYER

Whatever you must do.

Clique turns to the Sailors, nearly thirty of them altogether, who watch on eager for a show. They silence.

CLIQUE

What you are about to witness is not meant for tournament or farce!

Clique circles the hung shark, addressing each and every man.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

It is an ancient and deadly fighting style designed only for combat with armored men.

Clique holds up his black scythe for all to see.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

With weapons like these, the Southern Devils once waged war against the ancestors of men. Now they teach their art to any with the coin and dedication to learn their ways.

Clique faces Captain Fryer, and gives him a nod.

Fryer makes a show of the hourglass, then turns it over.

CAPTAIN FRYER

Begin!

Clique takes a long breath. Then, to a chorus of HOOTS and CHEERS, Clique raises his scythe, and takes his first swing.

In one stroke the shark's head is severed, and its body SWINGS freely from the rope strung to the boom overhead.

Clique circles the shark in martial dance, and slice by slice, cuts a SPIRAL in the shark's flesh from top to bottom.

The shark SWAYS, and with each attack gains momentum.

CAPTAIN FRYER (CONT'D)

Five seconds!

Clique spins his scythe, and SMACKS the shark with the flat of the blade. It rises up in the air almost horizontal.

Clique JUMPS and in one great swing cuts the shark clean through. Dozens of perfectly sized filets shower to the ground, and nothing remains on the rope but the tail.

Clique LANDS and comes to repose with great applause.

CAPTAIN FRYER (CONT'D)

Time!

The Sailors exchange coins amongst shouts of astonishment.

CLIQUE

Now! If you really want a show...

The crowds silence, and Clique points out to them ominously.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

Next time you might try dressing the shark in plate mail!

Hearty LAUGHTER breaks out amongst the men, and the merriment carries on to celebrations.

Rum kegs are tapped, and wine bottles uncorked.

Clique wipes the fish from his precious scythe blade as Fryer drapes his arm over Clique's shoulder.

CAPTAIN FRYER
Come now, Clique! Let's eat!

EXT. FARMLAND - NIGHT

Darry and the Stranger trudge through heavy rain and mud. Countless rows of tall, WITHERED crops scatter the farmland. Darry breaks off a plant stalk, and it CRUMBLES in his hands.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Dead trees surround the house, but near a large stone well, one huge tree lives on. One great branch blankets the house.

Darry leads the Stranger up to the door.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

The Stranger hesitates, but Darry pushes his way in.

DARRY
Keeli! Keeli get out here with some dry clothes!

Darry strips naked and stands by the fire. The Stranger shuts the door behind him, and cautiously enters.

KEELI (30s), a tired woman with brown hair and brown eyes, enters from an adjacent room.

KEELI
Just where have you been? Oh no, you're freezing! Here, let's get you covered.

Keeli thrusts a long shirt over Darry, wraps him in a fur blanket, and sets him down by the fire.

She looks up at the Stranger and half approaches.

KEELI (CONT'D)
Thank you. Thank you for bringing him back... I hope he wasn't too much trouble. Where did you find him?

STRANGER (V.O.)

I like her wooden eyes. They remind me of the forest.

DARRY

It was *I* who found *him*, woman! Naked as the day he was born, and left for dead in a ditch.

KEELI

And you brought him *here*! Why would you go and do a fool thing like that? Who is he? And what kind of trouble is he in?

DARRY

I don't know for sure. He can't speak common.

Darry laughs, and huddles under the fur.

DARRY (CONT'D)

Now go do something useful and get us some soup!

Keeli rushes off in a huff, and angrily prepares two bowls.

KEELI

Are you crazy? We don't know anything about this man... Darry, I want him gone.

DARRY

He stays.

KEELI

There's no way I'm letting some foreigner stay under the same roof as my children, Darry! Especially not when my husband, your son, their father, isn't here to protect us.

Keeli SLAMS the bowls of soup on the table.

DARRY

He stays.

KEELI

I won't have it, Darry!

DARRY

I said he stays!

Darry almost looks to slap her, but Keeli WINCES anyway.

DARRY (CONT'D)
I'll hear no more of it!

A baby CRIES out from a nearby room.

KEELI
Look what you did, you woke her up.

Keeli rushes off to deal with the child.

Darry motions for the Stranger to sit beside him. He does.

Darry pushes the second bowl of soup next to the Stranger,
then swirls his spoon, takes a sip, and sighs with pleasure.

The Stranger watches as Darry grows displeased...

But when the Stranger mimics Darry, and swirls his spoon and
takes a sip of the broth, Darry nods, satisfied.

CUT TO:

EMPTY bowls scatter the table.

The Stranger stands by the fire dressed in fresh clothing.

DARRY
There's more than enough work around here
for a man like yourself...

Darry sets a blanket on a chair nearby.

DARRY (CONT'D)
Get some sleep. We start in the morning.

The Stranger sits in the chair by the fire, and rests.

FADE TO:

Darry and Keeli talk in hushed tones in a nearby room.

The Stranger is motionless, but his eyes are still open...

STARING into the dying fire.

EXT. BLACK DREAMSCAPE - NIGHT

Dark, EMPTY wasteland surrounds Havik on all sides.

Havik looks to the sky, where silent LIGHTNING splits the
heavens in purple and gold streaks.

Against the flashes, Havik sees an endless MOUNTAIN range on the horizon. Jagged edges make the world look torn asunder.

A great WIND picks up.

With each flicker of light the shadowy BEAST comes into view.

Havik gasps with fear.

It lay across the black field as if a mountain itself, and when it RISES, the mountains ECLIPSE and the ground TREMBLES.

INT. TREE SHELTER, THE LONE TREE - DEAD NIGHT

Havik startles awake in the soft purple glow of his shelter.

The world is SILENT, and a thin white veil of fresh fallen snow covers everything. Violet shadows dance across his face.

HAVIK

The Dead Star's light is a foul thing.

A blood curdling SCREECH sounds out from the distance.

It WHIMPERS a moment, then falls still.

HAVIK (CONT'D)

A rabbit, most like. That's all it is.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

They're upon you, fool! Be ready!

Havik sits up. His breath FROSTS in the air.

Havik HOLDS his breath.

HEAVY BREATHING still sounds from behind him.

Havik turns, and through the white shroud of his shelter, a large GREY WOLF starts GROWLING.

The wolf's GREEN EYE stares directly into his.

HAVIK

It sees me.

The wolf HOWLS, and from the distance, more wolves respond.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO**INT. TREE SHELTER, THE LONE TREE - DEAD NIGHT**

The wolf's green eye stares back at Havik, watching him.

When Havik reaches for his sword, the wolf outside darts off.

HAVIK

Jhev! Jhev...

Havik rushes to Jhev's side, but the man is out cold.

Havik takes two hunks of silvery metal ore from a sack in the sled, and places them in Jhev's unconscious hands.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

His fate is sealed! Use it to your
advantage! Push him off the sled and
leave him to the wolves! Do not hesitate!

HAVIK

No.

Havik unsheathes the sword.

HAVIK (CONT'D)

If this is the end of me, then let it be
with honor. If I must live a lord, then
at least I'll die a knight, and wrap
myself in glory.

Havik pushes himself out from the shelter.

HAVIK (CONT'D)

The day could yet be mine.

EXT. THE LONE TREE - DEAD NIGHT

Sword in hand, Havik runs through the snow, and comes to a stop alongside one of the large upturned roots, when

Havik gets KNOCKED down! The sword FLIES from his hand!

