

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - AFTERNOON

ARGO (36) trudges through a muddy trail with a SHOTGUN in hand. He is a tired, but adamant huntsman on the prowl for monsters. The autumn woods loom over him, and a thick layer of fog obscures his vision.

A loud CROW flies out of the woods, which startles Argo. He groans in frustration.

MATTHEW (O.S.)
Scared of crows, Argo?

MATTHEW (28), a charming lad with a MACHETE strapped to his back, approaches him and smirks. Argo shakes his head dismissively and walks away.

DAVID (30) walks beside Matthew. He rests a RIFLE on his shoulder, oddly calm in spite of the eerie atmosphere.

DAVID
(to Argo)
You sure the caravan went this way?

Argo pulls out a cigarette and lights it with a match.

ARGO
(in a gruff tone)
The client said it was headin' to Old Grove about a week ago. We should be close.

MATTHEW
(he yawns)
I'm starting to think this is a lost cause. Why don't we just go back to Gino's?

DAVID
Can't buy drinks without cash...

MATTHEW
Then we'll tell the client he's dead! Got lost in the woods and killed by a therion. That's what *always* happens.

DAVID
I'm not gonna lie to the client, Matt. We're *huntsmen*, for God's sake.

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MATTHEW

Oh please, I've seen freelancers
get paid way more than this—

ARGO

(irritated)

Dammit, Matt! Will you quiet down?
I'm tryin' to listen here.

Matthew looks at him and raises an eyebrow. David takes a
step forward.

DAVID

Calm down, man. What's your
problem?

ARGO

(he sighs)

Look, I don't wanna be here either,
but this is the first job we've had
in weeks.

DAVID

I get it, but you don't have to be
so damn moody all the time.

ARGO

I'm not—

He is interrupted by a HUMAN-LIKE SCREAM echoing throughout
the woods. The huntsmen tense up for a moment and look at
each other. Argo tosses his cigarette.

ARGO (CONT'D)

Whatever. Let's keep moving.

Matthew peers into the fog ahead of them. He looks concerned.

MATTHEW

Uh, guys?
(he points forward)
Look.

EXT. RANSACKED VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Beyond the fog lies an old, ruined village. Wrecked abodes,
shattered glass, and blood stains litter the roads. A clawed-
up sign reading OLD GROVE is posted in front. The huntsmen
stare at the ruins in disbelief.

MATTHEW

What the hell happened here?
Where's the barrier?

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CONTINUED:

ARGO
 (in a low tone)
 They couldn't afford one. All they
 had were huntsmen...

David grasps the SILVER TALISMAN wrapped around his neck.

DAVID
 (muttering a prayer)
 Lord, protect us...

Argo pauses and looks down at his shotgun. He tightens his grip and steps into the village. Matthew grabs his arm.

MATTHEW
 Hey, whoa! You're not seriously
 going in, are you?

Argo breaks free from his grasp.

ARGO
 I'm findin' that caravan. If you
 wanna leave, then go ahead.

He continues into the village. Matthew looks at David.

DAVID
 (he sighs)
 Well, we can't just leave him.

He follows Argo.

MATTHEW
 Dave!
 (in disbelief)
 Son of a bitch...

Matthew pulls out his machete, inscribed with several RUNES. With one motion, the runes flicker and set the blade on fire.

Matt catches up to his friends. The ruins are eerily quiet. Argo sees the silhouette of an open carriage in the distance. The wheels have been broken, and the horses are gone. A SEVERED ARM covered in flies is wedged between two crates.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
 (growing impatient)
 Well, Argo? We found it! He's dead!
 Can we go home now?

Argo turns to respond, but his eyes widen in horror. Behind Matthew, a SCOLOPENDRA emerges from the fog. It has the grotesque body of a giant centipede and the rotting face of a man. The therion smiles at Matthew.

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CONTINUED:

ARGO

Look out!

Matthew narrowly avoids the therion's lunge. He retaliates with a flaming slash and cuts off one of its many legs. It SHRIEKS and retreats into the fog.

ARGO (CONT'D)

(aiming into the fog)

Steady! We got a big one!

