

The Dark Crystal:
Age Of Resistance

Episode 107

"Time to make... my move."

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Table Read Draft
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EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, CORRIDOR - DAY

1

THE HERETIC, sun-baked and LEANING ON A CANE, pontificates grandly as he welcomes them his ruined home...

HERETIC

Welcome, dear guests, welcome!
Three hundred and seventy-nine
trine we wait. For the message to
choose a recipient. Or is it the
other way around? These mystical
deeds, all a circle! Come! Follow!

He CACKLES to himself, turns and heads down the ROOFLESS CORRIDOR in this sun-faded collection of decaying structures.

DEET

Should we follow?

RIAN

We should run.

BREA

No. We've come too far.

She goes. RIAN and DEET share a look and follow with HUP and LORE. All the walls are covered in runic urSkek petroglyphs.

Together, they exit the corridor into --

2

EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

2

Our heroes gape as they enter an open-air AMPHITHEATER-LIKE COURT housing a collection of obelisks and statues in various states of decrepitude.

HERETIC

Now you appear at the time of our
greatest trial. A moment when our
very bonds are the most fractious.

Two more structures dot the courtyard... a ratty tent over a NICHE festooned with plants, and a TARPED-OVER SLEEPING AREA where an old SCIMITAR stands in the corner.

DEET

Why does the Skeksis keep saying,
"we"?

BREA

Maybe it's a reflection of a highly
elevated sense of self.

Rian spots the dangerous looking scimitar...

RIAN

Or maybe there's more Skeksis here.

HUP

[Or perhaps whatever meager wits
the creature once possessed have
been fried by the sun.]

They all look at Hup. No idea what he just said.

HUP

(gestures to the Heretic)
Crazy!

They all nod as Brea pushes ahead toward the Heretic.

BREA

Excuse me, uhm...
(then, realizes)
How shall I address you?

HERETIC

Formality is for my cruel and
fallen siblings. Once I was one of
them. Once I was known as "the
Conqueror", but I learned. Learned
that only harsh and twisted wills
demand dominance and titles. I am
now, simply, "the Heretic."

BREA

Are you alone here... Heretic?

HERETIC

Yes. I am alone. So very alone.
Imprisoned within myself.

BREA

So you left the message...

HERETIC

(lifts up a claw)
Yet I am also with myself.

The Gelfling FOLLOW the Heretic's pointing claw to see...

A MYSTERIOUS CREATURE SHAMBLING IN FROM ANOTHER ENTRANCE

Our heroes have never seen a creature like this: a MYSTIC.
This is URGOH, THE WANDERER. He looks them over. Serene.

WANDERER
Greetings, Gelfling.

Our title materializes over the gentle Mystic...

THE DARK CRYSTAL: AGE OF RESISTANCE

The Gelfling and Hup stare at the Mystic. Utterly baffled.

DEET
Who is that?

RIAN
What is that?

WANDERER
I am known as the Wanderer.

HUP
Skeksis?

BREA
I don't *think* so.

WANDERER
I am that which the Heretic follows.

HERETIC
(sharply)
No. No! I am that which the Wanderer follows.

The Heretic and the Wanderer squabble in front of them like an old married couple...

WANDERER
Was I speaking to you, Skeksis?

HERETIC
You were speaking for me, Mystic!

Mystic..? DEET RIAN
What's a Mystic?

WANDERER
I am not speaking to you. How could I speak for you? *

HERETIC *

It is I who should not be speaking to you!

Deet turns to Brea... *

DEET

Have you ever come across a
"Mystic" in your books?

*
*
*

BREA

Only legends. Stories. I didn't
know the Mystics were real.

*

WANDERER

It is you who wronged me! I am your
victim!

HERETIC

How can you be my victim when it is
you who has wronged me?

Brea, reeling, has to shout over them to be heard...

BREA

WHICH ONE OF YOU LEFT THE MESSAGE?

The Heretic and the Wanderer point their hands at the other.

BREA

I'm more confused than ever.

The Heretic turns to Lore...

HERETIC

Your task is done, Lore. Rest now.

*

Lore obediently turns to enter a LORE SHAPED NICHE on one of
the ruined stone walls...

BREA

Wait!

Brea runs to Lore and gives him a goodbye hug.

BREA

Thank you... for everything.

A beat. Then Lore gently closes his massive arms around Brea
and embraces her.

*
*

WANDERER

He's taken quite a liking to you!

*
*

Lore lets go of Brea and stands in his niche. Ready to rest.
The Heretic places his palm on Lore's chest.

*
*

HERETIC

You have earned some respite after
your long journey.

*
*
*

With a rumbling *CLACKETY-CLANK!* Lore's glow flickers and dies as he powers down. Inert. *
*

HERETIC

If only we could rest so.

WANDERER

Perhaps we might if you had not rent our lives asunder with your thieving ways.

HERETIC

(deeply offended)

You were the one that rent our lives asunder. It was you that stole the Esteemed Helper from me!

WANDERER

No. It was you that stole The Esteemed Helper from me. Now what was two is one. Now we are troubled with pain!

HERETIC

Return the Esteemed Helper!

WANDERER

I cannot return that which has already been taken!

The Wanderer, upset, turns his back and walks away.

HERETIC

You see what we are forced to endure!

Rian, very carefully tries to get a straight answer...

RIAN

I don't mean to be rude, but we have traveled... very far... because you told us --

BREA

In your message --

RIAN

Right, in your message, that you held the key to ending Skeksis' power.

The Heretic sighs and takes a seat. Leaning on his cane.

HERETIC

What good is the key when we who were once one have been made like this by that which was once two?

RIAN

Huh?

BREA

Does anyone here talk in anything other than riddles and portents?

HERETIC

We came here seeking clarity and unity -- but now we work in silence and separation but for when we fight.

(on the verge of tears)

How can we finish what we begun when we cannot finish a conversation? For two hundred trine we have been locked in this dispute...

Deet takes a moment to process what he just said...

DEET

Wait. You've been having this fight for two hundred trine?

BREA

After you sent the message...

HERETIC

Only the return of the Esteemed Helper can bridge this chasm.

The Heretic closes his eyes in what is clearly profound sorrow... The Gelfling all look at one another, and Brea finally asks the question in everyone's mind...

BREA

Who or what is "the Esteemed Helper?"

*

Rian and Deet look to the Heretic... and then to the Mystic, now far from them, etched and backlit by the rising suns... the distance between the two seemingly insurmountable...

MATCH DISSOLVE
TO:

3 EXT. CASTLE OF THE CRYSTAL - DAY - ESTABLISHING

3

Backlit by the rising Three Brothers, the jagged spires of the Skeksis stronghold spike over the dreary land.

CUT TO:

4 INT. CASTLE OF THE CRYSTAL, CATACOMBS - CONTINUOUS 4

Intermittent shafts of light make jagged friezes of the obsidian walls, occasionally illuminating strands of silk and parts of long-dead Arathim.

CRUNCH! A Skeksis foot CRUSHES an Arathim skull on the ground. TILT UP to reveal THE EMPEROR, stepping into the light through an INTERSECTION in the cave system.

THE GENERAL follows obediently. The two stop as they reach --

5 INT. CASTLE OF THE CRYSTAL, ARATHIM AREA - CONTINUOUS 5

The Emperor gestures to a THICK STRAND OF SILK, hanging from above and dolloping to the floor. *

EMPEROR
Summon The Ascendancy.

GENERAL
But the Ascendancy are our sworn enemy. *

EMPEROR
Not for long. *

The General bows, then reaches a long, black talon to the silken thread and PLUCKS it like a guitar string.

A SHRILL, DISSONANT VIBRATION fills the air.