A WOLF BITES at Havik's throat, teeth only inches from flesh. Its DROOL sprays across Havik's face and into his mouth.

Havik looks to the sword as he struggles against fanged jaws.

With a jolt of determination, he THRUSTS his arm into the maw of the beast, and LUNGES for the sword.

Its fangs BITE down through thick layers of clothing.

Warm red BLOOD drips out onto the fresh white snow.

Havik's hand wraps sweetly around the sword's hilt, and he runs the blade through the wolf's throat. It releases its hold and falls to the ground, WHIMPERING in pain.

Havik BASHES in its skull with a few STOMPS of his boot.

Havik steps back, PARANOID a second wolf might attack him, but when none appear, he finally catches his breath.

Havik rubs his wounded arm, and stares down at the dead wolf.

EXT. MAIN DECK, SHIP - DAY

The festivities are in full swing! Sea shanties are sung and instruments played. Sailors dance, and drink, and feast.

One TABLE is set prominently on the deck, at which:

Marcus plays *bounce the copper coin* with a few Sailors.

Fryer stacks his plate with food wiping grease from his chin.

All are enjoying themselves, all except Clique, who sits pensive and sullen, staring into the wine in his goblet.

A SMALL OBJECT is clutched in Clique's hand. He SQUEEZES it.

FLASHBACK

INT. DARK STONE STAIRCASE - NIGHT

A young, clean-shaven Clique in blue robes, ascends the stairs behind a tall MYSTERIOUS FIGURE cloaked in red silk.

Clique RUSHES up a few steps, turns around, and stops.

CLIQUE

Why won't you tell me where we're going?

The Figure looks down at Clique. CAT-LIKE neon yellow eyes peer out from the shrouded shadows of the hood.

Its eyes NARROW, then it PUSHES through Clique as if a ghostly apparition, and continues its rise up the steps.

Clique has no choice but to follow, up to

THE TOWER

Where Clique ascends to find himself SURROUNDED by tall statues. Each more inhuman than the next. All with RED EYES.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

Why have you brought me here?

The Figure approaches one of the statues, rises into the air as if carried up by wind, and removes one of the EYES.

The Figure descends, and holds the EYESTONE out to Clique.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE

(ghostly)

Ten years will it take to seek the mastery you desire. Ten years will you train with the old masters.

The Figure hands the EYESTONE to Clique.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE (CONT'D)

Ten years and a day, will the Gods of the Umbra watch over you.

Clique stares at the EYESTONE as he holds it in his palm.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE (CONT'D)

Return the Eyestone before their watch has ended, and master will you become.

Clique rubs the stone in his palm.

BACK TO PRESENT

Where Clique opens his hand and gazes at the EYESTONE.

Clique's musings are INTERRUPTED by MULLBO (40s) the grizzled cook, who's standing across the table, STARING at Clique.

CLIQUE

Yes, what is it?

Mullbo sets a steaming bowl of soup down before him.

MULLBO

I heard you never had shark fin stew.

Mullbo GRINS through his crooked teeth. Clique sighs.

CLIQUE

To be honest with you, it doesn't sound all that appealing.

MULLBO

Oh, no! No! It is a savory delight! A delicacy across the eight seas!

Mullbo wafts his hands through the steam.

MULLBO (CONT'D)
Can you not smell its inviting aroma?

CLIQUE
I don't know. What do you think Fryer?

Clique turns, but Fryer's long gone. His plate's empty.

Clique looks to Marcus, who's far more concerned with not missing his next shot, than idle conversation.

Clique sniffs at the steam, and finds it pleasant enough.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
Alright. Thank you, Mullbo.

MULLBO
Mullbo is honored his lordship remembers his name. Now, eat. Eat up! And tell me what you think.

CLIQUE
Alright.

Clique gathers some broth in his spoon.

MULLBO
I chose the *sweetest* meat for you.

Clique brings the spoon to his mouth. Mullbo watches.

TIME SLOWS for Clique. Everything moves in SLOW MOTION.

Marcus' bounced coin almost FREEZES in thin air.

FLASHBACK

INT. DARK STONE ROOM - NIGHT

A young Clique stands beside another MYSTERIOUS FIGURE.

Dozens of GLASS aquariums line the wall of the chamber.

Each one contains SCORPIONS of different shapes and sizes.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE
These scorpions kill with a single sting.
All except one.

Clique STARES at a scorpion through the glass.

CLIQUE

Which one is that?

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE

Choose, and accept its sting. Whether you live or you die, is up to you alone.

CLIQUE

But... How am I to know?

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE

The Three Aspects are there, in all living things. Trust in your training. The answer lies before you.

Clique doesn't hesitate.

He rolls up his sleeve and THRUSTS his bare wrist at the most hellish scorpion of all, with red NEON stripes and BIG CLAWS.

It STINGS his wrist, and injects a venom that OOZES out.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE (CONT'D)

Yes. The brightest smile is but a shadow of death. The deadliest poisons are relied upon at the expense of all else.

Clique rolls up his sleeve, unharmed for the most part.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE (CONT'D)

Look for the mastery of the venom, and do not fear the obvious opponent. For scorpions, and for men, small claws mean death.

BACK TO PRESENT

The spoon hesitates at Clique's lips.

MULLBO

Is something wrong?

Marcus makes his coin shot. Drool drips from Mullbo's mouth.

CLIQUE

You have some first, Mullbo. And tell me if you think it's not too salty.

MULLBO

You want... You want *me* to try some? I tasted it myself when I made it. I assure you it's spiced to perfection.

Clique pushes the bowl GENTLY towards him.

CLIQUE
All the same. I'd have you dine with me.

MULLBO
You *would*?

CLIQUE
Yes!

Clique STANDS.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
Sailor!

Clique POINTS to a MAN BALANCING a copper coin on his finger.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
Get the good cook a chair and sit him
down!

COIN MAN
Aye!

The COIN MAN catches the coin in his hand, GRABS a chair, and FORCEFULLY sits Mullbo down into it.

MULLBO
I'm afraid I can't stay, m'lord. There's
more cooking to be done.

CLIQUE
Nonsense, Mullbo! I insist!

MULLBO
Well, alright then.

Mullbo tries to gain his composure.

CLIQUE
Here!

Clique grabs the CAPTAIN'S PLATE and SLAMS it down.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
You'll want a bit of everything now! Some
shark!

Clique grabs a knife and IMPALES a steak, then SLAPS it down.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
And some mash!

Clique spoons a HUGE portion of mash onto the plate.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

And no meal's complete without some
gravy!

Clique GRABS a pitcher and SMOTHERS the mash with gravy.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

And some wine to help wash it all down!

Clique SLAMS a jug of wine down next to the plate.

By now, the ATTENTION of all the crew has been aroused. For most it appears in good jest, but a few DRAW their knives.

MULLBO

You are too generous! But what the hell!
Let the crew get their own damn seconds.
It's time for *Mullbo* to have his feast!

Mullbo fills a spoon with some mash.

Clique STABS a dagger NEXT to Mullbo's hand.

CLIQUE

The soup, first.

MULLBO

If it pleases you...

Mullbo stirs the spoon and lifts it up to his mouth.

MULLBO (CONT'D)

Mmm! I wish I could eat this every day.

He eats a single spoonful. Then a second and third.

MULLBO (CONT'D)

Are you *sure* you don't want any m'lord? I
think I've had enough. You *really* ought
to have some. It's... It's...