The Scolopendra re-emerges from the fog, barreling towards the caravan and toppling it over. The flying debris knock the huntsmen off their feet. Argo is struck by a crate.

The therion circles around Matthew, bites into his torso, and thrashes him around like a ragdoll. He screams in agony as its mandibles tear into his flesh.

DAVID

Matthew!

David fires his rifle at the therion, but the bullets glance off its carapace.

As the chaos ensues, Argo recovers from his daze. He rushes to Matthew's aid, but stops when he sees his mangled, half-eaten corpse fall to the ground. The Scolopendra, with blood dripping from its mouth, LAUGHS like a madman.

In a frenzy of rage and grief, Argo charges at the therion. He and David fight the creature. David stabs the therion in the back with his rifle's bayonet, which allows Argo to fire into its mouth, killing it.

DAVID (CONT'D)

(he looks at Matthew)

Oh God, no...

David falls to his knees and holds Matthew's corpse.

DAVID (CONT'D)

No, no no no...

(he weeps)

Fuck!

Argo stares at David, overcome with guilt. Several DEMONIC SCREAMS echo through the forest around them. With no time to waste, he grabs David and pulls him away.

DAVID (CONT'D)

(resisting Argo's grip)

What are you doing!?

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CONTINUED:

ARGO
We need to go, *now!*

DAVID
We can't just leave him!

ARGO
He's gonna turn any second now! We
can't stay here!

David looks back at Matthew. A BLACK MIST seeps from his body. The screams of the dead grow louder. David reluctantly grabs his rifle and runs with Argo.

EXT. VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS - CONTINUOUS

As the two huntsmen sprint out of the village, they spot a HORSE emerging from the woods, scared out of its mind. Argo looks back at the village, then cautiously approaches the horse. David keeps watch.

ARGO
(holding his hand out)
Easy, easy. We're not monsters.

The horse calms down a bit. Argo slowly strokes its mane.

ARGO (CONT'D)
(calmly)
We need your help, alright?

DAVID (O.S.)
Argo!

He looks back. MATTHEW'S THERION crawls out of the village, enshrouded in black mist. Its body is contorted beyond recognition, and its hands have transformed into scythe-like blades made of bone. It stares at David with hollowed eyes.

MATTHEW'S THERION
(with a distorted voice)
Da...vid...

David hesitates to shoot his friend. Matthew's therion leaps into the air and stabs him in the abdomen. They both tumble to the ground. David gasps in pain.

MATTHEW'S THERION (CONT'D)
Help... *help me...*!

Argo charges in and tackles the creature. They struggle on the ground. He eventually gains the advantage and pins the therion down, pressing his shotgun to its face.

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MATTHEW'S THERION (CONT'D)

(in pain)

We're going... home... right...?

Argo...?

Argo looks to his side. David clutches his wound, on the verge of passing out. He looks back down. He breathes heavily. His hands shake. He can't shoot.

MATTHEW'S THERION (CONT'D)

(at the top of its lungs)

ARGOOO!

BANG.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. CANTHAM - AFTERNOON

The city of CANTHAM sits beside the sea. A lofty stone wall surrounds the INNER CITY. Beyond the wall is the OUTER RING, a cluster of lower-class homes and markets. The entire city is protected by a magic, near-invisible BARRIER.

EXT. OUTER RING - SOUTH GATE - CONTINUOUS

ANTONIO (32) guards the south gate, gazing mournfully at the SILVER BRACELET on his wrist. An air of guilt looms over him. The CLOPPING of hooves break him out of his trance.

He looks up and halts the approaching carriage. The driver, SAMAEEL, tips his gray cap and smiles. He is a fairly young-looking man with deep crimson eyes.

SAMAEEL

Good day, sir! Something the matter?

ANTONIO

(observing the carriage)

No, just inspecting any passers-by. What's your name?

SAMAEEL

Samuel Rayne, but you can just call me Sam.

Antonio glances behind Samael. The carriage contains several canvases wrapped in cloth.

ANTONIO

Are those paintings back there?

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