The Emperor and the General look down, disgusted, as a line of THREADERS scurry past their feet in a neat line. *

THE CAVE SHAKES AS THE CLICKING BECOMES AN ECHOING DRONE *

The marching Threaders coalesce into an unseen FORM in the darkness. All we see are TWO MASSIVE GLOWING EYES as they open low to the ground and RISE above the Skeksis. *

Until the General and Emperor stand in the center of a HIGH-ANGLE, DISTORTED, FISHEYE POV: this is the perspective of the unseen ARATHIM ASCENDANCY. *

The Ascendancy speaks, its voice a HARMONY OF MULTIPLE VOICES, male and female, many speaking as one. *

THE ASCENDANCY
The Arathim Ascendancy hears your call. Speak your truth. *

The Emperor steps forth to speak, his haughty face DISTORTED
in the Ascendancy's fisheye perspective: *

EMPEROR

Since your failed rebellion, we
have allowed your continued meager
existence. I offer a way back into
my grace. A way out of the wilds. *

(off the waiting silence) *

The Arathim will fight the
Gelfling. You will crush them. *

Gather them. Bring them to me.

THE ASCENDANCY

Why would we do this?

EMPEROR

Become a fist for the Skeksis and I
shall restore your dominion over
the Caves of Grot. *

The Ascendancy does not reply immediately, as if cogitating,
leaving the Emperor and General exchanging tentative
glances... and then: *

THE ASCENDANCY

Our ancestral home... yes... the
Arathim Ascendancy accepts your
offer. But there is no need to face
the Gelfling in battle when they
will simply walk themselves into
your grasp. *

GENERAL

How is this possible?

THE ASCENDANCY

We have bred a new weapon. Bring us
your strongest Gelfling. Then you
will understand. *

The ECHOING DRONE fills the catacomb once more... and the
point of view of the ascendancy UN-DISTORTS as we hear the
Ascendancy fracture into a swarm and scurry away. A *

As the clicking of chattering insects FADES TO NOTHING... *

WIDEN TO SHOW *

That the Emperor and General are now alone in the cave. *

EMPEROR

We have an army. *

The Emperor cocks a triumphant look at the General and EXITS. But the General lingers -- perturbed -- then FOLLOWS to catch his lord as he makes his way down to --

6 INT. CASTLE OF THE CRYSTAL, DIFFERENT CATACOMB - CONTINUOUS 6
Clear of any snooping Arathim, the General stops the Emperor.

GENERAL
Emperor. The Caves of Grot...

The Emperor SPINS to look at the General, his tone sharp.

EMPEROR
What of them?

The General hesitates...

GENERAL
If we restore the Arathim to their spawning grounds... they might grow strong enough to threaten us.

The Emperor gives his General a smug, self-satisfied look.

EMPEROR
The caves will not be a home for the Arathim. They will be a grave.
(off the confused General)
Tell me. What do you hear of the Caves of Grot?

GENERAL
That they are infested with the filthiest of Gelfling. *

EMPEROR
What else?
GENERAL
(groping)
Emperor...

EMPEROR
What do you hear that you dare not say? Especially to your Emperor?

The General wavers... there is something he could say... something spoken only in whispers... but does he dare?

GENERAL
Some... whisper that the caves are infected by a blight.

EMPEROR
A blight? What sort of blight?

The General shakes his head, does he really have to say it?

GENERAL

The Darkening.

The Emperor REARS in a rage, his rictus curling into a SNARL.

EMPEROR

Darkening? There is no "Darkening".
I have so decreed! To speak of it
is heresy.

GENERAL

Forgive me. There is no Darkening.
To speak otherwise is heresy.
(a very deep bow)
Sire.

The Emperor SMILES. Creepily.

EMPEROR

Come with me. The time has come to
reward your fealty.

The Emperor walks out. The General FOLLOWS. Curious.

DISSOLVE TO:

7

INT. HA'RAR CITADEL, THRONE ROOM - DAY

7

The sun BLAZES through a large, panoramic-view-of-the-city opening on the far side of the room. MAUDRA MERA (the Spriton Maudra) stands before the ruin of the throne.

And before the throne? A pedestal holding the All-Maudra's crown, missing Maudra Laesid and Maudra Fara's pieces!

MAUDRA MERA

A Test of Flight has been put forth
to determine who will wear the
crown of the All-Maudra. The rules
are simple: contenders shall glide
as long as their skill allows. The
first to touch the floor loses.

Around her, the MAUDRAS: SEETHI, LAESID -- still clutching her piece of the crown - and ETHRI.

MAUDRA LAESID

(in disbelief)
This is no way to decide who should
lead us.

MAUDRA ETHRI

By the time one takes the throne I
shall be back at sea, and not a
moment too soon.

Maudra Seethi frowns, but doesn't speak.

MAUDRA MERA

The contest begins when I release
this Unamoth.
(then, looking up)
Seladon, Princess of Ha'rar...

ANGLE UP TO REVEAL --

SELADON (wearing a light, tight, streamlined suit of GLIDE
ARMOR) stands on a MEZZANINE stories above ground.

MAUDRA MERA

Princess Seladon? Are you ready? *

Seladon's eyes narrow.

SELADON

I am. *

MAUDRA MERA

Fara, Maudra of Stone-In-The-Wood -- *

FAST PAN TO THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE ROOM --

Where MAUDRA FARA stands on another MEZZANINE. Glares at
Seladon across from her. Defiant. *

MAUDRA FARA

Let us begin. *

BACK ON MAUDRAS

Maudra Laesid leans in on her cane to Ethri and Seethi.

MAUDRA LAESID

A hubris play by a naive princess.

MAUDRA ETHRI

Yet Maudra Fara agreed. Will you
give your piece of the crown to
whichever Gelfling wins?

Maudra Laesid shoots Maudra Fara a glance of solidarity.

MAUDRA LAESID

I trust that the strongest Gelfling
shall emerge victorious.

MAUDRA ETHRI

You nurny on like chuppering
Podlings when we all know the
Skeksis have always favored the
Vapra. If Maudra Fara takes the
crown... The Skeksis may punish us
all. We stand on the edge of
disaster.

*

Maudra Mera barks...

MAUDRA MERA

Contenders! Ready yourself!

SELADON AND FARA FLARE THEIR WINGS AS THEY FACE-OFF.

ON MAUDRA MERA, making a SWEEPING GESTURE to indicate three
MASSIVE CAULDRONS in a triangle spanning the room.

MAUDRA MERA

Paladins! LIGHT THE FIRES!

Three PALADINS, each with a torch and ceremonial STAFF, ENTER
and drop the torches into the kindling below the cauldrons.

*

*

Maudra Mera TURNS to the other Maudras, producing a small,
pearlescent box from her gown. An Unamoth FLUTTERS inside.

Maudra Mera glances at the PALADINS and NODS. They SLAM the
ends of their staffs on the floor like drums.

*

*

The fires ERUPT with an audible WHOOSH!

BAM! BAM! BAM! Seladon and Maudra Fara stare each other down.

BAM! BAM! BAM! The Maudras look up in expectation.

BAM! BAM! BAM! Maudra Mera lifts the pearlescent box...

MAUDRA MERA

CONTENDERS! FLY!

And opens it to RELEASE THE UNAMOTH!

SELADON AND MAUDRA FARA LEAP!

Their wings HOLDING THEM ALOFT, they each BANK in opposite
directions to SPIRAL around the room.

It looks like the two are in a COLLISION COURSE... until...

MAUDRA FARA STEERS OVER THE SMOKE COLUMN OF A CAULDRON

The rising heat LIFTS her just enough above Seladon to give her the advantage as they CROSS! Catching Maudra Fara's wake, Seladon goes into a CORKSCREW ROLL and DESCENDS SHARPLY!