Mullbo FOAMS from his mouth and falls from his chair, DEAD.

The festivities stop, and the ship falls silent.

CAPTAIN FRYER

Mullbo?

Fryer pushes through the crowd up to the dead cook.

CAPTAIN FRYER (CONT'D)
What in Eldaria happened to him?

They all look to Clique for answers.

All except one.

Clique picks up his DAGGER, and THROWS it across the deck.

It FLIES past Fryer's ear, and impales itself on the mast.

Everyone is AWESTRUCK, especially Fryer, but Clique hops onto the table, storms PAST Fryer, right up to the mast, where

The DAGGER has caught the WIRY SAILOR by his GREEN BANDANA.

CLIQUE
Going somewhere?

Clique removes a KNIFE from the Wiry Sailor's belt, and throws it down to the deck. It sticks with a TWANG.

WIRY SAILOR
I was... I just..

Clique pulls the DAGGER from the mast and holds it up to the Wiry Sailor's throat. A sliver of blood drips to the floor.

CLIQUE
Who?

WIRY SAILOR
I don't...

CLIQUE
Hold him!

Three MEN rush forward and take hold of the Wiry Sailor.

WIRY SAILOR
Please. I don't understand.

Clique takes hold of the Wiry Sailor's hands.

CLIQUE
Rough hands.

WIRY SAILOR
Yes. Yes, it's from years of the rope.

CLIQUE
What's your name?

CAPTAIN FRYER
That's Wodkins, our boatswain.

WODKINS (WIRY SAILOR)
Yes... I'm Wodkins...

CLIQUE
There, there, Wodkins. Don't be nervous.

Clique glances to the Coin Man.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
Grab his wrist.

The Coin Man HAPPILY obliges.

Clique delicately sets the point of his dagger up to the tip of Wodkins' finger, and GRINDS it into the bone.

Wodkins SCREAMS.

The crew gets rowdy. Fryer grows anxious.

WODKINS
Please! Stop! Stop! No! Stop!

CLIQUE
Who?

WODKINS
I didn't do it!

Marcus steps beside Clique, who's drawing angry looks.

MARCUS
(whispering)
Lord Gracious...

Clique SEVERS Wodkins ring finger and stuffs it in his mouth.

CLIQUE
Who!

Wodkins spits out his finger. Fryer starts drawing his sword.

WODKINS
He never told me his name!

The crew gasps. Fryer's sword slips back into its sheath.

WODKINS (CONT'D)
And... He hid his face.

CLIQUE

Then you're of no use to me alive!

WODKINS

No, no! I saw his ring! It was an octopus, with seven tentacles! Gold on silver. I'll never forget it.

Clique STABS the dagger into the deck by the knife.

CLIQUE

There, Captain! You see!

Clique walks back to his table with a swagger.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

You have your cook's killer. Wodkins...
The boatswain.

To the ASTONISHMENT of everyone, Clique makes a show of eating a big helping of mash and gravy.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

A pity too! Mullbo was ever so good at his job. Dare I say, he made it an art.

A few men laugh, but not Fryer, who kneels, picks up the daggers from the deck, and gives Wodkins a long icy stare.

CAPTAIN FRYER

String him up!

One Sailor HANGS a rope, while another ROLLS over a barrel.

CAPTAIN FRYER (CONT'D)

How much did he pay you, to betray the Sailor's Law?

Wodkins gets dragged kicking to the barrel.

CAPTAIN FRYER (CONT'D)

How much to betray your captain?

WODKINS

It wasn't like that! He knew my sister and her children by name. He said he'd kill them if I didn't do it.

CAPTAIN FRYER

But we've been at sea for six months! Why wait all this time to kill the cook?

Clique outright LAUGHS, and Marcus steps beside Fryer.

MARCUS

The soup was meant for Lord Gracious, who forced the cook to drink it.

REALIZATION comes to Fryer's face.

WODKINS

Poor Mullbo! I never meant any harm to come to him... He didn't even know.

The Coin Man slips a noose round Wodkins neck. Fryer sighs.

CAPTAIN FRYER

Hang him.

Sailors SPIT and CURSE as they lift Wodkins onto the barrel.

OLD SAILOR

Don't *hang* him Captain! You'll break his pretty neck! I want to see him dangle!

CAPTAIN FRYER

Very well. Hoist him then.

WODKINS

No!

Wodkins gets LIFTED into the air by the noose. He CHOKES.

Clique watches for a moment, then SPITS out his food.

CLIQUE

Shit...

Clique grabs his scythe, and SLICES the rope.

Wodkins THUMPS to the floor.

CAPTAIN FRYER

What's the meaning of this? The cook's death demands --

CLIQUE

-- I know what it demands! But, unfortunately... Wodkins must live.

Wodkins grabs at his neck, and looks up to Clique with hope.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

Don't worry, my good Captain.

Clique stands over Wodkins, unbuttons his pants...

And PISSES onto Wodkins face, who coughs and spits.
 A few sailors laugh, while others look on angrily.
 Marcus grins at Clique's attempt to placate the ship's crew.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
 He'll wish he was dead soon enough!

Clique lifts up his pants.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
 My father's men have a way with their
 words.

Clique stands over Wodkins, who lies helpless on the floor.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE LONE TREE - DEAD NIGHT

Havik stands over the dead wolf, lost in thought, when
 The corpse gives out a GHASTLY MOAN!

Havik jumps to attention.

HAVIK
 Abomination...

Havik approaches its dead body.

HAVIK (CONT'D)
 How is that thing not dead?

Havik leans over. Its FUR is knotted with brambles and ash.

HAVIK (CONT'D)
 But it *is* dead...

And though it does not move...

The wolf MOANS again... Guttural, and wet.

Havik catches a WHIFF of something FOUL, and doubles over.

He DRY HEAVES into the snow.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
 Are you still such a child, that you lose
 your stomach at the sight of a kill?

FLASHBACK**INT. CASTLE HALLWAY - DAY**

A young Havik (9), follows a bouncing BALL down the corridor. It rolls to a stop beside a large, ominous DOOR.

CUT TO:**INT. DARK ROOM - DAY**

A sliver of light splits the darkness. Havik's BALL rolls in. Havik cautiously enters, when a SHADOW overtakes him.

Havik turns, and looming behind him stands HAVIK'S UNCLE - HUBERT DAVENPORT (40s), whose imposing dark haired stature shares Havik's ancient purple eyes.

HAVIK'S UNCLE

Havik.

Havik drops his ball.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (CONT'D)

You know what happens now...

CUT TO:

Havik watches as his gagged WHIPPING BOY (9), is lashed with a whip by a SOLDIER. Hubert frowns.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (CONT'D)

Every choice has an aftermath. It's time you learned that, once and for all.

The Boy cries out with every strike, and Havik's had enough.

HAVIK

Stop! Stop it! I hate when he's whipped!
I hate it!

Havik rushes to the Boy's aid, and gets struck by the whip!

A single LASH draws blood across Havik's cheek.

Havik doesn't even touch his wound. He stares defiantly.

Hubert waves the stunned Soldier away.

HAVIK'S UNCLE

So! You finally stand in the boy's defense! Eh, Havik?

HAVIK

It's stupid! He didn't do anything. I'm the one who disobeyed you. I went in your solar, not him! It's my fault. Whip me.

HAVIK'S UNCLE

What's that now? You think you don't need a whipping boy anymore, eh? You think you're old enough now? Is that it Havik?

HAVIK

I'm almost *ten*!

HAVIK'S UNCLE

Then you know what happens now?

HAVIK

No...

Hubert draws a knife.

HAVIK (CONT'D)

I cut him loose?

HAVIK'S UNCLE

You cut his throat.

The Boy protests in frenzied moans.

Havik is stunned.

HAVIK

But... Why?

HAVIK'S UNCLE

What's your name?

HAVIK

Havik Davenport...

HAVIK'S UNCLE

And who are you?

Havik sighs.

HAVIK

I'm first in line to the Lordship of Witchblood castle, after you, uncle.

HAVIK'S UNCLE
And what does that mean?

HAVIK
It means... I have to be an Inquisitor...

HAVIK'S UNCLE
That's right.

HAVIK
But I'm not *ten* yet...

Havik takes the knife from his Uncle.

HAVIK'S UNCLE
And yet, your training starts today.

Havik approaches the Boy, and SLOWLY, CAUTIOUSLY, brings the sharp blade up to the Boy's throat.

The Boy falls still.

His amber eyes plead out to Havik, desperate and wet.

Havik's own eyes tear. But it makes no difference.

Blood spills.

Hubert smiles.

The knife drops.

BACK TO PRESENT

Havik (30s) kneels in the snow, his world still SPINNING.

HAVIK
His eyes were like honey...

Havik rises to his feet.

HAVIK (CONT'D)
Have I not suffered long enough for it?

POP! The wolf's chest BURSTS open!

Havik REELS as if expecting a shower of blood and gore.

Instead, thousands of tiny BLACK FEATHERY SEEDS puff up into the breeze carried by miniature sails of dark silky strands.

HAVIK
No! No! No!

Havik stands STRUCK with mortal TERROR by the vision of the necromantic BLACK CLOUD that rises from the wolf's corpse.

HAVIK (CONT'D)
It cannot be!

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
Run, you fool! When you're far away, safe
in the ship, all will be as if a dream.
Stay here and die! Run!

Havik TURNS, and spots another WOLF RACING towards him.

Without hesitation, Havik holds up his sword.

The Wolf LEAPS, and he PARRIES with the blade.

A second swing and the sword is bloodied, and the wolf, dead.

Snow starts to fall. The flakes are thick, and heavy.

Wolf calls HOWL in the distance.

Havik runs.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE**INT. TREE SHELTER, THE LONE TREE - DEAD NIGHT**

Havik pushes his way into the shelter, where A LARGE WOLF sits by the sled. Its white fur is RED with blood.

HAVIK

Jhev! No!

Havik's heart drops, until he sees the sled is UNDISTURBED.

The wolf's gnawing on a rabbit. It looks up, and GROWLS.

Havik backs away, and it follows him

OUTSIDE

Where Havik holds the sword up in defense.

The wolf STALKS him, step by step.

Havik takes a few WILD swings. The wolf keeps its distance.

Somewhere nearby, more wolves HOWL.

HAVIK

Is this wretched beast biding its time,
waiting for the pack to be upon me?

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

Do not hesitate!

Havik takes a mighty swing, but strikes only snow.

The wolf CHARGES.

Fangs and claws TEAR at his chest.

Havik falls back with the wolf upon him. It SNAPS its teeth.

With all his strength, Havik PUSHES the wolf aside, and readies his sword again.

The wolf LEAPS, and he THRUSTS the steel through the beast's heart, burying the blade up to its hilt.

The wolf COLLAPSES on top of him, pinning him down.

It DIES against his chest, blood SPILLING onto Havik's face, and streaming into his mouth. Havik coughs.

Havik pulls himself away, and tries to remove his sword, but the wolf's too HEAVY, and it won't budge.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
Dead weight.

The HOWLING grows closer.

Havik struggles to free the sword in futility.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
Do not hesitate! Run!

Havik looks to the distance, then runs back into the shelter.

HAVIK
Jhev! I can't leave him!

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
No! He'll only slow you down.

Havik emerges with the SLED in tow.

HAVIK
I've already made my choice... And every choice has an aftermath.

Havik pushes out into the wintery night.

EXT. HILL - DEAD NIGHT

Havik stands beside the sled overlooking the LONE TREE.

A PACK OF WOLVES has descended upon it.

They FIGHT over the FLESH of the fallen corpses.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
Wolves do not eat wolves...

Rings of snow BLACKENED with corruption surround each corpse.

HAVIK
It spreads...

The furs of all the living wolves are COVERED in BLACK SEEDS.

Havik watches them fight, almost numb to the horror...

But when he feels in his pocket and removes a roll of bread, true fear sets in. Fear and panic.

CUT TO:

THE TREE SHELTER

Where a SACK of food sits FORGOTTEN.

BACK TO:

THE HILL

Where Havik stuffs the leftovers from his pocket in the sled.

HAVIK

This isn't enough... It's not enough...

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

If you've time to complain, you've time to run.

Havik grabs the straps to the sled and pushes forward.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

They won't be sated forever...

INT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

The embers in the fireplace have long since grown cold.

The Stranger's asleep in the chair nearby.

Darry enters with a BIG SHOVEL clutched in both of his hands.

Darry creeps up to the Stranger, and LOOMS over him.

The Stranger opens his eyes.

Darry TOSSES the shovel at the Stranger!

He CATCHES it instantly... effortlessly.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

The Stranger STABS the shovel into dirt.

He wipes sweat from his brow, and takes a look around.

The rain has long passed, and the world is bright and sunny.

Dozens of fresh DITCHES line the field beside the house, which in the light of day, is seen to be in SHAMBLES.

The gardens are covered in WEEDS, and the FENCE is broken.

The Stranger picks up the shovel, and keeps digging.

Darry stands watching the Stranger with a sullen concern.

CUT TO:

An axe blade HITS a tree. Bits of bark CHIP off it.

Just one cut amongst many in its thick trunk.

Darry, axe in hand, step backs and sighs.

The Stranger sits on the ground, cross-legged, as he examines an insect crawling on a blade of grass.

Far BEHIND him, two GIRLS (12), Keeli's twin daughters, LILY and ROSE, laugh and play on the lawn.

The Stranger turns and watches them.

They take notice, and FREEZE. Their eyes lock.

Keeli rushes out from the house, calling the girls inside.

She USHERS them away and casts him a SUSPICIOUS glance.

DARRY
Nevermind them.

The Stranger looks up. Darry stands beside him with the axe.

DARRY (CONT'D)
I need that tree down by nightfall.

The Stranger stands.

DARRY (CONT'D)
You know how to use an axe? You ever
chopped wood before, lad?

Darry offers the axe to the Stranger, who AWKWARDLY takes it by the blade, instead of the handle.

Darry turns it right side up for him.

DARRY (CONT'D)
Right...

The Stranger holds it confidently by the handle, and smiles.

DARRY (CONT'D)
Well, come on lad. It won't get done by
itself.

The Stranger approaches the tall, dead, tree.

DARRY (CONT'D)
This is the one, lad.

The Stranger delicately places his palm against the bark.

DARRY (CONT'D)
Lad. Lad. Can't keep calling you that.
You need a name boy... Well, I guess it's
up to me to do the honors.

The Stranger holds the axe to Darry's attention, and motions to the tree. Darry nods.

DARRY (CONT'D)
Yeah, that's right. Just swing it like
I've shown you how.

The Stranger measures the weight of the axe in his hand.

He takes aim at the tree... and SWINGS.