Now it's clear that one flyer can undermine another by literally STEALING THE WIND BENEATH HER WINGS!

MAUDRA ETHRI TURNS TO MAUDRA LAESID.

MAUDRA ETHRI

We will be at war with the Skeksis
before the Three Brothers set.

MAUDRA LAESID

The Drenchen are not afraid to
fight.

*

The Maudras LOOK UP just as:

SELADON RECOVERS FROM HER BARREL ROLL

Flapping her wings like elevons to straighten up... in time to HIT A THERMAL from another cauldron, RISING once more...

But not as high as Maudra Fara, who FOLDS her wings -- GAINING SPEED as she descends in a WIDE ARC toward Seladon.

Seladon sees Fara coming. Eyes filled with stone resolve.

Seladon steers herself closer to the Throne Room wall... then closer... closer... CLOSER...

As Maudra Fara INEXORABLY SHORTENS THE DISTANCE:

SELADON KICKS A LEG TO PUSH OFF AGAINST THE THRONE ROOM WALL!

Her speed DECREASES, but the daring move sends her in an altered course -- across the diameter of the room -- as she hits the RISING HEAT AND SMOKE from another cauldron...

The Maudras and Paladins all look at one another. Impressed.

Seladon RISES even further -- just enough to SHOOT OUT OF THE THRONE ROOM through the panoramic-view-of-the-city opening!

Fara's eyes WIDEN: what is her opponent doing?

The Maudras and Paladins EXCHANGE CONFUSED LOOKS.

MAUDRA ETHRI
Has she lost the contest?

MAUDRA MERA
(impressed)
She hasn't touched the floor yet. *

SELADON SWOOPS IN THROUGH THE OPPOSITE WINDOW *

She DIVE BOMBS into the throne room like a guided missile --
looking down at her target: *

MAUDRA FARA -- LOOKING UP AT HER: A SITTING DUCK

Seladon's wings WRAP TIGHTER... her speed INCREASES... Fara's
expression HARDENS...

SELADON DIVES RIGHT IN FRONT OF MAUDRA FARA!

Barely missing her before DEPLOYING HER WINGS with an ECHOING
SWISH to pull out of her dive inches from the floor!

Seladon then RISES ABOVE Maudra Fara -- whose wings FLARE OUT
in every direction -- completely upset by the turbulence from
Seladon's impossible coup!

Maudra Fara TUMBLES in a messy spiral as she tries all she
can to land with a modicum of dignity...

Nope. CRASH! Maudra Fara TUMBLES across the polished Throne
Room floor in an inglorious mess of wings, limbs and SHRIEKS.

Maudra Mera, ever the Skeksis loyalist, is relieved to
announce:

MAUDRA MERA
The contest is settled! All hail
Seladon, our new All-Maudra!

Seladon planes her wings parachute-like and gently taps down
with the pli  of a beautiful, triumphant ballerina!

MAUDRA FARA
Nothing is settled! She cheated!

Seladon and the Maudras all turn to Maudra Fara, messily
gathering herself in the far side of the room.

SELADON
I did nothing of the sort. There
was only ONE RULE.

MAUDRA FARA
You left the venue of the
contest! You took advantage
of your knowledge of this
palace to -

SELADON
(getting in her face)
You lost and you are either
too proud or too foolish to
accept that you've been
bested!

Everyone watches the argument with no idea what to do... and
then, the one Maudra who has remained silent throughout this -
- MAUDRA SEETHI of the Dousan Clan -- speaks up:

MAUDRA SEETHI
THE WINNER HAS BEEN DETERMINED!
Join your pieces of the Living
Crown. Let time move as one with
fate!

SELADON
Well said, Maudra Seethi. Fellow
Maudras. Complete the crown.

Maudras Fara and Laesid trade glances. Maudra Laesid shakes
her head, PLACES HER PIECE OF THE CROWN ON THE PEDESTAL.

MAUDRA LAESID
I shall abide by the outcome. *

But Maudra Fara does not budge.

SELADON
Maudra Fara. We fought. I won. Now
let me go and negotiate peace on
behalf of all Gelfling.

Maudra Fara laughs darkly -- folding in her wings and
standing tall -- then reaches into her tunic, and pulls out
the last piece of the All-Maudra crown.

MAUDRA FARA
If you want the crown so badly that
you'd sacrifice the rest of us...
(to the other Maudras)
And if your wits have left you so
completely that you'd fall in line
with this foolishness -- then take
it. The Stonewood clan will stand
against the Skeksis alone. We will
raze the Castle of The Crystal and
you will sing songs of our victory.

Maudra Fara THROWS her piece to the floor and turns to go!

MAUDRA MERA
Maudra Fara, please --

Seladon motions for the Paladin to pick up the piece of the crown as she moves to the throne to retrieve the rest.

SELADON

Leave her be. She will realize the error of her ways in time.

As the Maudras look on, the Paladin hands Seladon the piece. Savoring every moment, Seladon slowly adds it to the others.

AND THE CROWN MAGICALLY REFORMS -- TAKING IN THE LAST PIECE!

MAUDRA ETHRI

Long live the All-Maudra!

MAUDRA MERA

Peace with the Skeksis. All hail the All-Maudra!

The Maudras slowly join -- Ethri wants this to be done with, Seethi sees no better option, and Laesid, not willing to risk Gelfling unity, but still on Maudra Fara's side, WATCHES.

MAUDRAS

Hail All-Maudra! Hail All-Maudra!

Seladon beams... but can't help but notice...

MAUDRA FARA

... as the Throne Room door SHUTS behind her...

CUT TO:

10

INT. CASTLE OF THE CRYSTAL, BUNKER - DAY

10

An IRON DOOR opens to allow the Emperor and General into this gloomy, low-ceilinged cavern.

A purple GLOW from far within provides the only illumination.

GENERAL

What is this place?

EMPEROR

A secret known only to your Emperor. And now... you.

GENERAL

I am honored. Sire.

The Emperor leads the General to a LARGE CREVICE on the rocky ground. The source of the PURPLE GLOW.

EMPEROR
Behold the Darkening.

The General, nervous, peers down into the crevasse and discovers a coursing channel of PURE PURPLE ENERGY below.

GENERAL
But you said there is no --

EMPEROR
(gleeful)
I LIED! It grows day by day, its
veins creep through the land,
blighting all it touches.

GENERAL
It's... purple.

EMPEROR
It is power. Pure. Raw. And it has
only spread faster since we began
draining Gelfling. That is why it
must be kept a secret and why I
have given the Caves of Grot back
to the Arathim.

The General's face lights up with admiration for his profoundly Machiavellian master.

GENERAL
The caves are infected. The
Darkening will consume the Arathim.

EMPEROR
But not until *after* we are finished
with them.

The Emperor lowers the head of his staff toward the Darkening. The CRYSTAL on his staff begins to GLOW as the Darkening below FLARES BRIGHTER. Surging for the surface.

GENERAL
You can control it.

The Emperor gazes into the purple void. Delighted.

EMPEROR
Not yet. On my scepter I hold a
crystal. Much smaller than the
Crystal of Truth, but gifted with
its own unique power.
(MORE)

EMPEROR (CONT'D)

(to the General)

In time, I will use this crystal to harness the might of the Darkening. For our greater glory.

*

GENERAL

Truly you are wise. That is why you are Emperor.

EMPEROR

No. I will show you *why*.

With a dark flourish, the Emperor reaches for the jeweled ornament on his beak and removes it -- a snotty trail in its wake -- to REVEAL the rotting chum where his nose should be!