The axe's handle EXPLODES in a SHOWER of splinters!

While the axe blade SLICES through the thick wood like SMOKE

And FLIES through the air, sailing far off into the field.

With a great MOAN the tree FALLS to the ground in a CRASH.

Dirt KICKS into the air, and Darry coughs in its wake.

The dust finally settles.

Darry stands awestruck, struggling to appreciate the gravity of the Stranger's inhuman strength.

DARRY (CONT'D)
But... How...

The Stranger looks to the broken tree, embarrassed.

He shrugs apologetically to Darry.

After a long, deep breath, Darry steps close to the Stranger.

DARRY (CONT'D)
Darry.

He taps his own chest.

DARRY (CONT'D)
I'm Darry.

STRANGER

Darry.

Darry places his hand on the Stranger's chest.

DARRY

Axe... Axe.

The Stranger places his hand over Darry's, and nods.

STRANGER

Axe Treefort.

AXE TREEFORT smiles.

EXT. MAIN DECK, SHIP - DAY

Clique stands alone against the wooden rails. He stares out at the wake the ship leaves as it passes through the water.

The DEAD STAR looms over the Northern horizon, watching.

The Sailors keep their distance.

Marcus approaches.

CLIQUE

See that Wodkins is packed in a crate. I don't want any accidents while we make the ascent.

MARCUS

It's already done...

CLIQUE

Is there something you want?

MARCUS

Lord Gracious... I was wondering...

CLIQUE

What?

MARCUS

The soup... How did you know?

Clique pulls the Eyestone from his pocket, and squeezes it.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE (V.O.)

The Aspects are intangible...

FLASHBACK - DARK STONE ROOM

Clique deliberately passes his hand through a flame.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE (O.S.)
And like fire...

Clique's hand burns, and he pulls it away.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE (O.S.)
Aspects cause change.

BACK TO PRESENT

Clique turns to face Marcus.

CLIQUE
Change causes waves.

MYSTERIOUS FIGURE (V.O.)
And waves can be felt... Even before they
hit.

Marcus grimaces in confusion.

MARCUS
A riddle?

Clique laughs, stuffs the Eystone back in his pocket, and pats Marcus on the shoulder.

CLIQUE
I was sick for half the voyage.

MARCUS
But you were around the crew every day?

CLIQUE
I took my food below. Nothing but
crackers and wine.

Understanding comes to Marcus' face.

MARCUS
You took no food from the kitchen... The
feast was his only chance.

CLIQUE
Indeed.

MARCUS
But that doesn't answer my question.

CLIQUE
How does the mouse know to fear the moon?

Marcus pauses as he considers the question.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
It senses the owl's killing intent.

LOUD SAILOR
Cliffwatch! Ho! Cliffwatch! Cliffwatch!

CLIQUE
Come, Marcus!

Clique strides off, and Marcus follows.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)
Home awaits.

EXT. SNOWY HILLS - DEAD NIGHT

Havik pulls the sled through an empty white wasteland.

Havik stops, and looks back along the way he'd come.

Far in the distance the wolves are gathered, STALKING him.

They HOWL as if aware he's watching.

Havik looks around at the emptiness in every direction.

The snow storm grows stronger.

Havik drops to his knees and starts DIGGING into a snowdrift.

INT. HOLE, SNOWDRIFT - DEAD NIGHT

Havik huddles beside the sled in a pitifully small hole.

His fingers clutch a STICK, wishing it were a sword.

JHEV
What was it he said, Havik?

HAVIK
Shh. I told you to get some sleep.

JHEV
Don't you remember?

HAVIK
Who?

JHEV

The man. All those years ago. The last surviving man of our fleet. That glorious fleet of ships.

Havik bites his fingernails.

HAVIK

You know for yourself what he said.

JHEV

Tell me...

HAVIK

He spoke of a pirate that commanded water itself, who took the octopus for sigil. The very waves they sailed obeyed the pirate's ungodly will... *Magic*, the man swore.

JHEV

Magic...

HAVIK

He was half drowned, mad from drinking the salty brine. He never lived to see dry land again... They were the fevered words of a dying man. Such words cannot be trusted.

JHEV

Don't you believe, Havik?

HAVIK

It was madness, and nothing more.

JHEV

But after everything we've seen?

Havik BITES too hard. BLOOD pools on the tip of his finger.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

No! You must not think of it!

HAVIK

Quiet! Quiet... Do you hear that?

They hold their breath. GROWLING creeps closer from outside.

Through the thin wall of snow, the SHADOW of a wolf appears.

Havik's fingers twitch against his stick.

The SHADOW moves away, and the GROWLING slowly fades.

EXT. SNOWY HILLS - DEAD NIGHT

Havik's arm PUSHES out from behind the snow.

Havik emerges and takes in his surroundings.

The storm has passed... but

FRESH wolf tracks encircle his pitiful shelter, and lead off to the distance, where the PACK of wolves are WATCHING.

Havik STARES back, his fists clenched.

HAVIK
They mock me...

Havik looks to his unconscious friend...

Then turns back to the wolves...

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
Feed them Jhev, or you will not make the shore alive.

EXT. MAIN DECK, SHIP - DAY

Clique stands beside Marcus as

The ship sails into CLIFFWATCH PORT, a massive cove dug into the TALL ROCK CLIFF with a bustling SEA TOWN inside.

Large, ancient, STEPS ascend the thousand feet it takes to reach the top of the cliff, where CLIFFWATCH CASTLE stands.

As the ship nears the DOCKS, Clique spots a group of KNIGHTS, with their grey and black cloaks flapping in the breeze.

CLIQUE
They expect us... My father must be anxious to speak.

Three Sailors set a large CRATE down next to Clique.

MARCUS
I sent a raven last night.

Wodkins GRUNTS from inside the crate.

CLIQUE

Make sure that gets brought up with the rest of my things. I plan to ascend straight away.

MARCUS

I thought you might.

Marcus extends his hand.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Be sure to look for me if you're ever in need of a ship. By all accounts, it should be the *finest* this port has to offer.

CLIQUE

I will, Marcus...

Clique embraces Marcus' arm, and they share a moment.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

Though I hope it'll be a shorter journey.

EXT. DOCKS, CLIFFWATCH PORT - DAY

Clique approaches the elder knight SER WALTHAUS SHADE (60s), who has grey eyes and grey hair to match his armor.

Clique comes to a stop before SHADE, and the FIVE KNIGHTS who stand diligently beside him.

CLIQUE

Ser Walthaus Shade... Could my father not be bothered to send his First? Where's Ser Rimolt?

SHADE

Three years dead.

CLIQUE

Right... Well. Congratulations.

Shade nods coldly. Clique looks to the steps.

CLIQUE (CONT'D)

Well! Let's get started, shall we?

He pushes past them and they begin their ascent.

EXT. STEPS, TALL ROCK CLIFF - DAY

Clique pauses to admire the view. A THOUSAND FOOT drop gives way to the town and sea far below. He can't help but smile.

Shade and his Knights watch with silent patience.

When Clique resumes his climb he TRIPS over a step!

And though he catches his balance, the Knights laugh anyway.

Shade shakes his head in dismissive judgment.

EXT. CLIFFWATCH CASTLE - NIGHT

Clique and his entourage pass through the IRON GATE.

INT. HALLWAY, CLIFFWATCH CASTLE - NIGHT

Clique peers into the Kitchen where COOKS prepare a meal.