The General RECOILS, horrified. But the Emperor is proud.

EMPEROR

Prolonged exposure to the Darkening is not without... consequences. But I understand true power demands sacrifice. And *that* is why I am Emperor.

The General recovers into a REVERENT BOW.

GENERAL

Command me, Sire.

EMPEROR

Choose the strongest Gelfling from our cages and give The Ascendancy the token they demand. Then marshall their forces to bring Stone-In-The-Wood to its knees.

*

(bearing in)

And never forget: there is nothing in this world that your Emperor cannot bend to his will.

*

The General BOWS. The Emperor beams, his awful, mutilated face ILLUMINATED by the poisonous glow of his staff.

CUT TO:

11

EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - DAY

11

The Wanderer's face RISES into the light of the Three Brothers as he SPINS like a dervish: arms FLARING OUT, eyes closed, mouth curled into a wizened grin.

Occasionally, The Wanderer's robes RISE to REVEAL he has a false leg, of iron, wood, and a collection of bits and bobs.

FIND RIAN, DEET, BREA, AND HUP

Watching -- the frustration clear in Brea's face and tone.

BREA

We traveled across Thra to save the Gelfling, and now our entire mission is being held hostage by a frazzled Skeksis and a contrarian Mystic.

INTERCUT WITH:

12

INT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, TENTED NICHE

12

The Heretic toils at a makeshift HERB LAB. Hollowed-out branches provide irrigation, drawing water for row after row of PLANTERS and TRELLISES. A verdant oasis among arid ruins.

The Heretic drops herbs into a small cauldron over a wood-burning stove. He then lifts the cauldron and INHALES deeply.

BREA

Because they have wasted the last two hundred trine on a squabble? They called us here!

DEET

We have to find the "Esteemed Helper" for them!

HUP

Helper!

RIAN

Deet is right. It's the fastest way to --

DEET

(in sync)
To bring our hosts back together and get them to patch things up!

BREA

But we don't even know what the "Esteemed Helper" is. And they are in no condition to tell us.

RIAN

I can brew up a batch of bean brew strong enough to restore the Heretic to reason.

BREA

While you do that, I'll spin with the Wanderer. Perhaps then I'll understand their argument. Or at least get the Wanderer to trust me.

DEET

If this "Esteemed Helper," is hidden anywhere around here, Hup and I will find it!

HUP

[As always, m'lady your lightest touch commands obedience].

As the four friends nod, now full of purpose...

DISSOLVE TO:

13

EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - LATER

13

Brea SPINS in the sunlight alongside the Mystic.

WANDERER

I could not do what I do without the Esteemed Helper, how could I not want the gift at all times?

Brea sucks in air, getting dizzier and dizzier.

BREA

So the Esteemed Helper was a gift.

WANDERER

All that makes progress possible is a gift. NOW can you understand what I have taken from my friend, and my friend has also taken from me?

BREA

Not really!

WANDERER

Then we must dance faster.

The Mystic ACCELERATES. As Brea wearily realizes she is going to have to match him if she hopes to get anywhere:

14 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, SLEEPING AREA 14

Deet RUMMAGES -- carefully, searching without ransacking -- as Hup stares at the Mystic's "bed", a strange armature with a jutting head-stand in the shape of a trowel.

Deet pokes through piles of useless, old trinkets and odds-and-ends, including a pile of DISCARDED WEAPONS collecting dust. Relics of a time of conquest.

DEET

Be careful! Some of these are still sharp!

*
*

But Hup has positioned himself on the "bed" headfirst. He squirms. Trying to figure out how the darn thing works.

HUP

[Verily, I am perplexed by this] uncomfortable [bed].

DEET

Hup get down off there!

*
*

Hup and Deet both laugh as Rian joins them...

*

RIAN

Did you see anything I could use to strain bean brew?

*
*
*

DEET

No but I can find something!

*
*

Hup shoots Rian a dirty look for interrupting their moment as Deet rummages in a nearby pile.

*
*

RIAN

How can you find anything in this place?

*
*
*

DEET

It's just like rummaging for Dreckels! Dreckels are large, brown, boneless and wet. Also they have no arms or legs. Or heads. They live in the mud!

*
*
*
*
*
*

RIAN

How can you tell the difference between the mud and the Dreckels?

*
*
*

She turns back and presents with him a strainer.

*

DEET
Dreckels have teeth!

He LAUGHS. A sound we haven't heard from Rian in a long time.
He takes the strainer. They lock eyes.

RIAN
Thank you.

DEET
You're welcome.

They smile at each other a bit stupidly for a moment. Hup watches, not liking this little turn of events one bit. After a beat, Rian clears his throat and exits. Deet watches him go as Hup, sulking, pokes through another pile. Until he spots a LARGE WHISK. His eyes widen! Another weapon upgrade!

CUT TO:

15 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, TENTED NICHE - MOMENTS LATER 15 *

In THE BACKGROUND, Brea SPINS with the Wanderer... Rian takes a pot from the stove and pours the THICK BROWN SLUDGE through a strainer and into a hollowed-out gourd.

RIAN
I was hoping we could talk about --

HERETIC
I will say nothing more about the message until that thieving Mystic has made amends!

RIAN
(hands over the mug)
Here, try some bean brew.

The Heretic SNIFFS then GUZZLES down the sludgy brew.

RIAN
Good, isn't it?

The Heretic licks the bean brew mustache off his lip.

HERETIC
MMMMMMM.

RIAN
I'm curious about the Esteemed Helper. Sounds like it must have been very... helpful?

HERETIC

There were once two, now there is
only one.

RIAN

There's two helpers?

HERETIC

(snaps)

No more! How can we move
ahead when there is only one?
One will always fall behind
the one made two!

RIAN

Wait -- so there were two, now
there is one -- so there's at least
one Esteemed Helper here?

HERETIC

Do you see one here?

RIAN

(no, he does not)
I -- I --

HERETIC

Because that thief took it!

As the Heretic points to the Wanderer in the courtyard:

RACK FOCUS:

To see Brea COLLAPSE! Overcome by nausea and dizziness. The
Wanderer looks down at her, confused, as Brea GROANS.

RESUME ON RIAN

Shaking his head, wanting to help Brea, but on to something.

RIAN

So the Esteemed Helper is something
you both had, and both needed, and
that helped you move forward.

HERETIC

And backwards, for that which moves
us ahead, can also move us back.

RIAN

Another riddle?
(off the Heretic's nod)
Oh yabnak!

CUT TO:

24 INT. CASTLE OF THE CRYSTAL, LAB ANTECHAMBER - NIGHT 24 *

The Scientist looks on as the General peruses the huddled Gelfling in their cages. Two Gruenaks stand by. Ready to take orders. *

GENERAL *

They all look... *weak*. *

SCIENTIST *

Of course they do. They're Gelfling. *

He scans past the RED-HAIRED PALADIN and stops when he notices TAVRA staring at him with hard eyes. *

GENERAL *

Ah. The orphaned princess of Ha'rar... *

Tavra rushes and GRABS THE BARS OF HER CAGE to go face-to-face with her mother's killer. *

TAVRA *

Murderer! *

SCIENTIST *

This one shows spirit. *

GENERAL *

She will do. *

The General turns his back on Tavra and exits, unconcerned. *

TAVRA *

I swear on my mother's life, my blade is the last thing you will ever feel! *

The Scientist nods to the Gruenaks. They OPEN THE CELL DOOR, and bear down on Tavra... *

CUT TO: *

17 EXT. STONE-IN-THE-WOOD, CRUCIBLE - DUSK 17

STONEWOOD WARRIOR #1, rushes past the Crucible -- looking out anxiously, until she hears:

MAUDRA FARA (O.S.)