Shade lingers behind him.

SHADE

Your father expects you.

Clique turns and stares into his wintry eyes.

CLIQUE

I know.

INT. SOLAR, CLIFFWATCH CASTLE - NIGHT

Ancient tapestries cover the walls. Endless books and scrolls clutter a sea of shelves and tables.

Clique's father ROBERT GRACIOUS (60s) sits at a desk writing.

ROBERT

Is that you, Henry?

Robert sets down his quill, and folds a piece of parchment.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Take this up to the rookery immediately.

CLIQUE

If I can remember the way...

ROBERT

Who are you? How did you get in here?

Robert stands and pulls a DAGGER from his coat.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
How'd you get past my guards?

CLIQUE
Father. It's me... Clique.

ROBERT
Who?

Robert steps forward, but before Clique can respond, his scowl turns to a mischievous GRIN.

Robert TOSSES the dagger aside, and HUGS his son.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You're so old! You're even greying!

Robert tussles Clique's hair, and frowns at his beard.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You look ragged --

CLIQUE
-- I stopped shaving after the first day on the boat. Where's mother?

ROBERT
She's at the Lookout with most of your siblings.

CLIQUE
Most?

ROBERT
Samantha and Felicia are long since married away.

CLIQUE
What of my brothers? Is Evan here? Has little Kevin made knight yet?

Clique and Robert share some wine and a pipe.

ROBERT
Evan's at the Lookout. As for Kevin... He's been squired away to Envek Davenport's first born. Havik.

CLIQUE
Havik? That's a Gracious name.

ROBERT

So named for his Gracious grandfather!
Your mother opposed it of course. She's
hated Envek and his brother since she was
a girl, and wouldn't have our son be
corrupted by them. But I set her straight
on the matter. Havik's a *good* lad, and
clever too. Kevin stands to learn a great
deal from him. Havik was going on some
polar expedition, and I thought it good
chance for Kevin to prove himself. Plus,
it strengthens our ties with Witchblood.

CLIQUE

But all the way to the North? Why --

ROBERT

-- Star metal.

Robert sees the fear for his brother in Clique's eyes.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Don't worry. Havik will keep him safe.

CLIQUE

Am I expected at the Lookout?

ROBERT

No.

CLIQUE

Then what is it, father? Why have I been
called home?

ROBERT

The peace has become so bloated, that
everyone expects it to burst. The Kings
of the East and West have summoned their
banners. Near a hundred thousand men on
each side.

CLIQUE

So it's to be war in the Realms again?
Will they never learn to live in peace,
like those of us in Midgard?

ROBERT

The situation has been dire, but my good
brother DAVIK has thrust himself fully
into the spotlight as an ambassador for
peace. In fact, he's already met with
King William and King Harloque separately
and negotiated an anniversary summit.

CLIQUE

A summit?

ROBERT

A *peace* summit, one hosted by Davik himself at Stormbreaker... But the Kings... Their distrust runs deep, and they're bringing their armies with them.

CLIQUE

But they can't! It's been a thousand years since the Realm's crossed our wall!

ROBERT

And yet, even as we speak, two opposing kingdoms march on our ancestral home. One down the Wind Road, and another by the Cloak... I'm sending you to Davik.

CLIQUE

Am I to be his errand boy?

ROBERT

You're to be his Chancellor.

Robert stands, and steps close to Clique.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

There isn't much time. You'll leave tonight.

Clique rises and they embrace once more.

CLIQUE

Wait... Why should you and Davik want peace? I'd have thought you'd both be stoking the flames of war, not dousing them! Putting Gracious forges to good use smithing steel for both sides.

Robert has a good laugh.

ROBERT

You've a sharp mind Clique, but your understanding of the Realms are antiquated at best. Peace is *paramount* to Midgard's future, and it's best you put your tongue towards nothing *but* peace from here on out...

Robert glances around and quiets his voice.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

There's no telling what spies have infiltrated our lands with the summit so soon upon us. Our words are ever for peace, but yes, Clique, yes. I've cooked up a special dish my brother will serve our guests. You might even do some of the cooking yourself. Davik will explain the rest. Do everything he commands, no matter what he might ask of you.

CLIQUE

Yes, father.

ROBERT

Tell me... *Seven years*. Was it worth it?

CLIQUE

It was a fair price to pay... Some have already tested my skills, and *failed*.

ROBERT

What do you mean?

CLIQUE

Your man Marcus will sing the song of it.

Clique takes the GREEN BANDANA and hands it to his father.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. SNOWY HILLS - DEAD NIGHT**

Havik CHEWS a piece of cheese and SPITS it into Jhev's mouth.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
If you don't eat, you'll die. Better him
than a Davenport...

Havik spots a ROCKY OUTCROPPING that rises in the distance.

He grabs the straps and starts making his way towards it.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

A hammer BANGS in a final nail.

AXE (The Stranger) takes a step back, and looks at his work.

He's constructed a tiny WAGON, with straps for him to pull.

LILY (12) tugs on Axe's coat. He looks down.

She hands him a glass of water, and he drinks it.

LILY
Mama said, that if you're not gonna eat
your berry cake, that we can have it.

AXE
That's fine with me...

He takes a knee to speak with her at eye level.

AXE (CONT'D)
As long as you save me a piece.

LILY
I will.

AXE
I know how much Rose likes them...

LILY
I'll save you some. I promise.

AXE
Oh, you promise, do you?

She holds out her pinky, and he interlocks it with his.

AXE (CONT'D)

Then I know you really mean it.

LILY runs off. Axe stands, and looks around.

The Farmhouse has been completely RENOVATED. The FENCE is rebuilt, and the fields are NEAT and lush with growth.

Months have passed, and Axe has learned the language, and gained the family's trust.

Two dozen BARRELS are lined up alongside the WAGON.

Axe picks up a shovel, and sets off with purpose.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Darry and Axe share a bowl of soup by the fire.

AXE

If I'm really as good with carpentry as Keeli claims, then why should Gerry labor so far away?

Darry nods in agreement as he eats.

AXE (CONT'D)

There's *plenty* of good trees nearby. We could build wagons to sell, and use the money for fresh seeds to plant. With some work this farm could prosper again.

Keeli serves Axe a piece of cake.

KEELI

Lily asked me to save this for you.

Axe stares down at the cake, and slowly takes a bite.

He looks up at Keeli, his mouth full, and his eyes watery.

AXE

It's delicious.

Their eyes meet, and they share a moment. Axe looks away.

AXE (CONT'D)

So tell me more about this town. Hopsdale?

DARRY

It's not really a town. More of a market where the three roads meet.

AXE
Will there be a lot of people there?

KEELI
Too many.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Axe sits on a tree stump as he watches the Red Star rise.

Darry approaches, and places his hand on Axe's shoulder.

AXE
Why did you trust me?

DARRY
Hmm?

AXE
You saw my strength. You saw the mystery
of me, and you still took me in. Why?

Axe looks to Darry with curious eyes. Darry sits with a sigh.

DARRY
I was afraid.

AXE
Of me?

Axe looks down to the ground, defeated.

AXE (CONT'D)
I suppose *I am* a thing to be feared.

DARRY
No, Axe. No. Not of you.

Darry draws Axe's gaze and looks into his eyes.

AXE
Then what? Of what were you afraid?

DARRY
Men... I fear men. And so should you.

AXE
Am I not a man?

DARRY
I don't know what you are Axe. But I know
this. You are what you make of yourself.
And here, with us, you've made a family.