I want every able-bodied warrior to muster to my lodge before night.

Flanked by flag-bearing WARRIORS, the Stonewood Maudra BUSTLES back into town, giving orders as fast as she can.

MAUDRA FARA

Pull whatever weapons you can from the Crucible.

STONEWOOD WARRIOR #1

Maudra Fara!

MAUDRA FARA

All childlings and caretakers are to go to the hills for safety.

STONEWOOD WARRIOR #1

I have news from --

MAUDRA FARA

It can wait. Now we prepare to storm the Castle of the Crystal.

STONEWOOD WARRIOR #1

But that's just it -- a Palace Guard has come... you will want to hear what he has to say.

18

INT. STONEWOOD GREAT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

18

A dirty, beaten-and-patched Gelfling in a CASTLE GUARD uniform stands before Maudra Fara -- at her throne, flanked by her Warriors -- delivering the dire news.

CASTLE GUARD

We took up arms against the Skeksis. We were well trained. We thought we stood a chance -- but even the meekest of them fought with ferocity. The entire guard was overtaken, no doubt to be drained. I escaped only because my brothers and sisters sacrificed themselves so that I might bring you this news.

Maudra Fara places her hand on the Castle Guard's shoulder.

MAUDRA FARA

We will rain down on the Skeksis with righteous fury and smite their plague from Thra. This I promise.

But her declaration is cut by a FAMILIAR, INTRANSIGENT RASP.

AUGHRA (O.S.)

Promise? Promises you cannot keep
are no better than lies!

Everyone looks up to see AUGHRA, AMBLING into the lodge,
paying no respects and owing no deference.

STONEWOOD WARRIORS

(in audible murmurs)

Is it?/Could it be?/After so long?

Maudra Fara answers them with two words:

MAUDRA FARA

Mother Aughra.

Aughra WADDLES impatiently toward Maudra Fara. Castle Guard
and the Stonewood Warriors give her a wide berth.

AUGHRA

What is this insanity? Mounting up
Warriors? Storming Skeksis Castle?

MAUDRA FARA

The Skeskis are predators. We will
not be their prey.

AUGHRA

Only their next victims.

Maudra Fara is not one to be told what to do in her own
village, even by Mother Aughra!

MAUDRA FARA

What would you have me do?

AUGHRA

You plot strife when you should
plot survival.

MAUDRA FARA

You want us to run?

AUGHRA

I want you to live. You are of
Thra. The Skeksis are not. To your
home you owe survival!

(off her look)

The Skeksis will meet their fate --
this I have foreseen -- But it will
not be by your hand.

MAUDRA FARA
 (genuinely offended)
 Why not? If not the great warriors
 of Stone-In-The-Wood, then who?

Aughra lifts her gnarled hand and squints her good eye.

AUGHRA
 The Song of Thra is complex. Many
 parts. No one knows the entire
 melody. Not even Aughra.

This REALLY rubs Maudra Fara the wrong way: the last thing she needs is to be told to obey what she doesn't understand.

MAUDRA FARA
 Gelfling don't live on guesses.
 Gelfling live on the ground beneath
 their feet.

*
*
*

Aughra SHAKES HER HEAD: the infinities she can see are simply greater than Maudra Fara's gifts for comprehension.

AUGHRA
 I see so many possibilities... But
 in all of them... If Stone-In-The-
 Wood falls... Terrible sacrifices
 will have to be made.

*
*
*
*

Maudra Fara looks at Aughra, then at her warriors... truly considering Aughra's words... before turning her down.

MAUDRA FARA
 Stone-In-The-Wood will never fall.
But the Castle of the Crystal must.
 And I am the only one with the
 strength to see it done.

*
*
*
*

A long beat. Aughra finally shrugs... and as she lets out a spitting HARUMPH!

CUT TO:

19

EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - DUSK

19

After an exhausting several hours, Rian, Deet, Brea and Hup COMPARE NOTES at the six-toed foot of a broken statue.

DEET
 I found a lot of junk. But nothing
 that looked like an "Esteemed
 Helper".

BREA

All I could get from the Wanderer is that the "Esteemed Helper" was "a gift". Won't say from who.

RIAN

Maybe it's a tool...

*

BREA

The lab, the spinning: they are trying to alter their perspective.

RIAN

Right -- and the Heretic keeps saying that they can't move ahead without -- whatever the "Esteemed Helper" is.

BREA

It's a thing that they both need...

RIAN

(putting it together)
They used to have two of them but now they only have one.

DEET

So... they used to have two, then one of them lost it and the other stole the only one that's left?

BREA

I'm not sure. Sometimes one of them says it was stolen by the other, sometimes the other way around.

HUP

One steals from other. When sleep. Like thief.

*

Brea LOOKS OVER at the Heretic and the Wanderer. Sitting on opposite ends of a fallen obelisk, pointedly avoiding one another... The Heretic LEANS ON HIS CANE.

RIAN

Only wherever they want to go they want to go together...

DEET

So one Esteemed Helper is not enough.

Rian sees Brea, walking over to the Heretic... and LIFTS ONE CORNER OF THE HERETIC'S robe to see he is missing his leg!

*

*

BREA

Why did they call you the
Conqueror?

The Heretic looks away. Sad.

HERETIC

There was a time when I tried to
fill the empty half of myself by
taking all from those with the
least. I regret the violence I
caused as the Conqueror --

WANDERER

Violence that cost you your leg...
and mine.

The Wanderer lifts his robe to REVEAL his peg-leg.

BREA

I know what the Esteemed Helper is!

Brea POINTS TO THE MISSING LEG AND THE PEG-LEG.

RIAN

That's the Esteemed Helper!

*

DEET

You two share a leg?

*

HERETIC

Not sharing when he steals
it!

WANDERER

(resigned)
Once we had two. Now we have
one.

RIAN

Then you used to have two
Helpers...
(off their nods)
So who lost the other one?

Both Wanderer and Heretic point multiple arms at the other.

BREA

Oh, for the love of Thra!

Deet steps in front of Brea, trying to be a conciliator.

DEET

Why not make a new leg? Together.
That way you are both part of the
solution instead of the problem!

Heretic and Wanderer exchange bitter looks, then TURN AWAY.

RIAN

Well which one of you made the
Helper that was lost?

As the two creatures, again, point arms at one another:

SMASH CUT TO:

AN ANVIL

A RED HOT STRIP OF STEEL hits the top. A MALLET -- wielded by the hands of the HERETIC -- SLAMS with a RESONATING CLANK!

20 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, TENTED NICHE - NIGHT 20

The Heretic -- now wearing the peg-leg -- works diligently at the anvil, set by his tool-festooned WORK TABLE, watched over by Rian under the light of TORCHES, lighting it, as well as:

21 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS 21

Where Deet holds the Wanderer's hand, helping him to stand on one leg as Brea MEASURES the distance between the ground and his stump with a piece of twine.

Brea holds up the twine to the light, and -- making sure to not lose the spot pinched by her fingers, races it over to:

22 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, SLEEPING AREA - CONTINUOUS 22

Where Hup places the Heretic's staff on top of a makeshift saw horse made of odds and ends as Brea enters with the piece of twine and places it over the length of the staff...

And as Hup reaches out of frame, and pulls out a SAW...

CUT TO:

23 INT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, TENTED NICHE 23

In a SERIES OF CUTS:

- Heretic and Wanderer work together to wrap strips of metal onto the piece of the staff...

- They CREATE A LEG SOCKET from leather and cloth...

- They CAP THE BOTTOM OF THE PROSTHETIC WITH A SHOCK ABSORBING PLUG made from a dried gourd...