AXE
Keeli *is* like a mother to me.

DARRY
Then be like a son, and keep her safe.

CUT TO:

Axe loads the last of the BARRELS onto the wagon.
Keeli and her twins, Rose and Lily, climb into the wagon.
Darry, with a BABY in his arms, waves goodbye from the door.
Axe starts pulling the wagon down the road.

EXT. ON THE ROAD - DAY

Axe crests a hill. The hamlet of HOPSDALE comes into view.
The DEAD STAR mounts the Northern sky above the town.

KEELI
Axe! Stop for a moment.

Axe and the wagon come to a halt.

KEELI (CONT'D)
Take this. I want you to wear it in town.

She hands him a black woolen HAT.

AXE
Why?

KEELI
Your golden hair might be taken unkindly
by some. Midgard's wall is close, and
many in these parts are from the East.

He reluctantly puts the HAT on, and she smiles, satisfied.

Axe ITCHES at his head.

EXT. MARKET, HOPSDALE - DAY

Axe pulls the wagon, marvelling at the different types of
PEOPLE, ANIMALS, and PLANTS that clutter the MARKETPLACE.

CUT TO:

Axe UNLOADS the barrels from the wagon.

CUT TO:

An ONION STALL has been set up.

Axe EMPTIES the last onions from a barrel onto the stall.

A BEARDED MERCHANT storms over, and GRABS Axe's shoulder.

BEARDED MERCHANT
Hey, you!

Axe STARES at the Merchant's hand, who quickly removes it.

BEARDED MERCHANT (CONT'D)
What do you think you're doing? You can't
set up shop here.

AXE
But I just finished...

BEARDED MERCHANT
Tell someone who cares!

Keeli approaches, holding hands with Lily and Rose.

KEELI
What's going on? What are you talking
about? Harold always lets us --

BEARDED MERCHANT
-- Harold's dead! This corner's mine.

ROSE
Mama! I want to eat!

KEELI
I told you honey, we'll eat later.

ROSE
But I'm hungry now!

BEARDED MERCHANT
Look lady, I don't have all day.

KEELI
No, listen. I'm sure we can come to --

ROSE
-- Mama!

KEELI

Quiet!

AXE

I can take them to eat...

Keeli looks to Axe, UNSURE, but the Merchant's IMPATIENCE, and the Girls TUGGING at her dress make the decision easy.

Keeli POINTS to a BRICK BUILDING with a smoking chimney.

KEELI

Sit them by the window, so I can see...
Oh, and Axe?

Keeli thrusts a few coins into Axe's hand.

KEELI (CONT'D)

Help yourself. You deserve it.

Axe nods and turns away, but she GRABS his wrist.

KEELI (CONT'D)

And don't let them talk to anyone. They
can be quite a handful. Keep them safe.

AXE

I will.

Axe nods solemnly to her.

AXE (CONT'D)

I promise.

INT. BRICK BUILDING - DAY

Axe enters with the Girls in tow.

He's immediately taken in by the smells and sights of FRYING BACON, ROAST CHICKEN, and FRESH BREAD from the oven.

A dozen PATRONS scatter the place, all eating their meals.

Axe sits the Girls down at a table, and approaches the bar.

A FAT WOMAN with black hair and a heaving buxom walks up.

FAT WOMAN

Yeah? What do you want?

AXE

I want to feed those two girls a meal.

He points back at Lily and Rose.

AXE (CONT'D)
And I want some wine for myself... Some
of that.

Axe points at the bacon, and ITCHES his head through the hat.

AXE (CONT'D)
And whatever else this can buy me to eat.

Axe dumps his handful of coins on the counter.

FAT WOMAN
Such beautiful girls. Are they yours?

Axe looks back at them, and SMILES.

AXE
(sincerely)
They're my sisters.

CUT TO:

Axe, Lily, and Rose are feasting and enjoying their meal.

His HAT sits on the table, TAKEN OFF.

The festivities of the tavern fall SILENT.

GRIZZLED BANDIT (O.S.)
What the fuck do we have here? Arsehole!
I'm talkin' to you!

The Bandit KNOCKS the wine flagon from Axe's hand.

It RATTLES as it rolls across the floor.

Axe swivels in his chair, and sees the Bandit and his BUDDY.

AXE
My name's Axe.

GRIZZLED BANDIT
Does it look like I give a fuck what your
name is, Westy? What I wanna know is what
the fuck you think you're doing!

AXE
I just want to eat in peace.

The other Patrons make for the door and leave.

The Bandit KICKS Axe's chair out from under him. Axe FALLS.

GRIZZLED BANDIT

I didn't put up with eight years of blood
and shit to eat in peace with Westies,
whether I'm South of the wall or not!

AXE

We'll leave.

GRIZZLED BANDIT

The fuck do you mean by we?

The Bandit's Buddy circles the Girls.

BANDIT'S BUDDY

Westy's prick ain't satisfied with one,
so he went and got himself two.

AXE

They're my sisters.

Axe RISES to his feet.

BANDIT'S BUDDY

Bull fucking shit they are!

GRIZZLED BANDIT

They're our sisters now, Westy.

The Bandit's Buddy GRABS Lily by the arm, SO

Axe grabs HIM by the arm.

AXE

(soft)

Don't you touch her.

Axe's fingers GRIP tight. Bones CRACK.

BANDIT'S BUDDY

Ahh! He broke my fucking arm!

Axe SNATCHES the DAGGER from the man's belt, but

The Grizzled Bandit DRAWS his blade

and HOLDS it against Lily's THROAT. Axe freezes.

The Bandit's Buddy takes HOLD of Rose with his one good arm.

Keeli enters from the front door.

KEELI

Axe? I saw people leaving and --

She sees the Bandit with the knife at Lily's neck.

KEELI (CONT'D)

No! Don't hurt my baby! Please!

BANDIT'S BUDDY

Fucking Westy has a whole slew of whores!

AXE

Stay back Keeli! It's me they have trouble with, and not the girls. Right?

The Bandit's eyes are LOCKED on the dagger in Axe's hand.

GRIZZLED BANDIT

Put it down.

AXE

If I do... You'll let them go?

GRIZZLED BANDIT

Put down the blade, and she can have her whore daughters.

AXE

Promise?

The Bandit gives a TOOTHY grin.

GRIZZLED BANDIT

I promise...

Keeli's eyes are on Axe, HOPEFUL, and yet, TERRIFIED.

Axe sets his DAGGER on the table.

The Bandit circles closer to Axe, and his Buddy lets Rose go.

AXE (V.O.)

The man promised...

Rose RUSHES into Keeli's arms.

Keeli CRIES. Lily SCREAMS. And Rose HIDES her eyes, AS

The Bandit takes his dagger, and SLITS AXE'S THROAT.

AXE (V.O.)

I'm sorry, Keeli...

BLOOD POURS from Axe's neck in thick red SHEETS.

AXE (V.O.)

I shouldn't have taken off your hat.

The blood is SLICK, and CRIMSON, and it SPILLS over his clothes, the table, and onto the floor.

But Axe DOES NOT DIE.

He DOES NOT FALL.

He doesn't even BLINK.

GRIZZLED BANDIT

What the fuck?

He pushes against Axe, who keeps his balance in spite of him.

BANDIT'S BUDDY

Fucking Westy don't even know how to die proper.

The Bandit's Buddy PUSHES Lily aside like a rag doll, where she FALLS to the ground and HITS her head.