The Heretic -- standing by his anvil and work bench -- then lovingly STRAPS THE NEW LEG onto his friend.

As both Heretic and Wanderer FAN OUT to REVEAL their new matching artificial limbs...

REVEAL DEET, BREA, RIAN, AND HUP -- admiring the teamwork on display with a not inconsiderable amount of pride...

DEET

You both look great! Together again, both reunited with your Esteemed Helpers!

HERETIC

We thank you little ones!

WANDERER

(smiles at the Heretic)
Their wise counsel has ended our feud!

Rian puts an acknowledging hand on Deet's shoulder, enjoying the warm moment of reconciliation. Hup looks askance at him -- Brea leans into them, keeping eyes on the prize.

BREA

(impatient)

Which brings us back to the reason why we are here. *

The Heretic and Wanderer turn back to the work table, facing one another.

HERETIC

The answer you seek is the answer to all our travails. *

As they speak, the Heretic and Wanderer don't just tell their story with words -- their hands REACH OUT TO ONE ANOTHER to form figures and objects: a tabletop performance that is half puppet show, half pantomime.

A harmony of narrative unity that starts with a depiction of the form of a PLANET, orbiting three suns!

WANDERER

Two thousand trine ago, our kind descended on Thra. We were not the crude flesh you see before you.

HERETIC

We two were one -- a single luminous form.

Their hands now form the complicated shape of an URSKEK.

WANDERER

Two thousand trine ago, we were urSkeks. One body, one will, one consciousness unburdened by the need to communicate with voice and words. We were perfect unity.

As the Gelfling and Hup STARE WITH AWE, Heretic and Wanderer add to the increasingly complex interplay of their hands a SERIES OF OBJECTS THEY PICK UP FROM THE WORK TABLE -- their performance gathering complexity and spectacle.

HERETIC

Sensing our goodness, and all we could give to Thra, Mother Aughra herself allowed us to take control of the Crystal of Truth...

WANDERER

But there can be no light without dark. Burdened by our duality, we attempted to use the Crystal to purge our darker selves.

HERETIC

Under the Great Conjunction in the sky.

WANDERER

And in our arrogance - our delusion that our intellect was greater than the natural truth of your world - our experiment on the Crystal split us into two: the Skeksis and Mystics.

As the hands and objects form into a STYLIZED VERSION of the SPLIT of the urSkeks into Skeksis and Mystic.

HERETIC

In the shock of division, a skirmish arose -- and the wrathful Skeksis broke the Crystal...

And BREAKING of the crystal by the Skeksis.

WANDERER

Four of us died. Two pairs. Gone.

HERETIC

We were left as two halves trapped within separate selves. Cast from a paradise we did not understand well enough to protect.

BREA

And now you seek to return to that
paradise. Where two is one again.

HERETIC

Yes. I tried to convince my
brethren Skeksis that we must be
made whole. That is when they
exiled me. Branded me... Heretic.

WANDERER

The Mystics wait in hiding for the
day they will be made whole again. *

HERETIC

We two want to be whole NOW! Every
moment one are two is too terrible. *

Their hands now FORM a Gelfling, PICKING UP A POLE-ARM LIKE
WEAPON WITH A BLADE ON EITHER SIDE.

WANDERER

So we forged our knowledge into a
blade: the Dual Glaive. Cast in the
deepest fires of the inner sun. The
Dual Glaive carries the spirit of
Thra within its being. It holds the
power to defeat the Skeksis...
forever. *

Some of the Skeksis and Mystic's hands become a
representation of the Castle of the Crystal, while others
become a representation of the Dual Glaive ... COMING DOWN ON
THE CASTLE and causing it to DEMATERIALIZE!

The Gelfling and Hup watch, enraptured, as the Heretic and
Wanderer end by making the form of the AUREYAL!

BREA

It's the sign!

HERETIC

Yes. It is a sigil of great power.
"The Aureyal". *

WANDERER

Seven clans. Seven fires. Joined as
one in the cause of unity.

RIAN

I have seen it too.

WANDERER

The power of the Aureyal is the power of all Gelfling. Alone you are small.

HERETIC

Together, you are a cleansing flame. Be that flame. Bring the many into one.

Rian -- ever the man of action -- stands...

RIAN

I'm ready! Bring me the Dual Glaive. I'll stand up to the Skeksis.

Heretic and Wanderer exchange glances. Then...

WANDERER

The Dual Glaive does not rest with us.

The Gelfling's hopeful faces fall...

BREA

What?

HERETIC

To keep so powerful an object within the same walls as those who oppose the Skeksis is careless.

WANDERER

If the Skeksis find it. They find us.

HERETIC

If the Skeksis find us. They find it.

*

RIAN

Then tell us where the Dual Glaive is.

HERETIC

The weapon was entrusted to the most secretive --

WANDERER

And reclusive of the Gelfling, deep beneath the land, somewhere the Three Brothers dare not shine --

HERETIC

Where we knew it would remain
undisturbed for as long as it took
our message to find those worthy.

Brea works out the riddle...

BREA

Where the Three Brothers won't
dare... most secretive of
Gelfling...

The answer hits Deet first...

DEET

IT'S IN THE CAVES OF GROT!

The Heretic and Wanderer turn to Deet... impressed. *

WANDERER

Very good! Now you must go... *

HERETIC

And where you go, so go our hopes
that we may be one again. *

RIAN

We will not fail. *

A grateful and gracious -- almost princess-like -- smile
plays across Brea's face as she steps up to the Heretic and
Wanderer, holding out her hand to theirs...

BREA

We thank you, wise ones. And
promise to do honor to your
message.

The Heretic and the Wanderer bow in perfect unison.

CUT TO:

16 INT. CASTLE OF THE CRYSTAL, SCIENTIST'S LAB - DAY 16 *

ON THE SCIENTIST as he heads to the door. Passes the two
mouths-sewn-shut GRUENAKS, working on the draining machine. *

SCIENTIST *

The Emperor wants a progress
report. Continue in my absence. *

Carelessness will NOT be tolerated. *

The Gruenaks NOD. The Scientist exits the lab. *

BEAT. Then... *

The door to the lab CRACKS OPEN... just enough to allow in the head of THE CHAMBERLAIN... SCANNING... to find only the two GRUENAKS inside. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

Hmmmmmmmm. *

GRUENAK #1's eyes widen as the Chamberlain pads toward him... *

CHAMBERLAIN *

Greetings. Wretched Gruenak. *

Gruenak #1 fans out his arms and BOWS grandly. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

Am here to commend. Much work you have done. Yes? Help make the Scientist's machine come to life in such short order. *

The Chamberlain makes his way to A WHEELED CART. Over the rack is a HUB where the draining tubes meet. And SPLIT to feed Essence into a vial for each Skeksis. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

So magnificent. Give what Skeksis need. Make young... and beautiful. *

The Chamberlain indicates the individual vials as he speaks. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

Vial for the Emperor... vial for the Ritual-Master... vial for me... *

The Emperor's vial is -- of course -- the largest. Next to it is the Ritual-Master's, red and gold with a feather... then the Chamberlain's, with an accent not unlike his carapace. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

And... Hmmmmmmmm.... *

The Chamberlain's tone DARKENS as he sees the General's vial... a little cask of matte steel. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

And a vial for the General. So blunt... So plain... Like his mind, yes? *

(off the Gruenak's nod) *

You know... a fellow -- a crafty fellow of great stealth -- could replace Essence of my enemy. *

The Gruenak takes a step back, hesitation on his face. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

Oh no... not with something so *
vulgar as poison... but perhaps *
switch Essence for a simple draught *
of water and the sweet, sweet milk *
of the swhuthu. Yes? *

The Chamberlain produces a small waterproof sack -- a tiny, *
gilt wineskin -- which he holds before the Gruenak. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

General would grow weak. *
Vulnerable. Yes? Perhaps crafty *
wretch who took such risks to rid *
me of meddlesome enemy would earn *
freedom for himself... and his *
friend. *

The Gruenak looks back at his fellow slave: WORKING on a *
piece of equipment at the far end of the lab... and NODS *
before he takes the sack from the Chamberlain. *

CHAMBERLAIN *

If that wretch does job well... and *
tells no one. *

The Chamberlain creepily strokes the stitches across Gruenak *
#1's mouth... as the Gruenak nods. It's a deal. *

CUT TO: *

25 INT. STONEWOOD GREAT HALL - LATE THAT NIGHT 25 *

The heavy entrance doors BURST open to allow in a very
agitated STONEWOOD WARRIOR #2.

STONEWOOD WARRIOR #2

Maudra Fara! Maudra Fara! The
Skeksis are coming!

REVERSE ANGLE to REVEAL Maudra Fara, LOOKING UP from a rough
wooden table with her council.

MAUDRA FARA

Coming?

The Warriors look among themselves in confusion:

SMASH CUT TO:

26 EXT. STONE-IN-THE-WOOD, MAIN THOROUGHFARE - MOMENTS LATER 26

A thick fog ROLLS DOWN the midway. Maudra Fara, flanked by many battle-axe-wielding Warriors -- the Castle Guard, Stonewood Warrior #1 and #2 at the front -- HURRIES to the town boundary to see:

THE GENERAL - IN THE DISTANCE, BATHED IN MOONLIGHT AND FOG
Maudra Fara and her warriors EXCHANGE LOOKS.

MAUDRA FARA
What is this?

The General just stands there, his figure a creepy apparition in the fog-louved light of the Three Sisters:

AS HE LOCKS EYES WITH MAUDRA FARA

Maudra Fara's eyes NARROW.

THE GENERAL'S REPTILIAN MAW

Opens... just slightly, savoring the moment... and then:

THE GENERAL LIFTS HIS ARMS

The wind makes a white maelstrom of the mist surrounding him. The land SHAKES. A SHRIEK fills the air. A SQUADRON OF ARATHIM rises behind the General!

MAUDRA FARA
The Arathim. They fight for the Skeksis. Sound the alarm! Weapons ready! Everyone fights.

Maudra Fara stands her ground and PULLS HER BATTLE AXE.

AND AS ALL OF MAUDRA FARA'S WARRIORS

Draw their steel...

THE GENERAL

Smiles.

SMASH CUT TO:

27 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, TENT/COURTYARD - NIGHT 27

As the harsh wind BEATS the tents and plants, the Heretic and Wanderer say goodbye to their visitors... *

HERETIC

Retrieve the Dual Glaive. End
Skeksis' power. *

RIAN

We will. Thank you.

The Heretic and the Wanderer each hold up a gourd. They both seem very proud of these gourds for some odd reason.

WANDERER

Take this nourishment with you, to
sustain you on your journey.

HERETIC

They're delicious!

But as the Wanderer holds out his gourd for Brea to take:

A DAGGER -- THROWN FROM THE DARKNESS -- PIERCES THE GOURD *

With an audible SCHWOOMP! Everyone TURNS in shock to see:

THE HUNTER!

Standing in the courtyard. Bathed in moonlight. *

HUNTER

I'VE COME TO CLAIM MY TROPHY!

He pulls another dagger and THROWS it at Rian! *

THE WANDERER STEPS FORWARD AND SWEEPS RIAN BACK *

WANDERER

Gelfling! *

CH-THUNK! The Hunter's dagger BURIES ITSELF in the Wanderer's hand! The Heretic and the Wanderer both CRY OUT! *

WANDERER

My hand!

HERETIC

MY HAND! *

Rian spins back around as the Hunter VANISHES into the dark. *

SMASH CUT TO:

28 EXT. STONE-IN-THE-WOOD, MAIN THOROUGHFARE - NIGHT 28

Maudra Fara stands in line with her Warriors... but...

MAUDRA FARA
What are they waiting for? Why
haven't they attacked?

As Maudra Fara looks out...

ANGLE ON THE GENERAL

Savoring the confusion of his enemies as a cloaked, hooded figure ENTERS from behind the gathered Arathim.

It's Tavra... but this is not the warrior princess we have come to know and love... she now has a Threader attached to the soft skin of her cheek, legs burrowed underneath!

GENERAL
Go.

As Tavra steps down towards the main thoroughfare of Stone-In-The-Wood --

SMASH CUT TO: *

29 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - NIGHT 29

Rian pulls the old SCIMITAR from its scabbard! *

RIAN *
(to Brea and Deet) *
Stay here. Find a weapon. *

Rian exits the tent, and strides purposefully into -- *

THE CENTER OF THE DARK COURTYARD *

Dappled in pools of light among an ocean of darkness. Shadows everywhere. The perfect hunting ground. Rian CALLS OUT... *

RIAN *
You want your trophy? Come and get it! *

He raises the Scimitar as Hup STEPS UP to join him. *

RIAN *
You sure about this? *

Hup raises his whisk. Face set. *

HUP

Hup.

They catch a glimpse of the Hunter as it SCURRIES through the dark. Circling. Hup and Rian stand back-to-back.

RIAN

Be care --

The Hunter RUSHES out of the dark, ROARING as he SPINS, his tail BATS Hup, sending him FLYING into the six-toed statue.

SLAM! THE STATUE CRUMBLES

And a rock SHATTERS onto his head. Hup is out -- and injured.

DEET

Hup! No!

As Deet RACES to Hup's aid...

RIAN MAKES HIS MOVE -- SLASHING AT THE HUNTER

But the Hunter vanishes once again into the dark. Playing. Rian spins. Sword high. Trying to look everywhere at once.

RIAN

Stand and face me!

HUNTER

(from behind Rian)

As you wish.

Rian SPINS and raises his sword as the Hunter LEAPS down from atop a statue! Claws flashing! Rian PARRIES and ATTACKS as the Hunter BLOCKS and SWIPES! Off their deadly dance --

SMASH CUT TO:

30

EXT. STONE-IN-THE-WOOD, MAIN THOROUGHFARE - NIGHT

30

Tavra steps to the assembled Gelfling Warriors, as Maudra Fara steps up to meet her - very confused.

MAUDRA FARA

Princess Tavra? Why do you stand with the Skeksis? Has Seladon made an alliance? Are you here to bargain?

TAVRA
We are not Tavra.

Tavra opens her cloak to REVEAL:

THAT HER BODY IS COVERED WITH THREADERS

Thousands. Like the one attached to her face -- minuscule Arathim SWARMING all over Tavra's body!

The Gelfling recoil in shock as:

THE CARPET OF THREADERS DESCEND FROM TAVRA'S BODY

And ADVANCES toward the shock-and-awed Gelfling Warriors!

SMASH CUT TO:

31 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - NIGHT 31

The Hunter KNOCKS the scimitar from Rian's hand. It flies into the dark! He GRABS Rian and THROWS him the other way. *

BREA (FROM THE TENT) *

RIAN! *

Rian lands in the sand. Stunned. He looks up as the Hunter DRAWS TWO SWORDS. Staring down at the defenseless Gelfling. *

HUNTER *

Is this what you wanted? *

The Hunter sweeps in to claim his trophy -- *

IN THE TENT *

Brea turns to the Heretic and Wanderer... *

BREA *

I have to help him! *

HERETIC *

It's too dangerous! *

Brea, determined, grabs an OLD DAGGER and hurries out. *

WANDERER *

Poor child. *

AS THE HUNTER CLOSES IN ON RIAN *

Swords raised. Brea RUNS but she won't make it in time! *

BREA *

RIAN! *

The gleeful HUNTER RAISES his twin SWORDS -- *

SCHWOOMP! THE HUNTER'S SHOULDER ERUPTS IN A SPRAY OF BLOOD

An arrowhead PROTRUDES from beneath his cloak and armor! The Hunter GROANS, dropping one sword, then turns to REVEAL:

THE ARCHER -- ENTERING THROUGH A FOG OF SWIRLING SAND

Wielding his bow! His shoulder now BLEEDS like the Hunter's. *

BREA RUSHES TO RIAN'S SIDE *

They both stare at the sight with incredulous eyes. *

BREA

Another Mystic!