BANDIT'S BUDDY (CONT'D)

I'll show you how it's done.

His Buddy takes the dagger from the table in his good hand, and PLUNGES it into Axe's chest!

TWANG! The sound of METAL upon METAL reverberates.

He pulls out the dagger. The TIP is BLUNTED.

Axe looks down to Lily, who's BLEEDING from her head, SO

Axe GRABS the Bandit's Buddy by HIS head.

Axe LIFTS the man a foot OFF THE GROUND.

Then SQUEEZES.

His head IMPLODES like an overripe melon.

Axe TOSSES his corpse aside.

The Grizzled Bandit turns and runs, but Axe THROWS a chair, and knocks him to the ground.

GRIZZLED BANDIT
No... Please...

Axe KNEELS beside him, and SNAPS the man's neck.

Axe RUSHES to Lily, where Keeli leans over her crying.

KEELI
Get back!

Keeli screams, and pushes Axe away.

KEELI (CONT'D)
Get away from her!

AXE
She's injured. She needs help.

Axe's throat may be slit, but his VOICE is UNAFFECTED.

KEELI
I've had enough of your help!

Axe PUSHES Keeli aside, takes Lily's motionless body,

And SLAPS her on the back!

Lily COUGHS out a piece of meat, and starts BREATHING.

Lily LOOKS UP at Axe's SLIT THROAT and SCREAMS.

Axe is stunned, and gets pushed away by Keeli.

LILY
Mama!

Axe looks around at the MESS he's caused.

The tavern is EMPTY except for the FAT WOMAN.

They make eye contact, and she FLEES in TERROR.

AXE
We should leave. Come on, let's go.

KEELI
We're the ones who'll be leaving.

She looks at him with HATEFUL eyes.

KEELI (CONT'D)
Come on girls.

Keeli grabs her daughters by the hands, and pulls them towards the door. When Axe follows, she snaps at him.

KEELI (CONT'D)

Don't you dare follow us!

AXE

I don't understand. I can't come with you?

KEELI

No!

AXE

Should I meet you by the wagon?

KEELI

No!

AXE

So I'll see you at the house then?

KEELI

Don't you get it, you stupid man!

Rose cries hysterically. Lily refuses to look Axe in the eye.

KEELI (CONT'D)

I want you gone!

AXE

But... I have nowhere to go.

KEELI

I don't know *what* you are.

(ice cold)

Some kind of monster... I'm thankful for what you've done, but I won't have you bring a curse down upon us.

AXE

I thought...

Axe swallows blood.

AXE (CONT'D)

You loved me...

Keeli is SHOCKED.

KEELI

You're just some stranger my fool of a father in law took in.

She opens the door.

KEELI (CONT'D)
And I never want to see you again.

AXE
Keeli please! Lily! Rose! Don't leave me!

But the Girls look up at him with Stranger's eyes.

Lily clings to her mother's side, and Rose, after a lingering gaze, looks away.

Keeli and the Girls step through the tavern door, and out of Axe's life forever.

CUT TO:

Axe takes the belt pouches from the dead Bandits, and steps

OUTSIDE

Where VILLAGERS are swarming, and ARMED MEN approach.

Axe watches Keeli and her twins DISAPPEAR into the CROWD.

AXE (V.O.)
What am I?

Axe turns, and with TEARS in his eyes, RUNS AWAY from the market, and from the only family he's ever known.

EXT. ICY CLIFF - DEAD NIGHT

Havik stands atop the summit, looking to

THE HORIZON

Where the FIRE of a lit BEACON turns the white world to RED.

CUT TO:

Havik CLIMBS quickly, but carefully, DOWN the icy cliff.

CUT TO:

Havik rushes to the sled, and kneels happily beside Jhev.

But when Havik unwraps Jhev's face, he GASPS in horror.

Jhev's VEINS are now BLACKENED with POX.

His eyes flutter open, and he coughs black phlegm.

JHEV
 (weakly)
 The ship...

TEARS come quick to Havik's eyes.

JHEV (CONT'D)
 Could you see it?

HAVIK
 Yes, Jhev. It's there. The fire is close,
 and the red and green sails of *your* ship
 are there too.

JHEV
 My... ship?

Havik cradles his friend, and offers him a sip of water.

HAVIK
 Yes, Jhev. Your ship. I'm giving it to
 you. I only needed it to get me here, and
 that part is done. When we return,
 Wandering Turtle is yours. A fine
 beginning to your new fleet. And a good
 business for your sons.

JHEV
 My sons...

Jhev BREATHES deep.

JHEV (CONT'D)
 Kalev was never the sailor. Give the ship
 to Jace.

HAVIK
 You can give it to him yourself, when we
 return.

JHEV
 Havik...

Jhev's PALM opens, and his fingers REACH OUT.

Havik takes him by the hand. Jhev SQUEEZES.

Jhev looks up into Havik's eyes, SILENT as the grave.

HAVIK
 You'll be fine old friend, you'll see.
 We'll return by the silvery light of the
 Rat's Moon.

(MORE)

HAVIK (CONT'D)

We'll send a raven before we get there,
so when we arrive they'll all be waiting
for us. Those marble docks at Astermount
will shine as bright as Lady Celinda's
hair. Your sons will all be there, and so
will my father and uncle.

Havik looks up to the HORIZON.

HAVIK (CONT'D)

We'll feast in Salt Comet Hall, and the
singers will make praise of your bravery.
Honors will be pinned, and all the Realm
will know of the men who braved the Gate,
and lived to tell the tale. Can you see
it, Jhev? Jhev...

But his friend is gone.

The light has left his eyes,

And even his corruption seems lifeless.

Havik closes his eyes, and grieves.

CUT TO:

Havik STANDS over Jhev's corpse packed in the sled.

Snow starts to fall.

He looks to the LEFT, where the PACK OF WOLVES HOWL.

He looks to his RIGHT, where the BEACON FIRE awaits,

Then looks back down to Jhev.

HAVIK (CONT'D)

His sons will have his ship, and his wife
will have his bones.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)

Don't be a fool! He'll burst, and corrupt
you as well!

Havik nods, rightfully concerned, so

He PACKS Jhev's body down with snow, and covers him TIGHTLY.

HAVIK

The snow should keep the black seed down,
and when I reach the ship, we'll burn him
and I'll have my bones.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
Do not risk black death for white bones!

Havik takes the sled by the straps, and starts PULLING.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
Fool! He is cursed and you are tired!
Leave his body to the wolves!

Havik and his sled FADE into the endless white of the wastes.

HAVIK'S UNCLE (V.O.)
You're too tired to drag him any
further... You must leave him... You are
too tired... Too tired... ...

FADE TO:

EXT. THE OPEN ROAD - EARLY MORNING

Clique rides on horseback, beside Shade and his five Knights.

A small LANTERN gives Clique LIGHT, as he dips a fresh QUILL into a pouch of INK, and scrawls into an OPEN JOURNAL.

CLIQUE (V.O.)
My lord uncle's castle is the most
defensible place in Midgard. And whether
by peace or by war, from its terrace will
be seen either a celebration to rival all
others, or the makings of a battle that
will shake the very foundations of the
Realm itself.

The SUNRISE of the RED STAR emerges from a distant hill.

Clique gazes out upon the fertile lands of Midgard,

His HOMELAND

And smiles.

CLIQUE (V.O.)
And I'll be in the center of it all.

FADE OUT.

THE END