DEET LOOKS UP FROM GIVING FIRST AID TO HUP

Also stunned by the sudden arrival of the Archer! *

ANGLE ON THE WANDERER

Looking up as he and the bleeding Heretic hold each other. *

WANDERER

The Archer.

BACK ON THE ARCHER *

As he lowers his bow and faces his dark half. *

ARCHER

You can not defeat me, SkekMal. *

HUNTER

I did not come for you. *

The Hunter raises his swords to strike Rian down as -- *

THE ARCHER FIRES ANOTHER ARROW

It HITS the Hunter's leg. The Hunter and the Archer WINCE in simultaneous pain! The Hunter drops another sword, but the Archer holds onto his weapon. Readies another projectile: *

RIAN TURNS TO BREA

RIAN

Now's our chance! My weapon! *

And as Rian bolts off to grab his scimitar: *

32

EXT. STONE-IN-THE-WOOD, MAIN THOROUGHFARE

32

Where Castle Guard, Stonewood Warriors #1 and #2, Maudra Fara, and other WARRIORS struggle in a TERRIFYING MONTAGE.

FLAILING as the tiny creatures CRAWL UP THEIR ARMS AND LEGS!

TAVRA WATCHES DISPASSIONATELY

As the first of her Threaders finds purchase:

ON STONEWOOD WARRIOR #1'S FACE

Stonewood Warrior #1 DROPS her axe and TURNS to face Tavra.

STONEWOOD WARRIOR #1

I am The Ascendancy.

BESIDE HER, STONEWOOD WARRIOR #2 DOES THE SAME

STONEWOOD WARRIOR #2

I am The Ascendancy.

AND THEN THE CASTLE GUARD

CASTLE GUARD

I am The Ascendancy.

AND AS MAUDRA FARA LOOKS UP

FLAILING to keep the Threaders from her body:

MAUDRA FARA
Get... Off..!

SMASH CUT TO:

33 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - NIGHT 33

THE HUNTER TAKES ANOTHER HIT!

As the Archer's latest arrow hits the Hunter's midsection.
The Hunter HOWLS in agony!

A WOUND OPENS ON THE ARCHER'S SIDE

The Archer CLUTCHES his torso, DROPS his weapon, and falls.

THE HUNTER STAGGERS

Blood runs from his side and shoulder. Pure force of will
keeps him on his feet. He turns, reeling, and sees Rian step
forward. Scimitar raised. Ready to finish the job. *

RIAN
For my father. *

The Hunter, realizing he has lost, REARS with a hateful
SHRIEK and TURNS, RUNS, and GRABS BREA! She KICKS AND PUNCHES
but she's no match -- as he TUCKS HER UNDER AN ARM! *

RIAN
Brea! No! *

And RACES to her aid as the Hunter gallops into -- *

34 INT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS 34

The Hunter DISAPPEARS into the corridor. Rian ENTERS.
Running. Brea's SCREAMS echo but soon FADE as Rian makes a
mad dash out to: *

35 EXT. CRYSTAL DESERT - CONTINUOUS 35

Rian clears the entrance to find himself facing an empty,
black desert. No sign of the Hunter or Brea. *

RIAN
Brea! Brea!

But there's nowhere to go, nothing to see, only sand.

RIAN
No! Please! Brea!

And as the rising wind SWALLOWS Rian's cries...

*

SMASH CUT TO:

36 EXT. STONE-IN-THE-WOOD, MAIN THOROUGHFARE - NIGHT 36

Maudra Fara FALLS to her knees -- FLINGING Threaders from her shoulders -- until one finds its way to her face. It attaches to her cheek, digging all its legs into her flesh.

Maudra Fara's face FALLS... then rises... blank and under the thrall of The Ascendancy.

MAUDRA FARA
I am The Ascendancy.

Maudra Fara stands... and as she slowly marches off...

FOLLOW ONE THREADER ON THE GROUND

As it crawls away and reaches a PAIR OF GNARLED FEET. The Threader tries to crawl onto the foot -- then keeps going up until it reaches...

AUGHRA'S FACE

But she shakes her head and PICKS IT OFF, pinching one of its legs to hold it up and look at it with her one good eye.

AUGHRA
You dare try to control Aughra?
Aughra can barely control Aughra!

And with that, Aughra FLICKS OFF the Threader, sending it FLYING into the darkness as she looks up to see...

MAUDRA FARA, JOINING HER ENTIRE CORPS OF WARRIORS

As they FOLLOW Tavra down the road toward the General... and eventually PASS him, disappearing into night and fog...

ALL THAT'S LEFT IS THE GENERAL, LOCKING EYES WITH AUGHRA

The two stand off across the way. The General gives her a smug, snide NOD and TURNS TO GO.

It's over. He has what his Emperor wants.

DISSOLVE TO:

37 INT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, SLEEPING AREA - DAY 37

The Three Brothers BLAZE over the hard land as Deet strokes Hup's bandaged head. His arm in a makeshift sling. *

DEET

We have to go on to the Caves -- *

HUP

Hup GO! *

DEET *

You can't. You have to heal... but
don't worry, the Heretic and the
Wanderer will take care of you... *

Hup doesn't like it but he puts his hand on hers. Nods... *

HUP

Hup. Stay. *

Deet musters a smile, and as she stands to look at the Wanderer -- balming the wounds of both the wounded Archer, and the Heretic with a salve from a small clay pot.

WANDERER

May the Three Brothers smile on
you, for Thra must be made whole or
die. *

Deet nods, then walks out of the tent to...

38 EXT. CIRCLE OF THE SUNS, COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS 38

Where she meets a positively destroyed Rian, wearing a pack and the scimitar on his belt.

RIAN

We should go after Brea.

DEET

The only way to defeat the Skeksis
and save Brea is with the Glaive. *

Rian nods -- grimly resolved to the quest.

RIAN

I know. I just don't like it.

DEET

Sometimes you have to make the best
of the bad choices. Come on.

*

As they take the corridor that will lead them back into the
desert and the Caves of Grot beyond we --

CUT TO:

39 EXT. CASTLE OF THE CRYSTAL, COURTYARD - DAY 39

Tavra the Threaded Stonewood Warriors into the Skeksis'
Castle and certain doom. They walk in perfect unison, faces
expressionless, as the Castle door OPENS to admit them... and
as they walk...

*
*
*
*

REVEAL THE GENERAL

Last in the line... LOOKING UP to see...

THE EMPEROR -- BEAMING FROM A BALCONY

Impressed by his General... WAVING A TALON IN A REGAL SALUTE.

The General returns his Emperor's salute as the Gelfling file
behind him... especially the last among them...

*
*

MAUDRA FARA

*

Eyes glassy, affect flat -- Threader clinging to her face --
as she willingly marches herself into the Skeksis' grasp.

*
*

The General steps into line behind her... and as the door
SLOWLY CLOSES in their wake -- the CREAKING of inevitability
giving way to an ominous SLAM...

*
*
*

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE